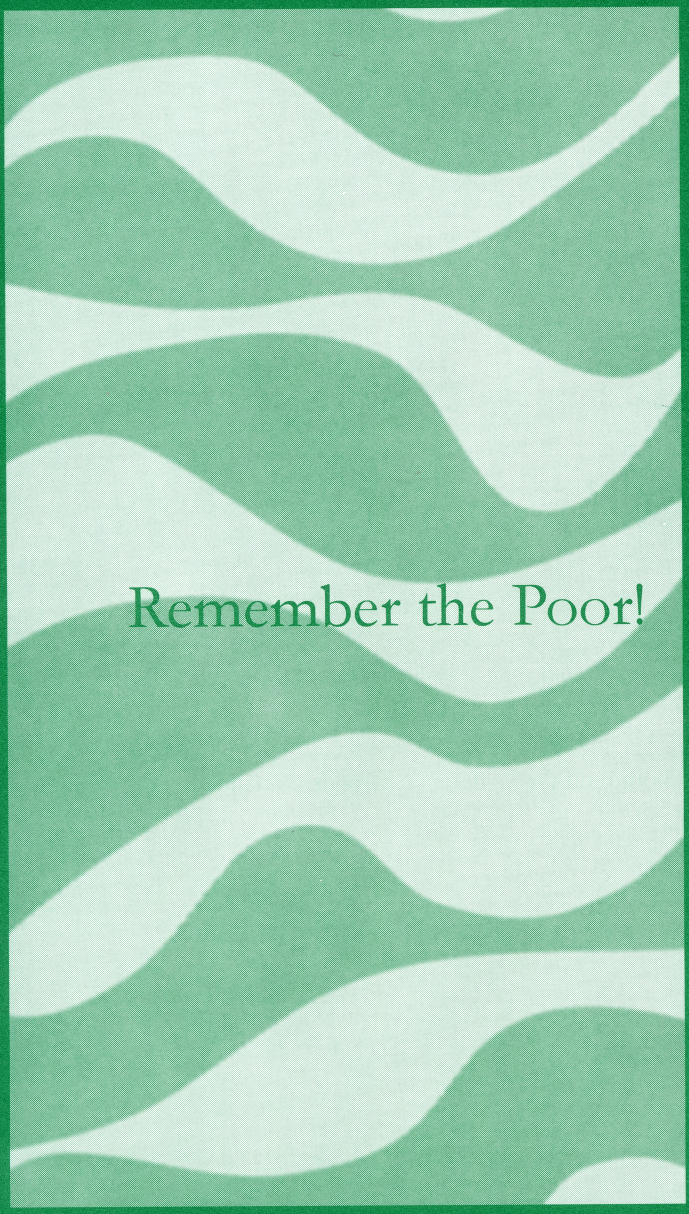
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Remember the Poor!

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is in the midst of preparations for a new hymnal/worship book and has been publishing a variety of worship resources in preparation for this event (see http://www.renewingworship.org/). Both at the seminary and in my own parish we have been using these trial materials, and in general I am pleased and excited by these preliminary results.

In some liturgies the final admonition—"Go in peace. Serve the Lord"—has been replaced by "Go in peace. Remember the poor." I am struggling with that change, not so much because I have not found this to be a common locution in the biblical text since after all God's preferential option for the poor has been made abundantly clear by liberation theologians and others. My struggle also is not because I have any doubt that I and other ELCA members need that admonition frequently. I for one have not been generous enough in contributing to the poor, nor have I worked hard enough for the systematic change that would make poverty illegal (see Deut 15:4).

Rather, my struggle is with the fear that this admonition will become so routine that I and others will not hear it, the fear that this admonition may well strike the poor as patronizing, and the fear that congregations that do little or nothing to help the poor will not be prohibited from using these words.

Ironically, my struggles with this proposal probably indicate that it is a good one. But my fears remain.

The articles in this issue of *Currents* in any case deal with other concerns: what to do when a Lutheran church body is too small to survive; the healing of the bent woman in Luke's Gospel (not far from God's concern for the poor); the place of rhetoric in preaching; homosexuality, marriage, and the Bible; and a moving funeral sermon for Richard Swanson.

Klaas Zwanepol reflects on the history of the very small Lutheran Church in the Netherlands and its recent merger with that country's two largest Reformed churches. The confessional basis for this merger was found in the Leuenberg Agreement of 1973, but the merger was also necessitated by the inability of the Lutheran Church to maintain its various ministries because of a lack of resources. The Leuenberg Agreement, in turn, takes its cue from the Augsburg Confession that it is sufficient for the unity of the church that the gospel be preached in its purity and the sacraments rightly administered. The Leuenberg Agreement is not a new confession but a way of dealing with old

confessions. Comprising only one percent of the new church, Dutch Lutherans have decided that the best way to keep the Lutheran tradition is by sharing it with others. Dutch Lutherans have a tremendous opportunity to spread their ideas and to learn from their partners.

Heidi Torgerson interprets the Lukan story of the healing of the bent woman to illustrate two Lukan themes: mercy is the basis for interpreting the law, and the lowly are raised and the mighty are brought down by God. For Jesus the law is valid only when understood through the lens of merciful action that serves the needs of the poor, the sick, and the infirm. Luke legitimates the reversals in the social order by connecting Jesus with the prophets of ancient Israel. The combination of evil spirit and infirm body in the bent woman creates a double marginalization that would have restricted her to the outer edges of the community. God's promise to Abraham can be fulfilled only through radical social upheaval in which the powerful are brought down and the lowly are lifted. According to Jesus, God's chief attribute is mercy, not holiness.

L. Roger Owens argues that only a christological construal of the sermon as speech will free homiletics from its captivity to rhetoric. The idea that sermons are to evoke in the hearers some latent religious feeling can be traced back to Schleiermacher, but it finds echoes in many manuals on preaching today. God's grace fits our human context because God has ordained the grace of the Eucharist to come as food and the grace of the proclaimed word to come as speech. Human communication reaches its apex and epitome in the sermon; the question is how ordinary human speaking can approximate the grace of the spoken Word of God. Bonhoeffer wrote that the primary responsibility of proclaiming Christ is not to give advice, arouse emotions, or stimulate the will, but its intention is to sustain us. In the proclaimed word, Jesus Christ in his humanity is his own rhetoric.

Todd Murken continues the discussion of homosexuality and the church from a more traditional position than many of the earlier articles on this subject in *Currents*. He argues that the "one flesh" aspect of marriage is permanent and that, even if the legal obligations of marriage are ended in divorce, the marriage itself is not ended. While recognizing that some laws in the Bible apply only to ancient Israel, he holds that the biblical legislation on homosexuality still applies, despite the fact that we do not know the reasons why homosexuality was forbidden in antiquity and despite the fact that a loving, committed monogamous homosexual relationship is nowhere discussed in the Bible. He builds his case on the widespread rejection of homosexuality around the world and across time, on the anatomical nature of the sexual organs, and on his reading of the Bible.

Stacie Fidlar was the preacher for the funeral of Richard Swanson, the chaplain emeritus of Augustana College, Rock Island, on March 15, 2005. "Swanie" effectively encouraged a generation of Augustana students to live soulful lives as servant leaders. She compares the walks Swanie often took with students to the fateful journey of Jesus to Emmaus, and she entrusts him back to the loving arms of his constant companion in his walk on this earth.

St. Paul provides some interesting help for my (our) struggles about remembering the poor. His account of the Jerusalem Council indicates that James, John, and Cephas would continue to work with the Jews, while Barnabas and he would go to the Gentiles. Then he adds: "They asked only one thing, that we remember the poor, which was actually what I was eager to do" (Gal 2:10).

Go in peace. Remember the poor. God, help our eagerness.

Ralph W. Klein, Editor

Dutch Lutheranism Keeps Its Identity as It Becomes Part of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands

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In May 2004 the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Netherlands merged with the two largest Dutch Reformed Churches into the Protestant Church in the Netherlands. In this article I outline this reunion process. I briefly sketch the development of Lutheranism in the Netherlands, indicate the motives to participate in this merger, and point out the expectations Dutch Lutherans have of this new Protestant Church.

History of Dutch Lutheranism

Martin Luther's ideas found early acceptance in the Netherlands.[1] The stage was set by movements like the Devotio Moderna and by the biblically inspired Humanism of thinkers like Erasmus. The adherence to Luther's ideas had consequences as his fellow members of the Augustinian order in Antwerp, Hendrik Vos and Johannes van Essen, had to pay with their lives for propagating Lutheran ideas in 1523. A shocked Luther reacted to their execution with an encouraging letter to the Christians in the Netherlands and was inspired to write the song "Ein neues lied wir heben an." In the Northern Netherlands Jan de Bakker shared the fate of the martyrs in Antwerp.

The exact origins of Dutch Lutheranism are disputable. The dispute is connected with the meaning of the word "Lutheran." In the first half of the sixteenth century "Lutheran" did not specify a confessional Lutheran identity or indicate the existence of a Lutheran church but was an umbrella term for all those who opposed the Roman Catholic Church of those days. From that point of view, Lutheranism can be spoken of as movements inspired by Luther, not so much as specific Lutheran congregations in the Netherlands.

Antwerp.[2] The birth of a Lutheran Church in the Netherlands can be set on September 2, 1566, when the "Martinists" in Antwerp got permission from the city government to build a few churches via a contract between Prince William of Orange and the Lutheran deputies representing the Lutheran congregation. That contract was vital for the Antwerp Lutherans, because it implied gov-

1. Casper Ch. G. Visser, *Hollands Lutheraner. Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Erlangen, 1991).

2. Oliver K. Olson, "The Rise and Fall of the Antwerp Martinists," *Lutheran Quarterly* 1 (1987): 98–119.

ernmental approval of the Lutheran Church. Around 1540 Antwerp Lutherans, who had asked Luther whether it was legitimate to found churches "under the cross," received from him a negative reply. They could read the Bible and pray together at home, he said, but for all public worship they should remain dependent on the Roman Catholic Church. Reluctantly Lutherans resigned themselves to Luther's advice.

In 1566 the government allowed the Lutherans as well as the much larger Calvinist congregations in Antwerp to hold their own religious worship services. Under the influence of German advisers, among them Matthias Flacius Illyricus, the Antwerp Martinists developed into a more confessional Lutheran community. Unfortunately, opposition to the Calvinists also increased, especially on the nature of the real presence of the body and blood of Jesus Christ in the Lord's Supper.[3] The Calvinists also thought the Lutherans were too docile politically, and the Lutherans accused the Calvinists of resisting the legitimate Prince.

The victory of the government troops at Oosterweel in the spring of 1567 led to the end of the tolerance of the Reformed and the Lutherans in Antwerp. In the middle of 1567 Roman Catholic worship was restored and the Lutheran congregation largely expelled. Among the Lutherans an exodus took place to Aachen and Cologne (Germany), where for the first time the organization of the Lutheran Church was taken into their own hands according to principles which later would be used for the founding of Lutheran congregations in the Northern Netherlands.

The "Pacification of Ghent" (1576) brought some improvement to the fate of the remaining Lutherans at Antwerp. The government allowed the Lutherans to worship in two places in the city, and Lutherans overcame their shyness to found and organize a church themselves. When Antwerp was occupied again by Parma in 1585, it meant the definite end of the Lutheran congregation. Protestants now had the option of becoming Roman Catholic again or leaving the city. Many Lutherans went into exile into Germany, but most of them fled to the Northern Netherlands. The provinces of Zealand and Amsterdam especially had to cope with a big rush of Flemish Lutheran immigrants.

Northern Netherlands. In the Northern Netherlands Lutheran communities have existed since the second half of the sixteenth century. Here could be mentioned Woerden, the oldest Lutheran community in the North, where since the pawning of the town to the Lutheran Duke, Erik of Brunswick (1558), the Word was preached and the sacraments were administered according to the Augsburg Confession. Lutheranism in the Northern Netherlands experienced strong growth from Flemish Lutheran immigrants. Though they were impeded almost everywhere by the Calvinists, they were no longer hampered by the obstacles which Luther had placed in the way of forming Lutheran congregations. Thanks to the presence of German and Scandinavian merchants and soldiers Lutheran congregations were built in trade centers and garrison towns.

The Lutherans were, however, not able to get a foothold in Dutch society. This was due to the mainly foreign character of Lutherans in the Netherlands as well as to

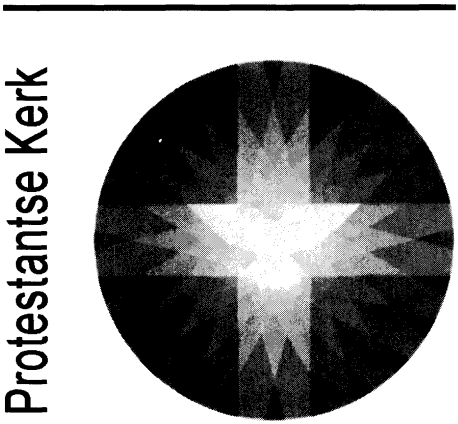
3. This conflict prompted Lutherans to publish the "Antwerp Confession" (1566). See Johannes W. Pont, *De luthersche kerken in Nederland. Haar belijdenisgeschriften, kerkeordeningen en liederenschat historisch toegelicht en ingeleid, tweede stuk* (Amsterdam, 1929).

their incapacity to take the lead in the Dutch insurrection against the Spanish king during the Eighty-Year War. The Lutherans left that role to the Calvinists, whose church soon became the "privileged religion" in the Netherlands.

Lutheran communities in the Northern Netherlands grew rapidly, when the Dutch Republic was economically flourishing and imported much foreign labor during the time of the "Twelve-Year Truce" with Spain (1609–1621). Unskilled laborers and craftsmen came in large numbers to the Dutch towns, especially from Germany. The climate was very favorable to the further development of existing congregations and the founding of new Lutheran ones.

Amsterdam. Since the beginning Amsterdam has taken an important place in Dutch Lutheranism. Already traces of Lutheranism can be found there in the early decades of the sixteenth century, and through the immigration of German and Flemish Lutherans it soon became the largest, wealthiest, and most influential Lutheran congregation in the Netherlands. No wonder that in 1605 the first Lutheran Synod met at Amsterdam. At this Synod a certain uniformity in liturgy and church order was established. The next Synod founded a "brotherhood" of Dutch Lutheran congregations which was presided over by Amsterdam.

In the course of the seventeenth century Amsterdam definitely took over the leadership in the Dutch Lutheran Church. Congregations that did not want to go along with the Amsterdam supervision were expelled from the brotherhood. And a union of expelled or dissatisfied congregations—the "Union of The Hague" (1698)—had a short life. During the eighteenth century all twelve congregations of the Union were reconciled with Amsterdam.



Dutch School. The Dutch School tried to put an end to the foreign and confessional isolationism of Lutheranism in the Netherlands. Its main achievements were the introduction of a translation of the Bible into Dutch and the obligation imposed on Lutheran pastors to preach in Dutch. This Dutch School adopted an irenic and even ecumenical attitude toward other denominations. Just like some Reformed theologians, representatives of this Lutheran Dutch School tried to overcome the Lutheran-Reformed separation. Furthermore, the Dutch School was open to new ideas that came up in science and culture in the second half of the seventeenth century. The education of Lutheran pastors in Amsterdam contributed much to spread the ideas of the Dutch School.

The Dutch School was sharply attacked by the "German Trend," which wanted to maintain the true Lutheran doctrine and was not ready to give up Lutheran isolation. Both movements, also named the Wittenberger and Helmstedter School, fought about filling vacant ministries and the election of members of the consistories. At the end of the seventeenth century the Dutch School appeared to have gotten the

upper hand. Nevertheless, because of their longtime self-chosen isolationism Lutherans were not able to obtain an important place in Dutch society.

Enlightenment. A serious problem arose when the theology of the Enlightenment gained ground in the Netherlands. This time the pastors, who were educated at German academies, brought typical Enlightenment ideas home and spread them through the Dutch Lutheran community. In the middle of the eighteenth century, however, "Germany" stood for modern, enlightened thought, which appealed to a Lutheran elite but provoked severe resistance among conservative, lower-class Lutherans. This conflict was characterized as a conflict between the "old" and the "new" light—that is, between the followers of Enlightenment ideas and those who adhered to the old light of the Scripture and the old Christian creeds.

This time the conflict could not be averted by measures of the Lutheran Synod, and in 1791 it led to a split of the Restored-Lutheran Church. This split caused deep wounds in the Lutheran communion, and it took about 160 years before both of these Lutheran churches were reunited.

In spite of these internal troubles, the Dutch Lutheran Church steadily kept growing. With the Dutch colonization in Africa, Asia, and America, Dutch Lutheranism also expanded abroad. A Lutheran church in Batavia (the present Indonesian Djakarta) and Capetown was founded, as well as Dutch Lutheran Churches in Brazil, Suriname, and the Caribbean. In New Amsterdam (later called New York) the Dutch Lutheran communion had far-reaching effects, because the Dutch Lutheran Church order became the matrix for the organization of the Lutheran churches in the U.S.A.

An acknowledged Lutheran denomination. The growth of the Lutheran Church almost stopped at the end of the eighteenth century. During the French occupation of the Netherlands, imposed financial regulations brought several Lutheran congregations almost to bankruptcy. In 1818, after being liberated, Lutherans accepted the royal approval and financial support for their church, which then took on its present name, Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Kingdom of the Netherlands. It consisted of about 45 Lutheran congregations. Later the Restored Lutherans also accepted acknowledgment by the crown. This new status led to a further integration of the Lutherans in Dutch society but also drove Dutch Lutherans in the direction of a nonconfessional religious association.

With the rise of modernism in the nineteenth century conflicts among the Lutherans broke out again. Anti-modernism did not lead to the founding of new denominations but to the building of associations that propagated orthodox Lutheran ideas and ideals. In general, liberalism and modernism seized the Lutheran church at this time in all its dimensions. Lutheran identity was a forgotten theme, and the mutual ties between Lutherans became more and more loose.

From about 1900, however, the tide started to turn. New attention was paid to Lutheran doctrine, and a revival of an awareness of Lutheran identity led to the building of new Lutheran congregations and to remarkable renewals, such as the appearance of women in consistories and ministries.

After World War II. Experiences during the German occupation (1940–1945) induced a critical reflection on fundamental theological questions. In combination with a new ecumenical elan, which also influenced the founding of the Lutheran World

Federation (1947), this ecumenical spirit resulted in the reunion of the Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Restored Lutheran Church (1952). In 1949 the Lutheran church order changed deeply. With the so-called "Praeambular Articles" (statutory articles), the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Netherlands got its confessional basics back. The Augsburg Confession and Luther's Catechism were explicitly accepted as true confessions of the Christian faith.

Through new ecumenical contacts Dutch Lutherans became aware of their membership in a Lutheran world family, but these also paved the way for talks about cooperation with other churches in the Netherlands. In 1956 a consensus about the doctrine on the Lord's Supper with the Dutch Reformed Church was accepted, which made intercommunion possible between the Lutherans and the Reformed.[4] Important practical ecumenical steps were taken with the acceptance of the New Bible Translation and in the participation in the development of a new Book of Hymns.

By signing the "Leuenberg Agreement" (1973) doctrinal obstacles for an inner-Protestant unity were removed. In the 1970s the Lutheran Church decided to deliberate about her position and not to join any program for church reunion for the time being. In the 1980s, however, the Lutheran Synod determined to participate in the reunion process between the two largest Calvinistic Churches—the Dutch Reformed Church and the smaller Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. The three churches, which are involved in "Together-on-the-Way"—as this (re)union process is called—decided in December 2003 to merge into the Protestant Church in the Netherlands. The merger was accepted by a large majority of the Synods of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands and of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Netherlands. However, a considerable minority of the Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church voted against the merger, and a Reestablished Reformed Church with over 60,000 members was founded after the new Protestant church became effective 1 May 2004.

Motives for participation

Regarding the motives that moved the Lutherans to decide to participate in this Reformed reunion process, three arguments need to be mentioned.

1. Problems of a decreasing church. The Lutheran Church in the Netherlands is one of the smallest Protestant churches in that country, with about 14,000 members in 56 congregations spread over all the country. These congregations are served by 37 pastors, of whom only 16 have a full-time job. Compared to the situation in the Dutch Lutheran Church a half century ago, the numbers have declined rapidly: In 1948 the Dutch Lutherans had about 58,000 members in almost 70 congregations served by 56 mostly full-time pastors.

With Lutherans spread all over the country, some pastors have to serve a whole province. Due to the usually small number of parishioners it is becoming more and more difficult to find Lutherans who are ready to participate in congregational work. On the regional and national—not to mention international—levels also this decline is painfully felt. There are not enough human and financial resources to carry out all the national and regional tasks in theological education, outreach, and ecumenical affairs. A permanent group of volunteers, which is becoming ever smaller, has to bear

4. Willem J. Kooiman, "Consensus on the Holy Communion," *Lutheran World* 3 (1957): 384–85.

an ever more heavy burden. Many small Lutheran congregations seem to have no other perspective than to wait until the last churchgoer will turn the light off and lock the door.

2. Opportunity to participate in the Reformed merger. In the 1980s, the opportunity arose to participate in the reunion program of the largest Reformed churches in the Netherlands, the "Together-on-the-Way" process. In 1985 the Lutheran Synod decided, not without wavering, to participate, first as an observer and later as a full participant.

The "Together-on the Way" movement started with the pursuit of reunification between the Dutch Reformed Church and the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. The latter church originated in the nineteenth century and was the result of two movements that seceded from the former "established" church. These developments should be seen as the result of a tendency in the nineteenth century toward (re)confessionalism. The most important issues were the replacement of a more or less democratic and independent church structure by an enforced, state-supported ecclesiastical authority and the perceived erosion of a classical Reformed confessional stance.

After almost a century, specifically in the decades after World War II, the idea arose that there was no longer a reason for a separate existence of these two Reformed churches. The Dutch Reformed Church realized that the nineteenth-century liberal views on the organization and on the confession of the church should be abandoned. These ideas were reflected in its new church order of 1951, in which the Dutch Reformed Church defined itself as a confessional public church. Meanwhile in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands some things changed as well: rigid and literal adherence to the Reformed confessions was viewed as neither possible nor desirable.

Although the two Reformed churches clearly had grown closer in the course of time and had become more and more interdependent in response to advancing secularization, it proved to be quite difficult to reunify them. But by the mid-1980s both churches managed to produce a Declaration of Consensus, which was attractive enough to appeal to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Kingdom of the Netherlands as well as the Remonstrant Brotherhood (Arminians) to participate in the "Together-on-the-Way" process. Discussions about a new church order were arduous, because both Lutheran and Reformed views had to be combined, and there was a broad spectrum of views within the Reformed tradition.

Following the first draft of the constitutional articles of the new church order, the Remonstrants left the process, because they could not find room enough for their liberal opinions in the new church. At times the Lutherans also considered ending their participation out of fear of being overwhelmed by a large Reformed majority. Furthermore, the Lutherans felt very frustrated by the orthodox wing of the Dutch Reformed Church, which tried to minimize the Lutheran influence. These orthodox Calvinists proposed, instead of a church reunion, a confederation of churches, each maintaining their own Reformed and Lutheran confessional status. After this confederation model was rejected, Lutherans fully continued their participation.

Two guarantees are crucial for the Lutherans in this merger: (1) the guarantee of being taken seriously in their confessional tradition and (2) the guarantee that vital kernels of Lutheranism should not be

dissolved in the Reformed masses. It can be objectively stated that Lutherans have almost reached the optimum in both guarantees. They have achieved the best result on the second point. In the organization of the new church a *status aparte* for the Lutherans has been created, and at least on paper the new Protestant Church is a classic example of how to deal with minorities! Lutherans will keep their own Synod (as well as its Executive Committee) and their own seminary. Moreover, no Lutheran congregation will be forced to merge with other Reformed or Reformed-United congregations.

Lutheran confessional identity is a more complex matter than the practical arrangements. It was especially difficult to find a basis on which Reformed and Lutheran confessions could be kept together. The Theological Declaration of Barmen (1934) and even more the Leuenberg Agreement were of great importance. The latter is an ecumenical document signed in 1973 by all churches participating in the "Together-on-the-Way" process.

The first draft of the constitution of the new church order, which simply enumerated all the creeds in use in the new church—the early Christian, the Reformed, and the Lutheran—was the best way to deal with a variety of confessions. But orthodox Reformed were not satisfied until these creeds were divided into a Universal, Reformed, and Lutheran group. So the final version of this article now reads: "that the Protestant Church in the Netherlands feels itself related to the Universal Christian Church through the early Christian creeds, to the Reformed tradition via the Reformed confessions, and to the Lutheran tradition via the Lutheran confessions."

An imminent split into two confessional traditions was forestalled only by assuring that the new church clearly wants to be related to *both* traditions. But on what basis should this be done?

The new church order refers to the Leuenberg Agreement: "With the Leuenberg Agreement the [new Protestant] church acknowledges that the Lutheran and Reformed traditions have come together in a common understanding of the Gospel."

The Leuenberg Agreement formulates a consensus on a common understanding of the gospel.

3. Theological possibility of combining different confessional traditions. The Leuenberg Agreement formulates a consensus on a common understanding of the gospel focused on the message of justification as the expression of God's free grace. As a result, fellowship could be declared among the participating churches. This church fellowship has far-reaching consequences for the confessional doctrines of these churches. On the one hand, loyalty to existing confessions of faith is not neutralized by the Leuenberg Agreement. On the other hand, the mutually pronounced doctrinal condemnations of the past are declared no longer to be applicable to the contemporary assenting churches and so could no longer be an obstacle for church fellowship. Here the Leuenberg Agreement is comparable to the recent agreement between the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and three Reformed churches in the U.S.A.[5]

In several respects the Leuenberg Agreement is a unique ecumenical document. It has nothing to do with unions imposed from above (like the Prussian Union in nineteenth-century Germany), but it was developed in view of the challenges posed to the churches by modern culture. The most peculiar aspect of the Leuenberg Agreement is its ecumenical method, as it is based not on one of the traditional unification models but on the *satis est* of article VII of the Augsburg Confession, where it says that it is sufficient for the true unity of the church to agree on the doctrine of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. This article is quoted almost verbatim in §2 of the Leuenberg Agreement.

The Leuenberg Agreement is not easily classified among ecumenical models. It declares church fellowship based on a common understanding of the gospel, which implies a *proleptic* doctrinal consensus, in which a complete doctrinal agreement is anticipated. Why is this? An answer to that question brings us to the essentials of the theology of the Reformation.

Doctrine derives its meaning only from the pivotal center of the faith, the mystery of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Confessional doctrine, however, is the result of human attempts to refer to this mystery. This does not make doctrine relative, but it does relate it to the pivotal center to which it refers. Reformation confession could and should be no more than reference to the justifying message of the gospel.

The Leuenberg Agreement follows this way of thought of the Reformation. It does not compel the assenting churches to put aside traditional confessions but calls for using them in relation to the heart of the gospel. Because of the common understanding of the gospel, the Leuenberg Agreement urges reassessing and deepening the traditional doctrine of the participating churches. That gives the Agreement a profoundly dynamic power. It includes a challenge for a continuing search for unity, which has already been reached in principle. But the Agreement is not so naive as to assume that traditional doctrinal differences have simply disappeared by the declaration of the common understanding of the gospel and of church fellowship. The participating churches may keep their traditional creeds and confessions, but the Leuenberg Agreement has robbed them of their divisive force. The Agreement must not be seen as a new confession but as a new way of dealing with old confessions (§37). With respect to the points of controversy between Reformed and Lutheran in the past, the Agreement does not offer a new doctrine on these subjects but formulates what is necessary for overcoming a split over these doctrines. The common understanding of the gospel is not only the bridge uniting diverse traditions; it also gives confidence that on those points where a full doctrinal consensus has not yet been reached, it will be reached tomorrow or the day after tomorrow—at least, as long as the pursuit of the common understanding of the gospel is continued![6]

Especially in the context of the Protestant merger in the Netherlands this ap-

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5. *A Formula of Agreement between the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the Reformed Church in America and the United Church of Christ on entering into full communion on the basis of a Common Calling* (Chicago, 1997).

6. In this respect a difference between the Leuenberg and the North American Agreement can be observed. Whereas the latter seems to have accepted doctrinal differences "even to the extent of their irreconcilability" (*A Formula of Agreement*, 5), the former is trying to overcome these differences by continuing common doctrinal discussions between the participating churches (§37).

proach is very much needed, as is apparent in the discussions about predestination with the orthodox wing of the Dutch Reformed Church. At the moment opinions differ too much to formulate a doctrine of predestination that is acceptable for all parties. There are still differences that have not been thoroughly discussed. But from a common understanding of the sufficiency of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments one may be confident that some day we will overcome the remaining doctrinal differences.

Mutual contribution of the Reformed and Lutheran tradition

Some Lutherans are anxiously asking whether they made the right decision in boarding this train. Will Dutch Lutheranism not go to rack and ruin in that united church with such a large Reformed majority? Lutherans comprise about one percent of the new church. What will remain of the Lutheran tradition? As a matter of fact, a serious form of cooperation between a Reformed and a Lutheran congregation has arisen in a very small number of places.

It is doubtful whether the benefit for Lutherans of "Together-on-the-Way" should first be looked for on a congregational level. The assistance in regional and national tasks for the church seems more advantageous. Some fresh blood is a real blessing for a decreasing church in which there is an in-crowd mentality. Most benefit can be gained when there is an optimal contribution of the Lutheran tradition; in the words of the new church order, "to take care that the Lutheran tradition will be kept and will serve the whole church." The Lutheran tradition contains elements that deserve to be brought into the united church as broadly and deeply as possible. The best way of keeping the Lutheran tradition is by sharing it with others. Lutherans must have the courage to think in the long term, letting the valuable elements of their tradition permeate the whole church as a leaven.

Here also lies a very important task for the Lutheran congregations. Often "Together-on-the-Way" is not considered by the Lutherans until one of their congregations cannot support itself anymore. Then it is actually too late to merge with another (Reformed) congregation, because who wants a weak partner? The purpose of making the Lutheran tradition subservient to the whole works only when a strong partner brings this tradition in.

This is not just a practical consideration. Lutherans would act contrary to their tradition if they would strive only for the existence of an independent Dutch Lutheran church. The Lutheran church derives its right to exist only from preaching the gospel through Word and Sacrament and serving the world with its *diakonia*. Herein is concealed a deep ecumenical insight: just as Luther never intended to start a new church on his own, his present-day followers should be focused not on the continuation of a Lutheran church, even when it has existed for centuries, but on preaching the gospel in word and deed, which (as the Dutch Lutheran Synod rightly observed in 1985) could only be carried out by merging with kindred churches.

This does not necessarily mean that after the (re)union every Lutheran congregation should merge as soon as possible with a Reformed congregation. In many cases it will be more worthwhile for the whole of the new church if Lutherans continue in a relative independence, not as an end in itself but as the best way of spreading the Lutheran tradition.

The Synod of the Lutheran Church made a wise decision by taking a parallel course regarding the Protestant Church in



the Netherlands: on the one hand fully aiming at a broad and deep introduction of the best that Lutheran tradition can offer, and on the other hand stimulating vital Lutheran communities to fold themselves into this new church body. The former requires a consciousness of Lutheran identity for which support of the LWF partner churches would be very helpful. The latter will succeed only if it is carried out with a realistic and positive attitude.

The new Protestant Church in the Netherlands can profit from a Lutheran presence, as it contributes the essential elements of Lutheran faith and confession such as the pivotal position of justification, the distinction between law and gospel, attention to the liturgy, emphasis on the real presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper, and stress on Christian freedom.

Dutch Lutherans have applied those ideas in peculiar contexts of openness, which characterize the Lutheran tradition in the Netherlands. I give two brief examples of this application.

1. Modest doctrinal defense of the real presence. From the Antwerp Confession (1566) it can be deduced that the Dutch Lutherans were not ready to give up their conviction of the real presence in the Lord's Supper. In 1603 the Amsterdam Lutherans had to defend themselves again, this time against their interpretation of the Lord's ascension. The Lord's ascension implied, according to the Reformed, that the body of Christ being in heaven could not be present in, with, and under bread and wine as the Lutherans hold.

The church council of the Amsterdam Lutheran congregation replied to this with an Amsterdam Confession in which they absolutely insisted on the real presence of the body and the blood of Christ in the Eucharistic communion.[7] The Amsterdam Confession, however, did not want to fall back on the idea of the ubiquity of the body of Christ, explained by the communication of attributes, as in Article VIII of the Formula of Concord. The latter theory must have been too severe a doctrine for the Dutch Lutherans, perhaps too severe to coexist with their Reformed fellow believers. Hence they resorted to the ubiquity of the body of Christ, explained by the mystical thought of the presence of everything in Christ.[8] This modest doctrinal explication was doubtless inspired by the still very worthwhile thought that the mystery of the presence of Christ should not be explained but should only be referred to in order to keep it a mystery.

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7. "Confessie, ofte Bekentenisse des Geloofs, der Gemeente de Confessie van Augspurgh toegdaan in Amsterdam," in Ferdinand D. Domela Nieuwenhuis, *Geschiedenis der Amsterdamsche Luthersche Gemeente. Supplement D* (Amsterdam, 1856), 73vv.

8. The Amsterdam Confession used thoughts developed by Philip Nicolai, who inserted himself into this conflict with the audacious writing *Verantwortung der Evangelischen Kirchen in Hollandt, wider die Lästerung Petri Plancii Calvinischen Predigers in Amsterdam und seiner Consorten . . .* (Hamburg, 1603).

2. *Flexible organization form.* Almost from the beginning Dutch Lutheranism followed a specific line in the organization of the church. Against Luther's advice, the Dutch Lutherans learned to organize themselves, because they could not rely on any governmental support. As a consequence they had to take the material interests of the church into their own hands. This principle, which came from Antwerp to Amsterdam, took shape in the Amsterdam church order, which came by various ways to North America. There it proved to be very useful in a political situation that was strongly marked by the separation of church and state. As a bottom-up order it appeared to fit very well in the democratic constellation of the United States of America.[9]

Of course, the American church order is not a copy of the Dutch one. It would even be contrary to the spirit of the Dutch Lutheran Church order for it to be rashly adopted, but this order should be accommodated to the needs of various situations. Without denying other influences, it is evident that the typical Dutch Lutheran form of administration, giving the congregation the basic authority and ascribing the supercongregational bodies no more authority than what was granted to them by the congregations, had become a fundamental idea in the polities of the Lutheran churches in the United States.

As the Americans once did, the new Protestant Church in the Netherlands now could gain from these Dutch Lutheran ideas, as the latter is confronted with serious challenges in organizing church ministry and church government.

Conclusion

By joining the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, the Dutch Lutherans rightly seized the chance that they had not gotten or taken before. The problem in the past was that Lutherans were not able to penetrate into Dutch society, and Lutheranism always remained a denomination on the margin. First isolated, later suppressed, but soon tolerated, and today simply too small to play a role of any importance: that is in a nutshell the development to the present position of Lutheranism in the Netherlands. By this merger, however, Dutch Lutherans get a tremendous opportunity to spread their ideas and ideals and to learn in many respects from their partners. In this mutuality faith will grow and the church will be built up. In this respect the merging churches have a promising future.

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9. Willem J. Kooiman, "Die Amsterdammer Kirchenordnung in ihrer Auswirkung auf die Lutherischen Kirchenordnung in den Vereinigten Staaten Amerikas," *Evangelische Theologie* 16 (1956): 225–38, and Klaas Zwanepol, "Lutheran-Reformed Unity in the Netherlands," *Lutheran Quarterly* 9 (1995): 419–51.

The Healing of the Bent Woman: A Narrative Interpretation of Luke 13:10–17

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The Episode

And he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath.
A And look, a woman having a spirit of weakness for eighteen years,
B and she was bending over double
C and was not being able to *straighten up* completely.
A' And seeing her, Jesus called and said to her,
B' "Woman, you have been *set free* from your weakness," and he put his hands on her.
C' And at once she was *straightened* and praised God.
But answering, the synagogue ruler, being angry that Jesus healed on the Sabbath, declared to the crowd,
a "Six days exist on which work *ought* to be done.
b Therefore come on those and be healed
c and not on the day of the Sabbath."
But the Lord answered him and said,
a' "Hypocrites! Each one of you on the Sabbath, does he not *loosen* his ox or his donkey from the manger and, leading it away, give it drink?
b' And this woman, being a daughter of Abraham whom Satan *bound* for eighteen years,
c' *ought* not she be *loosed* from this bond on the day of the Sabbath?"
And when he said these things, all the ones opposing him were put down to shame, and all the crowd rejoiced over all the glorious things that were done by him.[1]

Introduction

By the time we meet Jesus, the woman, and the synagogue ruler in this episode, previous stories in Luke have drawn the original hearer deep into the world of this intricate, powerful tale. Readers have witnessed magnificent birth stories and the abiding relationship between two faithful women. They have heard punctuating annunciations, prophecies, and testimonies about Jesus. Hearers have listened to Jesus announce his mission to the poor, the captive, the blind, and the oppressed and call his disciples. They also have witnessed Jesus' teaching, seen him heal and cast out demons, stood near as he related with undesirables, watched him break Sabbath laws, and experienced his defiance of powerful leaders.

Luke presents Jesus as an earth-shaking, justice-seeking prophet of God who

1. The letters at the left-hand margin illustrate parallelisms. Repeat words or cognates are italicized.

has an undeniably essential role in ushering in the rule of God. Prolepses of God's rule appear through many aspects of Jesus' actions in Luke. Jesus' ministry of healing exemplifies the mercy inherent to God's coming reign. The episode of the healing of the bent woman in Luke 13 illustrates one way that God's rule is made manifest among God's people. Luke tells this particular healing story in such a way as to demonstrate two Lukan themes: (1) Mercy is the basis for interpreting the law, and (2) The lowly are raised and the mighty are brought down.

Mercy and the law

The annunciation of Jesus' mission in Luke 4:18–19 illustrates the overall plot of Luke's entire narrative: that God anointed Jesus to address a nation troubled by social inequity.[2] Quoting Isaiah, Jesus describes himself as the fulfillment of the following verses:

> "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
> because he has anointed me
> to bring good news to the poor.
> He has sent me to proclaim release
> to the captives
> and recovery of sight to the blind,
> to let the oppressed go free,
> to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

From this point in the story forward, Jesus' mission includes acts of mercy that reveal the prominent place of liberation in God's kingdom.

Luke fills his Gospel with a number of stories that reflect Jesus' compassion and mercy for the poor, the sick, the infirm, and the oppressed. The cleansing of a leper (5:12–16), the healing of the centurion's servant (7:1–10), the raising of the widow's only son at Nain (7:11–17), and the healing of the Gerasene demoniac (8:26–39) are paradigmatic of Jesus' merciful actions toward those in need. The uniquely Lukan parables of the Samaritan who serves as an unlikely agent of healing for a battered traveler (10:25–37) and of the father who welcomes home his prodigal son (15:11–32) offer examples of the value Jesus placed on mercy.

Throughout Luke's Gospel, the narrator takes pains to show that Jesus proposed mercy as the lens through which to interpret the law. Rooted in the holiness tradition of Moses, the religious leaders regard the law as central to Israel's culture. The laws of this holiness tradition established proper order both in creation and in Israel's temple system, and the religious leaders were charged with upholding the holiness code that set the people of Israel apart.[3]

Though an heir of the same holiness tradition, Jesus adheres to a radically different interpretation of how the law ought to guide one's life. Jesus displays merciful compassion toward the sick, the sinful, and the infirm—directly in the presence of religious leaders who question the lawfulness of his actions. Luke's narrative illustrates such "unlawful" acts of mercy in the stories of the healing of the paralytic (5:17–26), the Sabbath healing of man with withered hand (6:6–11), the forgiveness of a sinful woman (7:36–50), our episode of the healing of the bent woman (13:10–17), and the healing of the man with dropsy (14:1–6). Though not explicitly in the presence of established religious leaders, Jesus also disregards holiness laws in stories like the healing of the woman with a hemorrhage (8:43–48), the cleansing of the lepers (17:11–19), and eating with tax collectors and sinners (as with Zacchaeus in 19:1–10).

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2. David Rhoads, *The Challenge of Diversity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996).

3. *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation*, ed. Jerome Neyrey (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991), 276–77.

Luke portrays Jesus, then, not as one who abrogates the laws of Israel but as one who reinterprets them. For Jesus, the law is only valid when understood through the lens of merciful action that serves the needs of the poor, the sick, and the infirm.

A mighty reversal: The lowly are lifted and the mighty brought down

Our analysis of the bent woman's story will show that the woman, through her healing, is lifted up from a disadvantaged and lowly state. By contrast, the synagogue leader, who was thought to have advantageous power and high authority in the community, is brought down through Jesus' shaming confrontation. This motif of reversals—upsetting the expectations set by a group or society—is one of Luke's favorites. In Luke's Gospel, the rich are poor and the poor are rich (1:53, 6:20, 16:19–25); the exalted are humbled and the humbled are exalted (14:11, 18:14); losing is saving and saving is losing (9:24, 17:33); the last are first and the first are last (13:30); low is high and high is low (1:52, 13:10–17). The powerful reversals of the expected norms are "the challenge the Kingdom brings to the complacent normalcy of one's accepted world."[4]

This continual challenge to the accepted social order has long stood as one of the key functions of the prophets. Luke's successful uses of reversals are legitimated, in part, by connecting Jesus with the prophets of ancient Israel. Indeed, Jesus' cultural role in the Gospel *is* that of a prophet who functions much like previous Israelite prophets. Jesus' cries for justice for the marginal remind hearers of the plea that the first prophets lifted up time and time again in public spaces where crowds gather. When Moses and Jethro name judges, God calls them specifically to appoint those attentive to the most vulnerable. The prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Amos, and Micah reminded wayward children of Abraham and Sarah of the essential elements of their covenantal bond with Yahweh that demands justice, care, and inclusion for all members of the community. Jesus' place as prophet and the bent woman's place among her sisters and brothers join to remind readers that this healing—on the Sabbath—is vital to the life of Israel and the laws of God.

In his use of parables, Luke challenges oppressive boundaries and favors inclusion of the marginal. Luke's treatment of the parable of the great banquet provides a fine example of Luke's emphasis on elevating the status of those considered "outside" the analogous "king's" great banquet. After inviting the rich, religious, and so-called "proper citizens" and receiving their many excuses why they are too busy to attend, the narrator says that the king extends the invitation to the "poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame" (14:15–24)—folks just like the bent woman. The parable concludes with the same message Jesus delivers to the unwelcome synagogue leaders in our story when he states that none of the original invitees "will taste my dinner." Similar treatments follow in virtually all of the parables that are unique to Luke (the Good Samaritan, the Prodigal Son, the Widow and the Judge, and the Rich Man and Lazarus). In the same vein, Luke's unique story of the bent woman also surprises the reader. The supposedly righteous synagogue leader is brought down to shame, while the woman, formerly crippled and excluded from her community, is lifted up to a place of honor.

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4. John Crossan, as quoted by John York in *The Last Shall Be First: The Rhetoric of Reversal in Luke* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 32.

The Sabbath healing in Luke: A type-scene

A good narrator uses various literary tools to weave the plot lines of a story. One such tool that Luke and the other Gospel writers often use is that of recurring type-scenes. A type-scene repeats certain characters, situations, interactions, and discourse throughout the narrative. Through these elements of repetition, the narrator sets up patterns that lead the reader to develop certain expectations about the ensuing episode.[5]

One of Luke's favorite type-scenes is that of healing. Stories such as the healing of the centurion's servant (7:1–10), the raising of the widow's son at Nain (7:11–17), the raising of Jairus' daughter (8:40–42, 49–56), the healing of the hemorrhaging woman (8:43–48), and the cleansing of the ten lepers (17:11–19) share many common characteristics: the suppliant previously has heard of Jesus; the narrator introduces the suppliant and his or her problem; the suppliant comes to Jesus for healing (on his or her own or through a surrogate); the healing occurs; and faith is directly linked to the healing.

Three healing stories in Luke, however, contain two features not found in the other healing stories. First is the feature of controversy with established religious leaders, and second is the setting on the Sabbath. Thus, the stories of the man with a withered hand (6:6–11), the man with dropsy (14:1–6), and our episode of the bent woman (13:10–17) together create a unique category of type-scene: the type-scene of Sabbath healing.[6]

The Sabbath provides the temporal setting for each of these stories. Each unfolds in the presence of religious leaders: two of them take place in a synagogue (6:6–11, 13:10–17), and one happens on the way to a Pharisee's house. The narrator then points to the presence of a person with a malady. Rather than approaching Jesus as in other healing stories, however, the infirm person is either already present or simply appears on the scene. There is no indication that any of the infirm persons are seeking healing, presumably because it is the Sabbath. Instead, Jesus initiates the healing, after which interpretation of Sabbath law comes into question, either by Jesus' initial questions to religious leaders (6:6–11, 14:1–6) or by a religious leader's annoyance at Jesus' apparent disregard for Sabbath work laws (13:10–17). Controversy with religious leaders ensues, and Jesus emerges victorious in the conflict, leaving the religious leaders angry, shamed, or silenced.

While a type-scene functions to create a pattern of repetition for the hearer of a particular story, each type-scene also introduces variations and/or new elements into the story. The introduction of variant features into the type-scene of Sabbath healing leads the reader to notice particular details and emphases that stand out from our episode in relation to the other Sabbath healing type-scenes.

The story of the bent woman introduces several feature variations into the type-scene:

- The infirm character is a woman, and Jesus calls to her in the synagogue.
- The duration of her infirmity is highlighted. The woman has been bent for 18 years. (The number 18 may be a reference to the number of individuals who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell upon them in 13:4. These 18 people died through no fault of their own. Repeating the number 18 in this pericope, then, suggests that

5. Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981).

6. Robert Tannehill, *Luke* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996).

the woman's infirmity is not her fault; it is not to be interpreted as a "punishment.")

- Her condition is attributed to a spirit and then to Satan.
- Jesus places his hands on the woman.
- The woman praises God in response to her healing, highlighting the connection between Jesus' work and God's saving power.
- The presence of a crowd is lifted up, adding intensity to the public nature of this synagogue setting.
- The religious leader speaks, addressing the crowd rather than Jesus.
- Jesus publicly defends the woman, naming her "daughter of Abraham," and publicly shames the religious leaders.
- The crowd rejoices at Jesus "glorious works."

The woman

The narrator introduces the woman early in the episode through a series of parallel lines.[7] The narrator gives little clue about why the woman is in the synagogue on this particular Sabbath day, saying simply that she "appeared." Because she is crippled by a "spirit of weakness," the narrator reveals that the woman has been unable to straighten up completely for 18 years. A few lines later in the story, the woman's condition is again attributed to evil powers; she has been bound by Satan.

Although each of the Gospels contains stories that convey a belief in spirits and spirit-aggression, John Pilch notes that this motif seems particularly prominent in Luke.[8] This episode is not an exorcism, but the fact that the woman's condition is attributed to an evil spirit connects her with other possessed people in Luke. According to Robert Tannehill, the woman's "spirit of weakness" can refer to various sorts of ailments, infirmities, or illnesses.[9] Taken in its ancient context, the notion of illness or infirmity does not point simply to a physical illness but also relates to social and personal perceptions of *socially* disvalued states. The presence of an evil spirit within and the reality of an infirm or un-whole physical condition provided cause for the bent woman to be labeled "unclean." Unclean persons were seen as a threat to the collective purity of the people of Israel.[10] Thus, the combination of evil spirit and infirm body in the woman creates a double marginalization of uncleanliness that would have restricted her to the outer edges of her community. Perhaps the narrator's choice to describe the woman's condition as "bent over" illustrates, at least in part, her low social position.

Even though a "spirit of weakness" has kept the woman from straightening up for 18 years, the story offers no evidence that she seeks to be healed by Jesus. Her inaction implies that the woman knows that approaching Jesus for healing on the Sabbath day would be illegal. Instead, Jesus summons the woman and places his hands on her. We are told that she was straightened at once and began praising God. The fact that the woman praises God rather than Jesus is significant here. Jesus is the instrument of the woman's healing, but she recognizes that God's work *within* Jesus restores her. Jesus' healing proclamation "you have been set free" emphasizes further that God has done the work of making

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7. See the translation at the beginning of this article for visual clues to parallelism.

8. John Pilch, "Sickness and Healing in Luke-Acts," in *The Social World of Luke-Acts,* ed. Jerome Neyrey, 196.

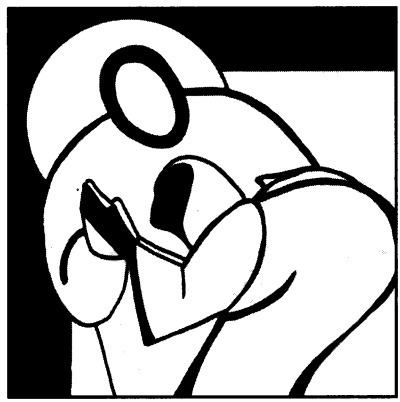
9. Tannehill, *Luke*, 65.

10. Turid Karlsen Seim, "The Gospel of Luke," in *Searching the Scriptures,* vol. 2, ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (New York: Crossroad, 1994).

the woman strong. God's mercy is mediated through Jesus, and the woman appropriately names God as the subject of her praise.

Later in the episode, the synagogue ruler suggests that infirm people ought not to present themselves for healing on the Sabbath. Jesus responds with support for the woman, however, revealing two essential points for understanding the significance of this story. First, Jesus identifies her as "this woman . . . a daughter of Abraham." Luke's Gospel reserves such an honored title for only one other person, Zacchaeus. Second, Jesus describes the woman's healing as an act of "setting free" or "loosing" one who has been bound.

Understanding the importance of Abraham's role in Luke's Gospel reinforces the significance of naming the woman a daughter of Abraham. The core of the scriptures for Luke lay in the First Testament prophecies to David and, before David, to Abraham.[11] For Luke, Abraham functions to represent God's originating covenant and promise to the Hebrew people. Part of God's fulfillment of the covenant made to Abraham is realized through radical reversals. Mary, for example, sings of such reversals in 1:50–55. In her song, Mary describes how the powerful are brought down and the lowly are lifted up, the hungry are filled and the rich are sent away empty.[12] For her, all of these reversals connect directly to God's steadfast love and to God's faithfulness to the covenant God made with Abraham: "He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever." Mary's song illustrates that God's promise to Abraham and his descendants can be fulfilled only through radical social upheaval in which the powerful are brought down and the lowly are lifted, the hungry are filled and the rich are sent away empty.



When Jesus calls the woman a daughter of Abraham, then, he essentially names her share in the blessing of Abraham's progeny and binds her forever to God's faithfulness and mercy. Placed first in the Greek sentence as a mode of emphasis, Jesus' use of "daughter of Abraham" reflects this Gospel's emphasis on the radical inclusion in God's election and faithful promises. Turid Karlsen Seim rightly notes that the woman does not *become* a daughter of Abraham at Jesus' naming; rather, she is already and has always been a child of the promise.[13] Jesus' public affirmation of the woman's place in Abraham's lineage points simply to the woman's restored place with her people.

Jesus says that the woman has been set free from Satan's bondage. Luke's use of the language of "loosing" or "setting free"

11. Neyrey, "The Symbolic Universe of Luke-Acts," in *The Social World of Luke Acts*, 295.

12. Abraham is also linked to radical reversals in 3:8, 13:28, 16:22–31, and 19:9.

13. Karlsen Seim, "The Gospel of Luke," 737.

points the reader back to Jesus' proclamation of mission in chapter 4, where part of God's saving work through Jesus involves setting prisoners free (v. 18). Significantly, the woman's freedom also comes on the Sabbath—the day that serves as a remembrance of the Jubilee in which all debts are forgiven and all slaves freed. The liberation of a daughter of Abraham is total, encompassing both the physical healing that restores her to health and the social healing that restores her place in the Jubilee community of promise.

Jesus in relation to the woman

Jesus acts with shocking boldness in relation to the woman in this episode. He is teaching in the synagogue on the Sabbath day when she appears. Apparently moved by compassion for the woman's condition, Jesus takes initiative for her healing. Seeing her, he calls her over to him and places his hands on her, ignoring any potential impurity or defilement that may come from touching a bent woman bound by an evil spirit. Highlighting the authority of Jesus' words and actions, the result occurs immediately after he declares the woman's freedom from her weakness: the woman is straightened "at once."

Not only does Jesus heal the woman by loosing her from Satan's bond, Jesus also becomes her advocate. He defends her to the crowd when the synagogue leader suggests that her Sabbath healing is tantamount to lawbreaking. From Jesus' point of view, the merciful act of healing fits perfectly with his interpretation of what it means to fulfill God's law. Not only does he heal her, but he also engages in dialogue so that the woman is doubly lifted up from her marginalized position as the powerful ones rejecting her are brought down to shame.

The synagogue leader

The synagogue leader takes center stage just after Jesus' healing actions that led to the restoration of the bent woman. The hopeful mood created through this healing encounter is quickly interrupted when the synagogue leader responds with anger about what has just taken place. Indignant at Jesus' seeming disregard for the law, the leader addresses the gathered crowd: "Six days exist on which work ought to be done. Therefore come on those and be healed and not on the day of the Sabbath."

Jesus responds directly to the synagogue leader and calls him and all those like him "hypocrites." When Jesus continues his discourse in a way that reverses the synagogue leader's view of the law and what "ought" to be done on the Sabbath, the leader and all those like him are put to shame.

Before we consider the character of this leader and his reactions to Jesus, it will be helpful to understand the leader's roles and responsibilities.[14] The honored office of synagogue leader, acquired by election, appointment, or inheritance, served a wide range of practical and spiritual leadership. Duties included regulating worship, choosing Torah readers and prayer leaders, inviting other people to preach, and contributing to the building and restoration of the synagogue building. The leader also represented the congregation to the community and to outside authorities, functioning as the synagogue's ambassador to the world beyond the synagogue walls.

As a person of public authority in the congregation, this leader had a specific view about the healing that had just taken place. First, his response falls clearly within

14. Claudia J. Selzer, "Rulers of the Synagogue," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992).

the expectations of his position. Part of his work involves regulating what happens within the walls of the synagogue, and outright disregard for Sabbath law is unacceptable. Second, the leader's interpretation of the law is at stake in the face of Jesus' public Sabbath healing. The leader in this episode interprets the Scriptures in much the same way that the Pharisees and other leaders do throughout Luke's Gospel—they tend to understand the legal prescriptions of the law of Moses as literal and binding. The holiness system promulgated by the established Jewish leaders was, in their minds, scripturally based and obligatory for a set-apart and holy nation. A healing on the Sabbath flies in the face of such an interpretation of the law.

According to the synagogue leader, then, Jesus' flagrant lawbreaking denigrates the holiness that should define his behavior as faithful and God-fearing. Jesus' "lawbreaking" action also dishonors the synagogue leader personally as one charged with enforcing Sabbath law. For the leader, the only appropriate response to Jesus is anger. The leader's rhetoric of response reinforces his indignation by using the strict language of Sabbath law to rebuke both Jesus and the woman.

The leader displays his point of view about Jesus when he responds publicly to the healing of the woman. Jesus, the synagogue leader, and the woman in this episode are immersed in a culture that centers on the core values of honor and shame.[15] According to the rules of this culture, one person's honor may be challenged through word or action in almost any instance. When such a challenge occurs, the one whose honor is at stake is expected to respond in such a way that preserves his honor. Such a game of challenge and riposte can happen appropriately only between two people who enjoy relatively equal honor in the eyes of the public. When the synagogue leader addresses the crowd rather than addressing Jesus directly in response to the Sabbath lawbreaking that has just occurred, one may deduce that the synagogue leader does not perceive Jesus to be on equal social footing with him. Hence, Jesus' actions do not warrant direct response. Jesus, however, believes that he himself acts out of the higher authority of God's power and, rather than slinking away shamed by the leader's public retort to his actions, Jesus responds directly to the synagogue leader. Using the strong language of hypocrisy, Jesus exposes the inconsistency between the leaders' (plural) Sabbath interpretations and their own Sabbath activities. They perceive Jesus' Sabbath healing action as lawbreaking, but they themselves loosen their livestock, lead it away, and give it drink on the Sabbath. This, too, is "work" according to Sabbath law, and Jesus exposes the leaders' anger at healing as two-faced and hypocritical.

The crowd, being even lower than Jesus in the honor-shame society, rejoices at Jesus' response to the synagogue leader and all those opposing Jesus. Though at first glance the crowd's presence may seem insignificant, its role in this scene is crucial. Matters of honor and shame must be witnessed publicly in order to be recognized as valid. As such, the crowd's response to the interactions between Jesus and the synagogue leader is instrumental to the outcome of the honor-shame challenge that is taking place. Jesus has exposed the leaders' hypocrisy, and the crowd rejoices. In so doing, the crowd publicly affirms

15. See Bruce Malina and Jerome Neyrey, "Honor and Shame in Luke-Acts: Pivotal Values of the Mediterranean World," in *The Social World of Luke-Acts*, ed. Jerome Neyrey, 25-67.

Jesus' place of honor while the leaders' once mighty positions become humiliated positions of shame.

Jesus is not the only one honored, however. He has not only defended himself but has also publicly advocated for the woman. He calls her a daughter of Abraham in the presence of religious leaders and before a crowd that once would have seen and treated her as one of lowly position. Jesus' witness to the woman's share in Abraham's progeny raises *her* up to a place of honor at the same time that Jesus' opponents are brought down to shame.

Jesus in relation to the synagogue leader

As we have seen, Jesus confronts the synagogue leader swiftly and harshly. Using a series of parallelisms, the narrator shows how Jesus challenges each of the points that the leader made in his earlier admonition to the crowd:

a (Leader) "Six days exist on which work ought to be done.

a' (Jesus) "Hypocrites! Each one of you on the Sabbath, does he not loosen his ox or his donkey from the manger and, leading it away, give it drink?"

b (Leader) "Therefore come on those and be healed . . ."

b' (Jesus) :And this woman, being a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years, ought not she be loosed from this bond . . ."

c (Leader) "and not on the day of the Sabbath."

c' (Jesus) "on the day of the Sabbath?"

Jesus' words portray him as an advocate for the woman, and the language Jesus uses to confront the leader places this episode in continuity with Jesus' articulated mission of liberating and releasing captives. Jesus' confrontation turns on its head the synagogue leader's interpretation of the law. Finally, Jesus' words and actions function to shame the synagogue leader and all the ones like him.

The woman in our story has experienced the gift of holistic healing through Jesus. Not only her physical health has been restored, but her newly "clean" body allows her to be socially healed as well. The synagogue leader's role is to maintain proper observance of the Sabbath, and thus he is adamant that people in need of healing ought not present themselves in the synagogue on the Sabbath day. Jesus, however, interprets the law differently and publicly advocates for the woman against the leader's criticism of her presence there.

Jesus' comparison between the woman's situation and the treatment of livestock sets up several points of contrast. Jesus first affirms that this woman is a daughter of Abraham, not an animal. She is a child of God's promise, utterly deserving of honor and dignity whether or not she suffers from weakness or infirmity. Further, while the animals that are loosed for drink on the Sabbath must wait only a short time to be relieved of their thirst, this woman has been waiting eighteen long years to be loosed from her bondage.

The drastic contrast between the leaders' name, "Hypocrites," and the woman's name, "Daughter of Abraham," also emphasizes the woman's place in God's reign over against the law-bound religious leaders. The language "daughter of Abraham" connects the hearer with John's preaching in Luke 3. In this passage, John warns the people that being recognized as a descendant of Abraham necessarily includes acts of repentance. Specifically, John's admonition tells those who would hear that bearing the good fruit of repentance means caring for and sharing with the poor and the marginalized. Any tree that does not bear such fruit will be cut down and thrown into

the fire (3:9). In this light, then, the leaders who respond hypocritically to God's in-breaking kingdom as illustrated in the daughter of Abraham's story will receive no share in God's reign.

Jesus has also chosen carefully the words of his confrontation to connect the daughter of Abraham's healing with his previously announced mission of proclaiming release to captives. Rather than describing the woman's restored condition as "healed" or "cured," Jesus uses forms of the word λυω, "to loose" or "to release." The religious leaders untie (λυει) their cattle on the day of the Sabbath in order to lead them to water. How much more, then, should this woman, daughter of Abraham, be loosed (λυθηναι) from her captivity on the day of the Sabbath? She becomes an example of Jesus' freeing proclamation, liberated to experience *shabbat* in her very being.

In the synagogue leader's recitation of Sabbath law, the narrator employs notable use of the Greek word δει ("it is necessary," "ought"). Only six days exist on which work ought (δει) to be done. He declares that the Sabbath is not made for work, thus forming the basis of his critique against Jesus' healing. In his response, Jesus cleverly picks up on the leader's use of the word δει. The leader cites the necessity of observing the Sabbath in accordance with the law. "Six days exist on which work ought (δει/) to be done." Jesus, however, cites the much greater necessity of freeing a human being from whatever has bound or diminished her. "And this woman . . . ought (δει/) not she be loosed from this bond on the day of the Sabbath?"

Jesus does not abrogate the Sabbath by his apparent lawbreaking. Rather, he reinterprets it according to the covenants made to Abraham and David whereby God acted in mercy to elect unlikely people as recipients of blessing and promise.[16] According to Jesus' interpretation of the law, God's chief attribute is mercy, not holiness. As such, mercy is lifted up as the norm, the lens through which the law is interpreted.

According to Jesus' interpretation of the law, God's chief attribute is mercy, not holiness.

As we have seen, Jesus' public confrontation results in the shaming of his opponents and the raising up of the woman. The good news of liberation for the woman—and for the crowd—stands as a supreme challenge to the established religious community. God's reign is breaking into the world through the ministry of Jesus, but not everyone will be included. The daughter of Abraham's story is surprising, indeed, for it tells the community that the ones like her—crippled, excluded, on the margins—will share in God's reign. Those who fail to do the work of God's just kingdom—caring for and sharing with the poor and marginalized—will have no share in the kingdom of God.

Conclusion

The story of the bent woman points to two major Lukan themes. First, the law is appropriately interpreted only through the

16. Neyrey, "The Symbolic Universe of Luke-Acts," 296.

Witnesses to and participants in Jesus' actions catch a glimpse of what God's coming rule entails.

lens of mercy. Second, in Luke's Gospel the lowly are lifted and the mighty are brought down. Far from being disparate themes, however, Luke tells the story of the bent woman in such a way that mercy—particularly the woman's healing—*becomes* a matter of lifting the lowly and bringing down the mighty. Witnesses to and participants in Jesus' actions catch a glimpse of what God's coming rule entails. The marginalized are healed and reintegrated into a society that prefers to ignore them. They are raised up, liberated to assume their rightful place in God's realm. The keepers of the law, conversely, are brought down from their assumed places of honored authority, rejecting the prolepsis of the rule of God and thereby removing themselves from a place at the feast. The major sociopolitical implications of a story such as this certainly would not have been lost on a first-century hearer.

As the primary protagonist in the larger Lukan narrative, the impact of Jesus' role in this episode is perhaps most significant. First, Jesus' words and actions reveal clearly that he values people and their well-being over rules and the law. Second, Jesus' activity emphasizes his commitment to stand at the margins with those who are outcast rather than on the side of established leadership. These two realities, combined with Jesus' unapologetic shaming of "powerful" ones that do not share his values, create a profoundly countercultural message to an original hearer. If the hearer is a woman who also feels the weight of exclusion and marginalization, one can only imagine the liberation of being publicly affirmed as a "daughter of Abraham."

Jesus Christ Is His Own Rhetoric! Reflections on the Relationship between Theology and Rhetoric in Preaching

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Homiletics began in the United States when the rhetoric of the Scottish Enlightenment, with its particular way of construing the relationship between speaker, hearers, and speech, entered the American classroom. Recently, James F. Kay outlined this advent of homiletics and its effect on American preaching in his inaugural lecture as the Joe R. Engle Professor of Homiletics and Liturgics at Princeton Theological Seminary.[1] As he notes, "beginning with [John] Witherspoon [1723–1794], homiletics in America has generally operated within a rhetorical, rather than a theological, frame of reference."[2]

Kay tells the story of homiletics, the broad outline of which is generally agreed upon by homileticians: First, homiletics was primarily rhetoric applied to the pulpit art. Second, some began to doubt that rhetoric could adequately account for the *kind* of persuasion and announcement spoken from the Christian pulpit. Third, Karl Barth transformed homiletics by divorcing it, or at least trying to, from issues of rhetoric, thus placing discussions of preaching and its role in the church appropriately back in the framework of theology. Fourth, we have realized that not even Barth could avoid rhetoric completely. New forms of the sermon must be—and have been—developed to achieve the appropriate hearing of the sermon. In this fourth stage, it is clear that preachers dismiss rhetoric to their own peril and to the peril of the religiosity of their congregants. Finally, because much narrative homiletics is necessarily wedded to theological liberalism, Kay suggests a theologically more appropriate way to retrieve the importance of context and rhetoric for the sermon.

I argue that no account of preaching and rhetoric that does not call into question the assumption that theology and rhetoric need somehow to be *related* can solve the homiletical dilemma but will only perpetuate it. Only a christological construal of the sermon as speech will free homiletics from its captivity to rhetoric.

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1. James F. Kay, "Reorientation: Homiletics as Theologically Authorized Rhetoric," *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 24/1 (2003): 16–35.
2. Ibid., 17.

Narrative homiletics and theological liberalism

Though I have reservations about Kay's critique of Barth and his own constructive proposal, which I discuss below, I find Kay's essay extraordinarily helpful because it makes clear that the dominant homiletics of the second half of the last century has been a wellspring of liberal theology and that it must be seriously critiqued, though he does not put it quite that way. He worries that homiletical theories emphasizing narrative rhetoric in preaching remain vague concerning the subject matter of theology. In his exposition of the goal of the new rhetoric in theology one thing becomes clear: the role of the sermon in almost every narrative homiletics is to evoke in the hearers some latent religious feeling, a sense of the noumenal, a relationship with the holy.

One can trace this understanding of evocation of the holy as the job of religious speech in general and the Christian sermon in particular back to Schleiermacher's understanding of religious feeling and his account of preaching in *The Christian Faith*.[3] When the affective religious-self-consciousness reaches a certain stage of development, it issues in utterances that are the speech-symbolic expressions of the internal religious emotion (p. 77). Doctrine for Schleiermacher is the cultivated outward expression of these religious emotions; and preaching as the re-presentation of these doctrines in a rhetorical mode endeavors to elicit religious emotion, the highest of which is a feeling of absolute dependence. He writes, "When we speak of Christian *Preaching*, we mean chiefly the utterance and presentation which have a directly rousing effect" (p. 87). Doctrine for Schleiermacher expresses and isolates in human speech the religious experience; homiletics uses human speech to rouse the very human consciousness to that religious experience which it finds codified in doctrine. In the retrieval of rhetoric for homiletics, rhetoric is the vehicle for rousing the consciousness.

Unfortunately, this way of approaching the sermon is alive and well in the world of homiletical theory. One of the greatest proponents of liberal experientialism in preaching, Eugene Lowry, has not confined his speculations to his book written in 1980, *The Homiletical Plot*.[4] There he was clear enough that he hoped the "revelatory clue" of the sermon would be "*experienced* by the congregation rather than simply *known*" (p. 48). His homiletical plot is a method of sermon preparation by which to assure that such experience takes place, for if you execute it properly "there is therefore no option [for the hearer] but to stay involved in the sermonic process" (p. 38).

That was 1980. In his more recent book *The Sermon: Dancing at the Edge of Mystery*[5] Lowry revised his method, making it even clearer that the goal of the sermon is to evoke a certain experience. He writes, "Preaching is an offering intending to evoke an event that cannot be coerced into being" (p. 37). For Lowry, proclamation does not occur, even though preaching might happen, if an experience is not evoked. "Preaching is our task," he writes. "Proclaiming the Word is the realized goal. Perhaps the act of evocation may become the bridge, the spanning medium of possibility, between preaching and proclaim-

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3. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, ed. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989).

4. Eugene L. Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot: The Sermon as Narrative Art Form* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1980).

5. Eugene L. Lowry, *The Sermon: Dancing at the Edge of Mystery* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997).

ing" (p. 38). He then offers a modified version of his homiletical plot as a rhetorical means by which to evoke a religious experience. As to the nature of that religious experience, Lowry is silent, for the experience itself is what counts.

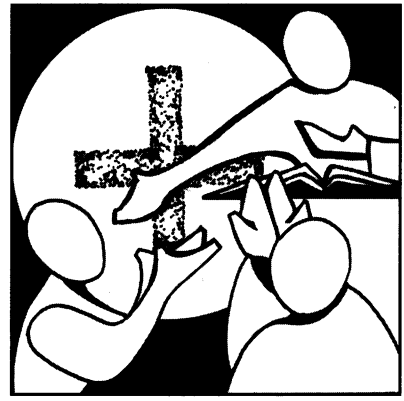
I wish this account of preaching were confined to theory; unfortunately it is present in practice, and in the practice of one of the most prominent practitioners, Barbara Brown Taylor. For her the interior response and experience of the individual listener is of utmost importance. In her *The Preaching Life* she writes,

> With any luck, where the sermon finally leads both preacher and congregation is into the presence of God, a place that cannot be explained but only experienced. Everyone involved in it goes away with images, thoughts, and emotions that change and grow as the process of discovery goes on and on.[6]

The job of the sermon is to lead into the presence of God, and it is rhetoric, the preacher's effective use of words, that does the leading. The presence of God, moreover, is an experience "that cannot be explained." A sermon of hers for Trinity Sunday ends,

> Meanwhile, I do not know why we hold ourselves responsible for explaining things that cannot be explained. Perhaps the most faithful sermon on the Trinity is one that sniffs around the edges of mystery, hunting for something closer to an experience than an understanding. What, for instance, is the sound of three hands clapping?[7]

We see here in Lowry and Taylor the theological gaps characteristic of any homiletical theory and practice that values the ambiguities of religious feeling over the particularities of the Christian gospel. They have little to say about God, the gospel, or the Word which is proclaimed and much to say about the goal of such proclaiming, the evocation of religious experience—a goal,



it seems, that can be reached by the wonders of rhetorical skill. As Kay puts it, "Rhetoric is the constant; theology is the variable."[8] When I read Lowry and Taylor I can imagine a perfectly straight line drawn from them to Schleiermacher. The job of the sermon is to evoke, rouse the religious emotion. In evocation, rousing rhetoric has a distinctive role to play.

Barth and the relationship between theology and rhetoric

While such a critique of the return to rhetoric in all its various forms is helpful, even essential, it is not enough if it does not expose the fault line underlying the way the question of the relationship between theology and rhetoric in preaching is usually framed. The shape of this fault line becomes clear if we examine Kay's critique of Karl Barth and his alternate proposal for a reorientation of theology and rhetoric. I

6. Barbara Brown Taylor, *The Preaching Life* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley, 1993), 83.

7. Barbara Brown Taylor, *Home By Another Way* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley, 1999), 154.

8. Kay, "Reorientation," 29.

will show how, by accepting the validity of the seemingly perennial question of the relationship between theology and rhetoric in preaching, Kay is unable in his constructive proposal to overcome the very liberal homiletics he critiques. Finally, I turn to Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who helps me suggest a more appropriate theological perspective that heals the fault line in modern homiletics precisely because it will not abide the traditional distinction between theology and rhetoric in preaching.

Kay accuses Barth of incoherence for rejecting sermon introductions on theological and psychological grounds. Kay argues that when Barth suggests that introductions should be eschewed because they imply a "point of contact," an *analogia entis* (analogy of being), between creation and God—that there can be some kind of human preparation for the reception of the Word—Barth conflates the rhetorical point of contact between preacher and listener with the analogy of being between God and the creature. By confusing the two, Barth dismisses tactical introductions on theological grounds. Kay writes that "dogmatics, as such, has no right to demand, as Barth does, that homiletical theory should outlaw sermon introductions."[9] Furthermore, Kay suggests that Barth's rejection of sermon introductions on psychological grounds abandons his own principle that the theological perspective is primary. "As a former pastor with years of experience," Kay writes,

> Barth is certainly entitled to his opinions. Nevertheless, if the theological frame of reference is primary, then on what *theological* grounds can Barth unexpectedly move to a rhetorical frame of reference where the psychological needs and cultural context of the listeners affect the very structure of the sermon?[10]

If we look carefully at Barth, we find that Barth makes none of these errors and that the distinction between the theological and the rhetorical is in fact an imposition, unknown to Barth. First, Barth does not "outlaw sermon introductions." He suggests to his students (for his *Homiletics*[11] is based on seminar notes taken by students) that certain kinds of introductions are appropriate, but most are psychologically unhelpful and theologically dubious. Only these latter kinds should be "rejected in principle" (p. 121).

Second, Barth offers his psychological critique of introductions before his theological critique. And why should he not offer his experienced opinion to his students? There is no reason to assume that Barth's theological perspective would prevent him from discussing the form of a sermon, and in such a discussion the question of introductions is bound to arise. This is far from Barth "unexpectedly" and illegitimately moving to the "rhetorical frame." Perhaps we ourselves should reject the common notion that Barth rejects rhetoric in favor of a more nuanced reading of his theology of preaching.

Third, Barth does make a very constructive and important suggestion regarding sermon introductions: "The course of worship itself is the introduction to the sermon, its climax. The act of proclamation should begin at once" (p. 122). A high view of sermon introductions! All of worship is preparation for the proclamation of God's word, Barth suggests. For that reason we should not delay with witty introductions.

Finally, Barth rejects sermon introductions on the theological grounds that they try to find a place for the Word of God

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9. Kay, "Reorientation," 33.
10. Ibid.
11. Karl Barth, *Homiletics*, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley and Donald Daniels (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1991).

to land in the listener, a place only the Word itself can create. But notice: far from conflating the rhetorical realm with the theological, Barth is making an empirical claim. He writes,

> The theological damage of sermon introductions is in any event incredibly extensive, and it is usually an error when preachers use them. For what do they really involve at root? Nothing other than the search for a point of contact, for an analogue in us which can be a point of entry for the Word of God. (p. 124)

Sermon introductions are *usually* errors. Indeed, Barth is vehemently opposed to the kind of theological error he thinks sermon introductions cause. Nonetheless, he is not suggesting that all sermon introductions commit this error, only that most do; thus, only a certain *kind* of introduction, albeit a common one, needs to be avoided. Barth might have been perfectly content with a sermon introduction that neither was psychologically unhelpful nor implied a point of contact.

Authorizing rhetoric from the theological realm?

Kay concludes his critique of Barth: "This incoherence in Barth's homiletical theory arises through his failure to furnish theological arguments authorizing rhetoric" (p. 33). Indeed, given his analysis of the new rhetoric and Barth's failure, Kay thinks the challenge facing homiletics in light of the "impasse between two incommensurable frames of reference, namely, the theological and the rhetorical" is how "these two frames of reference might be appropriately related" (p. 32). The new rhetoric rejects theology in favor of rhetoric (though, as I have shown, the new rhetoric has an implied liberal theology).

Barth ostensibly rejects rhetoric. Kay wants to offer an appropriately theological argument justifying his position that "*Preaching is more faithful to the Word of God when it is fitting or appropriate to its hearers' context*" (p. 33; emphasis his). Kay's argument is simple. Because God is "richly differentiated," that is, God is Trinity; and, furthermore, because God gives grace in ways appropriate to particular recipients, the church likewise should differentiate its message in ways appropriate to the context of the hearers. "This Good News of God's own giving to each creature what is contextually fitting and appropriate to it, with full regard for its particularity, authorizes the church's own *concursus* in the ministry of the Word" (p. 34). The preacher must make rhetorical judgments in writing and delivering the sermon, taking into account the contextual situation of the hearers, thus performing a homiletical *imitatio Dei*.

Kay's suggestion, while neither shocking nor groundbreaking, leaves several questions unanswered and fails to overcome the insufficiencies of the homiletics he critiques. First, *how* is the preacher supposed to make rhetorical judgments that imitate God's own taking account of the creatures' context? The various contexts of the congregants are as many as the people in the pews. Second, to imagine that God is "taking into account" the context of his creatures before dispensing grace is to suggest an anthropomorphic form of discursive reasoning and rhetorical judgment in God that does not fit the mystery of God's simplicity. Put differently, God's grace is fitting of our various contexts not from God's side but from ours. Rather, the idea that God's grace fits with human circumstances is more appropriately conceived in broader terms. God's grace fits our human context because God has ordained the grace of the Eucharist to come as food (since human creatures eat) and the grace of the proclaimed word to come as speech (since

humans are linguistic). The pinnacle of this understanding of grace is of course the incarnation itself, in which God becomes a human being and not, for instance, a plant. God "takes into account" our peculiar nature as human creatures not by surveying our various contexts and dispensing grace accordingly but by ordaining means of grace appropriate to humans as such. Thus, that the grace of preaching is "contextually fitting and appropriate" is accomplished by the very fact of proclamation itself, not by the rhetorical judgments of the preacher.

> The preacher's job is to preach in such a way that he or she does not interfere with . . . the word's "self-movement."

The deepest insufficiency of Kay's approach lies not in the particularities of his proposal but much deeper: in his accepting the terms of the argument without calling them into question. Like the Enlightenment rhetoricians, like Kay's account of Barth, like the new rhetoric, Kay supposes that the problem of homiletics is the *relationship between theology and rhetoric*. He assumes that, because "whatever else a sermon is, it is at least a speech" (p. 31), considerations appropriate to speech *in itself* must be given due weight. This assumes that there is a natural category called speech—human linguistic communication—of which the sermon is a special, idiosyncratic type. Theologically speaking, this is exactly backward. Rather than suggesting we know what a speech is and then trying to figure out how to apply its rhetorical principles to the sermon, we should assume that human communication reaches it apex and epitome in the sermon; the question is how ordinary human speaking can approximate the grace of the spoken Word of God. To get clearer on this point I turn to Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the rhetoric of Christ's humanity

In his lectures on homiletics to the seminarians at Finkenwalde,[12] Bonhoeffer offers a theological account of the nature of the proclaimed word, one that rejects the liberal approach we saw in Schleiermacher. He says that the proclaimed word "neither originates from a truth once perceived nor from personal experience. It is not the reproduction of a specific set of feeling" (p. 101). Rather, the proclaimed word originates in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. The incarnate Jesus Christ has taken on all of humanity, establishing a new human nature. Furthermore, "The church is included in the incarnation as the *sanctorum communio*" (p. 102). If Barth wrote of the threefold nature of the Word of God—Jesus Christ, Scripture, and preaching—Bonhoeffer speaks of the threefold nature of the incarnation. The Son became incarnate, taking on human flesh. The church participates in that incarnation as the new humanity embodied in the communion of the saints. Finally, and here is Bonhoeffer's innovation, the "proclaimed word is the

12. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Worldly Preaching: Lectures on Homiletics*, trans. and ed. Clyde E. Fant (New York: Crossroad, 1991).

Christ bearing human nature" (p. 102). The proclaimed word presupposes and constitutes the fellowship of believers. It "makes individuals part of one body" because the "Word includes us into itself" (p. 102). Therefore, Bonhoeffer writes, "This proclamation of the Christ does not regard its primary responsibility to be giving advice, arousing emotions, or stimulating the will—it will do these things too—but its intention is to sustain us" (p. 102).

If the aim of the proclaimed word is to sustain us as the new humanity, the body of Christ, precisely because the proclaimed word "conveys the new humanity" (p. 102), what is the job of the preacher in constructing and preaching the sermon? The preacher's job is to preach in such a way that he or she does not interfere with what Bonhoeffer calls the word's "self-movement." He writes,

> This self-movement of the word to the congregation should not be hindered by the preacher but rather should be acknowledged. The preacher should not allow his or her own efforts to get in the way. If we attempt to give impetus to the word, then it becomes distorted into words of instruction or education or experience. (p. 102)

In the same way that Christ's body was not a vehicle for delivering God's gracious presence but was that presence itself, and in the same way that the church is not the vehicle to bring the new humanity but is the new humanity itself, the words of the sermon are not vehicles for the conveying of a gracious message. Rather, according to the promise of God, the meaning of the proclaimed word

> does not lie outside itself; it is the thing itself. It does not transmit anything else, it does not express anything else, it has no external objectives—rather, it communicates that it is itself: the historical Jesus Christ, who bears humanity upon himself with all its sorrows and its guilt. (p. 103)

In these words of Bonhoeffer we begin to see the true distinction between other speeches and the speech that is the proclamation of the word.

Rather than saying "whatever else a sermon is, it is at least a speech," we should look at other speeches and say that "whatever else they are, they are not quite speech." For in the purest speech communication there is no distinction between the message and the medium, and this is only the case in the proclamation of Christ. In all other speeches "human words communicate something else besides what they are of themselves. They become a means to an end" (p. 103). Only when the latter is the case, only when there is a distinction between the means of conveying the message and the message itself, is the question of rhetoric of utmost importance, for the better the rhetoric the better the message will be conveyed. But in the proclaimed word, according to Bonhoeffer, the spoken words themselves are the message; they themselves are what they communicate by the grace of God: the historical Jesus Christ. No amount of rhetoric, of contextualization, of prudential judgment, can increase or decrease the conveying of Jesus Christ in the proclaimed word.

Now, this does not mean that discrimination does not need to happen as to whether a sermon is in fact the proclaimed word; but insofar as it is, and whether it is, remains independent of questions of rhetoric, for no rhetorical considerations can make that proclamation more effective. Another way to put this is that, in the proclaimed word, Jesus Christ in his humanity *is his own rhetoric*. With that, the question of the relationship between theology and rhetoric in the sermon disappears into the unity of the humanity and divinity of Christ, joined in a single person, present as the proclaimed

Word, "who bears humanity upon himself with all its sorrows and its guilt" (p. 103).

Bonhoeffer will not allow the liberal homiletics that sees its job as the evocation of some religious experience. But the answer to such homiletics is not to reconceive the relationship between theology and rhetoric, viewing the sermon as at least a speech that must take into account rhetorical issues, then authorizing a particular rhetorical approach derived from dogmatic considerations. Such an approach recapitulates the fundamental error of liberal homiletics—the notion that the job of the sermon is to do something beyond the sermon itself. If we consider the proclaimed word itself prototypical speech, as Bonhoeffer does, we will see the need for rhetoric in other forms of speech as an accommodation to the fact that in these speeches the job of the speech is to do something—convey a message, evoke an experience—external to the speech itself. Bonhoeffer puts the reversal this way: "The word of the sermon is not the species of the genus 'word,' but rather it is just the opposite: all our words are species of the one, original Word of God that both creates and sustains the world" (p. 104). The sermon is not *at least a speech*! Rather than taking as a starting point the fact that sermons are speeches and then learning the necessity of rhetoric to achieve their end, we should see that other speeches need rhetoric because they are not sermons. They need rhetoric so that they can more closely approximate the epitome of human speech—speech that does not need to close a gap between the message and the means because it is speech which is itself the message, the humanity of Jesus Christ. In that case Christ needs no help from the rhetoricians. Jesus Christ is his own rhetoric.

Hath God Said . . . ?

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The questions about sexual acts between men, or between women, are not only contentious but complex. That is, to come to a responsible decision demands consideration not only of biblical texts and the lived experiences of our gay Christian brothers and lesbian Christian sisters but also of what authority the biblical texts have, the varying history of biblical interpretation, changes in society and its understanding (or misunderstanding) of sex, and newer understandings of the homosexual orientation—and beneath it all, what is the will of God. I offer this essay hoping it will help my sisters and brothers to sort through the many levels of argument and come to a sound conclusion.

Time for decision

I sense that the path I have walked through these issues may be like that of many others. It has not been short or direct. Initial prejudices or assumptions fell to new thoughts and possibilities. Namely, at first I was shocked at the mere suggestion that homosexuality was not simply perverse. Eventually—and I am grateful to those who speak up as, or for, gays and lesbians—I was made aware of how their orientation is primarily determined by forces beyond their control. Second, I came to see that their condition is one that no one would choose: to be very different from the vast majority of humanity in so basic a matter as sexuality. And with this rise of empathy for gays there also came to me the wish to make their situation better: to remove the condemnation, the ridicule, and the social and ecclesial prohibitions.

On the most important plane, I hoped that the biblical criticism toward homosexuality could be removed or at least modified. I was glad to learn to distinguish between homosexual people and homosexual acts. For the Bible never condemns *people* of homosexual orientation, only homosexual acts. Are homosexual acts condemned wholesale? What about when they are a part of an otherwise laudable relationship, like two men who love and care for each other? Perhaps the Bible intends to condemn only promiscuous homosexual acts. Maybe, in a good gay relationship, homosexual acts are the equivalent of marital coupling. Then the burden of condemning the actions of people we know and love and respect, fine church members and leaders, would be lifted from us—a longed-for relief.

But this revision was opposed by those arguing for the correctness of the tradition, even though maintaining that the tradition is awkward or even painful for us. I continued to listen to both sides, revisionists and traditionalists, and eventually I was persuaded that the latter were correct.

Order of presentation

I reckon with two considerations:

1. We must first arrive at a theological judgment: Does God prohibit or permit homosexual acts? Practical decisions about what then we must *do*, whether in civil legislation or church policy decisions, do not follow automatically from theological judgments (as when Moses, being a sensible legislator, allowed divorce simply because strict enforcement would have done more harm overall in society than controlled lenience). But the theological determination must be first, and this essay concerns only that.

2. I do not begin with scriptural texts, because our thinking does not in fact always begin with the Bible. We have many assumptions and values that we bring *to* our Bible reading. These must be reckoned with first so that we can better hear the biblical voice.

This, then is my order of presentation:

1. My understanding of how God has created sexuality to be.

2. On the authority of the Bible—what authority it has and why.

3. The Bible on slavery and the position of women.

4. Interpreting the Bible in the twenty-first century.

5. The biblical texts in question.

Sex

My understanding of the biblical teaching on sex comes from Genesis 1 and 2 and their quotation and interpretation by Jesus in Matt 19:3–9 (similar is Matt 5:32).

Jesus' point in Matthew 19 is that sex and marriage go together. His argument is not that there is merely a moral connection, that sex and marriage "should" go together. Rather, he says, sex and marriage simply *are* together, like two sides of one coin. This is true, he says, whether or not we like it or even know it.

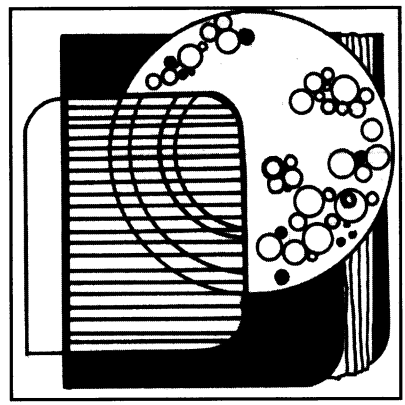
This very important point comes up as he answers the Pharisees' question about divorce. Jesus' response is that divorce does not end marriage: "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman is committing adultery." Against whom could he be committing adultery?—his first wife? But they are divorced; there is no longer a marriage for adultery to violate. Except, by Christ's word, there plainly is. How can this be?

To show the truth of this, Jesus draws our attention to what marriage essentially is and distinguishes that from those things that usually accompany marriage but do not constitute it. Specifically, even if the legal obligations of marriage are ended by a legal divorce, the marriage itself is not ended. The Pharisees' mistake—and ours, since we have trouble taking this in—is to confuse the legal accompaniments of marriage with marriage itself. According to Jesus, the legal contract does not make the marriage. It can be ended and yet the marriage itself continue—at least enough to be violable by adultery.

Then what is marriage itself? It is the union of one flesh. The one flesh that is created when man and woman join themselves sexually is real. This union lasts longer than the act of sexual intercourse that consummates it. It is permanent: "They are no longer two, but one flesh." This change is irreversible. Sexual intercourse so unifies husband and wife that, even when the local legal structure has declared the marriage legally defunct, the real union, the actual marriage, created by sexual intercourse, still lives and endures as long as the flesh.

Here are a few facts from life and Scripture that illustrate the truth of the Lord's word. (1) It is a commonplace that divorce is more painful than a spouse's

death. In the latter, one half has died. In the former, two living halves are severed without anesthesia. (2) The old legal category of common-law marriage recognized that marriage can happen without the participation of court clerk or church cleric. (3) This is our understanding of the marriage of Adam and Eve. (4) In canon law, not consummating a marriage is ground to regard it as null and void. (5) When patriarch Jacob discovered in the morning that he had had sexual congress not with Rachel but with Leah, he recognized the *fait accompli* of his marriage to Leah.



An understanding of marriage as "a committed relationship" is badly inadequate. First, though marriage surely is that, a host of other relationships are that as well. "Committed relationship" tells us too little. Second, what a disembodied understanding of marriage this is—as if bodily and sexual intimacy of wife and husband were not constitutive of marriage. Third, how sad if marriage were built on no stronger foundation than the sand of human commitment. It is a great blessing that through sexual relations husband and wife "are no longer two, but one flesh."

Not that commitment is not important. The official marriage rite of the ELCA (in the *LBW* and accompanying manuals) says that the couple "by their promises bind themselves to one another as husband and wife." This presents a different view from the one implicit in Matthew 19. Promises do not make a one-flesh union, but do they not have a role?

Just as promises cannot alone inaugurate a marriage, neither does sexual intercourse alone. Consider the one-night-stand, as Paul does in 1 Cor 6:16. Even this creates a union, the apostle states, however little either man or woman intend it to. But what social chaos if we regarded that as a marriage rather than as fornication. Traditionally, the nuptial vows have served to distinguish the consummation that rapidly followed them as constituting a marriage from other sexual intercourses which constitute fornication, concubinage, or even rape.

This social need for distinction seals the point. Though "from the beginning" sexual intercourse was for marriage, *just because* there are so many cases of sexual intercourse that are not meant to and, as a purely practical matter, cannot be treated as making a marriage, society needs the nuptial promises to understand in which unions the man and woman are actually taking on the obligations of marriage and in which they are not. But we must remember the Lord's stress that marriage *is* the union of one flesh. The vows are necessary only after the fall, because of the confusion of sin.

To summarize: The Creator made us male and female so that sexual union is possible, through which the one-flesh union which is marriage can happen. Therefore sex without marriage is a bad misuse, and it is no wonder that it results in such damage.

Only in a time when our culture has forgotten these facts and divorced sex from marriage (and, for that matter, from repro-

duction) could it be proposed that a gay sexual relationship is like a marriage. Two gay men in a beautiful platonic relationship, plus same-sex sexual acts, does not equal marriage. For a man putting his penis where it is not physiologically designed to go does not really resemble a husband and wife's joining their most intimate parts and becoming one.

Arguments unconnected to biblical texts

Pathos. This argument is the strongest the revisionists have. It appeals to me; it sways many, even sober legislative assemblies of our church. This argument in brief is that if a gay man cannot have sexual relations with a lifelong male partner, he is condemned to a life of loneliness. He is deprived of the joys of lifelong partnership.

The immediate response to this argument must be that it is beside the point. The point is, "What hath God said?" (Gen 3:1) Does God approve of and bless same-sex sexual acts, or does he condemn and punish them? What the church must say, and how it must regulate its own life, are not based on pity but on what God says.

The second response is that even if two gay men have a lifelong profound partnership, and then add same-sex sexual acts to it, they can never have a marriage or one-flesh union like a male and female couple can have.

The third response is that they are far from alone in having sexual desire unfulfilled. The list of people who do not have sexual intimacy is long: widows and widowers, the never-married and divorced. And it includes persons who were celibate and still champions of marriage, such as Paul and our Lord.

Like remarriage. A second possible argument, though I have not seen revisionists introduce it, is that every pastor knows of truly blessed second marriages involving divorced persons. One or both spouses are committing adultery against their first spouse, and yet God has manifestly blessed that second marriage with deep love, joy, and spiritual gifts. So, it could be argued, even though God prohibits remarriage as he does same-sex sexual acts, since he nonetheless blesses some of the former, could we not suppose he might bless some of the latter?

I can think of two necessary responses to this, though neither is entirely convincing: (1) remarriage of divorced persons typically includes regret, humility, and asking for forgiveness, whereas proposed gay partnerships demand to be recognized as righteous; and (2) remarriage is at least within the form of the Creator's male-female design.

Biblical material

What is the Bible's authority? First, the Bible is the authoritative witness to Jesus Christ. We are not authorized to say any more or less or different about him and his salvation and benefits than what the Scriptures say. But this is beside the point here, for our question concerns the Lord's law on same-sex sexual acts.

The Bible has such laws, but reading laws from the Bible is not simple. Everyone knows that not all biblical decrees are for all people. But, then, which are for whom?

This question is answered very helpfully by Luther in a treatise, "How Christians Should Regard Moses." Following the breakdown of the Roman Church's control in 1520 there were suddenly many teachers and preachers, and not all of them were well informed. Luther found that he had to protect his hearers from those who said Christians must obey all OT laws since they are part of God's word.

Luther's response: "We must deal cleanly with the Scriptures." Of course it is God's word, but that is not the whole question. You must also ask, Is it God's word *for you?* For example, God told David to make war and conquer cities. That was God's word—but to David, not to you. So also the dietary laws are God's word to Jews but not to Christian believers or anyone else in the world.

In the most dramatic part of his argument, Luther says that even the Ten Commandments don't apply to us. Read them. They begin, "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt." Did God bring *you* out of Egypt? If not, this word does not address you.

This sentence is stunning. And even more so when we recall that Luther's own catechism begins with the commandments! Luther continues: Of course we teach Christians to obey the Ten Commandments. For they are God's law for us, but *why* are they so? Not because Moses gave them to the Israelites but because they are the law of human nature. (Rom 2:14: "When Gentiles who do not possess the Law, do instinctively [literally: 'by nature,' whence Luther gets the term] what the Law requires, these, though not having the Law, are a Law to themselves. They show that what the Law requires is written on their hearts, to which their own conscience bears witness.")

Indeed, except for oddities, all humanity, even without having Moses, has condemned disobedience to parents, murder, adultery, theft, and perjury. Only the commandment not to work on Saturday is not universal, the one commandment of Moses' ten that the NT explicitly nullifies for Christians (Rom 14:1–6).

Here we have at least a tool, though no more than that, for looking at scriptural words on same-sex sexual acts. The OT clearly forbids "lying with a man as with a woman." In the same paragraph (Lev 18:19–23) are also forbidden sex with a woman during her period, sexual relations with a kinsman's wife, sacrificing children to Molech, and sexual relations with an animal. There is no question what God's word is for Israel. The question is whether or not these words are also for all people. About the first, sex during a woman's period, we could suspect that this may not be universal-divine-natural law for all humans. About the others, though, who would argue that they are not God's law for all people? Again, not because Moses decreed them for Israel, but because all people just *know* they are wrong.

That question about how to tell if a law applies is taken up below. The initial point to be made here is that the church can no more quote the decrees of the OT and impose them on Christians than it can dismiss them out of hand. "We must deal cleanly with the Scriptures." Some OT laws indeed apply to all people, and the Lord judges people by them. Others are valid only for Israel, and the Lord evaluates only Israel on their basis.

Slavery and women. The argument is made that we have decided that the Bible is simply outdated on slavery and the roles and status of women, so it is equally legitimate to set aside its condemnation of same-sex sexual acts.

Let us look at what the Scriptures actually *say* and not muddle them by thinking in terms of general tendencies.

The Bible does not command slavery. Little more needs to be said. Those Americans who from the eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century wanted our republic to prohibit slavery could do so without violating God's Word.

Slaveholders countered this by saying that the Scriptures tolerate slavery. This

same point is made today by people wishing to limit the Bible's use for moral decisions. But the observation is beside the point. Our American decision to eliminate slavery from the republic does not violate a clear biblical message that there must be slavery. In contrast, there are clear biblical words that there must be marriage, baptism, worship, and government, and we would be in violation of divine law to eliminate any of them. So "toleration" is irrelevant to the question. The Scriptures deal with slavery because it was a huge part of ancient society and economy. Scriptures do not say "slavery is a good thing" any more than they say "bigamy is a good thing." Jesus, in telling parables about masters and slaves, is neither commanding nor commending slavery. And from Exodus 21 to 1 Peter the Bible does a great deal to soften the harshness of slavery. But that is no command that slavery must be. Slavery can be outlawed without violating the Word. We can give thanks that through the leading of the Spirit we do *not* tolerate slavery, but that does not set Spirit against Word.

There are also the texts about the role and status of women, both in marriage ("Wives, be subject to husbands as you are to the Lord," Eph 5:22; "Wives, accept the authority of your husbands," 1 Pet 3:1) and in the church ("As in all the churches of the saints, women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says. . . . For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church," 1 Cor 14:33b–36; and "I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent," 1 Tim 2:12).

In marriage, concerning the texts about wives being subordinate to their husbands, one can wonder why this needed to be said. In nearly all societies until recently, the husband-father of a household was the decision maker, and subordination by wives was expected. The household was openly a hierarchy, with superiors and subordinates, just like today's businesses, schools, and the military are. (In all cases harshness is an unnecessary perversion of the gift of authority.) Because these epistles adjure obedience not only by wives but by slaves (or, as we might interpret today, employees and students) as well as by citizens to government and by children to parents, it may be that this was to counteract the kinds of misinterpretation of the gospel we have often seen, as if it abolished all temporal hierarchies. Still today in almost all these areas of life the church concurs that God's Word demands subordination, except today, in the two-person structure of marriage, we have doubts about that, I admit.

In church, undeniably the gospel levels. It casts down the mighty (by confining all under sin) and lifts up the lowly (by giving rights of divine offspring to all believers). In the church people of every class, sex, race, and occupation receive the Lord's Supper side by side. In 1 Corinthians 11 Paul gives precise instructions for how women should dress and conduct themselves *when* they publicly pray and prophesy (preach). Obviously women were active in sacred functions as well as having other responsibilities as leaders of house churches. Therefore 1 Corinthians 14 cannot be harmonized with chapter 11. Which word authoritatively bears God's word to us? At least we can see that there was a practice of women as ecclesial leaders that is not criticized by Paul. Meanwhile, the traditional view had not disappeared, and 1 Timothy reflects this, though even there the writer merely says "*I* permit," suggesting that this may be a personal decision rather than an apostolic imperative for all time.

If this attention to small linguistic details cannot satisfy us that there is a con-

vincing univocality to the Scriptures, we must admit that the NT has mixed messages regarding ecclesial leadership by women. There are instances of the new thing (that in Christ there is neither male nor female) as well as old-style "men only" rules. With this lack of univocality, our practice of ordaining women can be justified from the Word as permitted by precedence and recommended by the new trajectory that seems to have arisen from the advent of the gospel.

In sum, while the church has changed its view of slavery and of women's roles, it has not done so contrary to an unambiguous word from the Lord not to do so.

The twenty-first century is different. There is another way of questioning whether the Bible can be a norm for us, even before looking at texts, and that is to observe that the world has changed much in twenty centuries. We may have new situations that the Bible does not speak to because it could not anticipate them, such as guidance on how to vote in a republic.

Two points answer this question when applied specifically to the matter of whether God allows same-sex sexual acts. The first is to note that one of the characteristics of the twenty-first century is extreme sexual license. Sexual intercourse is rampant among teenagers. Couples to be wed routinely engage in intercourse long before the wedding. As part of the same cultural wave, abortion and divorce are common. The point is that such an era, when there is scarcely any sexual restraint to be found, is the worst time to consider formally liberalizing the culture's or church's sexual ethic, because in the imbalance of these days almost any sexual sin will look mainstream and normal.

The second point is to examine the revisionist argument about this century. It has two forms. One, the historical-critical, claims that the Bible objects only to the kinds of homosexual relationships it knew at that time (cultic, exploitative, commercial, or adult male with adolescent male). The other form, the textual, says that because the Bible does not specify what kinds of homosexual relations are wrong, we cannot be sure that it objects to the modern kind of loving, committed relationship.

Such an era, when there is scarcely any sexual restraint to be found, is the worst time to consider formally liberalizing the culture's or church's sexual ethic.

The first form of argument imports reasons why same-sex sexual acts would be rejected. But, as the second points out, the Bible never gives reasons beyond the thing itself. It does not reject this or that kind of homosexual relation. It does not give reasons why one kind would be wrong (so that, possibly, some other kind would be okay). The condemnation is always general.

This answers the second form of the argument, which claims that because the Bible does not specifically reject the modern, loving form of homosexuality, how do we know that the Bible does reject it? Answer: because it simply, constantly rejects

all forms of homosexuality. The Bible says that a same-sex sexual act is wrong and says nothing about its being redeemed by any particular emotional context.

There is even a biblical text that can help us to see this. In 1 Corinthians 5 Paul objects vigorously because a man is having sexual relations with his (presumably widowed) stepmother. Why is Paul critical? Is it because that relationship is not consensual, loving, and committed? Because it is commercial or cultic or exploitative? It may or may not be. We do not know, because Paul does not say, and this omission is the most interesting part. That particular sexual relation is wrong in itself—just plain wrong ("not even the Gentiles do such!"). The psycho-emotional relationship in which it may take place is simply beside the point.

Biblical texts

Actually, now that we finally come to the biblical texts there is little that needs to be added. As the most honest revisionists admit, the Bible has nothing good to say about homosexual sexual acts. The only arguments, which we have already reviewed, are not about interpreting the texts but advocate setting them aside entirely.

However, there are a few points to be made. First, is the OT prohibition of same-sex sexual acts merely for Israel or, as part of the law of human nature, valid for all people? What is "natural"? Luther's argument refers to the phenomenon Paul describes in Rom 2:14, when the nations act according to the law even though they don't have (from Moses) the law. It is not a matter of an individual's "natural" or innate urges or desires. By that definition vengeance is "natural"—it is present in all cultures. So are adultery and oppression of foreigners and violence "natural" in that sense. But this is not natural law but natural lawlessness! That humans have a will and desire for these does not make them compatible with natural law. To the contrary: all societies seek to restrict vengeance, adultery, and violence—just because they are common instincts, which all societies reckon are not good. This is Luther's sense of natural law. So, when revisionists say that what is natural for heterosexuals is not natural for the homosexually oriented, that is not the sense of "natural" that is relevant here, that Luther means in his argument.

Second, neither is it true to say that because homosexual orientation or desire is not sought but a given, probably even innate, it is then created by God and can be gratified without sin. Human nature is a great thing, so fine a work of God that he took it on personally in Jesus Christ. But human nature in all other cases but Jesus Christ is always corrupt. So we confidently tell people the Lord made them with personal care (Psalm 139). And we also confess that we are born infected, and only through death and resurrection will our purity be regained.

Third, even if homosexual desire is innate, the physical act of same-sex sexual acts is not natural in the plain anatomical facts.

So, just as an orientation toward anger or greed or domination does not justify the acting out of such an orientation without further reason, neither does orientation toward an otherwise forbidden sexual act legitimate it. Same-sex sexual acts cannot be defended as in harmony with natural law based on the givenness of homosexual orientation.

Answering the question "What is natural?" can be approached in another way. The Ten Commandments, except the Sabbath law, are found nearly universally in human societies diverse in space and time and so are taken to be natural law for all

humans. On the same basis, because condemnation of same-sex sexual acts is, though not completely universal in human history, nearly so and vehement, this strongly suggests that that condemnation is also part of the law of human nature.

We are spared the need to calculate whether or not the prohibition of same-sex sexual acts is only Israelite law or natural law. Where the NT abolishes OT prohibitions they do not bind Christians. And where the NT explicitly carries them forward, they do. The NT clearly sets aside laws for diet (Mark 7:19), Sabbath (Rom 14:5–6), and separation from Gentiles (Acts 10:28). But sexual taboos are rigidly upheld: only between husband and wife are sexual acts legitimate.

There is a persuasive argument in "Background Essay on Biblical Texts for 'Journey Together Faithfully, Part Two: The Church and Homosexuality,'" edited by Arland Hultgren and Walter F. Taylor Jr., p. 15. It says that *arsenokoitai* (1 Cor 6:9–11) is a word that does not occur prior to Paul (NT scholars say it may even be of his own coinage). It appears to be made from the two words in the Septuagint for "male" (*arsenos*) and "lie" (*koite*) in Lev 18:22 and 20:13. This makes it probable that not only is the OT proscription of same-sex sexual acts carried forward into the NT but that these very verses are taken as authoritative for all people.

Conclusion

While feelings and experiences of gays and lesbians need to be seriously considered in our attempt to determine God's will in this, it is scarcely necessary to describe the theological disaster if feelings are the only or even the dominant factor in our deliberations.

There are many, many arguments to consider and contentions to examine. This question is not simple at the beginning of consideration. But, now that we have done the hard work of considering the arguments, in the end it is quite simple. We have on the one hand the desires of some people—dear Christian brothers and sisters and genuine sexual desires, to be sure. In opposition to that are, first, the nearly universal repugnance toward same-sex sexual acts of humanity both around the world today and throughout time; second, the anatomical given that penises and vaginas are meant for each other; and third, in addition to these items from the book of creation, there is the book of revelation, the Bible, whose rejection of same-sex sexual acts is constant.

Walking with Jesus, Walking with Swanie

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Sermon preached at the funeral of Richard A. Swanson ("Swanie"), March 15, 2005, St. John's Lutheran Church, Rock Island, Illinois. Pastor Swanson served at Augustana College–Rock Island for 33 years.

Text: Luke 24:13–35
"The Road to Emmaus"

I wonder how many of you have a story similar to these disciples—these two depressed, disappointed, slightly lost, certainly confused followers of Jesus who just needed to take a walk. To clear their minds. To talk about everything swirling around in their heads and clenching at their hearts. They take a walk, aiming toward a little village, perhaps not even caring if that was where they ended up.

Along the way as they journey, they run into a man who with a simple question draws out of them their story. Without even much effort, they seem to know that this is someone they must talk to. And he listens—listens to what were their hopes and dreams. He listens to what has gone wrong. He hears their story, even as they continue to walk. Most important, he listens to their hearts and all that pours forth from them. And only after he has listened does he throw a little wisdom their way.

I wonder how many of you have a story similar to theirs? A great many of you, I suspect. Even more who are not here. Still more whom we may never know.

Swanie took seriously his calling to be as Christ for others and to live out Christ's radical, embracing grace in the world. So, just as Christ joined his disciples where they were in that moment in their life and faith, he joyfully and humbly did the same with many of us. I know that there are many stories, so many shared these last few days, but indulge me in this one example.

About three weeks ago, Swanie showed up for church in a dress.

He protested that it was not exactly a dress, it was more like an old robe costume, or an enclosed toga. But it was a dress, worn over his turtleneck and pants and with walking shoes. The few of us standing in the church kitchen simply watched him approach, sipped our drinks, and stood silently but intently waiting for the explanation. "Good morning," he said. "I'm John the Baptist. But you can call me Jack."

He was there to teach the children—and what better way than to *be* the story? How else could they begin to listen and to learn except to have the story come alive there with them? He was intent on taking those children on a journey, determined to meet them where they were and then open them up to a little bit of truth, intent on leaving them with their hearts burning at

what they heard. Even if it just involved a short walk around the basement and a brief conversation in a dress.

Many of you here have spent some part of your life taking walks of varying lengths and types with Swanie. Some of you enjoyed actual physical walks with him. Along the river, around the block, at a monastery, through a cemetery, along the slough (now known as the pond) path. A gentle pace of listening, combined with the cadence of a good walk, until his companion, too, felt a renewed hope or intellect or spirit.

Some of you enjoyed walks of faith and understanding. Conversations over time meant opening doors or hearts to new ideas, or maybe just looking from a new angle at some old ones. Sometimes those conversations were meant to look at possibilities not yet considered—Why can't we have an interfaith holocaust remembrance? Have you ever read the rule of St. Benedict? How do you pray? Sometimes the questions were meant to be pondered or challenging—Is it possible to be a reconciling people in such a warring and broken world? What does it mean to forgive? How does a person heal? Never were these times meant to give answers, only to be part of the dialogue along the journey.

The thing is, in all of those lifetimes of conversations with all of you and untold numbers of others, he truly believed that he had only scratched the surface. He had only just begun to understand that concept, only just started to ask some good questions, just barely had gotten to the tip of that understanding of God or of you or of all of us together and what it all means. He was always eager to hear more, know more, see more, explore more—and to see what surprises God had in store just around the next corner. His curiosity and thirst for the journey was never sated, whatever the journey, whoever the companion.

We gather today brokenhearted, just as those disciples did on the road. But I think that we also gather with grateful hearts, because our story is similar to theirs. We have had a companion with us who listened and who made our hearts burn within us. More than that, we have had a companion who made it his life's joy to help us recognize what the disciples could not that day—the presence of God persistently and gently with us.

They saw at the end of their walk: light and life and hope and possibility. They knew at the end, without necessarily understanding it, that God had been at work, that their hearts burned for a reason, that they had to tell others.

We do have a story similar to theirs, one of resurrection and life, and we know it in part because, as with those Sunday School children, Swanie lived it for us in our walk together. It is a story of life, life promised and given, life that overcomes death and our fear of death and even despair. It is a story of hope, the hope in which we gather, a hope that resurrects and renews our spirits. We do have their story. It is our story. It is our faith. It is the story of a people who know death but who also know, with hearts that burn within, that there is more than death—that there is life and love abundant and a God who gives us that gift of life, day after day, moment after moment.

Our journeys do not end here. We have only scratched the surface of the exploring and surprises yet to come. Our journeys do not end here, and neither does Swanie's. We entrust him this day to the light of God he gave others a glimpse of. With hopeful hearts, we entrust him to that God of life whom the disciples encountered on the road. We entrust him back to the loving arms of his constant companion in his walk on this earth.

Well done, good and faithful servant!

Book Reviews

Biblical Greek Language and Lexicography: Essays in Honor of Frederick W. Danker. Edited by Bernard A. Taylor, John A. L. Lee, Peter R. Burton, and Richard E. Whitaker. Grand Rapids and Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 2004. xxi and 266 pages. Cloth. $36.00.

If an American New Testament scholar ever deserved a Festschrift, Frederick Danker would stand close to the top of the list. He singlehandedly revised the standard lexicon of New Testament Greek in magisterial manner, thus putting every New Testament scholar, every pastor with even a smattering of Greek still alive, and every seminary student who takes the Bible seriously in his debt. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature,* third edition, edited and revised by Frederick W. Danker (University of Chicago Press, 2000) is one of the core volumes that belong on every desk, consulted frequently in the study of the New Testament. Scholars with the knowledge of ancient Greek literature, epigraphic texts, and papyri needed for lexicography are few indeed; when one adds to that the requisite knowledge of the scholarly literature on the New Testament since 1800, all of which Fred Danker has, he is a *rara avis* indeed, and highly deserves this token of respect and admiration from other well-known scholars of ancient Greek. Having been his colleague without interruption since he came to Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, in 1954, and after that at Christ Seminary–Seminex and the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago until he retired in 1988, I have known Fred as a thoughtful and supportive colleague, an inspiring teacher, and an indefatigable scholar, who sees both the big picture and controls the infinite minuscule data that underlie lexicography. Seventeen colleagues in the lexicography and philology of ancient Greek have produced a fitting tribute to him; they include two former students, John H. Elliott and James W. Voelz. I am sorry that only one of his faculty colleagues, Jack Elliott, was asked to write. Many, including me, would have gladly contributed.

The editors include a revised form of the essay Fred delivered in 1999 on the publication of BDAG: "Lexical Evolution and Linguistic Hazard" (pp. 1–31). Danker gives an extended history of the Preuschen–Bauer series of lexica, a valuable supplement to Bauer's introduction in BDAG. While it should have been included in BDAG itself, it now is available for the wide audience it deserves.

The editors wisely include a picture of Fred as frontispiece, a brief biography, and a select bibliography. It is too bad that none of the anecdotes that reveal Fred's wit and humor that endeared him to students could be included. He is one of those, like many in academia, who deserve to have someone do an oral history on material drawn from interviews.

I can pick out only a few of the articles for special attention, though the whole is a rich feast for anyone interested in New Testament philology. Elliott is the only former student or faculty colleague to contribute: "Look It Up. It's in BDAG," a brief description of the lexicon's value. Richard Whitaker gives a helpful survey of "Concordances and the Greek New Testament." And there is a aeries of articles related to the Septuagint: Katrin Hauspie, "The LXX Quotations in the LSJ Supplements of 1968 and 1996," Erik Eynikel and Katrin Hauspie, "The Use of δράκων in the Septuagint," Bernard A. Taylor, "Hebrew to Greek: A Semantic Study of σπεύδω for the New English Translation of the Septuagint," Cameron Boyd-Taylor, "Linguistic Register and Septuagintal Lexicography," and Bernard A. Taylor, "Deponency and Greek Lexicography." Clearly there is need for and interest in preparing an extensive lexicon to the Septuagint.

This is a worthy tribute to an outstanding scholar. *Ave, Frederice! Saluto te in amore.*

Edgar Krentz

Apocalypse Recalled: The Book of Revelation after Christendom. By Harry O. Maier. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002. xvi and 271 pages. Paper. $18.00.

"Of all the books of the Bible, the Book of Revelation is probably the one that most of us would rather live without," acknowledges Harry O. Maier about the canonical text that looms large in our collective imagination but appears infrequently in the lectionary of mainstream churches. Maier, whose dissertation was published as *The Social Setting of the Ministry as Reflected in the Writings of Hermas, Clement and Ignatius* (Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1991), tackles the book of Revelation with equal interest but with a more focused concern for today's Christian. His thesis is straightforward: "the Book of Revelation is not only worth studying in depth but, more importantly, . . . it forms an indispensable resource for helping first-world Christians conceive of their place in the contemporary world and meditate on the role the church is to play in a modern secular society." The oft en ecclesially ignored though highly influential Book of Revelation is quite simply "a call to Christian discipleship." After prefacing his work, the first chapter addresses "Apocalypse Troubles," followed by "I, John." The next two address the visual aspects of Revelation in "Seeing Things" and the auditory concerns in "Hearing Voices." The fifth and sixth chapters concern the text's reception—both ancient, "Games with Time," and modern, "The Praise of Folly."

Maier's intent, while academically grounded, is primarily hermeneutical, as the book encourages a "post-liberal vision for a socially engaged religious identity in an irreligious, secular, pluralistic society." By "wedding sociopolitical critique with autobiographical exegesis," he writes of both the personal and corporate challenge of John of Patmos. For pastors and folks in the pew struggling to live faithful lives in this millennium, Maier's work provides a thoughtful and encouraging guide through a two-way critique of the book of Revelation.

Laurie Brink, O.P.
University of Chicago

The Art of Reading Scripture. Edited by Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays. Grand Rapids and Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 2003. xx and 334 pages. Paper. $32.00.

This collection of essays by various scholars grew out of the Scripture Project, meeting over a period of four years and being supported by the Center of Theological Inquiry, Princeton, New Jersey. The intention was to overcome the fragmentation of the theological disciplines; therefore, scholars of the Old Testament, the New Testament, systematic and historical theology, and parish ministry were involved in reading the scriptures together. In the beginning of the book, Nine Theses on the Interpretation of Scripture are given that state the principles by which the authors interpret the scriptures. The gist is that the scriptures tell truthfully God's action and must be seen as a whole and interpreted within the church although in dialogue with others outside the church. It is remarkable how these theses permeate all the essays in this collection.

The essays are divided into three sections, followed by a section of sermons.

I. How Do We Read and Teach the Scriptures? Davis advocates reading scripture with a theological interest, with openness to repentance, with understanding the OT witness to Christ, and in dialogue with Jews. Robert W. Jensen emphasizes the connection between the scriptures and the church. Several authors argue for interpretation with the unity of the scriptures in mind.

II. A Living Tradition. James C. Howell compares Christ with St. Francis. William Stacy Johnson is reading the scriptures in a postmodern age, stating that we have to reach beyond the Foundations and beyond Totality by deconstructing the texts and going toward the Other, philosophically, ethically, and eschatologically. In view of the recognition that we cannot assume knowledge of the biblical story, Christine McSpadden gives suggestions for sermon preparation. L. Gregory Jones illustrates "Embodying Scripture in the Community of Faith" by using Augustine and Martin Luther King Jr.

III. Reading Difficult Texts. Davis is not willing to repudiate any biblical text as a potential source of edification for the church (pace

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza). She believes (correctly, I think) that the tradition within and outside the Bible has sometimes corrected, adapted, and reinterpreted difficult texts. R. W. L. Moberly struggles with Genesis 22. While Hermann Gunkel saw aesthetic value in the story, Immanuel Kant interpreted it negatively, i.e., that the moral law has to have precedence over religion, that it could not have been God's voice that demanded the sacrificing of Isaac. Moberly concludes that the meaning of the story is "that true religion entails a costly self-dispossession that relinquishes what is most precious in trustful hope in a demanding but gracious God" (p. 196).

It should be mentioned here that Davis in the fourth part of the book includes a sermon on this text that speaks fascinatingly of the vulnerability of Abraham, God, and Isaac. This sermon is worth contemplation. God is vulnerable because he has been hurt so badly by humankind in the preceding events of Genesis that an unimaginable demonstration of human trust is necessary in order to heal God's pain. Gary A. Anderson parallels "Joseph and the Passion of Our Lord." Richard B. Hays argues against Robert W. Funk and the Jesus Seminar that the scriptures have to be interpreted backward from the resurrection, as is shown in John 2:13–22; Mark 12:18–27; Luke 24:13–35. This accords very well with the theses at the beginning of the book that scripture has to be seen in its entirety. Marianne Meye Thompson, in reading John 13:1–18, puts the emphasis in understanding the washing of feet in a christological, theological sense rather than the ethical setting of an example, but without neglecting the latter. Jesus follows the path of humility, service, and death.

IV. Selected Sermons. Following the sermon on Genesis 22, mentioned earlier, other sermons on difficult texts deal with Psalm 149 for All Saints' Day, appealingly combining this text with the other texts for the day, pointing out that saints (all believers) have to win the battle over evil in themselves. The remaining sermons are by the two editors and were actually preached in various situations. They illustrate in a fine manner the application of the nine theses.

Despite the many authors represented in the book, it manifests a remarkable unity and can be recommended to all interpreters and preachers. The emphasis on the unity of the scriptures is noteworthy and necessary for all of us. A small observation: I did not detect any misprints.

Wilhelm C. Linss
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

Dialogues of Paul Tillich. By Mary Ann Stenger and Richard H. Stone. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2002. xii and 276 pages. Paper. $22.00.

This is a collection of essays focusing on various aspects of the thought of Paul Tillich. The essays are grouped into three sections: "Interreligious Dialogue," "Theology and Feminism," and "Religion and Society." The format is designed, according to the authors, in the spirit of Tillich's own lifelong tendency toward using conversation to develop his thought. The dialogues in this text "bring his thought into conversation with other significant thinkers to explicate its relevance" (p. 3).

The section on interreligious dialogue includes two chapters on the import of competing truth claims in various religious traditions and what direction Tillich's thought offers for conversation between traditions. Specific instances of these conversations are also considered, with a chapter on Buddhism and a chapter on Judaism. The authors' discussion of the relationship between the traditional Christian viewpoint of "affirmation (grounded in being) and negation (grounded in nothingness)" that emerges from Buddhist teachings is especially fruitful and interesting.

The middle section of the text, on theology and feminism, is somewhat less lively than one might expect given its reliance upon Mary Daly as the central feminist conversation partner. It shines in the authors' explication of Tillich's thought on idolatry and the very adept application of that critique to the Christian tradition, including Tillich's own neglect of the potential for hidden idolatry in God-language. The core insight of this process is that "exclusively male language for God ceases to be effective symbolism for God and becomes idolatry" (p. 82).

The first two sections of the book—and indeed, two important schools of theological thought—are connected and illuminated with the observation that "the tension in the effort to bring together symbol and concept, philosophy and theology, is important since the cross-cultural critique has moved most strongly philosophically and the feminist critique most strongly theologically" (p. 90). An interesting constructive element from Tillich that is laid out for the use of feminist theologians is Tillich's use of "the mother-quality of giving birth, carrying, and embracing, and at the same time, of calling back, resisting independence of the created, and swallowing it" as language to describe the ground of being (p. 94, citing *ST* 3:294). However (even given the somewhat ambiguous description of the "mother-quality"), there is limited feminist critique of Tillich, from Daly or anyone else, included in this section.

The final third of the book contains a great deal of interesting history of Tillich's life and the course his thought took throughout his lifetime. His lifelong interest in Marx is explored at length, including the revealing observation by Tillich that he considered Marx "the most successful of all theologians since the Reformation" (p. 160). The three conversation groups to which Tillich belonged (the first during the early years of his career, the second until his departure from Germany in 1933, and the third for more than twenty years of his time in the United States) are examined, and their influence on Tillich's thought is shown to be significant. Stone includes a few reflections upon personal conversations with Tillich and with Reinhold Niebuhr (whom, charmingly, he calls "Reine") and discusses his own decades-long concern with Tillich's thought.

Of particular interest to today's readers are the final chapters, which detail Tillich's work for socialist causes and against Nazism; especially compelling is the account of his then-secret work for Radio Free Europe during World War II (including 112 essays he wrote for broadcast in Germany between 1942 and 1944). Despite his stance against the Nazis, which had cost him his homeland and his professional life in Germany and endangered his life and the lives of his family, Tillich argued that the use of nuclear weapons cannot be justified ethically, even if they are used in self-defense. Perhaps the most compelling insight in the book belongs to Niebuhr, who wrote about "the moral ambiguity of all righteous people in history, who are, despite the good they do, involved in antecedent and in marginal guilt" (p. 245, citing correspondence between Niebuhr and James B. Conant).

The book as a whole is full of interesting nuggets and compelling insights. It is not a systematic treatment of Tillich's thought, nor is it deeply concerned with critique. The book does seem at times to be somewhat thinly edited. The chapters are better read as essays than as part of a continuous whole, but on balance the text is an excellent treatment of Tillich: it is equally devoted to explication and constructive application of his thought, and this combination does Tillich justice.

Courtney Wilder
University of Chicago

Toward a Christian View of a Scientific World: Fifteen Topics for Study. By George L. Murphy. Lima, Ohio: CSS Publishing, 2001. 151 pages. Paper. $13.95.

Murphy, a Ph.D. physicist and Lutheran pastor, has become increasingly well known for his ability to make the complexities of theoretical physics digestible for pastors and laity. This book is particularly skillful in this regard. It is divided into fifteen short but meaty chapters that portray contemporary understandings of nature, the origin of the cosmos, evolution, the much-debated "anthropic principle" (the view that the evolution of intelligence was inevitable given physical laws), the environment, new technologies in medicine, artificial intelligence, and, surprisingly, religious themes in science fiction.

This book is particularly welcome because it is designed to be used in congregational study groups. Much today is being written on the relation between religion and science, but it is not often accessible to laity of either science or religion. This book is written to fill this need.

Murphy joins the chorus of thinkers who wish to move beyond the stereotype stemming from Andrew Dickson White that "warfare" exists between science and religion. For Mur-

phy, such talk of warfare is misleading. Many new theories of the philosophy of science recognize the need for metaphysics. The attempt to bridge the study of religion across disciplines opens new possibilities for discussing the interface of religion and science. For Murphy, natural science obtains knowledge that can convey divine truth; it is augmented by the revelation of salvation in Jesus Christ. His ability to deftly present molecular theory, the Big Bang, and insights from physics is welcome. He transgresses the boundary between physics and metaphysics by discussing divine agency (in chapter 3): he suggests that in light of natural law, God chooses to limit himself with respect to creation (p. 48). If God were to act in arbitrary and unpredictable ways, "such a world would be a nightmare. We would never have any idea what to expect of it. We wouldn't know when the sun would rise or which foods were nutritious and which poisonous. God might always act to shield us from any harm and from any consequences of our actions, but then we would be like babies in a nursery" (p. 48).

With respect to human evolution, Murphy maintains, with Reinhold Niebuhr, that given our genetic heritage, sin is "inevitable but not necessary" (p. 80). Yet, the divine image in humanity is still in the making; creation is also a future event. "While beginnings are important, God's purpose for humanity also has to be kept in view" (p. 80).

Murphy will surprise and delight readers with his discussions of the religious import of some science fiction novels, a subject implicit in much of this genre, meriting discussion.

Given the encroachment of science technology in daily life, Murphy's genre here is extremely welcome. This book is accessible to parish study groups; it challenges the most advanced in a scientific discipline or theology and yet keeps the layperson on board.

Mark C. Mattes
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High Expectations: Understanding the ELCA's Early Years, 1988–2002. By Edgar R. Trexler. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003. 224 pages. Paper. $10.99.

Edgar Trexler, editor of *The Lutheran* from 1988 to 1999, offers a candid portrait of the first fifteen years of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America from its birth in 1988 until 2002. He gives not a year-by-year chronology of events in the ELCA but a topical presentation that analyzes the development of agendas and themes that have been at the forefront in shaping the life of the ELCA. The primary topics he explores include financial concerns, leaders (presiding bishops, council of bishops, staff), sexuality issues, ecumenism, successful ventures in the ELCA, diversity, and outreach.

Trexler boldly describes the challenges to institutional loyalty that has plagued the ELCA from the beginning. He points out that while the transition to the ELCA from its predecessor bodies was marked by good will, it produced dislodged loyalties (p. 29). Indeed, the newness of the ELCA's leadership and structure was both its promise and its "downfall, at least at the beginning" (p. 30). "Being 'new' raised expectations to impossible heights, suggesting that the church could do whatever it set out to accomplish. When it was unable to deliver on these expectations, people felt betrayed and began to find fault" (p. 30). Hence, "a lack of trust that infected the ELCA in many of its early dimensions, a sickness that would last for some years as members challenged its fiscal management, its perceived 'liberal' stances on social issues, its alleged lack of evangelistic zeal and the influence of pressure groups that felt the beginning of a new church was a time for them to get their oar in the water" (p. 30). With newness came new headquarters, new synodical geographies, untested leadership, loss of memory in the church-wide organization, and other hurdles.

While congregational giving has remained strong in the ELCA, less and less money has flowed from congregations and synod offices to the national headquarters, resulting in significant cutbacks. Trexler ably and winsomely portrays the leadership styles of Herbert Chilstrom, H. George Anderson, the ELCA Church

Council, and the Conference of Bishops. He only alights on the ministry of the current presiding bishop, Mark S. Hanson, who is new to this office. He also objectively presents the results of the first sexuality study and how it was perceived in the wider public. He shows the ecumenical ventures of the ELCA, its successes and struggles, such as disagreement by some on the historic episcopate and the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification.*

Of great hope for the ELCA's future are successful national youth gatherings, efforts in social ministry, responses to hunger awareness and benevolence, and Global Mission Events. These are encouraging signs in the ELCA.

The role of teaching theologians is absent in the book, as is the significance of higher education in general (with the exception of pages 199–200). Should not some attention be paid to theological trends in the seminaries and colleges? One hopes that theology has more bearing in the ELCA than what is indicated here.

It is to Trexler's credit that he has honestly portrayed power struggles in the ELCA and the quest to find a clear vision for mission. Naturally the question arises: Whither the ELCA?

Mark C. Mattes

The Equipping Church: Serving Together to Transform Lives. By Sue Mallory. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001. 208 pages. Cloth. $21.99.

Sue Mallory is a full-time director of lay ministries and executive director and founding member of Leadership Training Network as well as an adjunct faculty member at Fuller Theological Seminary and Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary. She contends that the call of Ephesians 4:11–13 is not just a division of the labors of ministry but a mission statement for making all believers complete by living out their own ministry call. This book outlines her group's current strategies for transforming a church from one that is ministered to into one that is empowered to minister.

Mallory suggests that following the principles of equipping lay volunteers to take up the tasks of ministry will energize their faith and invigorate their congregations. She maintains that all believers need to have what they do in their lives for Christ identified as ministry. She is critical of ministers who are unwilling to share their roles with others. She contends that these ideas are not new at all but are a part of the traditional understanding of the priesthood of all believers that is included in the traditions of most denominations anyway. Finally, she believes that the only way to ensure strong participation in the activities of ministry is to give over full ownership and responsibility to those who have the passion for it.

She admits that her approach is not quick and easy or a plug-and-play program but holds that it is doable for any congregation that puts forth a commitment to work on identifying and empowering people within their community.

To support her understanding, Mallory describes the trial-and-error processes that took place at Brentwood Presbyterian Church. Her book is laid out in narrative fashion, highlighting her experiences along the way. But each chapter is also accompanied by sections that identify Equipping Principles and show examples used in other congregations.

This book would be best read by a leadership team or in a book study because of the follow-up questions it provides. There is an accompanying workbook that can be purchased to help a team explore whether these principles are possible in their context. She utilizes numerous examples of growth principles that are familiar to anyone with a background in business, and her "translating" into ministry language is extremely helpful. I found her planning models and flow charts at the back of the book useful. They would come in handy if I needed to make a presentation to the congregation about the changes she is suggesting.

Mallory is certainly a person who is encouraged and empowered to bring new ministries to life in her community. She is a white Euro-American from Southern California suburbs, and so certain assumptions about church work are inherent in her thinking. Chapter 3, "Making Systematic Changes Can Be Shocking," is particularly telling of her financial well-being, because her narrative describes a church

that is able to afford additional full-time staff and her own ability to work at the church full time without compensation. Throughout the book, the paradigm of giving wings to people's passions by funding their program ideas is evident, and many especially mid- to small-sized congregations would have trouble making those decisions. Examples from other congregations she identifies as "Equipping Heroes" are all large- to mega-sized congregations with multiple staff ministries and generous budgets. Nonetheless, with some tweaking many of the principles she has outlined can be useful to smaller churches.

I agree with her conclusions in many respects. At the center of her principles, she believes that pastors are not the only persons that can do ministry and that a church works best when all its members are participating in ministry. She feels there is tremendous fulfillment for believers in being identified as ministers for their work, and I could not agree more. However, I do not believe *The Equipping Church* will work for everybody. To implement a transformation in perspective on ministry of this magnitude, a church must have an open-minded and adventurous pastor who is agreeable to letting decisions be made by laity as well as a congregation with many members who are ready to take the initiative to tackle the work of ministry. I believe it is best suited in its current form for large, suburban, American congregations within a middle-class area with the potential for growth in size. It is a radical departure from the old methods of ministry, but a necessary one for continuing to stay relevant to the changing American culture.

Eric Horner
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

Magic and Paganism in Early Christianity. By Hans-Josef Klauck. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003. xii and 136 pages. Paper. $15.00.

Klauck's commendable work has the benefit of offering a serious academic study that will also be immediately useful to pastors and other students of the New Testament. It functions as a study of religion in the book of Acts, and it tackles many of the pesky questions that curious readers may have. Who was the Ethiopian covert? Simon Magus? the slave-girl soothsayer? And what of Paul's sermon at the Areopagus? Which philosophical schools, cults, or folk religions competed with Christianity for converts or provided targets for evangelism? The short volume moves at a fast clip through story after story, raising questions of evangelization and inculturation. It makes for a nice commentary, tackling questions that befit a good study of early "gospel and culture."

Klauck sees even the form of the book of Acts as "literary inculturation," with its adherence to conventions of the day (p. 4). Beginning with the mission proclamation in 1:8—to go "to be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth"—he quickly proceeds to the formation of the early sending community, of the events at Pentecost, and of work in the diaspora. The second chapter treats the evangelist Philip (Acts 8), and the third chapter treats the foundational events in Caesarea (Acts 10–12). The last half of the book examines Paul's first missionary journey (Acts 13–18), his work in Greece (Acts 16–18) and Ephesus (Acts 19), and his final journey to Rome (Acts 17–28). A short conclusion frames the discussion, with Klauck writing that "the primary intention of the Acts of the Apostles as a book is not missionary, but it does portray missionary history, as an inspiration to the reader" (p. 121). In his narration, Klauck does a remarkable job not only of highlighting the most obvious candidates for discussion but also of raising new questions.

Klauck is ever the dispassionate observer, refereeing debates over passages and offering possible interpretations. Not surprisingly, the University of Chicago New Testament scholar is uninterested in speculating on what this discussion offers to the church or to theological treatment. Others, however, may find this work remarkably helpful in constructing New Testament theologies, in reconstructing the vibrancy of early Christianity, and in probing the intersection of Christianity with the magics of today.

Jonathan Seitz
Princeton Seminary

From Paul to Valentinus: Christians at Rome in the First Two Centuries. By Peter Lampe. Trans. Michael Steinhauser, ed. Marshall D. Johnson. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003. xvii and 525 pages. Cloth. $42.00.

This path-breaking study of the rise and shape of the earliest churches in Rome integrates history, archaeology, theology, and social analysis. Peter Lampe, Professor of New Testament at Heidelberg University, uses epigraphic evidence to complement Christian texts: from Paul's Letter to the Romans to the writings of Clement of Rome, Justin Martyr, Montanus, and Valentinus. Thoroughly reworked and updated by the author, this English-language edition is broad in scope yet closely detailed.

The six parts, comprising fifty-one chapters and four appendices, greatly advances our knowledge of the shape of leadership and the Christians' relation to the Judeans living in Rome. The examination of the city areas in which Jews and Christians lived provides a new context for interpreting early Christians' social status. An examination of Roman Christianity from Romans through the Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus concludes that the majority were poor in the first century, a minority came from higher social classes in the second, with Greek as their first language, left few archaeological remains behind; with a greater percentage of women in the higher social classes.

Section 4 is a prosopographic study of all Roman Christians known by name, an extremely valuable contribution. A large proportion were immigrants to Rome. From Commodus on, members of the *familia Caesaris* and people of senatorial rank (especially women) appear in growing numbers. The last section examines the factionalism of the Roman Christians from Paul's Romans on. In the first two centuries this was based on the scattered house churches. Some were probably based on geographic origins, e.g. Montanists and Quartodecimans who came from Asia Minor and continued their customs and theology in Rome. The latter were more attached to their native bishops than to Bishop Victor of Rome. There were also social and educational causes; ultimately it was the will of the majority that led to the triumph of orthodox views.

The German first edition of this work won universal acclaim on its publication in 1987. A quick perusal of this English translation shows why: Lampe's work is comprehensive, balanced, extensively documented, yet clearly written. It is a must-read for every student of Paul's Romans and early Christian history, a marvelous achievement, based on detailed knowledge of the sources, literary, epigraphic, and archaeological. This work will be basic for the study of Roman Christianity for years to come.

Edgar Krentz

Jesus and the Empire: The Kingdom of God and the New World Disorder. By Richard A. Horsley. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003. vii and 178 pages. Paper. $17.00.

Horsley, Distinguished Professor at the University of Massachusetts and a leading proponent for the sociopolitical reading of the New Testament, has written this important book that compares Roman Empire with the American Empire. Actually, Horsley uses only the last twelve pages to compare Rome with the United States. He did not really need those pages; by his choice of texts and examples, and his use of contemporary vocabulary for ancient data, the comparison throughout is quite clear. It does not take a rocket scientist to know that Horsley is thinking of America when he writes of Rome.

The author first describes with terrifying detail the impact of Rome on the peoples of the Empire. Galilean Jesus must have been intensely aware of how his people were so severely subjugated by Rome, Roman puppets, and temple authorities. Using the covenantal structure of the prophets, Jesus attacked the Roman Empire and, on the other side, called for renewed covenant community in the villages of Galilee. He attacked the Empire by casting out the demons of supernatural tyranny. He developed village community by healing the sick and returning them to their rightful place. A restored covenantal community could withstand the political and economic devastation created by the Empire.

Those who ply the sociopolitical type of analysis usually reject later religious or even

theological interpretations of Jesus and the New Testament. Horsley is no exception. By interpreting Jesus in terms of his political and economic environment, Horsley gives credence to those who are reluctant to define Christianity in terms of liturgy or creeds. Nevertheless, applying Jesus to our time is fraught with complications. Many writers lack knowledge both of Jesus and his times and of the modern situation. Horsley does well with the Jesus context. By keeping short the application section he may have approached the proper methodology: Tell the story, and let the readers discern its relevance.

Graydon F. Snyder
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The Power of Full Engagement: Managing Energy, Not Time, Is the Key to High Performance and Personal Renewal. By Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz. New York: The Free Press, 2003. 256 pages. Cloth, $26.00; paper, $15.00.

Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz are senior partners and principals at LGE Performance Systems. Loehr, a performance psychologist, and Schwartz, an athletic coach, have worked with hundreds of Fortune 500 executives and managers as well as numerous athletes. They have written many other books including *Stress for Success* (Three Rivers Press, 1998) and *What Really Matters: Searching for Wisdom in America* (Bantam, 1995).

This is a book about self-care and leadership. Its central thesis is that managing energy, not time, is the key to high performance and personal renewal. According to the authors, we live in a digital time. Our days are carved up into bits and bytes. It is breadth rather than depth that most of us are after as we us race through our lives. Words like obsessed, crazed, and overwhelmed are used not to describe insanity but to depict our everyday lives. Feeling forever starved for time, we assume that we have no choice but to cram as much as possible into every day. The authors remind us that managing time efficiently is no guarantee that we will bring sufficient energy to whatever it is we are doing.

Everything we do—from interacting with colleagues and making important decisions to spending time with our families—requires energy. Obvious as this seems, we often take into account only time and not energy. Yet, without the right quantity, quality, focus, and force of energy, we are compromised in any activity we undertake. Likewise leaders, as the stewards of organizational energy, inspire or demoralize others by how effectively they manage their own energy as well as mobilize, focus, invest, and renew the collective energy of those they lead. The skillful management of energy makes possible what the authors call *full engagement.*

To be fully engaged, we must be physically energized, emotionally connected, mentally focused, and spiritually aligned with a purpose beyond our immediate self-interest. Full engagement begins with feeling eager to get to work in the morning, equally happy to return home in the evening, and capable of setting clear boundaries between the two. It means being able to immerse oneself in the mission one is on, whether that is grappling with a creative challenge at work, managing a group of people on a project, spending time with loved ones or simply having fun (p. 21).

Four key energy-management principles that drive full engagement are:

1. Drawing on four separate but related dimensions of energy: physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual, recognizing that none is sufficient by itself and each profoundly influences the others..

2. Balancing energy expenditure with intermittent energy renewal, because energy capacity diminishes with both overuse and underuse. When we live highly *linear* lives—spending far more energy than we recover or recovering more than we spend—the eventual consequence is that we break down or burn out, individually or organizationally.

3. Pushing beyond our normal limits, training in the same systematic way that elite athletes do. Stress is not the enemy in our lives. Paradoxically, it is the key to growth. This training is relevant to building "muscles" in every dimension of our lives—from empathy and patience to focus and creativity to integrity and commitment. What applies to the body applies

equally to the other dimensions of our lives.

4. Ritualizing positive energy rituals so that high performance can be sustained. Change is difficult. We are creatures of habit. Most of what we do is automatic and not conscious. The status quo has a magnetic pull on us. Therefore the authors use the word *ritual* purposefully to emphasize the notion of a carefully defined, highly structured behavior. In contrast to will and discipline, which require pushing yourself toward a particular behavior, a ritual *pulls* at you. A *positive ritual* is a behavior that becomes automatic over time—fueled by some deeply held value.

As I read *The Power of Full Engagement*, I was continually reminded of John 10:10, "I came so that you might have life." What these authors, I believe, are aiming for is abundant life. As they write, "the richest, happiest, and most productive lives are characterized by the ability to fully engage in the challenge at hand—and to disengage periodically and seek renewal" (p. 18). Recognizing human will and discipline as an extremely rare resource, the authors caution that we have to use them well. Like Paul's admonition about *aeskesis*, to train as if we were athletes, Loehr and Schwartz recommend creating practices to develop all four dimensions of who we are. The authors' shifting of perspective from managing time to managing energy as well as a concrete, nonshaming methodology make this an excellent book.

Allen Gustafson

Universal Salvation? The Current Debate. Edited by Robin A. Parry and Christopher H. Partridge. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2003. xxvii and 291 pages. Paper. $27.00.

Eternal life is what it's all about. So when self-described conservative evangelicals start debating universal salvation, one knows that "who gets saved" remains a living question across the religious spectrum. While the essayists share a specific faith perspective, they reflect diverse understandings on the nature and effects of salvation.

Opening the book with his case for a Christian doctrine of universal salvation, Dr. Thomas Talbott offers three thesis statements. First, God desires salvation for all. Second, God accomplishes what God desires. Third, some sinners "will be separated from God forever" (p. 7). According to Talbott, any two statements can be held simultaneously without contradiction, but not all three. Though a biblical case exists for each, Talbott argues that the third assertion—for limited atonement—is the weakest. The other contributors then respond with well-reasoned arguments for or against Talbott's proposition.

While each writer turns to Scripture and tradition for support, universal salvation also clearly evokes strong personal feelings. Unfortunately, the authors do not explore why so much seems to be at stake. For instance, they do not ask whose interests are served through doctrines of universal salvation or limited atonement. Another silent subtext is whether or not Christians depend on an eternal Hell for ethics and evangelism. The authors also present salvation as a personal event rather than a collective experience, which Paul suggests when he tells the Philippians to "work out your [plural] salvation with fear and trembling" (2:12).

Though such submerged issues receive little attention, this collection gives its subject an otherwise thorough and engaging treatment. *Universal Salvation?* shows that behind this debate lurks the central question of life in Christ: how God meets us and how we meet others.

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Briefly Noted

A Biblical History of Israel. By Iain Provan, V. Philips Long, and Tremper Longman III (Westminster John Knox, $24.95). The last generation has seen great turbulence in the discussion of the history of ancient Israel, with the breakdown of the Albright-Bright consensus and the rise of a group of Old Testament specialists, sometimes called minimalists, who have challenged not only the historicity of the patriarchs, Exodus and conquest, but of the United Monarchy and much of the history of Judah as well. I picked up this book with some hope, therefore, of finding a plausible recounting of Israel's history for the twenty-first century. Alas, while the authors show some awareness of the changing scene, they give a much too simplistic account of Israel's history that often does little more than paraphrase the biblical narrative. A number of anachronisms in the patriarchal account, for example, that call into question the antiquity of the whole, are glibly interpreted as later updatings of a basically historical account. *RWK*

Exploring the Old Testament. A Guide to the Pentateuch. By Gordon J. Wenham (InterVarsity, $25). In this undergraduate textbook W. offers an illuminating guide to the structure, meaning, and composition history of the first five books of the Bible. Maps, figures, tables, and a glossary make for an appealing and digestible layout, and "Digging deeper" and "What do you think?" panels allow readers to make up their minds about controversial issues. He fairly lists the strengths of and the challenges to the documentary hypothesis and winds up by giving interpretations of the Pentateuch if its setting was in the twelfth, tenth, seventh, or fifth centuries B.C.E. At times I wanted the author to decide among the alternatives he describes, but, given the purpose of the book, his may be a wise decision. *RWK*

Give Us This Day: A Lutheran Proposal for Ending World Hunger. By Craig L. Nessan (Fortress, $9.99). N., professor and Dean at Wartburg Theological Seminary and a book review editor for *Currents,* offers an important addition to the "Lutheran Voices" series of Fortress. N. notes perceptively: "If, however, we are to begin to comprehend the dynamics that lead to terrorism, we need to pay attention to the disparity in our world between rich and poor that gives rise to anti-Western ideology." N. urges that the ending of hunger become a matter of *status confessionis* and pledges to donate all royalties from this book to Bread for the World and the ELCA World Hunger Program. A great resource for an adult forum. *RWK*

Reading Women's Stories: Female Characters in the Hebrew Bible. By John Petersen (Fortress, $22). P., a professor at Pacific Lutheran University, uses the literary study of characterization, plot, and point of view to study the stories of Hannah, Deborah, and Judah and Tamar in the Old Testament. He explores how these stories go about communicating what they had to say. The approach is rooted in the "school of poetics" that facilitates creative interaction between literary theory and text. The family conflict in the story of Hannah illustrates the techniques of character development. Dramatically contrasting points of view emanate from the victory poem of Deborah. The focus in this study of Tamar is on plotting dynamics. The approach is quite different from historical criticism. Rather, it seeks to appreciate how the texts construct their stories and communicate sense and significance. *RWK*

Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament. Volumes XIII and XIV. Edited by G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry (Eerdmans, $60 each). The 165 articles in these two volumes provide in-depth studies of words ranging from *qos* (thistle) to *shakan* (settle, dwell). In between are such important words as spirit, compassion, firmament, Satan/adversary, Sheol, and Sabbath. Eerdmans continues its solid record among the top religious publishing houses in the United States. *RWK*

I Have a Dream: Martin Luther King Jr. and the Future of Multicultural America. Edited by James Kenneth Echols (Fortress, $15). E. notes that King's famous speech—the most famous sermon in modern American history—called all Americans to fully embrace and include racial and ethnic equality as a key aspect of the American dream. The seven essays in this book, by James A. Forbes Jr., Robert M. Franklin, Justo L. González, Dwight N. Hopkins, Peter J. Paris, Linda E. Thomas, and Emilie M. Townes, comprised the Hein Fry Lecture Series in the ELCA in 2003. King's agenda is here expanded from issues involving people of African and European descent to the multicultural challenge and opportunity of the twenty-first century. Essayists examine King's upbringing and formative influences, the speech itself, the twenty-first-century importance of King's dream, and the divine call for all God's people to participate in the ongoing struggle for equality and justice. *RWK*

The paperback reprint of the ***Biographical Dictionary of Christian Theologians***, edited by Patrick W. Carey and Joseph T. Lienhard (Hendrickson, $34.95), makes a helpful reference work available to a wider public. The work covers theologians from the second century on. Each entry includes a valuable bibliography to enable further research. While the Catholic editors understandably stress Catholic theologians and thus include some lesser-known figures, major Orthodox and Protestant theologians are present. I did miss entries for Adam of St. Victor, A. Calov, Quenstedt, J. B. Lightfoot, Schlatter, von Hofman, T. Zahn, E. Hirsch, and R. Prenter, and others. A useful dictionary for quick identification and characterization of major theological figures. *EK*

Rhetorical criticism of biblical texts is a growth industry. ***Rhetorical Argumentation in Biblical Texts***, edited by Anders Eriksson, Thomas H. Olbricht, and Walter Übelacker (Trinity Press International, $47), contains the papers from the sixth conference on the rhetorical analysis of Scripture held in Lund, Sweden, in 2000. The conference focused on rhetorical argumentation (as opposed to genre analysis, rhetorical structure of documents, etc.). The 23 articles discuss argumentation theory and method, historical background (the enthymeme and letter writing), rhetorical argumentation in the Old Testament (two articles), the Gospels (four), Pauline letters (nine), Hebrews (one), and Apocalyptic and Romance (one, on the *Shepherd of Hermas* and the *Acta Petri*). The articles are all quality contributions. I found especially useful R. Dean Anderson's evaluation of the utility of Lausberg's *Handbook of Literary Rhetoric* for the study of ancient texts (some negative strictures), Carol Poster's study of the economy of letter writing in Graeco-Roman Antiquity, Johan S. Vos on sophistic argumentation in Romans, Anders Eriksson on "Enthymemes in Pauline Argumentation" (in 1 Corinthians), Rollin A. Ramsaran on the use of the maxim "Living and dying, living is dying" in Philippians, and Thomas H. Olbricht's "Anticipating and Presenting the Case for Christ as High Priest in Hebrews." This is a worthy sixth volume in this series on rhetoric and the Bible. It is also volume 8 in the Emory Studies in Early Christianity. *EK*

Who Were the Early Israelites and Where Did They Come From? By William G. Dever (Eerdmans, $25). D., a leading Syro-Palestinian archaeologist, answers the twin questions of the title primarily from his interpretation of archaeological data. After an inconclusive chapter on the Exodus (where there is little archaeological evidence to go on), D. devotes the rest of the book to demonstrating that the early Israelite peoples were Canaanites indigenous to Palestine—thus opposing the conquest and peaceful infiltration models of Israel's entry into the land. In a highly technical argument he argues against Israel Finkelstein, who sees the early Israelites as nomads who settled down, while D. himself believes there was a major population shift from the lowlands to the central hill country by people who sought "a new society and a new lifestyle" or who exercised a protest against a corrupt landed aristocracy that disenfranchised the peasant class. He and Finkelstein agree that there is no significant immigration from outside. D. argues that the newer archaeological evidence must be the primary source for writing any history of early Israel, but that evidence, of course, has little to say about the faith, which makes this

history important for most of the rest of us. D. also waffles between rigorous archaeological method and a nostalgic hope that the tradition is true. In one paragraph he states that archaeological evidence contradicts the Exodus from Egypt, wilderness wanderings and conquests in Transjordan, but then goes on to suppose that there just may have been a miracle worker like Moses among the Semitic slaves in Egypt, who may have mediated to them knowledge about the new deity Yahweh. For him the Exodus is not historical, but only a "metaphor for liberation." One hopes this is not the last word. *RWK*

The Song of Songs. Translated and edited by Richard A. Norris, Jr. (Eerdmans, $40). Drawing on commentaries and sermons during the first six centuries of Christianity and the Latin Middle Ages, N. illustrates Christian readings of this ancient love poem. For early Christians the Song of Songs ranked with the Psalms and the Gospels as top resources for describing the believer's relationship with God. N. translates the largely allegorical comments by Origen, Gregory the Great, Gregory of Nyssa, Ambrose, Augustine, etc., and arranges them as verse-by-verse comments on the biblical text. The translations provided by N. are based on the Septuagint and Vulgate, which were the texts used by the ancient commentators. This is the first volume in a new commentary series edited by Robert L. Wilken (The Church's Bible) designed to present the Holy Scriptures as understood during the first Christian millennium. *RWK*

Jerusalem in Bible and Archaeology: The First Temple Period. Edited by Andrew G. Vaughn and Ann E. Killebrew (SBL, $49.95). The essays in this volume were presented over a four-year period at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature. Although Jerusalem has experienced many excavations in the last century and a half (the bibliography in this volume comes to fifty pages), there have also been severe limitations on where one can dig because the temple mount/Dome of the Rock area is ruled out for religious reasons and because people still live in other parts of the city of the First Temple period! Essays in this book represent a wide diversity of opinion on what all this digging proves. Was Jerusalem during the reigns of David and Solomon the significant capital of the United Monarchy, or did it remain primarily a village until the ninth century? Jerusalem may have competed with the famous sites of Megiddo and Hazor in the tenth century, but it completely outshined them in the centuries to come. *RWK*

Reading Race, Reading the Bible, by Peter T. Nash (Fortress, $6), is a short essay on color awareness both in modern times and in the biblical era. Nash, a visiting professor at Wartburg Theological Seminary, argues that color awareness is a relatively modern invention. Before identification by color, people were known more by the political entity to which they belonged. Given that thesis, Nash reinterprets some biblical passages where, in terms of genealogy, geography, or anthropology, people of color, otherwise not mentioned as such, must play a significant role. The thesis is helpful and should be expanded to include the New Testament and the early church. Knowing that the biblical writers were unaware of what must have been an extensive color mixture would be an encouragement to modern cross-cultural churches. *Graydon F. Snyder, Chicago, Illinois*

Revolution of Spirit: Ecumenical Theology in Global Context: Essays in Honor of Richard Shaull. Edited by Nantawan Boonprasat Lewis (Eerdmans, $30). Richard Shaull died in late 2002, a few years after this Festschrift was published in his honor. A short biography and an eight-page bibliography mark his contributions as a missionary in Colombia and Brazil and then as a professor at Princeton Seminary. Shaull's long-term work in Latin America made him gradually more sympathetic to Marxist theologies; he was around for, and influenced, the early years of liberation theology. This work is largely the product of students and sympathetic colleagues. It is divided into three quite loose sections: "Critical Issues in the Struggle," "New Theological Questions in New Historical Situations," and "New Paradigms in Ecumenical Theology." Contributors span the globe in their interests, and topics are exceptionally broad: immigration in the U.S., the Catholic Church's "New Evangelization" in Latin America, issues

of gayness or disability, even an essay on campus ministry. The underlying theme is always a concern for the other and a desire to follow Shaull's example in working for and with those marginalized by society. This work offers an eclectic blend of interesting essays and serves as a faithful memorial to Shaull's work. *Jonathan Seitz, Princeton Seminary*

Zondervan Bible Study Library, Scholar's Edition. 5.0 (Zondervan, $349.99). Zondervan here presents a twenty-first-century study Bible, loaded on a CD-Rom and powered by Pradis, a software designed to make the resources of this collection easily accessible. The default screen is divided into four panes containing respectively the text of the Bible (biased toward NIV, but nine English versions are provided as options, as well as the Hebrew and Greek texts); a Bible dictionary; a two volume commentary, and an analytical lexicon to the text in its original language (this pane also contains tabs that lead to Hebrew-English and Greek-English dictionaries). The panes are synchronized so that as you move from verse to verse the panes containing the commentary and the analytical lexicon move with you. In addition to Hebrew, Greek, and English Bibles, this "library" contains study Bibles, Bible commentaries (many reflecting the evangelical orientation of Zondervan or dated), biblical encyclopedias (archaeology, Bible difficulties, also a dictionary of the Christian church), reference works (all the men and women of the Bible, Christian theology and creeds, Greek beyond the basics). The CD's box boasts that these resources would total more than $3,000 in their print editions. One will not find here explanations of the latest critical insights, but in terms of getting at basic biblical information this library is hard to beat. Stripped-down editions are available from $49.99 to $199.99. Confirmation classes and church libraries might find one of these versions attractive. *RWK*

Zephaniah. By Marvin Sweeney (Fortress, $47). In this important contribution to the Hermeneia commentary series, S. dates most of the book to the lifetime of the prophet in the late seventh century B.C.E., during the reign of Josiah. The book presents a prophetic discourse that calls on its audience to turn to Yahweh before the threatened purge of apostasy that will take place on the Day of Yahweh. S. notes that the Septuagint version of the book also calls on the audience to change but presupposes that it is unwilling to do so. The lengthy introduction analyzes the structure, settings, and rhetorical strategies of each of the versions of Zephaniah—MT, LXX, Dead Sea Scrolls, Targum, Peshitta, etc.—in order to assess their unique interpretive perspectives. *RWK*

Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah. By Daniel J. Simundson (Abingdon, $32). S., emeritus Professor of Old Testament at Luther Seminary, has written a highly competent and very accessible interpretation of the first six minor prophets. Based on the NRSV, the Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries avoid extensive philological comments, but S. excels in presenting mainstream critical interpretation clearly, and his judicious remarks on the ethical and theological significance of these books are right on. Micah, for example, is exceedingly harsh in its judgments but ends with a description of a God who is forgiving, merciful, and faithful. S. urges that the whole book of Micah needs to read in the light of the way that it ends. *RWK*

The Struggle to Understand Isaiah as Christian Scripture. By Brevard S. Childs (Eerdmans, $35). C.'s contribution to biblical studies has been substantial and sustained for many decades, and the history of the interpretation of Isaiah offered in this book—ranging from the Septuagint and the New Testament to many figures in church history, including Luther and Calvin, up to the early twentieth century—shows C. at his well-informed and widely read best. He skips from the early twentieth century, however, to postmodern interpretation, omitting a host of significant twentieth-century scholars, and delivers in the postmodern chapter a scathing critique of Walter Brueggemann that I found quite one-sided. Almost anyone who does not accept C.'s "canonical approach" would face the same criticism. In a sense, C.'s discussion of Isaiah is a test case for trying to understand the church's use of the Old Testament in general, and he

identifies the following characteristics of the church's approach: the authority of scripture, use of both literal and spiritual senses, divine and human authorship, christological content, and the dialectical nature of history. While admitting that parts of Isaiah come from several centuries, C. argues that the dating of the book in its superscription functions canonically to locate the historical setting of the whole prophecy to the preexilic period. Most historical critics will not find this persuasive, nor are we really given much help by this approach with the considerable difference between Isaiah's view of the messiah in chaps. 9 and 11, for example, and the radical reinterpretation of this idea in the New Testament; the same could be said for Isaiah's views on the servant that also function quite differently in the New Testament's interpretation of the death of Jesus. It is these latter questions that really energize me. *RWK*

A Biblical Text and Its Afterlives: The Survival of Jonah in Western Culture. By Yvonne Sherwood (Cambridge, $25.99). S. not only offers a fine survey of and response to biblical scholarship on Jonah but also deals with treatments of Jonah in art, literature, and popular culture. Luther (who used Jonah to denounce Judaism and also muses on the absurdities of the book) and Calvin pass in review, as do contemporary exegetes, literary theorists, and artists over the ages (there are seventeen black-and-white plates). The first section of the book, "The Mainstream," overviews Christian and scholarly interpretations of Jonah from Jesus until today. The second section, "Backwaters and Underbellies," pays special attention to Jewish and popular interpretations. In a third section, "Regurgitating Jonah," she considers modern theories of reading and then gives her own post-structuralist exegesis of this very short book. As one reviewer also puts it, S. is incapable of writing a bland sentence. *RWK*

Useless Beauty: Ecclesiastes through the Lens of Contemporary Film. By Robert K. Johnston. (Baker Academic, $17.99). J. argues: "Contemporary movies afford interpreters a deeper access to Ecclesiastes' center of power and meaning than does much of mainstream Old Testament scholarship" (ouch!) and "Conversely, the paradoxes and tensions found in Ecclesiastes can provide interpretive lenses for the viewing of movies." Films reviewed include, among others, *About Schmidt; Liar, Liar; Magnolia; Pleasantville; My Name Is Joe; The Sixth Sense;* and *American Beauty.* J. seeks to explore what a reader/viewer-oriented criticism might contribute to an understanding of Ecclesiastes and to recover a concern for hearing God's Word anew. *RWK*

Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible. Edited by James D. G. Dunn and John W. Rogerson (Eerdmans, $75). One-volume commentaries are extremely valuable for pastors and church libraries for help with those books on which one cannot afford a full-length commentary. This 1,629-page volume moves to the head of the class with 67 contributors from England and North America, and from Protestant and Roman Catholic scholars of note (David Balch [Luke] and John Reumann [Romans] pitch in from the Lutheran perspective). The apocrypha is included and even 1 Enoch. *RWK*

The Bible in History: How the Texts Have Shaped the Times. By David W. Kling (Oxford, $35). Each chapter begins with a Bible verse, the interpretation of which has shaped a significant Christian event: monasticism, the papacy, Bernard and the Song of Songs, Luther, Anabaptists and the peace tradition, the African American experience, Pentecostalism, and women's ordination. These texts have shaped history, and history has shaped the interpretation of these texts. In K.'s opinion the exodus theme of deliverance and liberation became the most significant myth for American Black identity, and Gal 3:28 became the *locus classicus* in defense of the full participation of women in ministry, superseding other texts that would restrict women's role. Texts have served as transforming agents: Anthony heard Matt 19:21 and gave away all his possessions to follow Christ, Bernard pored over the Song of Songs and experienced a mystical encounter with divine reality, and Luther "sweated over" Rom 1:17 and came to a new realization of God's grace. *RWK*

Old Testament Commentary Survey. By Tremper Longman III (Baker Academic and InterVarsity, $12.99). This is the third edition of L.'s commentary guide, in which he presents exhaustive lists of English commentaries and evaluates each of them in short paragraphs. Though written from an evangelical perspective, his analyzes are fair and helpful. (For my own recommendations see http://prophetess.lstc.edu/~rklein/ and look under Old Testament: Commentary Recommendations.) *RWK*

Inspired Speech: Prophecy in the Ancient Near East. Essays in Honor of Herbert B. Huffmon. Edited by John Kaltner and Louis Stulman (T & T Clark International, $125; available from Eisenbrauns for $87.38). Huffmon, who studied with the likes of Albright, Cross, Mendenhall, and Wright, has written important studies on the Amorite language, prophecy at Mari, and other Old Testament–related topics. Most of the 31 essays in this Festschrift deal with prophecy in Israel and in the Ancient Near East. Among noteworthy contributions is a discussion by Robert R. Wilson of the importance of the relationship between oral and written literature in study of the biblical prophets. David A. Leiter also treats visions of peace in Isaiah (2:1–4; 9:1–7; 11:1–9; 32:1–20; 35:1–10; 55:1–13; 60:17–22; and 65:17–25). Because of the many judgment oracles in the prophets, contemporary readers often miss the fact that peace has the last word. *RWK*

Carefully examining 1 Cor 1–4 and 9; 2 Cor 2:14–4:6; Paul's use of "I" in Rom 7; Rom 9:1–5, 14:1–15:13 and Acts 17, Mark D. Given argues in ***Paul's True Rhetoric: Ambiguity, Cunning, and Deception in Greece and Rome*** (Trinity Press International, $26.95) that Paul, much like the Sophists, uses deception, irony, ambiguity, and other rhetorical devices in his argumentation, not surprising because of "Paul's sincere conviction that he knew the Truth and had a divine mandate to promote it in an apocalyptic world filled with deception" (p. 176). By using these devices he battled the deceptive rhetoric of demonic forces that deceive non-Christian Jews, Gentiles, and some "weak" believers. He is close to Plato's Socrates but with a theological dimension that is not in Plato. This is a highly interesting combination of historical criticism with rhetorical criticism and a form of deconstruction that turns out to be very useful. It is no. 7 of Emory Studies in Early Christianity. I like this work. *EK*

The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls. By James VanderKam and Peter Flint (HarperSanFrancisco, $34.95). Now that all of the Dead Sea Scrolls have been published, V. and F. provide an up-to-date introduction in five parts: Discoveries, Dating, Archeology, and New Methods; The Dead Sea Scrolls and Scripture; The Non-biblical Scrolls and their Message; The Scrolls and the New Testament; and Controversies about the Dead Sea Scrolls. A few gleanings: the Essenes were, after all, the community behind the scrolls; there are 222 biblical and 670 non-biblical scrolls; John the Baptist may have had some contact with the Qumran community; the scroll writers align themselves with Jubilees and date festivals to a 364-day calendar; the covenanters expected a war in the future in which the Davidic messiah would lead the forces of good to victory and execute the leader of the armies of evil; DNA research will enable scholars to assign a number of tiny fragments to a particular scroll or to determine the number of skins from different animals that are used for the long scrolls; a scroll that was hailed a decade ago as announcing a slain messiah actually has the messiah killing his enemies. The authors provide a list of the best Web sites on the scrolls. Throughout, the book makes wise use of photographs and explanatory charts. This is hands-down the best introduction to the scrolls. *RWK*

Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings. Edited by Timothy F. Lull. Second Edition with CD-Rom, edited by William R. Russell (Fortress, $39). L. died in 2003, and R., a longtime friend, guided the second edition to publication. New here are more personal, autobiographical pieces, as well as Luther's Preface to Romans, The Estate of Marriage, the Marburg Colloquy, and other items. The CD-Rom includes the full text, links to other resources, a short biography of Luther, a research-paper guide, and a glossary.

Preaching Helps

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost—Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Series A

Congregational Song and Sermon Preparation

"Music is a servant of the Gospel and a principal means of worshiping God in Lutheran churches. Congregational song gathers the whole people to proclaim God's mercy, to worship God, and to pray in response to the readings of the day and in preparation for the Lord's Supper." So declares *The Use of the Means of Grace: A Statement on the Practice of Word and Sacrament* (11A).

Whenever I read this wonderful description of the essential role that music plays in Lutheran worship, two phrases jump out at me—"servant of the Gospel" and "response to the readings." That I am drawn to these words reflects at least three of my biases about the relationship of music and worship, and particularly music and preaching.

Obviously, my attraction to the words *servant* and *response* reveals that I am not a musician. Though I thoroughly enjoy listening to music, singing hymns, and intoning the liturgy, both my natural musical ability and my formal training in this arena is, shall we say, limited. As a parish pastor, I was blessed by strong partnerships with organists and choir directors. The congregations we served together were blessed by the fruits of our intentional collaboration.

The phrase "servant of the Gospel" also reveals my concern that, just as a preacher's personality and charisma should not overshadow the message, music in worship is not a performance. Or, more precisely, music in worship is more than a performance. We dare to believe that God speaks in and through music. Excellence in performance surely helps this to happen, but excellence in performance is not the goal.

The phrase "response to the readings" reveals my conviction that our first act of faith, of bearing witness, of giving God thanks and praise, all in response to the good news we hear in preaching, is singing the Hymn of the Day. The congregation or assembly does not wait until worship is over before it proclaims the good news. Worship itself is the congregation's first opportunity to respond to the gospel by claiming its role in the *missio Dei*. In fact, worship forms the assembly to carry out its mission and ministry in the world.

While these convictions may be correct, I fear they have kept me from appreciating the powerful role that hymns can play in sermon preparation. As I read this series of Preaching Helps, prepared for us by **John Rollefson**, I was struck by the way he uses hymns to shape his sermons. While I have always been attuned to selecting hymns that reflect the message, I am excited by the way hymns can offer insight, language, and images. What *The Use of the Means of Grace* calls the ever-expanding "treasury of music" is itself a commentary on scripture worth considering. I imagine Pastor Rollefson sitting at a round table as he prepares these "Preaching Helps." He is surrounded by a choir offering praise to God. As their music connects with the text he is considering, he takes note of the hymn and describes the connection in order to share it with us. More than helping us to prepare sermons for these summer Sundays after Pentecost, this series of Preaching Helps might serve as a catalyst for cultivating intentional collaboration with your congregation's musician and for inviting music as a "servant of the Gospel" into your process of sermon preparation. I encourage you to read these pages with hymnals close at hand. If, like me, you cannot read music, why not gather some members of the choir and invite them to sing?

Since January 2004, Rollefson has served as pastor of Lutheran Church of the Master in west Los Angeles near UCLA. In February John celebrated the 30th anniversary of his ordination. In those years John served congregations in Ann Arbor, Milwaukee, and San Francisco. He is a graduate of Luther College, Yale Divinity School, the University of London, and the Graduate Theological Union. He's been a Resident Fellow at the Institute for Ecumenical and Cultural Research at St. John's Abbey and University, a Merrill Fellow at Harvard Divinity School, and a member of the Center of Theological Inquiry at Princeton Seminary's Pastor Theologian Program for which he continues to lead a group in L.A. John enjoys playing basketball, tennis, and golf, as well as, with his wife, Ruth—a vocal music and piano teacher—attending films, concerts, and museums and visiting wine country. He is the father of two grown sons, the elder, Griff, a Ph.D. student in Musicology at UW–Madison, and the younger, Jake, a May graduate of Wittenberg University.

During the summer I invite colleagues to contribute to this conversation on preaching. We are currently scheduled through June 2006. If you are interested in writing, or if there is someone you would like to hear from, please let me know. I pray the coming summer brings you rest and refreshment.

Craig A. Satterlee
Editor of Preaching Helps
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Eighth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 10) July 10, 2005

Isaiah 55:10–13
Psalm 65:[1–8] 9–13
Romans 8:1–11
Matthew 13:1–9, 18–23

You visit the earth and water it,
you greatly enrich it;
. . . and blessing its growth.
You crown the year with your bounty. . . .
—Ps 65:9a, 10b, 11a

First Reading

More than half of our first readings from Hebrew Scripture these weeks of midsummer are taken from Isaiah, all but one falling in that section of this composite book that scholars attribute to the anonymous prophet variously called Second Isaiah, the Prophet of the Exile, or the Prophet of Consolation. For an historical overview as well as insightful exegesis see Paul D. Hanson, *Isaiah 40–66* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995) in the Interpretation Bible commentary series. Isaiah 55 (we will read an earlier section in three weeks) brings the message of Second Isaiah to what Hanson calls "a fitting conclusion" (p. 177).

It's a text I find sufficiently compelling that I chose to have it read at my ordination/installation, sensible that in the small, struggling inner-city church to which I had been called I would need more assurance than what *my* schooling, *my* good intentions, and *my* best efforts could hope to accomplish. Together as a community, we all needed God's promise that God's Word would not return empty but would accomplish God's purpose and succeed in whatever God intended for it. Our task was to trust in the Word, celebrate, proclaim, and enact it as a community for the sake of the world around and within us. I'm delighted to report that this "mission strategy" works—not because of us but through us and sometimes despite us! God's Word sprouts and bears fruit, providing both "seed to the sower and bread to the eater," both the promise of future growth and vitality and also strength and nourishment to those needing it right here and now. The promise of Isaiah 55 empowered our little congregation gathered in the midst of the City of St. Francis to live out its God-given destiny to become truly "a house of prayer for all peoples" (Isa 56:7b).

No wonder that the strong natural imagery of rain and snow coming "down from heaven," which funds the agricultural metaphors of sowing and sprouting, should eventuate in a vividly Isaian eschatological hymn of the new creation. We might call it an "ecological doxology," as "the mountains and hills . . . burst into song," "the trees . . . clap their hands," and beautiful myrtle and cypress spring up where prickly thorns and briars formerly intruded. (See #R250, "Light Dawns On a Weary World," in *Renewing Worship Songbook* [Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003] for a contemporary setting of this text to music.) This is the natural world's symphony of shalom, the restored creation's ode to joy (v. 12), in which we human earthlings are invited to join our voices.

Pastoral Reflection

Our reading from the prophet may well have been in Jesus' mind as he, the very One whom the church confesses as the preexistent Word of God, tells his story of the sower. "Such great crowds" had gathered, Matthew tells us, "that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach," a peculiar setting in which "he told them many things in parables." Among these "many things" was a memorable story

about a farmer sowing seed. This story is allegorical in form, uncharacteristic of Jesus, which invites Matthew to provide his readers with a detailed exegesis. The parable is found in varying forms in all three synoptic Gospels as well as in an abbreviated form in the Coptic Gospel of Thomas (see Arland Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000], 181ff.).

Here in Matthew's Gospel the seed is not itself the Word of God, as Luke's Gospel interprets it (8:11). Admitting that in the original parable "the imagery of casting the seed had to do with proclamation, and the seeds corresponded to the word," Hultgren asserts that in Matthew's interpretation of the story the imagery has been transformed, so the focus has now become different sorts of "people and their reaction to the preaching and teaching of the word" (p. 196). This is a subtle distinction, to be sure, but should be kept in mind by the careful exegete.

Hymns illustrate well this distinction. For example, while *With One Voice* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1995) #716, "Word of God, Come Down on Earth" nicely underlines God's initiative and purposefulness in showering the Word, the "living rain from heav'n descending," the original point of the parable, Matthew's interpretation is better served by the plea in *WOV* #713, "Lord, let my heart be good soil, open to the seed of your Word. . . . When my heart is hard, break the stone away. When my heart is cold, warm it with the day. When my heart is lost, lead me on your way." Or, again, #714 sings "The thirsty fields drink in the rain, the earth receives the sower's seed and covers it. So, Lord, we receive your Holy Word." A sermon seeking to be faithful to both Isaiah's and Matthew's proclamation of the gospel, like these contemporary hymns, will boldly proclaim the unfailing graciousness of God's initiative while recognizing the reality and amazing obdurateness of our human resistance, which only God can overcome—and has!

Since late May and continuing on through mid-September our second readings are drawn from that most mature (and difficult) of Paul's surviving writings, the Letter to the Romans. While these semi-continuous readings will only occasionally prove helpful in casting light upon the first reading and Gospel, which are supposed to help illumine one another, this presents a valuable opportunity to craft a continuing sermon series on Romans, which in some congregational settings could be both challenging and rewarding to preacher and hearers alike. Because the readings extend over the summer, they might serve as the occasion of designing a special liturgy and preaching style to provide a fresh alternative to the rest of the church year. (Truth in advertising leads me to admit I've never dared to try such a series myself.) Less radical but just as appropriate is to hold a continuing Bible study on Romans, focusing on the weekly lections, which I have done with some success. Companion resources are numerous and various, from the once popular but now ancient Fritz Ridenour, *How to Be a Christian without Being Religious* (Glendale, CA: GL Publications, 1967), to David L. Bartlett's pastorally sensitive and accessible *Romans* volume in the Westminster Bible Companions series (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995) to Peter Stuhlmacher's scholarly *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994).

Paul's stark contrast in today's reading between "those who live according to" and "set their minds on" the "flesh" as opposed to the "Spirit" provides an interesting diagnosis of both our resistance and our receptivity to God's Word. Here too *WOV* helps us to sing our way to the truth of the matter as in #712, the Tanzanian hymn "Listen,

God is Calling," and #715, set to a Hasidic tune, "Open Your Ears, O Faithful People." With Isaiah's mountains and hills and trees, we too can clap our hands and join all of nature in singing "Hallelujah!" to God using a Jewish tune. JR

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 11) July 17, 2005

Isaiah 44:6–8
Psalm 86:11–17
Romans 8:12–25
Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43

You, O Lord, are a God
merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in
steadfast love and faithfulness.
—Ps 86:15

First Reading

Today's prophetic text arises out of the situation of Israel in exile. The people's chronic susceptibility to idolatry, older even than the golden-calf episode in the time of the wilderness wanderings, had become epidemic as the exiles learned to live "up close and personal" with the rich and alluring cultic life of their Babylonian conquerors. Add to this the existential trauma of living as a defeated people who viewed their God (despite the prophets' warnings) as their own tribal deity, and one begins to sense the difficulties of sustaining faith in a defeated God, or at least a God in retreat from the once supposedly "chosen" people. "How could we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?" the psalmist laments (137:4). *WOV* #656 is a tuneful setting of this psalm.

Scholars tell us that the time of the Babylonian exile became precisely the crucible out of which the remnant faithful would learn to sing the Lord's song under duress as Israel undertook the remembering, collecting, and editing of its traditions. But Second Isaiah also testifies that what would emerge as the faithful remnant's tradition was pounded out on the anvil of pagan idolatry by the hammer of that first and formative commandment handed down at Sinai. "Is there any God besides me?" (v. 8b) was *the* question of Israel's struggle for identity and faithfulness, as it was Second Isaiah's passionate vocation to move the people to resist and reject the cultural and religious temptations that surrounded them with a resounding "No!"

Today's verses from Isaiah are followed by a deft and sarcastic lampooning of the whole process of idol production that merits attention (vv. 12–20). This leads to an extended reflection contrasting God who is our Maker (like a potter working with clay) with the way idolaters make their own gods, a passage that nicely anticipates Ludwig Feuerbach's nineteenth-century critique of the gods as merely "human projections" (see Walter Brueggemann, *Isaiah 40–66* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998], 69). Second Isaiah continues this critique of idolatry through chapter 46 where he pokes fun at the way idols become literally a "burden" to their makers, who must carry them upon their shoulders. The people of Israel, by contrast, God asserts, "have been borne by me from your birth, carried from the womb." God promises that "even when you turn grey I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save" (46:3–4).

Pastoral Reflection

In the first of his Beecher lectures, published as *What's Good about This News?* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), David Bartlett argues that, in addition to Paul's emphasis on the legal image of "justification" as God's way of saving sinners,

we need to pay attention to his metaphor of "adoption," which may translate better in our day. "You have received a spirit of adoption," Paul writes in today's reading from Romans 8, which is the Spirit's "bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ . . ." (8:15–17). Bartlett tells the following story to illustrate how the image of adoption "works":

> My wife and I have friends who have a wonderfully mixed family, mixed in part because one of their sons is their biological offspring and the other children are adopted. Not long ago they were explaining to the youngest child what it meant for him to be adopted—how he had been chosen, and waited for, and welcomed with joy. As part of the story they also had to explain that Mark, the brother, was their child biologically. When they had finished explaining what it meant to say that Tommy was adopted, he cried out: "Oh, that's wonderful. Can't we adopt Mark too?"

And so, Bartlett concludes, Paul is here testifying that "God has adopted us all, Jew and Gentile, male and female, slave and free, in Jesus Christ" (p. 16). This is indeed good news!

Paul goes on to give voice to his vision of a cosmic salvation in which the creation itself "will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God." Further, "we know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves . . . groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies." Paul here recasts what he calls "the sufferings of this present time" and the groanings of the whole creation in which we share as a hopeful time akin to that of childbirth pangs. Adoption/redemption is a painful process sustained by hope, hope that is not a matter of seeing but of waiting with patience.

An insightful essay on biblical hope is Hans Weder's "Hope and Creation" in *The End of the World and the Ends of God*, ed. J. Polkinghorne and M. Welker (Harrisburg: Trinity, 2000), 184ff.

"Here is a place where the Scriptures leave the interpreter with a dilemma," Arland Hultgren says of today's Gospel reading. For the edgy parable Jesus tells of the "Weeds in the Wheat" and its explication, which many scholars attribute to Matthew, seem to head off in different directions. Today may be a good day to be transparently honest about the tensions we preachers face in seeking to preach the Good News of Jesus while interpreting faithfully the texts placed before us. How are we to respond to those within the community of faith who, in our own or someone else's judgment, do not seem to be living up to God's expectations? "Are patience and restraint the answer" as the parable itself seems to counsel? asks Hultgren. Or are "judgment and warning" to be our approach, as Matthew's interpretation of the parable seems to suggest? (*The Parables of Jesus*, 302)

Jesus' story speaks to the perennial issue of the faith community as *corpus mixtum*, which Jesus will also address in Matthew 18, 22, and 25. In Christian terms, saints and sinners live intermixed within the body of Christ. To put a characteristically paradoxical Lutheran spin on it, we are all *simul iustus et peccator*. We are both weeds and wheat at one and the same time. The parable, while attributing the presence of the weeds to the work of "the enemy," nonetheless counsels patience until the harvest (see Hultgren, p. 296). The "gracious and merciful" and especially "slow to anger" patience of the God of the psalmist is to be preferred in this meantime as we heed the prophet's warning "Do not fear, or be afraid" and as we join with the apostle in crying "Abba! Father!" to the only God beyond the many gods who has adopted us and made us

heirs with Christ. Marty Haugen's "Soli Deo Gloria" (*Renewing Worship Songbook* #R300) invites us to raise "a billion voices in one great song" of praise to this our long-suffering and patient God. JR

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 12) July 24, 2005

1 Kings 3:5–12
Psalm 119:129–136
Romans 8:26–39
Matthew 13:31–33, 44–52

Keep my steps according to your promise. . . .
—Ps 119:133a

First Reading

"Give your servant . . . an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?" Just a few months removed from an unusually divisive presidential election in which quite differing values were articulated as to what constitutes "good" and "evil," the young King Solomon's words from three millennia ago provide an opportunity to reflect on issues of political leadership and decision making from the perspective of faith. Historians debate the relative merits of Solomon's actual kingship (his reputation for polygamy, which included wives of a dazzling array of religious backgrounds, for example, is always disconcerting to those who feel compelled to defend the "biblical view of marriage"). Still, "solomonic" remains a synonym for "wise."

Similarly, today's psalmody from the 176-verse-long acrostic celebration of God's gift of Torah (better understood here as "instruction" than "law") witnesses from Israel's sapiential tradition to the goodness of God's guiding providence in humankind's everyday affairs. (See Robert Davidson, *The Vitality of Worship: A Commentary on the Book of Psalms* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998], 388ff.) God's gift of Torah, in this understanding, is not a rule book so much as "the ABC of the God-centered life," a kind of spiritual primer providing a practical ethical structure in which the personally good life including the welfare of one's neighbors might be lived out.

Central to an appreciation of Israel's sapiential tradition is the understanding that wisdom is God's good gift (hence Solomon's dream-request for the gift of wisdom) rather than a human accomplishment. As the psalmist reminds us in his prayer to "keep my steps according to your promise," Torah is seen also as a kind of God-given user's manual as to how to live faithfully in the light of the covenant promise, an aid to "practicing our faith."

For a classic Old Testament theology particularly attuned to the wisdom tradition of Israel see Samuel Terrien's *The Elusive Presence: The Heart of Biblical Theology* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1978), 278ff. On Christian "practices" see *Practicing Our Faith*, ed. Dorothy Bass (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997), and *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*, ed. Dorothy Bass and Miroslav Volf (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

Pastoral Reflection

Jesus appears in today's Gospel reading as a teacher within Israel's wisdom tradition, telling no fewer than five pithy parables in the space of a few verses. He concludes by asking his hearers "Have you understood all this?" They unhesitatingly answer "Yes." Perhaps not as confident as his disciples that they have understood, Jesus concludes with an enigmatic epigram, which might have been taken from the Book of Proverbs:

"Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old."

Whatever else Jesus may mean by this, it suggests to me that Jesus is commending his own imaginative yet homely storytelling mode of teaching to his followers. We preachers might well ponder Jesus' recommended technique of bringing out of our treasure (our "bag of tricks" consisting of stories, experiences, and accumulated wisdom?) "what is new and what is old" as we strive to be faithful to our calling to proclaim the gospel. Throughout the Gospels we are encountered by the indirection and metaphorical character of Jesus' preaching and teaching, which, together with his humorous and ironic creativity, drove the legalists and literalists of his day crazy. (See Fred Craddock, *Overhearing the Gospel* (Chalice Press, 2002), on the necessary "indirectness of preaching" and Colin E. Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement* [London: T & T Clark, 1998], 27ff., on the use of metaphor in theology and proclamation. See also Patrick Henry, *The Ironic Christian's Companion* (New York: Riverhead, 1999).

Likening the kingdom of heaven to mustard seeds and yeast, to hidden treasure, pearls, and dragnets demonstrates not only Jesus' power of imagination but the very incarnational character of his life and message; God's revelation occurs as an "underwhelming" from below rather than an overwhelming, top-down intrusion from heaven. (See James Breech, *The Silence of Jesus* [Fortress, 1987], for a provocative account of Jesus' intent in speaking in parables.) If you choose to dwell on Jesus' parabolic style, the simple song "The Parables" from Robert Wilson's musical *He Lived the Good Life* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1974) puts it well: "Story teller, yes, he was the story tellin' kind;/ He painted pictures in their mind,/ It was the way he let them see/ How things were really s'posed to be."

Our reading from Romans 8 contains gospel grist for any number of sermons and is a text to which we pastors resort often in times of loss and perplexity. "If God is for us, who is against us?" is a rhetorical question to which pastoral caregivers long have resorted in times of crisis, as is Paul's affirmation that "all things work together for good for those who love God." Less often, I expect, have we taken Paul up on his offer to see this text as an opportunity to address the nagging issue of predestination/election, which today's church largely ignores.

In the face of the religious pluralism that many of us now encounter daily, questions of "who's in and who's out" as far as the salvation offered by God is concerned have become pastoral questions that merit the preacher's attention in our commitment to being genuinely evangelical in our proclamation. See Paul F. Knitter, *No Other Name?* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1985) as well as Douglas John Hall, *Why Christian?* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998), especially chapter 6, for discussions as to how a particularist Christian commitment to the gospel need not result in a view of salvation excluding non-Christians.

"What then are we to say about these things?" Paul asks. We need not so much provide *the* answer(s) as help folks encounter the Word whose Spirit, Paul says, "helps us in our weakness," interceding for us "with sighs too deep for words." I sometimes wish we in the church would recognize our captivity to words and could make room for a bit more "liturgical sighing"—maybe even from the pulpit! The Swedish composer Per Harling's "You Are Holy" (*Renewing Worship Songbook* #R185) sets a contemporary Sanctus to a lively samba beat that enables our praise of a God who is "always ever more than we ever understand." JR

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 13) July 31, 2005

Isaiah 55:1–5
Psalm 145:8–9, 14–21
Romans 9:1–5
Matthew 14:13–21

The eyes of all look to you,
and you give them their food in due season.
—Psalm 145:15

First Reading

The opening verses of Isaiah 55 (of which we heard later verses several weeks ago) extend God's invitation to Israel to participate in the feast of the covenant. Neither self-conscious dieting nor binging on junk food ("spend[ing] your money for that which is not bread" nor "for that which does not satisfy") are recommended behaviors. Rather, Israel is urged to "eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food." Here Second Isaiah echoes the sentiments of the original Isaiah whose reading we heard as an Easter text: "On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear" (Isa 25:6).

Jesus will not only use the metaphor of salvation as eschatological banquet in his teaching, but inclusive table fellowship will become a parabolic mark of his ministry and a major point of contention with his foes. See Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 200ff. Walter Brueggemann suggests that the scene opens in what might be taken to be the hawking voice of a street vendor offering to passersby free water, wine, and milk, which is to be contrasted to the "life resources" offered by what Brueggemann calls the "empire." (For a stimulating contemporary theological critique of American "empire" see Sharon Welch, *After Empire* [Augsburg Fortress, 2004].)

Yahweh's free "alternative nourishment" of life lived in loyalty to the covenant is a stark contrast to Babylon's tempting allures that are nonetheless "always expensive, grudging, and unsatisfying" (p. 159). Many communion hymns sing of this reality, notably *WOV* #711, "You Satisfy the Hungry Heart," the old spiritual now available as *Renewing Worship Songbook* #R172, "Welcome Table," as well as the Spanish hymn "Let Us Go Now to the Banquet," #R178.

In a culture in which obesity is epidemic and even the church's Board of Pensions has begun to get serious about preventive health care, nutrition, and exercise because of skyrocketing health-care costs, the counsel to "delight yourselves in rich food" may need to be subordinated to the prior word to "eat what is good" (v. 2).

Still, banqueting/feasting/celebratory partying with good food and drink is a dominant image of that messianic feast to come of which the Christian Eucharist is to be experienced as a "foretaste." While as Christians we live always in awareness of the inequitable distribution of the world's goods, including notably food and water, we nonetheless worship a provident and even prodigal God who did not create a world of scarcity and hunger. Many first-worlders will testify to the astonishing feasting and generous hospitality they have experienced while visiting the "poor" third-world communities of our "companion" synods. (It's worth remembering that the word "companion" derives from the Spanish word meaning "to share bread with.")

Pastoral Reflection

I am one of those pastors who finds fiction and film great resources for reflection on

issues of faith and life. Two of my all-time favorites happen to be short stories made into films retaining the same titles, Isaak Dinessen's "Babbette's Feast" and James Joyce's "The Dead." Both stories/films center around a gala meal in which the feast becomes a communal epiphany. Transcending the mundane existence of everyday life, the feast opens a window onto the abundance-celebrating "culture of God," which lies both beyond and below our ordinary plane of existence.

Today's story of the feeding of the 5,000—the only New Testament miracle story involving Jesus to be found in all four Gospels—carries Jesus' penchant for table fellowship outdoors into a picnic setting. The disciples of Jesus play an interesting role in the story. They are the ones who first inform Jesus that "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late" and then plead with him to "send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves." I always hear this as the disciples' plea to Jesus, after a day full of Jesus' healing the sick, now to heal them of the hungry crowd by sending them home. It's a feeling, as a long-time pastor, with which I am familiar.

But Jesus sees this as a teaching moment for his disciples as he says to them, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." Apparently they had anticipated some such response from Jesus, for they report, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish." Jesus responds, "Bring them here to me," and proceeds to bless, break, and give the loaves (in words that anticipate his blessing, breaking, and giving the bread at table on the night he was betrayed—see Matt 26:26) to the disciples, who in turn distribute the food to the crowds. The miracle is that "all ate and were filled" with twelve baskets full left over—the "all" including five thousand men, not even counting women and children.

Parker Palmer sees this as a story that illustrates the "scarcity assumption," under which we ordinarily live in our world, being overcome by the "abundance reality" of God's way. For Palmer the true miracle is how "suddenly, through a community ignited by an example of generosity, scarcity turns into abundance" (*The Active Life* [San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1990], 131). I once heard Palmer illustrate this further by telling what he claimed was a real-life experience of flying into a Canadian city for a weekend speaking engagement and then boarding for the return flight early the next Monday morning with many of the same fellow passengers. The takeoff was delayed, and somehow the expected food and beverages had not arrived before taxiing out onto the runway, so the hungry, tired, and late passengers quickly became surly to the point of rebellion. Into this deteriorating situation, as Palmer tells the story, stepped a take-charge, canny, funny flight attendant who immediately calmed the crowd by saying something to the effect of, "Listen up! Now, I was working the flight in on Friday afternoon, and I know that many of you put those extra bags of peanuts and pretzels we gave you in your pockets. I know some of you have brought with you this morning some fruit and sandwiches and bottles of water for the flight. So let's all break them out now and share what we have."

The miracle wasn't simply that they did so but that, in the process of sharing, passengers began talking with one another, smiling, and becoming a true if temporary community—all enabled and encouraged by that savvy flight attendant. Palmer, something of a guru in leadership training circles, winked at the flight attendant on the way out and said "Nice job!" She smiled back, nodded, and said, "You know the story of the feeding of the 5,000, don't you?" JR

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 14) August 7, 2005

1 Kings 19:9–18
Psalm 85:8–13
Romans 10:5–15
Matthew 14:22–33

Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other.
—Psalm 85:10

First Reading

Mountaintop experiences are great, but the exhilaration that attends them often is short-lived. Take Elijah, for example. Fresh from his (really, of course, Yahweh's) stunning triumph over and the ensuing slaughter of the 450 prophets of Baal at Mt. Carmel, God's prophet suddenly finds himself a hunted refugee, fleeing Queen Jezebel's wrath and hiding out in a cave at "Horeb the mount of God." Here in a nice piece of ironic dialogue the "word of the LORD" addresses God's prophetic word-bearer, asking "What are you doing here, Elijah?"—which is invitation enough for God's so recently victorious mouthpiece to vent his frustration with the ill treatment he feels he's received, culminating in his self-pitying lament "I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away." In other words, "I'm all you've got left, God. You'd better start taking better care of me!"

It's a feeling-sorry-for-ourselves moment that we pastor-types share now and again with Elijah. Funny thing is, "the word" doesn't spend time sympathizing with Elijah or holding his hand but orders him peremptorily: "Go out and stand on the mountain before the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by." Then follows that great nonepiphanic episode where the prophet is encountered first by a great wind, "so strong that it was splitting mountains," followed by an earthquake and finally by a fire. "But the LORD was not in the wind . . . not in the earthquake . . . not in the fire," the text says in a wonderful economy of understatement. "And after the fire a sound of sheer silence." I love that simple alliterative translation of the NRSV, replacing the RSV's "still small voice."

Old Testament scholar Samuel Terrien believes that this "constitutes a repudiation not only of the mode of divine intervention on Mt. Carmel but also of the possibility that the Mosaic theophany on Mt. Horeb/Sinai would ever occur again in later history. The era of theophany is now closed, and its validity is consigned to the hoary glamour of distant ages" (*The Elusive Presence*, 230–36). Again the voice is heard asking Elijah "What are you doing here?" Again Elijah answers with his self-pitying answer. But the voice now directs Elijah to return to his prophetic calling in the thick of the everyday, political life of his people, which includes the anointing of his own successor, Elisha. Elijah in the "sound of sheer silence" did not see God but recognized God's presence sufficiently to be able now to heed God's voice and return to his own vocation as word-bearer.

Pastoral Reflection

I remember my summer of serving as a counselor at a Lutheran Bible camp. The week was an unusually invigorating one since Pastor Nelson Trout, who later became the first African-American bishop in the ALC, was our week-long guest evangelist. I loved his stimulating presentations to our young campers but especially enjoyed the late-night conversations around the kitchen table. There he would gently but in a no-nonsense manner engage in theological table talk that challenged the far more

conservative, literalistic, and even revivalistic Anglo pastors, who seemed intent on making their youths' camp experience one in which success would be counted by the number who had "given their hearts" to Jesus by "making a decision for Christ." I recall the adrenaline rush I felt one particular warm summer evening as I summoned up the courage to pray aloud at our closing campfire that "the still, small voice" of God might be heard amid all the bombast and emotionalism of the wind, earthquake, and fire to which we were being subjected by the Bible-thumpers. (Even then I wasn't quite foolhardy enough to use the word!) It was a defining moment for me in my own way.

The story of Jesus' stroll across the stormy sea is another instance of epiphany by way of theophany being subordinated to the Word or voice of God, of the sense of sight being subordinated (and interpreted) by sound. (See, e.g., Matthew's story of the transfiguration in 17:1–9.) The disciples are terrified—who wouldn't be?—by the sight of Jesus walking toward them "on the sea." "It's a ghost!" they "cried out in fear." But Jesus reassures them with the encouraging words "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

Characteristically, it is Peter, the leader of the disciples, who impetuously says, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." Whatever Peter's motivation might have been in doing so, he steps out onto the water. But "when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink" cries out, "Lord, save me!" Jesus reaches out his hand and catches him, while asking Peter, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

This story of Jesus' curious power has suddenly become a parable about faith that countless homileticians have seen illustrated by Peter's casting his fearful eye upon the roiling waves rather than on Jesus, the object of his trust. But I've long been fascinated with the conditional character of Peter's response to the sighting of Jesus: "Lord, *if it is you*, command me to come to you on the water." To me this suggests that Peter was caught up in what Terrien would call the "theophanic" character of Jesus' walking on water (like Peter's enthusiastic offer to build three dwellings in commemoration of the transfiguration, in which, notice, Elijah also plays a part), desiring to share in and perhaps perpetuate the display of glory and power. And so Jesus bids Peter "Come," knowing, one suspects, that this will teach Peter something about the nature of the divine presence that is apprehended by faith rather than sight.

Paul is up to something similar in paraphrasing the Deuteronomist to the Romans regarding how "the word is near you, on your lips and in your heart." Paul explains, "the word of faith that we proclaim." To his closing quartet of rhetorical questions, "How are they to call . . . to believe . . . to hear . . . to proclaim?" his answer is essentially one: to hear and trust the good news. Peter desired to perpetuate the moment of theophanic glory as did Elijah before him. "It's a great mistake," the great Anglican Archbishop William Temple once said, "to think that God is chiefly interested in our being religious." Being faithful to the Word in the thick of everyday life, which Jesus once described as "taking up your cross" ("daily," Luke's Gospel adds)—this is the heart of discipleship lived out according to what Luther called a theology of the cross as opposed to a theology of glory. See Douglas John Hall, *The Cross in Our Context* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003) for a recent exploration of this theme. JR

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 15) August 14, 2005

Isaiah 56:1, 6–8
Psalm 67
Romans 11:1–2a, 29–32
Matthew 15: [10—20] 21–28

Let the nations be glad and sing for joy,
for you judge the peoples with equity
and guide the nations upon earth.
—Psalm 67:4

First Reading

Today's readings share an unmistakably universalist thrust, extending God's good news of salvation beyond insiders. For once, our reading from Paul's "Final Account," as Krister Stendahl calls the Letter to the Romans, might take the lead, since today's passage so clearly contradicts the conventional wisdom of our age-old assumptions regarding our Christian "mission to the Jews." "I ask, then, has God rejected his people?" Paul asks while in the next breath answering his own question with an emphatic "By no means!" The bottom line, for Paul, was that "the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable," meaning that God's covenant with Israel is eternal. (See Krister Stendahl, *Final Account: Paul's Letter to the Romans* [Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1995], especially chap. 4.)

It's ironic that we Christians need to resort to Saul/Paul the one-time Pharisee, known for his persecution of the early church, to learn a lesson about Christian anti-Judaism that may instruct us regarding appropriate attitudes toward other faiths of our day. (See "The Declaration of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to the Jewish Community" [ELCA, 1994] for an effort to address in an act of repentance the church's complicity in the history of anti-Semitism.)

Let's start with the passage from Third Isaiah, the prophet of the return from exile, who articulates God's call to embrace "the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord," culminating in the divine declaration "my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples" (vv. 6–7). This sequel to the time of Babylonian exile and the need to keep the people free from the allures of pagan gods marks an amazing self-confidence on the part of the prophet. The calling to be "a house of prayer for all people" is indeed a mission statement that the church of our and every age would do well to hear and heed!

"Thus says the Lord God, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, 'I will gather others to them besides those already gathered'" will become the promise of welcome embodied in Jesus' ministry of hospitality to strangers and sinners as recounted in today's story of his edgy encounter and dialogue with the Canaanite woman. (On the central role of hospitality in Jesus' own ministry, literally "love of the stranger" in Greek, see John Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985].) At first Jesus seems to ignore the woman, and then he outrightly rejects her entreaty for mercy in his uncharacteristically excluding remark "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." He caps it all off with the snide dismissal "it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." Jesus seems to me to be playacting his disciples' often excluding prejudices for the purpose of teaching them a lesson in how faith is to be found in unexpected places and persons, even among those upon whom "people of faith," as we say, look down their noses.

Pastoral Reflection

Perhaps it is no mere coincidence that we ELCA Lutherans are hearing these texts on the Sunday that our churchwide assembly

concludes its sessions in Orlando. What will it mean as this expression of the church concludes its meetings having made decisions regarding the inclusion/exclusion of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender persons in the church? Is it significant that our reading from Isaiah 56 conspicuously jumps from verse 1 to 6, omitting what I find to be the following highly relevant text?

> Do not let the foreigner joined to the Lord say, 'The Lord will surely separate me from his people'; and do not let the eunuch say, 'I am just a dry tree.'

Then follow these words of inclusion, which overturn the excluding verses of Torah found in Leviticus and Deuteronomy (see Hanson, *Isaiah 40–66*, 194):

> For thus says the Lord: "To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, I will give, in my house and within my walls, a monument and a name better than sons and daughters. I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off." (vv. 3–5)

"Cut off" may well be an attempt to inject a witty wordplay into a matter of deadly seriousness. But while eunuchs are not on the "cutting edge" of the church's welcome to sexual minorities in our day, we know who are. Here the only "vision and expectations" are God's universal command to "keep my sabbaths, . . . choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant." The inclusion of the formerly excluded becomes a prime expression of God's initial command to the newly returned from exile, fearful of miscegenation and idolatry (see the Books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Ruth), to "maintain justice, and do what is right." Justice, not only pastoral sensitivity and freedom of conscience, needs to be the plumbline of the church's struggle with issues of who's in and who's out in our day as well. Marty Haugen's hymn "All Are Welcome" (*Renewing Worship Songbook* #R219) sings invitingly of this theme of inclusion as does Ray Makeever's "People of the Word" (*Dancing at the Harvest* [1997] #1).

Jesus himself will quote Isaiah while engaging in a memorable act of exclusion as he drives the money changers out of the temple with the words "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations" (Mark 11:17). His concluding accusation is borrowed from Jer 7:11, "but you have made it a den of robbers." Jesus' welcome to outsiders and sinners, of course, did not mean an embrace of the behavior of breakers of the first commandment. Yet in our day of heightened sensitivity to living in a multifaith environment amid reassertions by those of the evangelical right of the exclusivist "Christian" character of our nationhood, we disciples of Jesus need to reconsider in the light of today's texts the inclusive reach of God's grace beyond the originally "chosen." Both the "first" and the "newer" covenant's intention is to articulate God's "salvation" and "deliverance" as good news for the whole cosmos.

We may not be sure why, but Jesus' astounding declaration of inclusion to what we can assume was an idol-worshipping Canaanite woman with the words "Woman, great is your faith!" at least raises a question mark over the easy assumption of many churchgoers that salvation (which of course also means "healing") is a prerogative of only Christian (and/or Jewish) "faith."

For a discussion of the church as a "representative community" before God, God's "means, not an end," see Douglas John Hall, *Professing the Faith* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1993), 523–24. See Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement*, 170ff., for provocative suggestions regarding how the church might more fruitfully view its mission and role in what Stendahl insists on calling God's *tikkun*, or project for the "mending of the earth" (*Final Account*, ix, 7). JR

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 16) August 21, 2005

Isaiah 51:1–6
Psalm 138
Romans 12:1–8
Matthew 16:13–20

I give you thanks, O Lord,
with my whole heart;
before the gods I sing your praise.
—Psalm 138:1

First Reading

St. Paul's appeal to the Roman Christians "to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship" is a good starting point for the consideration of today's texts. Life as worship, or *ora et labora* as the Benedictines like to put it, is a fruitful way of viewing our daily baptismal calling. Formed by *leitourgia* in our gathering as *ekklesia* we then scatter to perform our "public work" as the church scattered in praise of the One God "before the gods" of the everyday world, as the psalmist sings.

This way of doing worship "somatically" results in ways of believing and behaving, of thinking and doing, that are not "conformed" to this world but rather are "transformed," or, in Greek, "metamorphosed." This is the same word translated as "transfigured" when used of Jesus' encounter with Moses and Elijah and the Voice on the mountaintop. The result of such renewed and transformed lives is, as Flannery O'Connor is reputed to have said in paraphrase of Jesus' words in John's Gospel, "You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you odd." The odd, eccentric, foolish character of the church's calling into the world is a matter, I'm afraid, to which we pay insufficient attention in our well-meaning efforts to be evangelically appealing and missionally successful.

Second Isaiah's counsel is for God's faithful ("you that pursue righteousness") to go back to first principles and consider their origins. "Look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug" suggests an alternative metaphor for being the descendants of the seed of Abraham and Sarah, progeny promised to be as numerous as the "stars of the sky." Remembering whose we are, whence we have come, and what we are called to be lies at the foundation of identity and vocation as the light-bearers of the good news of what is variously called God's "justice," "salvation," and "deliverance."

Pastoral Reflection

Opinion polls have a biblical origin, it seems. Jesus poses a question to his disciples: "Who do people say that the Son of Man [Jesus' favorite self-reference] is?" Answers vary, his disciples report. "Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." Some kind of prophet seems to have been the general consensus.

"But who do you say that I am?" Jesus asks, turning from mere reportage to an avowal of personal commitment.

Why should we be surprised that it is Peter who steps forward to utter the words that together with the following story of the transfiguration serve as a kind of hinge in Matthew's Gospel? For here Jesus figuratively turns his face toward Jerusalem and the destiny that awaits him there, which he will anticipate in his lamentation over the city: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it!" (24:37).

"You are the Messiah," Peter confesses, "the Son of the living God"—a christologi-

cal high point in Matthew's Gospel concerning which (as in the ensuing story of the transfiguration) Jesus will urge secrecy upon his disciples.

But first Jesus will bless Peter for his confession, while attesting that this was not really Peter's own doing ("flesh and blood have not revealed this to you") but God's. Then follows Jesus' words not found in the other synoptics that have bedeviled interpreters and the church itself through the ages: "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it." This is followed by words about Peter being given "the keys of the kingdom of heaven" (from which derive subsequent Christian art's identification of Peter as the guy with the keys) and the authority of binding and loosing to which we'll return in our Gospel reading in two weeks.

The pun in Greek, of course, is intended. While "church" does seem to be an anachronistic intrusion of Matthew's into the text, the wordplay regarding Peter's naming has always seemed to me characteristic of Jesus' own sense of humor. *Petra*, the Greek word for "rock," here becomes Jesus' nickname for his impetuous, quicksilver disciple who will not live up to his name in Jesus' time of trial. Peter will prove anything but a "rock" but will nonetheless serve as de facto leader of the twelve. The early traditioning of the church in which Peter will eventually be martyred in Rome, where he had become the originating *episkopos*, sees today's Gospel as its authenticating link.

I well remember how self-consciously Protestant interpreters used to insist that the "rock" to which Jesus refers, upon which he intends to build his church, was the foundation stone of faith alone, Peter's own God-given confession. See Nikolai Grundtvig's classical Lutheran hymn "Built on a Rock the Church Shall Stand" (*LBW* #365) for an example.

Rather than the rock imagery of our readings from Isaiah and Matthew for the *ekklesia* of the faithful, Paul invokes the organic image of the body, which he'd previously used to good effect in his Corinthian correspondence. Here Paul argues a diversity of function within the "one body of Christ" of which individually we are "members one of another." Such diverse functions are to be seen as "gifts that differ according to the grace given to us" and include such wide-ranging endowments as prophecy, ministry (literally, serving), teaching, exhortation, giving, leading, and being compassionate. That these gifts are found distributed throughout the members of the "body of Christ" and evident in the nonconforming, transformed behaviors of the church bear a family resemblance to Jesus' own way of being in the world—the original "body of Christ."

The hymn "God of Change and Glory" (*The New Century Hymnal* [Cleveland: Pilgrim, 1995] #177) sings well of this reality as does Ruth Duck's "In Christ Called to Baptize" (*Renewing Worship Songbook* #R223), commissioned for the 50th anniversary of the Lutheran World Federation celebrated in Hong Kong in 1997. JR

Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 17) August 28, 2005

Jeremiah 15:15–21
Psalm 26:1–8
Romans 12:9–21
Matthew 16:21–28

Prove me, O Lord, and try me;
test my heart and mind.
For your steadfast love is before my eyes,
and I walk in faithfulness to you.
—Psalm 26:2–3

First Reading

Jeremiah's opening lament is reminiscent of Elijah's earlier bout of feeling sorry for himself, apparently a career danger to those called to the prophetic profession. But Jeremiah's description of his calling is unusually vivid, poignant and painful as he accosts the One who had called him when this reluctant prophet was but a youth: "Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and delight of my heart." The "delight" was short-lived, however, as just three chapters later we find Jeremiah regretting the prophetic calling that has overtaken him, making him a laughingstock who, like a person afflicted with Tourette's Syndrome, finds the most horrendous and hateful words escaping from his mouth, "a burning fire shut up in my bones" that he could no longer hold in (20:9). See B. Davie Napier, *Time of Burning* (Philadelphia: Pilgrim, 1970), 52ff., for a searing series of poetic reflections on Jeremiah's sense of being captive to the Word.

Painful indeed is Jeremiah's ensuing bitter inquisition of God: "Why is my pain unceasing, my wound incurable, refusing to be healed?" But the effrontery and brutal honesty of the prophet's accusation of the One who called him is even more shocking: "Truly, you are to me like a deceitful brook, like waters that fail" (v. 18). "Steadfast love? What a joke!" God's Word-bearer seems to be saying in response to the psalmist's calm assurance.

Yet Yahweh is not easily provoked and promises to make Jeremiah "a fortified wall of bronze." Our reading concludes with the reassurance "I am with you to save you and deliver you, says the LORD. I will deliver you out of the hand of the wicked, and redeem you from the grasp of the ruthless."

Brian Wren's "God of Jeremiah," set to the tune of a Scottish folk melody, is a rare hymn that sings the painful prophetic song in a key relevant to our own day of aspiring empire (*New Beginnings* [Carol Stream, IL: Hope, 1993], #7).

Having reached the paranetic/exhortatory conclusion of Romans, we encounter words that begin with the injunction to "let love be genuine." "Genuine" here is a translation of the Greek word that literally means "un-hypocritical," action that does not indulge in playacting or wearing a mask. To me Paul's advice sounds as though he may have been inspired by a familiarity with Q's version of what would become at Matthew's hand Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. (See George Forell, *The Christian Lifestyle: Reflections on Romans 12–15* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975] for a series of short meditations on Paul's practical, ethical advice to the Roman Church.)

Pastoral Reflection

As summer vacations wind down and folks prepare to resume their ordinary routines of work and school, today's Gospel text and the looming Labor Day secular holiday provide an opportunity to reflect upon our shared sense of Christian vocation in the world. Renewing Worship 3, *Holy Baptism and Related Rites* (Minneapolis: Augsburg For-

tress, 2002), 85–86, provides a useful rite for the "Affirmation of Christian Vocation." Fred Pratt Green's "How Clear is Our Vocation, Lord" (*Presbyterian Hymnal* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1990], #419) is a rare hymn on the subject of vocation, set to a familiar tune. Jesus' words following Peter's confession and rebuke, as well as our reading from Jeremiah, challenge us to reflect on the nature of our vocation as Jesus' cross-bearing followers. Jesus promised: "For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it."

Inasmuch as this year marks the fortieth anniversary of Albert Schweitzer's death in 1965, the occasion of his commemoration (September 4) would be a good opportunity to hold before our congregations the life and witness of perhaps the best-known Lutheran of the twentieth century. Already a celebrated philosopher/theologian/pastor/academic administrator/musicologist/organist, at age 30 Schweitzer began medical studies, as he explains in his autobiography, "that I might be able to work without having to talk. For years, I had been giving myself out in words, and it was with joy that I had followed the calling of theological teacher and of preacher. But this new form of activity I could not represent to myself as being talking about the religion of love, but only as an actual putting it into practice" (*Out of My Life and Thought: An Autobiography*, trans. C. T. Campion [New York: Mentor Books, 1949], 77). And so on Good Friday, 1913, the newly graduated and licensed medical doctor set out for French Equatorial Africa to become a missionary doctor for the remainder of his life, a life of service eventually recognized and honored by the granting of the Nobel Peace Prize.

What had turned Schweitzer's life from its initially already remarkable and distinguished bivocational academic and musical career path was an experience he'd had more than a decade earlier, when at his parents' home for summer vacation, in the Lutheran parsonage in the little village of Gunsbach in the Voges Mountains near Strasbourg, where his father served as pastor. Schweitzer later recounted how in his 21st year—then as now a coming-of-age time—he was suddenly struck by the thought of how incomprehensible it was that he should be allowed to lead such a happy, carefree student's life while he saw about him so many people wrestling with care and suffering.

In his autobiography he remembered: "One brilliant summer morning there came to me as I awoke, the thought that I must not accept this happiness as a matter of course, but must give something in return for it. Proceeding to think the matter out at once with calm deliberation while the birds were singing outside, I settled with myself before I got up, that I would consider myself justified in living till I was 30 for science and art, in order to devote myself from that time forward to the direct service of humanity. Many a time I had tried to settle what meaning lay hidden for me in the saying of Jesus: 'Whoever would save their life shall lose it, and whosoever shall lose their life for My sake and the Gospel's shall save it.'" Schweitzer concluded: "Now the answer was found. In addition to the outward, I now had inward happiness" (p. 70).

No longer a household name, Albert Schweitzer is worth commemorating in our churches as a saint who took to heart Jesus' call to cross-bearing discipleship marked by the kind of "genuine love" that even the secular world could recognize and celebrate. It may also be worth noting that his theology and his "reverence for life" ethic were considered too "spacious" by many of his fellow Lutherans! JR

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 18) September 4, 2005

Ezekiel 33:7–11
Psalm 119:33–40
Romans 13:8–14
Matthew 18:15–20

Give me understanding,
that I may keep your law
and observe it with my whole heart.
—Psalm 119:34

First Reading

Turn back, O man, forswear thy foolish ways.
Old now is earth, and none may count her days,
Yet thou, her child, whose head is crowned
with flame,
Still wilt not hear thine inner God proclaim,
Turn back, O man, forswear thy foolish ways.'
—*Service Book and Hymnal* #348

Prophet, psalmist, and poet conspire to put before us the conundrum once posed so poignantly by Paul the apostle in a reading we heard from Romans earlier this summer: "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. . . . For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. . . . I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind" (7:15, 19, 23a). Paul concludes his thought with a sigh of frustration, "Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?" while with his next breath he exults "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (25a).

Now nearing the end of his epistle to a church he had yet to visit personally, the apostle in a more irenic mood remembers in today's reading the words of the Master that the early tradition of the church had passed down in which Jesus is found quoting Torah: "Love your neighbor as yourself." After puzzling through in the preceding chapters God's eternal election of Israel in the light of what he felt to be God's turn to the Gentiles in his own apostolic calling (see Stendahl's *Final Account*, 9–44), Paul here chooses as he rarely does in his letters to cite the *ipsissima verba* of Jesus: "Love," Paul expands on Jesus' pronouncement in tones reminiscent of 1 Corinthians 13, "does no wrong to a neighbor," concluding that "therefore love is the fulfilling of the law" (v. 10).

Pastoral Reflection

"Discipline" is a little-appreciated dimension in the life of being a disciple from which the word itself derives. At its best discipline refers to the formation or process through which one is "discipled." In this regard Paul's counsel to the Romans to count love of neighbor as the fulfillment and summary of all that Torah was meant to teach is his effort to instruct the church at the heart of the empire in the discipline of love. By implication such bad behavior as the "reveling and drunkenness," "debauchery and licentiousness," "quarrelling and jealousy" that Paul singles out for mention are examples of actions that offend the command to love one's neighbor and do him/her no wrong.

Our reading from Matthew 18 contains a passage that is said to be the only Scripture cited in the ELCA Model Constitution for Congregations (in the section dealing with "Discipline and Adjudication of Members"). The passage likely owes its origin to a practice of the early church that encouraged a process for reconciling differences between members. Over time it may have evolved into a process of handling accusations of "sinful" behavior as in the passage itself and eventually charges of false teaching. The advice is simple and outlines a common-sense approach that experts in conflict resolution still recommend. It begins with personally, by yourself, going to the person

with your concern. "If the member listens to you, you have regained that one." If you are not listened to, "take one or two others with you" as witnesses. And, "if the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church." Finally, "if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector."

In his careful and pastorally sensitive published work on Matthew's Gospel and in various lectures I have attended over the years, Mark Allan Powell has helpfully exegeted this passage along with the ensuing, often misunderstood, words of Jesus, "whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (v. 18). Powell explains that "the phrase 'to bind and to loose' refers to the rabbinic activity of discerning the will of God for the present day by determining how commandments of the law apply in contemporary situations," that is, whether they are to be strictly interpreted (bound) or judged inapplicable (loosed). Jesus himself was known to both bind the law in matters of adultery (5:27–28) and loose it in matters relating to the Sabbath (12:1–7). The church, Powell argues, is here authorized by Jesus to continue his important activity of "binding and loosing" (*God with Us: A Pastoral Theology of Matthew's Gospel* [Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1995], 67–68).

In an important application of the church's authority to bind and loose, Powell suggests that this passage should be understood as a significant scriptural authorization for the church's responsibility to consider such controverted issues as the ordination of persons in committed same-sex relationships and the blessing of such relationships by the church. Binding and loosing becomes a way in which the church is authorized by Scripture to reconsider a teaching—especially one involving possible discipline—and change its mind and teaching, including whether certain behavior constitutes "sin," if it judges necessary. The church's rethinking and "loosing" of Jesus' own teaching on divorce (5:31–32; 19:3 ff.) is one such example. At the same time, the bottom line of church discipline, letting the "offender [who] refuses to listen even to the church" be treated as "a Gentile and a tax collector" is not likely the final excluding/expelling punishment it initially may appear to be, Powell believes. He argues that we need to hear Jesus' harsh-sounding conclusion as tinged with a bit of Jesus' characteristic irony, for who was more pilloried by his opponents for his indiscriminate welcome of and table fellowship with "Gentiles and tax collectors" than Jesus' himself?

As Powell also points out in another recent book I highly commend, *Loving Jesus* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2004), Jesus' concluding promise "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them" is not to be understood as a defense of poorly attended church gatherings. Rather, Powell asserts, two or three is not to suggest a spiritual quorum of how few it takes for Jesus' presence to be felt but, rather, how many. "It takes *at least* two or three, which is to say more than one," implying that "the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ is not realized in any one individual but, definitively, in the fellowship or interaction that takes place between individuals" (pp. 32–33). For Christ to be truly present he needs a "body," a healthy, disciplined body functioning together in love. As Brian Wren's song puts it, "Love alone unites us, wakens and invites us. Nothing else can root and ground us. Habits of compliance, dictates and defiance, soon dispirit and confound us. If by law we keep score, pride will soon divide us. Love alone shall guide us!" (*Bring Many Names* ([Carol Stream, IL: Hope, 1989], #24). JR

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