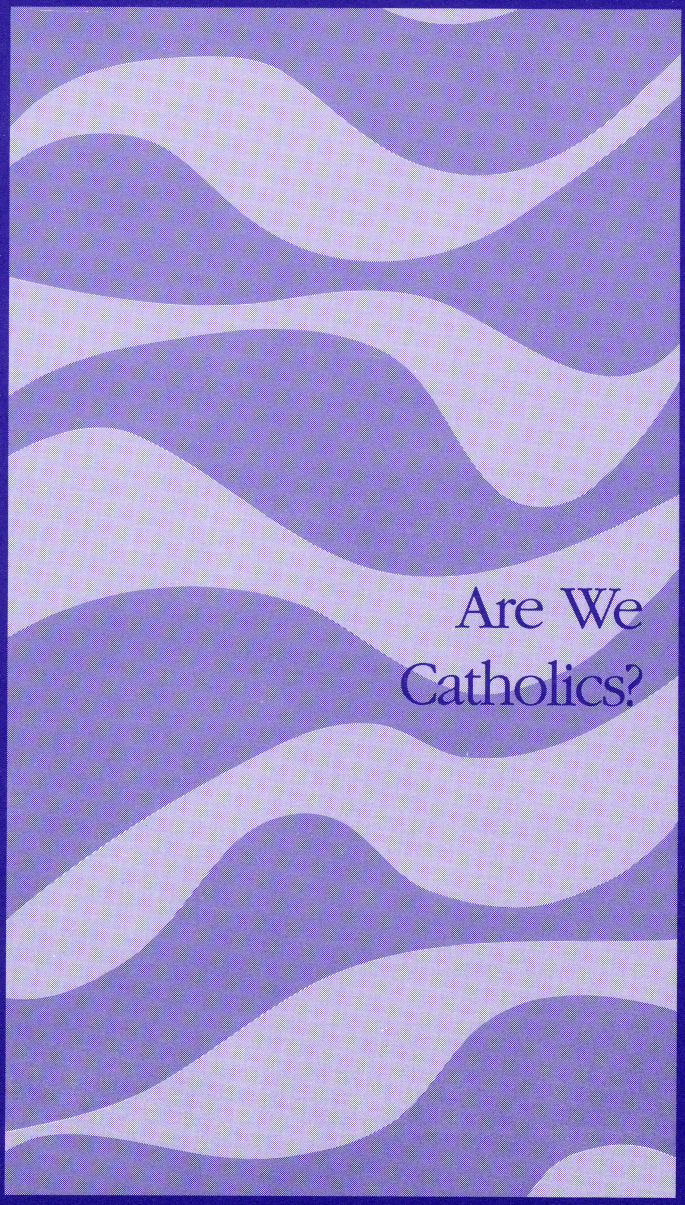
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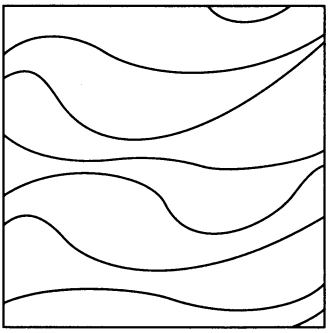
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Are We Catholics?

The question was posed by my grandson Luke Klein-Collins as he rode with his dad and triplet brothers Seth and Jonah in suburban Chicago. They had just passed a massively impressive church, especially to someone who was almost four. When informed that it was a Catholic church, Luke just had to know: Are we Catholics?

In the fall semester of 2004, I moonlighted at Catholic Theologial Union, where I team-taught an introductory course in the Bible with a Dominican Sister, Barbara Reid. There were forty-two students in the class, more than half women, fifteen from Vietnam, one from Baghdad, and all but one Roman Catholics; the exception was Greek Orthodox. The diversity in this class was a foretaste of the church of the twenty-first century. I often thought about little Luke's question: Are we Catholics? Well, no, and yet. . . .

Frederick Niedner Jr. preached the funeral sermon for an old friend of mine, David Truemper, chair of the department of theology at Valparaiso University, on November 3, 2004. It was a funeral we all dream of—majestic organ, wonderful hymns and choral anthems, and the sermon about David and about the gospel that sustained him in the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic faith. Reading this exemplary sermon is not the same as being there, but it is a close second. Would that we all could preach like Fred. Would that we all could live—and die—like David.

David Sandmel and **John Stendahl** recently participated in an observance at LSTC of Kristallnacht (the night of broken glass) that took place in November, 1938, when hundreds of synagogues were destroyed in Nazi Germany. **Sandmel** recalls a quotation that no statement about the Shoa, theological or otherwise, should be made that would not be credible in the presence of burning children. Redemption in our time will be built slowly by people of good will; we cannot restore the broken glass to its former state. Perhaps the shards of glass can be made into a new mosaic that can serve as a memorial and a sign of the covenant between us as human beings and between us and God. **Stendahl** refers to the holy name of God, which in Judaism is unspoken, and to the uspeakable horror of Kristallnacht and Holocaust. Beyond our silence we are called to pray Kaddish and celebrate Eucharist in order to defy evil with words of high doxology. We need also to acknowledge the obscene words spoken by our ancestors in the faith. A memorial to the Holocaust in Wittenberg recalls Luther's own highly inappropriate reflections on a carica-

ture of Judaism carved into the wall of the City Church. We Christians are called to silent grief and contrite hope and to speaking about the unspeakable past.

Robin Bisha and **Phil Ruge-Jones** remind us that Christians are called to watch for signs of the times that indicate the contemporary movement of the Spirit. But Christians also need to read critically what they hear and see in modern media. Whose voices speak in the media, and whose voices are silenced? The news media often present current events primarily through their impact on the interests of large corporations. This approach is so pervasive that we begin to accept it as "natural." News coverage of the war in Iraq uses word choices that affect our understanding of what is really going on. Infrequent discussion of the civilian casualties in this war may result from the frame imposed on that war as "Americans liberating Iraq." The authors offer six strategies for reading, seeing, or hearing critically American news sources. In addition to reading independent and alternative U. S. news media, one should pay attention to reports from around the world on the World Wide Web. The goal of the pastor is not to offer one more political commentary but rather to help reshape the frame within which the people of God interpret all news and events that come their way.

John D. Lottes speaks of a theology of hospitality to other religions on college campuses, but such hospitality is also increasingly a high priority on main street and in local parishes as well. Students and the rest of us need a safe place to ask critical questions and firm up appreciation of the heritage of our faith in comparison with other traditions and in dialogue with those who espouse these differences. Hospitality, especially to the stranger, is a metaphor for the moral life to which Christians are called, and there are great resources for twenty-first–century hospitality in Scripture. In the New Testament Jesus embodies the welcoming hospitality of God to all in his ministering, in his dying, and in his sending the gift of the Spirit. He calls communities of faith to that same hospitality. Christians are called to a hospitality toward others that is based on the foundational reality that the face of Christ himself is in every stranger to whom we can be hospitable.

Lawrence H. Williams reviews the circumstances behind the Black Manifesto issued by James Forman in 1969. It demanded that half a billion dollars (later raised to three billion) be given for various black ventures by American Christian churches and Jewish synagogues as reparations for African American slavery in the United States. Stephen Long contends that recent church statements on slavery seek cheap forgiveness since without penance forgiveness is cheap. Williams attributes the failure of the Black Manifesto to the Marxist rhetoric of Forman and to the American mindset of the time.

Martin Luther King Jr. once said, "Anything that gets white folks so upset must have some good in it." The implicit question behind this essay is this: What should the church today do in this regard?

Joseph W. Blotz presents an imaginary conversation of two college students about the Book of Ruth. "Shannon" represents an understanding of Ruth that raises up the characters of Ruth and Naomi as models of women who can be emulated today. They exemplify friendship, loyalty, and fidelity. "Kara" opposes this reading of recovery with a reading of resistance. She sees the text so steeped in patriarchy that little if anything can be gleaned from the story except another example of our religious tradition's suppression of women. While notable for the active women it portrays, the Book of Ruth does not break with the tradition of patriarchy. These two "students" know the text and recent bibliography on it well. We hope that it leads to a fresh reading of Ruth by you.

So: Are we Catholics? Do you mean with a big C or a little c? Are we—Lutherans/Protestants/non-Catholics—anything more—or less—than a reform movement within the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church?

Jonah, the youngest of my triplet grandsons—by ten minutes—was not yet ready for the momentous ecclesial dimensions of this question. Are we Catholics? "No, Jonah said, we're triplets."

I'd give my right arm to write lines like that.

Ralph W. Klein, Editor

Sermon at the Funeral of David G. Truemper 1939–2004

Frederick Niedner Jr.
Acting Chair, Department of Theology
Valparaiso University

At the time of his death David G. Truemper was Professor of Theology and Chair of the Department of Theology at Valparaiso University. This sermon was preached at his funeral in the Chapel of the Resurrection November 3, 2004.

Only a little more than a year ago, as we returned together to Valparaiso after attending Walter Rast's funeral in Michigan, David Truemper initiated a conversation that I now understand was an early stage in the preparations for this day. "I am perplexed," he said, "by the amount of talk at funerals nowadays concerning the deceased. I have always assumed that at my funeral there would be very little talk about me and what I did or didn't do. It isn't really about me."

I knew he must be right, for David knew more about the liturgies of the church than anybody in these parts. I also knew, because we had been raised in the same ecclesial culture and taught by the same teachers, that David's comments reflected what our tradition dictates. In the little black book on both our shelves, used by generations of pastors for the conduct of occasional services, emergency baptisms, and communing the sick and homebound, the first rubric for the conduct of a funeral in the church says, "It is not in the best Christian tradition to eulogize the departed." This will not surprise many of you, for you know that it is not part of the tradition and ethos of the church body that formed David, myself, and many others here to speak well of anyone, whether living or dead.

So, on that day in the car a year ago, I said, "Yes, David, your funeral is not about you. It's about the gospel, and about the living ones who have only that word of promise to cling to. And yet it is about you, because if you wouldn't have died we would not be gathered like this. Moreover, we come not only to join in burying you and comforting ourselves. We come for Eucharist. We come to give thanks. We come to lift up our hands as a way of handing back to God a dear one whom God gave us as a companion on our way through this wilderness. And as we do that we name the gifts for which we're grateful, and we praise the God who gave them."

In the end, then, this gathering is about David . . . and it isn't.

We have much to give thanks for today. President Alan Harre and Pastor Randy Lee have already named, in both general and specific ways, gifts that Valparaiso University and the Lutheran family of Christians have received because God called David to follow a vocation in the church and in the academy.

As David's colleagues and friends in this place, we give thanks not only for a gifted theologian, teacher, and intellectual partner in countless debates and colloquia; we are also grateful for the host of details he attended to over the years, and now we wonder who in the world will ever figure out the computer programs by which he kept track of our business so efficiently. We will eventually manage, for David was also the one who brought many of us into the digital age, beginning with that old computer named Sweet Pea he built for us and taught us to use back in long-gone Lembke Hall.

His role as director of the Institute for Liturgical Studies was only the visible tip of a proverbial iceberg when it comes to all the ways David taught us to worship through his leadership, participation, and embodiment of the sacramental life we practice and cherish here. Gail Eifrig, our longtime colleague now retired and moved away, may have found the best way to express this gratitude when she wrote in a note this week, "One solace I find amidst this great loss of David's untimely death comes in anticipating the work of the committee that must surely now serve to welcome the rest of us in the heavenly rite of Receiving the Faithful Departed: Herbert Lindemann, Jon Nelson, and now David Truemper. My, what a liturgy that will be!"

As with any more or less public person, there are a million stories we could tell today (and have been telling all week, and will tell in the days to come). Our lives get so intertwined with each other that it is all finally one story, yours, mine, David's. I, for one, would not be here if David had not gone off to finish his dissertation and teach at the St. Louis seminary in 1973. Instead of taking a parish call as planned, I agreed to come here and fill in for a year. David, meanwhile, got caught in the biggest battle of the Missouri Synod's long war and became the only person he ever knew of to get fired from a visiting professorship. Along with the rest of the faculty and most of the seminary's students, David first helped to bury his mentor and Doctorvater, Arthur Carl Piepkorn, another passionate and churchly scholar of the Lutheran Confessions who left this life too early by our way of thinking, and then with the other survivors experienced the birthing of something new, an offspring that soon got the name Seminex, symbolized here today by this Resurrection banner that comes from those days, and which has been present at so many services just like this one over the past thirty years.

We can't even hint at all the stories in the course of a sermon. But there are golfing stories out there if you want to hear them, and stories that have to do with a surprising knowledge of classical music, a love of the theater, photography, and food. Well, not just food. Cuisine.

David's family has a host of stories, too, that the rest of us could scarcely guess at—stories of a man who could fix or invent almost anything that needed fixing or inventing (ask his mother about the plumbing in her bathroom down in Florida), a dad who loved to invent word puzzles for Pam and Rebekah (ask them how they ever found their Easter baskets), and one whose heart melted into sheer delight in the presence of his three grandchildren.

One feature permeates almost all of the stories. David was a big man who stood up straight, was quick with words, and had a gravity about him—a combination many found intimidating. Moreover, David knew he could be intimidating. Doubtless many here today experienced that at some time or another. Sometimes, however, even that became a reason to give thanks. During the Truemper family's Reutlingen years, when

Pam and Rebekah were schoolgirls, the family nearly got trampled in a Swiss train station when a throng of skiers on holiday began pressing all at once to board the train. David braced himself against a wall, and made of himself another wall between the children and the crowd, and shouted over his shoulder, "Pass auf für die Kinder!"—Look out for the children!—followed by a common interjection that's really a theological term in English that starts with a "D." With that, the crowd parted like the Red Sea of old.

On another occasion a group of us colleagues attending a professional meeting in New York City went out to eat and got off at the wrong subway station, whereupon we found ourselves lost on a cold, November night in a very rough district of the Bowery. Five of us in trench-coats, hands in our pockets, with David in the lead, began to walk along the sidewalks strewn with broken glass. Though no one said it, we were frightened—until we began to notice how the few people we saw along the street would dart into the shadows and disappear when they saw us coming. If we had to be lost, it was good to be lost with David.

All of his life, however, big, strong, intimidating David knew the truth of the gospel he preached and taught here for 37 years, including the part about our strength being made perfect in weakness. Two years ago came the time to begin practicing that truth with a new intensity, taking it more than ever as a habit in which to live. For a small, malignant invader, no bigger than a battery in one of Dave's cameras, came to make him weak.

He preached some marvelous, gospel-laden sermons in these last two years, and he did perhaps the most powerful teaching in all his tenure here, openly facing his illness and its threats and clinging publicly

With Luther, he believed and taught that the only God we can truly know, or dare to give our hearts to, is the one we see in the crucified Christ.

to the cruciform promise that, as he put it, "God loves you, for Christ's sake, and will never let you go." David was a teacher of the theology of the cross, an unabashed practitioner of what some scornfully call "gospel reductionism." With Luther, he believed and taught that the only God we can truly know, or dare to give our hearts to, is the one we see in the crucified Christ. There, in that brokenness, we find the God who gives anything and everything to be reconciled to us, who takes on every sin, every shame, every pain, every curse that befalls us or that we visit on one another. And in exchange, we take from that cross the crucified one's identity—we are children, the sons and daughters of God. Nothing more, nothing less.

David wrote his doctoral dissertation on Christ's descent into hell, which had become a controverted matter among sixteenth-century reformers, and that piece of Christ's biography, which also became his own biography, remained a centerpiece of David's theology. Think how often you heard David quote Luther on what it means to confess that Jesus Christ descended to hell. "It means this," said Luther, "that there is no place I might ever go, no depth

to which I might sink, but that even there, he is Lord for me."

That was David's faith and his teaching. But, like all the rest of us, he had to learn it over and over and over. Only in his final days did he tell some of us how hard he had worked through these last two years to remain in control as the manager of his cancer, the administrator of his treatment

> We live in him, that we may die well. We die with him, that we may live well. That is the path of repentance and faith.

and recovery, the intimidator against all that threatened his life and the years he still hoped to have with Joanna. In the end, it took all the courage he had, but mostly the gift of faith, to receive a simple gift, permission to give up that complex project of saving his life and to rest in the embrace of the crucified. "I'm free now," he said last Thursday morning. "It's such a relief. Now I'm just one more sinner hanging by a thread."

In that spirit David chose in those last days some elements of this service today. He said he didn't want to be the choreographer, but please read from the beginning of 1 Corinthians, he asked. And for a Gospel lesson, use Mark. All of it.

David loved Mark's Gospel, for he came to see in it the simplest and most eloquent theology of the cross in all of the New Testament. Mark's Jesus lives and dies as we all do—vulnerable, misunderstood, trusting in a secret that gets tested over and over, agonizing in his last hours, and dying with the hardest question of all on his lips, "My, God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" And there is no vindication in Mark. We do not see a happy, healed, risen Jesus who came out on the other side even stronger than before. No, we find only an empty tomb, a messenger, and a promise: "You will see him, even as he told you."

I told David, "Yes, we will use Mark on the day that we bury you. And we will find you in Mark's story, and hopefully find ourselves as well." Actually, in our conversations at the hospital last week we found David, and everyone else in the room, all through Mark's Gospel. It truly is his story. But in those last days we found Dave's part especially near the end of the story. Many of you know that what finally killed David was that his breath was taken away. Despite all the tumors elsewhere, and the assaults of chemotherapy on his system, it was the tiny microtumors that covered the inner surface of his lungs that left him breathing as deeply as he wanted but unable to get oxygen. It's not that different from being crucified, for it's not the nails, the whippings, or even the thirst that finally kills you. In the end, you can't breathe. *Surely he has borne our griefs!*

Mark meant for all of us to see ourselves in Christ the crucified. But I want to close on this day by pointing to another place where we find David, and ourselves, in Mark's Gospel. Only Mark adds one little snippet to the story of Jesus' arrest in Gethsemane. There was a young man out there that night, says Mark, a *neaniskos*, a "new guy," dressed only in a strip of linen, the kind used for burials. They seized him

by that strange garment, meaning to take him, too, it seems, but he fled away naked, leaving the grave-clothes behind.

The prophet Amos had envisioned such a day, when even the strong, the mighty, and the young would flee away naked in the great and terrible "day of the Lord." Yes, that was the David we saw in these last days, a strong, mighty, and too-young man whose strength and youth had failed him and who left us on Saturday naked as the day he was born, leaving only a hospital gown behind.

But it wasn't the first time he'd done that. It had happened 65 years before, on the day of David's baptism. The same scenario played out. Like that *neaniskos*, and like all of us, he was stripped of his old clothes, buried with Christ by baptism into his death, and dressed in a new, white garment in which he, and we, might testify that we cling to the promise of a different life, a new life, a life that for now is hid with Christ in God.

Today we see again that *neaniskos*, and David as well, in the next place he appears in Mark's Gospel, sitting inside the tomb, dressed in baptismal attire, and witnessing to the promise. "Don't be afraid. If you would see the crucified one, don't look here. He is risen. You will see him, even as he told you."

Here the rest of us belong, today and always, the collection of the baptized gathered at the entrance to the tomb listening to the promise of our Lord as it comes to us from yet another *neaniskos*. And today it's David. So one more time, in *Neaniskos*-David's own words, hear the promise, from a sermon he preached here in this place last April, on Maundy Thursday:

"We live in him, that we may die well. We die with him, that we may live well. That is the path of repentance and faith: we let go all that entices our devotion, all that pretends to make a life, in the death that we baptized ones share with Jesus Christ; we receive from him, crucified and risen, all that genuinely makes a life out of our being buried with him. So dying and living get all turned around, all upside-down, all inside-out and backwards, and our lives, as the apostle says, are "hid with Christ in God," even as our dying is as good as done, together with that Jesus, stashed as he was, in Joseph's fresh-hewn grave.

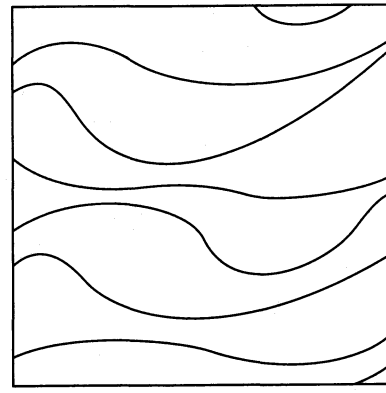
"What a way to live—buried with Christ. What a way to die—a life hid with Christ in God. What a way to be a part of Jesus, to have a share in Jesus. Imagine, then, as God keeps promise with you, how you shall be able to die—and since you can thus die, how you are able to live!"

A Meditation on Kristallnacht

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I want to begin with a poem by Dan Pagis. Pagis was born in 1930 and spent three years in a Nazi camp. He emigrated to Palestine in 1946 and became one of Israel's most celebrated poets. This poem is called "written in pencil in the sealed box-car."[1]

here in this carload
I am eve
with abel my son
if you see my older boy
cain son of adam
tell him that I



The poet leaves us to wonder what it was that Eve said, or if she said anything at all. Did she pour out her heart or find that what she wanted to communicate was inexpressible?

In the face of the reality of unfathomable loss that our people suffered, words seem, as they do so often, inadequate. One is tempted to say that silence is the only appropriate response. But we also know that silence was a response, an abdication of responsibility, the ultimate result of which was complicity if not collaboration.

And so we must use words, however inadequate they are, to address God, to address the past, but most important, I think, to address each other. That is what we are doing here this morning in this sacred moment.

I for one do not look for meaning in the Shoa, in the Holocaust. Those who suggest that the Shoa took place to teach us a lesson or to make the rebirth of the state of Israel possible have not, in my opinion, thought it through sufficiently. I find the suggestion that it happened for a reason, or that it was part of God's plan, unacceptable, even obscene.

Irving Greenberg wrote:

> . . . what shall be spoken in a generation when thousands went by dogs and by fire, when over a million innocent children were savagely killed? No statement, theological or otherwise, should be made that would not be credible in the presence of burning children. Any easy affirmation of God would appear to mock the burning children. Any easy denial of God would appear to turn the children's deaths into a gigantic travesty. A simple denial of God would appear to deny the reality of redemption in our time and the validation of biblical promise by contemporary fulfillment.[2]

There is a connection between Greenberg's words and our presence here this morning. We have come together with our knowledge of the past, but with our eyes focused on the future. We meet in prayer and in consultation and in study because we recognize that "redemption in our time," if it is to happen at all, will not appear miraculously like manna from heaven. Rather, it will be built slowly by people of good will reaching, stretching, grasping to unite the sparks of divinity that have been scattered throughout God's creation. We cannot restore the broken glass that we commemorate this morning to its former state. We cannot go back in time, we cannot bring to back to life the men, the women, the children, the communities, the culture that have been lost. Perhaps, however, we can take those shards of glass and create a new mosaic that can serve as a memorial, and inspiration, and a sign of the covenant between us as human beings and between us and God.

> If you see my older son Cain,
> the son of adam, tell him that I

In humility, we pray that we can find words that lead us on the paths to shalom.

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1. *The Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse*, ed. T. Carmi (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), 575.

2. Irving Greenberg, *The Jewish Way: Living the Holidays* (New York: Summit Books, 1988).

Speaking the Unspeakable

John Stendahl
Lutheran Church of the Newtons, Newton Center, Massachusetts
Member, Consultative Panel on Lutheran-Jewish Relations, ELCA

There is a plaque placed as a holocaust memorial in the pavement below a wall of Luther's church in Wittenberg. The text makes reference to the *Shem haM'phoras*, the ineffable, unspeakable Name of God.

What is that unspeakability about? Certainly we know first this about it: that there is the ineffability which is a humble holding of the gift of the Holy, with deep reverence for its power and mystery, and also with care for the immense danger of its being taken in vain, used as a tool for our pride and sin. This ancient and still-living discipline, whereby the divine Name was not to be spoken, whereby even substitutes for it were to be handled with great care, has stood as sign and reminder against the presumption of our claims to know and understand it all. The Name of God may thus be held unspeakable in an observance of faithful devotion to it.

But then we are reminded this day that there is more that is unspeakable for its enormity, the knowledge that words cannot capture it, wrap it up, do it justice. The enormity of 6 million dead, or of 81 dead, or even one dead, and of each desecration of the holy in the divine image—the memory of Kristallnacht and of Holocaust—is unspeakable grief. And this too is a holiness, that we can grieve, and that we do so in respectful silence, not rushing to cover over tragedy with lovely words.

There is yet another unspeakability before us, that of obscenity. How can we sully our lips to repeat the hateful words, the poisonous speech of the haters and the prophets of violence? How can we stand it, or if we are comfortable with it, why are we not ashamed, to speak what desecrates and slanders the holy? Isn't that exactly what Jesus is angry enough to call unforgivable, the blaspheming of the Holy Spirit?

Yet in these unspeakabilities, we are called not only to silence but also to speech and to words of remembrance. Ineffable is the Name, but we do, both Christians and Jews, call upon God in prayer, caress the holy in words, remember the grief in retelling it, and pray Kaddish or celebrate Eucharist in order to defy evil with words of high doxology.

But also this, you know, that we need to remember and speak with honesty that which is toxic and obscene, about the realities of hatred and violence. Such ugly words and sentiments have not been purged from our scriptures, and they need to remain there, to trouble and warn us, lest we think murderous passions belong only to the alien and the heathen. Still more, what I mean this day for us Christians, and not least for us Lutheran Christians, is that we need to hear and acknowledge the words spoken by our ancestors in the faith, and take responsibility, and grieve, and resolve to begin anew.

One reason the memorial plaque in Wittenberg bears the term *Shem haM'phoras* is that such is the legend over a stone

carving on the church wall above it. It is the medieval image of the Judensau, the Jewish pig, a classic and obscene expression of Christian contempt for Jews and for Judaism. Luther wrote about this carving approvingly: "There is here in Wittenberg, on our parish church, a sow carved in stone, young piglets and Jews lie under it and suck teats. Behind the sow stands a rabbi who lifts the sow's right leg up, and with his left hand pulls the tail over himself, bows and stares with great attentiveness under the tail of the sow into the Talmud, as if he wanted to read and understand something intricate and extraordinary."

There was of course much that was great and wise and humane in Luther, but we have a duty also to remember this, and not to leave it unspoken. Luther's vitriolic diatribes against the Jews are part of the history that leads to Kristallnacht. While the fires of that night of horror still smoldered, a Nazi bishop of the church issued a tract that rejoiced in the appropriateness that November 10 is Luther's birthday: "the synagogues in Germany are aflame. . . . In this hour the voice must be heard of the man, who, as the German prophet in the sixteenth century, began first out of ignorance as a friend of the Jews, [and] who, driven by his conscience, driven by experience and reality, became the greatest anti-Semite of his time, the warner of his people against the Jews." He followed up with citations from Luther's 1543 tract *On the Jews and Their Lies*, including the recommendations to secular authorities on how to deal with the Jews, words that read like a blueprint for the violence of the preceding two days.

The city of Wittenberg elected not to remove the Judensau from the wall of the church. They did not rush to make the obscenity invisible and unheard. Instead they placed this plaque down below it. The German text declares: *God's own name, the slandered Shem HaM'phoras, which the Jews before the Christians kept almost ineffably holy, perished in six million Jews under the sign of a cross.*

In those days, indeed down through generations and centuries, we Christians have terribly failed the teaching of *our* Rabbi, the one who not only told the story of the good Samaritan, of the despised other who becomes the neighbor, the bringer of blessing, but who himself became the outsider who blessed, the other who, when we draw lines of exclusion, repeatedly stands on the other side. The issue is alive still, and contempt of others is often still taught, or left unchallenged, in our communities. After our silent grief and our contrite hope, let us speak of it.

Critically Reading the Other Hand

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In one of the most cited comments by any theologian of the twentieth century, Karl Barth exhorted pastors to preach with the Bible in one hand and a newspaper in the other. Many have followed his advice, finding in newspapers and other news media a valuable resource for contextualizing the Word of God. They have done this out of a commitment to the God who has created this world and who still cares passionately about it.

The events that take place in our own time and place are matters of utmost concern to the Creator. As God's creatures we are called to think through our relationship to events that happen in the sphere that God has brought into being. The incarnation of Jesus also demands that our own theology be an incarnate one. Since God so loved the world that the Word took on flesh in the world, how can the community that calls itself by Jesus' name not be utterly engaged in the issues around us? Finally, the God who creates and redeems us remains present among us in the Holy Spirit who makes all things new.[1] Christians therefore listen and watch for signs of the times that indicate the contemporary movement of the Spirit. Karl Barth would applaud attentiveness to the movement of God in our midst, but he would also undoubtedly offer stringent warnings to us. He would be grieved that, while biblical scholarship has maintained a growing critical awareness in relationship to the reading of Scriptures, the script in the other hand—or, more often these days, the television-channel changer—is often taken in naively with little critical sensibility at all. Temptation bids us to take the mainstream media at their word and to hold to their version of the truth as an uncritically accepted source for theological reflection.

Preachers would do well to remember that Barth's own turning point and the loud "No!" he shouted that reshaped twentieth-century theology occurred because of what he read in a newspaper and found to be a betrayal of all that God stands for. He read there a manifesto of support for German war policies signed by ninety-three German intellectuals including, most painfully for Barth, the leading liberal theologians who had been his teachers. In the newspaper Barth found a word that the Word could not tolerate. In Barth's hand, the Bible became a tool for attacking the idolatrous message of the newspaper that he held in his other hand. With the Word of God he called into question the versions of truth peddled by government and media in the name of a misguided nationalism.

Barth reminds us of the dangers of totalizing versions of truth. One need not

1. A thorough discussion of the theological foundations for contextuality can be found in Douglas John Hall's *Thinking the Faith* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989), 69–144.

accept all of his theological assumptions to develop a theological motivation for critically reading our own media.

Part of the Christian inheritance is a wariness of official versions of the truth. The majority of the Scriptures that Christians claim were written and collected as a critical alternative to the official stories of their days. Whether the imperial force that demanded allegiance was Assyria, Babylon, or the Roman Empire, the Scriptures defined faithfulness over and against the hegemonic claims that enslaved the people of God. Even those writings that were collected in times of stability and relative freedom for Israel often launch a critique of Israel's own version of the truth and the way that it could cover up the plight of the poor. The difficulty that those in power have in seeing themselves critically and thus interpreting the story of the day in a manner that would threaten their way of life also provides major obstacles to reading the Good News appropriately. As Richard Horsley, among others, has stated, "we readers located in the modern imperial metropolis may have difficulty discerning [the gospel's chief] indications."[2]

One response to the totalizing forces of those who would market a restricted version of the truth is to interject diversity into the descriptions. Multiple perspectives, sometimes even contradictory ones, stand side by side in the Bible and provide a fuller picture than any one of them alone could. In 1 Samuel 8–12, for example, human kingship is first described as an unfaithful rejection of God's sovereignty, but later the same kingship is accepted as an unfortunate but necessary concession to human stubbornness. Multiple examples of this kind of diversity occur in the New Testament as well, the four Gospels being chief among them. Not one version of Christianity's great story but four are necessary. Each of them stands defiantly asserting its idiosyncratic version of the Good News, sometimes with the others but often in very distinctive ways. Each of them is infinitely more interesting than the unified and synthesized versions of the story that misguided individuals have created to clear up the diversity.[3]

Although diversity begins to address the danger of a monolithic and idolatrous version of the truth, this does not mean that all claims therefore stand on equal ground. Christians who follow the one crucified by the guardians of Rome's official story would do well to adopt what Mary Solberg calls an "epistemology of the cross." Such an epistemology asks whose voices speak in the media and whose voices are silenced. It asks whose interests a particular version of the truth serves and whose it harms. Solberg writes, "to the degree that relatively undistorted and ethically defensible knowing matter, the place of the least favored—at the foot of the cross, in all its contemporary forms—is a better place to start than any place of domination could be."[4]

Solberg's vision flows out of Martin Luther's thought. Luther knew from experience the dangers created by those who present a monolithic version of the truth and have the resources to promote it in the public sphere. In his Heidelberg Disputation he named such pretensions "*volatilem*

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2. Richard A. Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark's Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 45.

3. For a thorough discussion of the Gospels' diversity see David Rhoads, *The Challenge of Diversity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 1–38.

4. Mary M. Solberg, *Compelling Knowledge: A Feminist Proposal for an Epistemology of the Cross* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1997), 17.

cognitatum," that is, "understanding that is prone to violence."[5] In the face of violent knowledge Luther proposes that Christians must "call a thing what it is." In order to do that one must be willing to look for the attack on God's presence in the midst of suffering and violence. A faithful follower of the God of Jesus will be attentive especially to the plight of those who are most often neglected in official stories.

With this theological bias, we turn to analyze the problem of reading today's news media and propose a practical strategy for interpreting them in a critical and faithful manner.

Why citizens must become media critics

The current situation of the American news media makes critical reading and active searching for a variety of perspectives both essential and easier than in the pre-Internet era. Mainstream news media face a number of pressures that result in a narrowing of the topics covered and a simplification of coverage. The consolidation of ownership of news media is one pressure on complex news coverage. Another pressure is the requirement that news divisions earn profits on a previously unimagined scale for their corporate owners. The race for profits leads to cost cutting. That the bosses are no longer news people but corporate executives leaves serious journalists trying to explain the nature of their product to people who do not share the service ethos that formerly permeated newsrooms.

Some media scholars argue that the consolidation of ownership of local newspapers and radio and television stations has resulted in a monopoly on information by a few very rich individuals who also enjoy relationships with the United States' political elite.[6] These scholars see the influence of the political views of the wealthy people who own such media organizations as Fox News and CNN trumping the established news value of objectivity in the reporting of the news. They believe that the owners' political preferences determine the stories that are covered as well as the choice of sources of information.

Other scholars argue that corporate control of the media has resulted in the naturalization of "the corporate voice" as the American view.[7] In other words, the news media present current events through their impact on the interests of large corporations. We have become so used to this "frame" for news that we see it as the natural way to interpret events. News editors and reporters generally claim that they make decisions independent of media owners' biases, but some scholars argue that the independence is perceived only because the journalists do not stray outside limits that match the perspectives of their superiors. The result is self-censorship that is often explained by concern for the practical considerations of keeping one's job or making a decent career in the field.[8]

It seems logical, then, that concentration of ownership of the "press" in the hands of the few would cause restriction of the number and types of voices that the average news consumer hears. But other scholars have examined this "homogenization hypothesis" and found that mainstream media were rather closed to alternative

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5. Philip Ruge-Jones, "Cross in Tensions: Theology of the Cross as Theologico-Social Critique" (Ph.D. diss., Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, 1999), 128.

6. Ben H. Bagdikian, *The Media Monopoly,* 5th ed. (Boston: Beacon, 1997).

7. Herbert Schiller, *Culture, Inc.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

8. Michael Parenti, *Inventing Reality: The Politics of Mass Media* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), 38–40.

interpretations even before the consolidation of ownership that took place across the country in the 1980s and 1990s. A study of the content of more than 90 local newspapers found that no matter the ownership conditions—monopoly, quasi-monopoly, or competitive—news content varied little.[9] In towns with only one daily newspaper, two dailies owned by the same conglomerate, or multiple dailies with a variety of owners, stories mention a similarly narrow range of actors; stories appearing throughout the same paper present little disagreement of views. The authors of this study concluded that the pressures of the market operate similarly on news outlets, no matter their ownership. Competitive papers are trying to attract the same mass audience and mass advertisers as monopoly-owned papers in order to turn a profit. The concentration of ownership, according to this study, does little to restrict the diversity of coverage in media because the coverage is narrow to begin with.

Corporate cost cutting is one of the main problems facing news organizations. Walter Cronkite, an icon of American news reporting, warns continually of the effect of budget reductions on international news coverage. Few news organizations have bureaus abroad; instead, they practice what has been termed "parachute journalism" by relying on stringers until a huge story breaks. The names and faces the audience has come to associate with coverage of wars and other upheaval are those of reporters who fly into complex situations as they are unfolding without the benefit of background acquired by long-term observation on the spot.[10] Budget reductions also limit the amount of investigative reporting news organizations can conduct on domestic issues and the number of reporters available to cover the news. Overworked reporters increasingly rely on news releases issued by large corporations and government offices because they do not have time to do extensive legwork themselves.[11] News organizations rely more on elite official sources (such as government press offices) who are easy to reach and eager to place their messages in the press. For similar reasons, the media cover official events, such as press conferences and speeches, rather than searching for a variety of sources outside of corporations and government offices.

The power of frames

As if this were not enough for the overworked pastor to have to think about, elements of the regular media work routine also lead to the reduction of complex issues to simpler terms that can be presented as shorthand in headlines and brief broadcast news stories. The resulting news frames influence the way the audience understands issues and are remarkably similar in mainstream media (for the same reasons outlined above on choice of stories to cover and sources to consult).

Pastors have probably experienced the power of frames in their work. When a person listens to a sermon through a powerful personal frame, he or she may hear the opposite of what the pastor is saying on an issue because the frames differ too widely. The frames through which we see the world are built over a lifetime and influence both

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9. Robert Entman, *Democracy without Citizens* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

10. Walter Cronkite, *A Reporter's Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996), 373–84.

11. Patricia A. Curtin, "Reevaluating Public Relations Information Subsidies: Market-Driven Journalism and Agenda-Building Theory and Practice," *Journal of Public Relations Research* 11:1 (1999), 53–91.

how we construct and how we perceive the news.

Reporters begin their research with certain considerations in mind that may set the frame in which the details of the event at hand are placed. Reporters consider, intentionally or not, the prevailing political ideology, the probable responses of their superiors and sources to the story, and the angle their news organization is likely to take on the story.[12] Framing techniques create a particular impression without explicitly revealing support for a particular interpretation of events. Thus, the news report appears to be objective, because it follows a format we have been taught to associate with objectivity, but subtle turns of phrase, labels, illustrations, and word choices embed the subject in larger interpretive schema.

Scholars analyze frames to aid in understanding how texts convey particular perspectives on issues.[13] A frame, which we might think of more simply as the context in which the story is placed, can define the problem, diagnose causes, make moral judgments, and suggest remedies for the problem. These four functions of framing may be present in one sentence or be developed through an entire story, news program, or issue of a newspaper or magazine. Analysis of frames also provides a helpful way of thinking about the act of preaching itself. Frames can be located in the communicator (the way you see the issue addressed in this Sunday's sermon), the text (the script of the sermon), the receiver (the preexisting conceptions of members of the congregation), and the culture (the prevailing views on the issue in current ideology, values, etc.). In the case of news reporting, the communicator, a reporter or editor, makes conscious or unconscious judgments about how to present a story based on preexisting beliefs that are embedded in the text as frames. Frames appear in the text in keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images, and selections of information sources. The receiver (in this case a consumer of news reports) approaches the subject of the story with a set of frames as well. These may or may not correspond to the frames embedded in the text. In fact, readers are more likely to notice frames in a text when these do not correspond to their own preconceived ideas. Culture provides frames that a large group of people hold in common; this may be the strongest source of frames of the four locations.

Frames highlight certain aspects of the available information and deemphasize others. They begin to work at the point of the selection of events to cover. The selection of these elements of reality to highlight increases their salience. At the same time, frames also determine which elements of reality will be omitted from coverage.

As we look for urgent topics that require a critical reading of the media, the obvious issue at the time of this writing is the war in Iraq. This is the subject where the temptation to wed the media to a particular official frame is most potent. Attention to a sampling of issues in relation to the war will show the workings of powerful frames and the need to reflect critically on the frames in which other issues like poverty, crime, and economics are also embedded. We are painfully aware that an analysis of the Iraq war merits many more pages than we are able to offer here.

One basic unit of framing is word choice. What does it mean, for example, to

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12. Parenti, *Inventing Reality*, 45.

13. Robert M. Entman, "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm," *Journal of Communication* 43:4 (Autumn 1993), 52. The following discussion of framing is based on Entman's article.

introduce discussion of the war under the rubric of "Operation Iraqi Freedom"? What difference would it make if the story began with "the widely unpopular occupation of Iraq"? The term "terrorist" is often used as though its meaning is transparent; yet one frame's terrorist is another frame's patriot. Other words and phrases like "full sovereignty," "friendly fire," "fundamentalist," "liberation," and "precision weapons" come together to create a particular effect. Attention to those words, and the words not chosen, is an essential part of a critical reading of the media.

Jack Lule studied the use of metaphors in the language used in NBC's coverage of the final weeks before the invasion of Iraq in March 2003. Lule mentions the metaphors NBC's reporters used, including "countdown" and "showdown," for example, which both imply that conflict is inevitable. Lule concludes by asking what might have turned out differently if the NBC journalists had chosen other possible metaphors. He points out the vast difference between a showdown and, for example, a debate, a word that lacks the sense of inevitability of a violent outcome.[14]

Maintenance of a frame also determines which events are selected for coverage, that is, which events are salient to the unfolding story. In the case of the current war in Iraq, for example, serious discussion of Iraqi civilian casualties is rarely considered, probably because this element of the war does not fit the frame of Americans as liberators of Iraq.

Powerful, persistent frames may lead to serious distortions of reality. When news organizations use such distorting frames, their consumers, predictably, end up with misperceptions of news events. A study done in the summer of 2003 by the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) at the University of Maryland surveyed consumers of various media on their understanding of three specific issues: whether there was specific evidence that links al-Qaeda to Iraq, whether actual weapons of mass destruction had been found in Iraq, and whether world public opinion favored the U.S. launching the war with Iraq. Overall, 60 percent of those polled misunderstood one of these three issues. Almost half of CNN and NBC viewers and slightly more than half the newspaper readers surveyed answered at least one of the three questions incorrectly. Consumers of NPR and PBS were almost four times more likely to understand the issues than Fox viewers: 77 percent of the public broadcasting audience answered all three questions correctly, while 80 percent of Fox viewers got the answers wrong. These differences correlate to political postures that individuals take. The Nieman Report states, "Among those with none of the misperceptions listed above, only 23 percent supported the war. Among those with one of these misperceptions, 53 percent supported the war, rising to 78 percent with

Frames highlight certain aspects of the available information and de-emphasize others.

14. Jack Lule, "War and Its Metaphors: News Language and the Prelude to War in Iraq, 2003," *Journalism Studies* 5:2 (2004), 179–90.

those who have two of the misperceptions, and to 86 percent with all three of the misperceptions."[15]

Attention to the editorial pages may open up critical awareness of bias for other stories in each press since in these editorials the authors openly state the stances that lie behind their daily decisions. The print media, which come off relatively well in the PIPA report, also had difficulty distancing themselves critically from the administration's frame for the war.

In the *Columbia Journalism Review* Chris Mooney has reviewed the editorial pages of major newspapers in their response to the impending war. George W. Bush's motive for the war, at least in the early days, focused on the "imminent threat" that Saddam Hussein posed to the United States. This cause was buttressed by Colin Powell's speech to the United Nations that attempted to make a case for the presence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. The editorial pages in *The Washington Post* described Powell's case as "irrefutable" and spoke of Iraq's "lethal menace."[16] *The Wall Street Journal* wrote that this action was "above all about American self-defense." *USA Today* saw Powell's speech as presenting "new and forceful evidence."[17]

The New York Times took a more critical stance. The *Times* accepted the evidence for the existence of WMDs but questioned the wisdom of attacking without the United Nations' support. Most critical of all was the *Los Angeles Times* that questioned numerous claims by Powell (although not the existence of WMDs) and chastised an administration willing to invade without UN support.[18]

With hindsight most of these editors must blush at their enthusiastic support of misinformation. Yet the fact that the *Los Angeles Times* did not jump into the administration frame shows that even at this early point serious questions could have been asked.

Off the editorial pages, the media also echoed the official frame. Michael Massing has done an important study on how the media helped create faith in the existence of an imminent threat to the United States from Saddam Hussein.[19] According to Massing, *The New York Times* reporter Judith Miller, who covered the issue of WMDs, seized upon the aluminum tubes discovered as evidence of a nuclear program despite the fact that expert sources she interviewed clearly stated that this was questionable. Whereas she did mention that technical experts disagreed, she used the words of "a top senior administration official" to undermine their correct analysis, quoting him as saying the differences among experts is "a footnote, not a split."[20] In an interesting turn of events, Miller not only repeated the administration's position, she strengthened it, providing the very evocative language that Condoleezza Rice would use when appearing on CNN. Taking nearly verbatim Miller's own metaphor, Rice stated, "We don't want the smoking gun to be a mushroom cloud."[21] Miller's front-page headlines and stories helped create the frame that justified the United States' attack on Iraq. In a remarkable admission of a warped sense of jour-

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15. Steven Kull, "The Press and Public Misperceptions about the Iraq War," *The Nieman Reports* (Summer 2004), 64–66.

16. Chris Mooney, "The Editorial Pages and the Case for War," *Columbia Journalism Review* (March/April 2004), 28–34.

17. Mooney, "The Editorial Pages," 29.

18. Mooney, "The Editorial Pages," 30.

19. Michael Massing, "Now They Tell Us," *The New York Review of Books* (February 26, 2004).

20. Massing, "Now They Tell Us," 44.

21. Ibid.

nalistic vocation, Miller stated what is certainly a minority view among reporters when she said, "my job isn't to assess the government's information and be an independent intelligence analyst myself. My job is to tell readers of *The New York Times* what the government thought about Iraq's arsenal."[22]

If serious print media took on such a bias, the situation was even worse on the major network news shows. A report prepared by the media watch group Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) looked at on-camera sources in the nightly news programs of ABC, CBS, and NBC during the month of October 2003. Of the 319 sources that appeared on camera, 73 percent were current or former U.S. officials or their appointees on the Iraqi Governing Council. FAIR writes, "Overwhelmingly, the Iraq story was told through U.S. eyes, with 81 percent American sources and only 10 percent Iraqi."[23]

The news frame of clean and accurate American military power made news coverage a platform for the Bush administration and determined the boundaries of the story. American officials did not mention civilian casualties brought about by the U.S. invasion. Such discussions did not fit into the official frame, which the mainstream news media presented uncritically. Only ten sources of the 319 even broached the topic of civilian deaths. All of these discussions took place on CBS in two stories. The first six were in response to a critical report issued by Human Rights Watch (*http://www.hrw.org*) on the abuse of civilians, a story the other networks apparently could not fit into their frame. The other four were in a story on the death of civilians from Coalition countries who had been shot at by soldiers in the Coalition forces.[24] The death of thousands of Iraqi noncombatant men, women, and children did not fit the frame of interest of any of these news shows. During other months when the effect on Iraq's citizens were reported, these deaths and displacements were understood under the rubric of "accidents." Another FAIR report noted that during a spot on NBC Nightly News, "Pentagon correspondent Jim Miklaszewski reported, without a trace of irony, that military officials predict that 'thousands' of Iraqi civilians may 'be killed entirely by accident in an intensive bombing campaign.'"[25]

The death of thousands of Iraqi noncombatant men, women, and children did not fit the frame of interest of any of these news shows.

This brings us back to where we began. All elements of news coverage—selection of events to cover, words chosen to describe them, images selected to illustrate them—support one of many possible frames,

22. Massing, "Now They Tell Us," 48.

23. Steve Rendall and Tara Broughel, "Amplifying Officials, Squelching Dissent: FAIR Study Finds Democracy Poorly Served by War Coverage," *Extra!* (May/June 2003) *http://www.fair.org/extra/0305/warstudy.html.*

24. Ibid.

25. Rachel Coen and Peter Hart, "Brushing Aside the Pentagon's 'Accidents': US Media Minimized, Sanitized Iraq War's Civilian Toll," *Extra!* (May/June 2003) *http://www.fair.org/extra/0305/civilian.html.*

and one frame may become so powerful that it completely excludes other possible interpretations of an issue.

Strategies for looking outside a powerful frame

Given the restrictions we have discussed, certain techniques can aid in the critical reading of the sources in question.

1. Expose yourself to media reports from a variety of sources including some that are produced outside of the United States. While it may not be possible to do this on a regular basis, certainly take the time to do so on issues you plan to address in a sermon.

2. Be aware of the leanings that are typical in the sources that you most frequently use. Examine who makes the decisions for these sources. For example, how much local control is there in decision making on which stories get covered and how they are covered? Familiarity with the editorials written by the staff of the paper also provides the most frank expression of a medium's bias. The choice of stories that receive preferential placement on the front page might also indicate bias.

3. Ask yourself which sources have been consulted and given voice in the story. Whose voices are granted the most authority? Whose perspectives are undercut by the way they are introduced? Whose voice gets to trump someone else's? What is the balance of various groups that have been consulted? Republicans and Democrats? Males and females? Hawks or doves? White or Black? Administration or its critics? Workers or owners? Civilian or military? Domestic or international commentators? Be especially attentive to those voices that disrupt the dominant perspective, and seek out more information on those sources when possible.

4. Be attentive to the framing of a story. What larger narratives is the story written to affirm? Which narratives does it deny? Where are qualifiers like "so-called" or "alleged" used? Are "unnamed sources" cited? Given the information you have access to, how might you have told the story differently? After reading an article, ask yourself if the evidence garnered in the story warrants the title that it has been given. Often an article will be more nuanced in its story than the title suggests. Yet the large type can bias the consumer to be more receptive to some evidence and less to others.

5. Ask yourself what spectrum of perspectives have been considered as legitimate or viable. If the options available are A through Z, has the story framed the possibilities in such a way that only P through Z are presented as the full field of perspectives? For example, at the brink of war, were those who were skeptical of going to war on the grounds of a lack of international support pitted against those who supported the administration's rationale without recognizing those voices who thought the war was simply an unacceptable response on other moral grounds? The practice of restricting the spectrum leads to a trivializing of perspectives that fall outside of the framer's supposedly reasonable alternatives. Alternatively, has the story been set up in such a way that there are only two extreme positions possible, with all middle ground ignored out of existence and one of the two responses presented as the only truly viable option?

6. Just as the media may be more nuanced in its stories than in its titles, the media often is more expansive in its explorations than featured stories would indicate. Be attentive to articles that are buried in the back pages of a paper but that disrupt the typical rhythms of the official story. Take in the information presented there,

and ask yourself why key disruptive stories were not given more prominence. Consult serious critics of mainstream reporting, so-called media watchdogs, to find alternative interpretations.

Media watchdogs and blogs

Journalists themselves are aware of the difficulties of providing accurate reporting that is not biased toward any particular political position and have established various organizations to critique and assist other professionals in the field. The Pew Research Center for People and the Press (*http://people-press.org*), Poynter Institute (*www.poynter.org*), and the Nieman Foundation (*www.nieman.harvard.edu*) publish reports on the current performance of the news media and offer training to improve journalists' ability to cover the news fairly and ethically. The reports of these organizations also provide a ready source of information for citizens who are looking beyond shallow mainstream views. Focusing heavily on survey research, the Pew Center studies what the mainstream media are covering and how audiences are responding to the coverage. For example, the Pew Internet and American Life Project found that almost 80 percent of American Internet users got information about Iraq during the first week of the war.[27] The Center also reveals the nexus of news coverage and governmental policy. The Poynter Institute's main focus is media ethics.

The Nieman Foundation for Journalism at Harvard University publishes the Nieman Reports and recently launched Nieman Watchdog: Questions the Press Should Ask (*www.niemanwatchdog.org*), a Web site that presents questions posed by experts in fields that are currently in the news.[27] The site aims to use the knowledge base of the experts to help journalists inform their reporting. In the process of offering this service, the site also provides valuable information and perspectives for citizens to delve more deeply into current events than mainstream media reports.

The site's editors, veterans of *The Washington Post* and other major American newspapers, also provide guidance to enter the new and exciting sphere of reporters' blogs. Blogs—journals kept on the World Wide Web—written by independent journalists are one of the newest opportunities to dig more deeply into the issues surrounding events that concern us. They are also one of the trickiest areas to navigate. Because anyone can blog, readers can run into the same kind of misinformation as one may hear on talk radio. Recommendations from experienced journalists can lead Web surfers to those blogs that offer in-depth reporting along with commentary and criticism of the way journalists are handling current stories. Blogs may be the most important new source of independent commentary by media observers.

On the war in Iraq

Numerous resources are available for those who would like to extend their reading on the war in Iraq to sources that question the dominant framing of events. The problem, then, is not finding information, it is sifting through the mountain of material that is easily accessible on the World Wide Web. A good place to begin is the American

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26. Lee Raine, Susanna Fox, and Deborah Fallows, "The Internet and the Iraq War: How Online Americans Have Used the Internet to Learn War News, to Understand Events, and Promote Their Views," Pew Internet and American Life Project. *http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_Iraq_War_Report.pdf.*

27. Nieman Foundation news release, available at *http://www.nieman.harvard.edu.*

Where was the correspondent when the report was written? Did he or she actually witness the events reported in the story?

Press Institute's page "Iraq and U.S. Conflict."[28] This page features links to 75 Web resources, including such official sources as White House and Defense Department press briefings; major media reports, including those of CNN, ABC, MSNBC, PBS *Frontline, The New York Times*, and al-Jazeera's English-language page (*http://english.aljazeera.net/HomePage*); background materials from academic experts and nongovernmental organizations; governmental sources from Iraq and other countries; and less official Weblogs.

While large and influential American news organizations maintain powerfully similar frames, their reports are still useful. Nevertheless, it pays to learn a little bit about the organization and the reporter. For example, does the reporter speak Arabic? Anthony Shadid, winner of the 2004 Pulitzer Prize for international reporting, is one of few American correspondents in Iraq who does.[29] Those who do not must rely on translators and may miss nuances in sources' comments. Where was the correspondent when the report was written? Did he or she actually witness the events reported in the story? Did he or she rely on a variety of sources, or is the bulk of the material drawn from official news conferences? Some war correspondents now have contracts with their organizations that allow them to publish uncut versions of their stories on their own Weblogs if the newspaper or magazine edits portions out of the story. Christopher Allbritton began his work in Iraq as an independent reporter who published only on his own "Back to Iraq" Weblog. He now writes for *TIME* and *The New York Daily News* while concurrently maintaining his blog, where he posts his full reports.[30] This blog contains Allbritton's reports and impressions of living and working in Baghdad.

In addition to reading independent and alternative U.S. news media, news reports from around the world are within easy reach online. While not a complete listing of all news sites on the Web, the Web site *world-newspapers.com* provides a list of news sources, which may be searched by country. News sources from English-speaking countries include the BBC (*http://news.bbc.co.uk*), *The Times of India* (*http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com*), and Australian reports, available at *News Interactive* (*http://www.news.com.au*). Reports framed for readers in countries that oppose U.S. policies in Iraq provide news through entirely different frames than those used by American or allied countries' media. For a sampling of these reports in English try the French wire service Agence France-Presse reports (*http://www.afp.com/english/home*)

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28. *http:www.americanpressinstitute.org/content/3948.cfm*

29. *http://www.pulitzer.org/year/2004/international-reporting/bio/*

30. "Back to Iraq 3: Blogger-Journo Balances Dual Role in War Zone," *Online Journalism Review. http://ojr.org/ojr/workplace/1089248925.php.* Back to Iraq is located at *http://www.back-to-iraq.com.*

and Germany's Spiegel Online (*http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/english/*).

Nongovernmental organizations, like FAIR, established in 1986 to work with activists and journalists to invigorate the First Amendment, provide counterpoints to the mainstream media's framing of events in Iraq. The American Press Institute's section "Iraq and the Media" contains articles on coverage by particular media outlets, the Bush administration's framing of the war, and explications of common word usage in mainstream reports.[31]

Conclusion

This article is intended to help readers see some ways of encountering the complexity of news media. We have suggested dynamics we all should be aware of when we reflect on the most common sources available and some strategies to make our readings of those sources more critical. Just as reading the Scriptures critically is a skill that we learned over time and with repeated practice, so also is the tool of critically reading the media. This article is not meant to discourage anyone from consuming news media but to make us more informed consumers.

The goal of the preacher generally is not to offer one more political commentary but rather to help shape and radically reshape the frame within which the people of God interpret all news and events that come their way. The tools we offer here are most helpful in preparation for preaching, not in the act of preaching itself. Just as we use the critical tools for biblical interpretation in order to prepare sermons and do not overburden our listeners with historical-critical material, the critical tools used in evaluating the events of the day serve to prepare us for the pastoral task of preaching the Good News in the midst of the daily news. God calls us to speak a word of hope to a world in need of that word. Having listened to the world in which we live, we are also ready to speak a challenging word of life to it on God's behalf that all things might be made new.

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31. *http://www.fair.org/international/iraq.html.*

Toward a Christian Theology of Hospitality to Other Religions on Campus

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The need for hospitality

At the very root of the Christian tradition is the biblical model and mandate to offer welcome to and share hospitality with "strangers," those who are outside one's particular community or community of faith. In the Hebrew Scripture hospitality is underscored with classic stories, such as the welcoming of the three strangers by Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 18), and with God's command to Israel to welcome the stranger and sojourner because the Israelites themselves were in those categories during their slavery in Egypt (e.g., Lev 19: 33–34). Hospitality in the New Testament includes the entire ministry of Jesus in word and deed in the canonical Gospels as well as the continual encouragement of the apostle Paul and other writers. Even though many Christian communities and individuals may have lost a firm perspective on that heritage of hospitality over the centuries, "hospitality is a way of life fundamental to the Christian identity."[1]

On today's college campus, there is a great need for Christians to rediscover and renew that heritage of hospitality. The pressures of religious pluralism on campus have the potential to divide students, faculty, and administrators. Students have the developmental need for safe places to explore their faith and other faith traditions. All people of faith, but particularly college-age Christians, who are questioning their inherited tradition and making it their own, have a need—and a rich opportunity—to see their faith heritage as a gift to be shared. Christians of all ages and circumstances have a moral mandate to be hospitable. Christians on campus and elsewhere have the calling to be a community that embodies the gospel message and lives its identity. Finally (although other reasons could be added), Christians on campus need to rediscover and renew their heritage of hospitality, because hospitality as a public act is different from students' common understanding of hospitality as intimacy, which actually excludes the stranger instead of welcoming. Each of these needs is further explained in the following paragraphs.

The pressures of religious pluralism on campus. Robert Nash, in his book *Reli-*

1. Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), x. See also pp. 33–36.

gious Pluralism in the Academy, sees a profound need for religious conversation in American universities: "My somewhat dramatic contention is that *religious pluralism, if left unattended, is a phenomenon that in the future will threaten to divide students, faculty, and administrators in a way that makes all other campus divisions look tame by comparison.*"[2] Nash is concerned that campuses could be fragmented and Balkanized by religious groups if they do not have opportunities to come together for open dialogue in intentionally designated multifaith dialogue spaces. Without such attempts at understanding, he asserts, the result is continued triumphalism, suspicion of others, and unmitigated grief.[3]

Because institutions of higher education seem to have systematically defined diversity and pluralism in ways that exclude religion, Nash argues that colleges and universities ought to expand their understanding of pluralism "to include open, challenging, spiritually and educationally revitalizing conversations about genuine religious difference." He advocates "unbounded religious dialogue" by on- and off-campus religious groups with scholars, administrators, and students in the campus community in a carefully structured "moral conversation," which, unlike adversarial discourse, can offer a respectful structure for such critically important conversation.[4] His six moral principles, elaborated later in this essay, may or may not be the structure preferred by Christians in offering hospitality to people of other religious traditions, but his points underscore the need for hospitable conversation by Christians on campus that is in harmony with the roots of our heritage.

The developmental need to explore faith. Campus ministers and others who work with college students recognize that the college years are a critically important time to reexamine the faith of childhood and to reassemble a personally considered, critically examined, deeper faith that grows as the intellectual life of the student is also maturing. Often such growth in faith is quite painful as one has to let go of cherished, assumed childhood faith perspectives, because those perspectives no longer fit with new experiences and learnings.

Students need a safe place to ask critical questions, work through doubts to a deeper understanding of faith, and even firm up the appreciation of their faith heritage by comparing it to other traditions and talking with those who espouse them. A mentoring environment can provide such a safe place for students' religious imagination to tackle the big questions of faith.

Sharon Parks recently wrote an important work describing this process for young adults. As mentoring environments, campus ministries can grow in their role as important "communities of practice."[5] In this setting of hospitality, students can experience safe and inviting "hearthside" conversation that supports critical questioning and the search for new understanding. Conversations around food offer a welcoming and nourishing atmosphere for persons with different faith perspectives to be comfortable and authentic around one another. For some traditions with common roots, even worship time can be a time to

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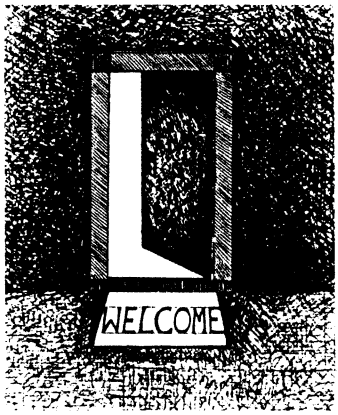
2. Robert Nash, *Religious Pluralism in the Academy: Opening the Dialogue* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 30.

3. Ibid., 33.

4. Ibid., 4, 9, 176–85.

5. Sharon Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Young Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 154–57, 197–205. Parks offers important insights on the practices of hearth, table, and commons.

celebrate, in spite of differences, the common connection with the mystery of God, a mystery larger than any of our differences and under which we all stand together.



Our human search for such places where life can be lived without fear and where community can be formed is the foundation for the insights on hospitality shared by Henri Nouwen in the middle section ("From Hostility to Hospitality") of his seminal reflections on reaching out to ourselves, others, and God.[6] Although Nash underscores that pluralistic dialogue can begin, if "unbounded," in the classroom or counseling office or coffee house, campus ministers find that campus ministry is an ideal place of hospitality where dialogue can happen about "what truly matters to students: *their heartfelt search for religious and spiritual meaning*."[7]

A gift to share: particularity. When students have an opportunity to share their "heartfelt search for religious and spiritual meaning," they are sharing part of their gift of particularity: talents, faith, joys and sorrows, and other life experiences that form the uniqueness of a person. Not only for college students but for all of us, our faith journey—including our current perspective on faith, doubts, questions, concerns, and related life experiences—is part of what we offer to others in conversation, dialogue, or friendship.

To view one's faith journey as a gift not only for oneself but also for others means that such a gift needs to be honored by the giver as well as by the receiver. Rather than apologizing or minimizing or even avoiding the particularity of our own faith journey, we will find common ground in any religious conversation or dialogue only by pursuing with one another the depths of that identity.[8] Only then can we be surprised by the grace of God in the faith-journey gifts of others. Indeed, when host and guest in hospitable dialogue share the promise that is within them, each brings new life to the other.[9]

In such sharing of faith and religious traditions, many students and campus ministers have found that they not only receive a gift from another tradition that enriches their own faith perspective but also that their own faith is strengthened rather than threatened by the experience.

Christian obligation. The need for Christian hospitality toward other religious traditions on campus also comes from the biblical mandate for Christians to be welcoming and hospitable people. The evangelists portray Jesus as embodying the

6. Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life* (New York: Doubleday, [1975] 1986), 63–109.

7. Nash, *Religious Pluralism*, 43-44.

8. Parker Palmer, *The Company of Strangers: Christians and the Renewal of America's Public Life* (New York: Crossroad, [1981] 1997), 86–89.

9. Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 66–67.

welcoming realm of God in all of his words and actions. These writers underscore the command of Jesus to live out that same hospitality by welcoming the stranger (Mt 25:35), expanding the boundaries of those included in God's community (Mk 8:27–29), including the marginalized (Lk 15:1–10), and embracing a servant role to others (Jn 13:1–17). Paul encourages this posture frequently, especially in articulating the "fruits of the Spirit" (Gal 5:22–23).

These references are but a brief glimpse into the pervasive attitude of and expectation toward hospitality by followers of Jesus in the New Testament. Hospitality, especially to the stranger, is a metaphor for the moral life to which Christians are called.[10] Henri Nouwen affirms strongly that "it is possible for men and women *and obligatory for Christians* to offer an open and hospitable space where strangers can cast off their strangeness and become our fellow human beings."[11] The point for Christians is to live out of the posture of the Spirit-empowered grace they have received, to share with others the love and care of God that they have experienced.

A plausible community. In spite of human limitation and weakness—which underscores the need for the activity of God in Jesus Christ!—Christians are called to live in a community of faith that bears concrete witness to the new reality and activity of the Spirit among them. If Christians cannot practice what they proclaim, the world will not see the plausibility of faith. It is not that Christians should manufacture a contrived life for evangelistic purposes; a genuine Spirit-led community can be a social reality as that community is shaped by the story of Jesus. Lesslie Newbigin underscores this need passionately: "the only hermeneutic of the gospel is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it." The community of faith must live out that faith as a community of truth.[12]

As Christians offer hospitality to those of other religious traditions on campus, they embody an incarnated, plausible community of faith that lives out its Christ-shaped story and embodies the truth of that story.

Recovering a genuine Christian hospitality. In her book about recovering hospitality as a Christian tradition, Christine Pohl has given us a gift of seeing the biblical roots of hospitality, the riches of Christian hospitality in the first centuries, and a pathway to reconnecting our current communities to those early resources to help us live out our vocation of hospitality more faithfully.[13]

Parker Palmer cautions us to be careful how we define hospitality in contemporary communities of faith. When Christian communities picture themselves as "families" to attempt to embody what they believe to be hospitality, that image actually undermines the public life in the church in such a way that strangers feel excluded rather

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10. Thomas W. Ogletree, *Hospitality to the Stranger: Dimensions of Moral Understanding* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 1: "to be moral is to be hospitable to the stranger." See also *And You Welcomed Me: A Sourcebook on Hospitality in Early Christianity*, ed. Amy G. Oden (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), 15–16.

11. Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 65; emphasis added.

12. Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 227, 229. See also Parker Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, [1983] 1993), xii, 88–105, where Palmer uses the classroom as modeling that community.

13. Pohl, *Making Room*, esp. 6–43.

than included. Christian communities are called instead to practice the living presence of God, who in Christ bridged gaps, healed wounds, and surmounted obstacles in such a way that all—especially the stranger, the outcast, and the marginalized—were accepted into community.[14]

Part of the critical but unfinished agenda for the Christian community, says Patrick Keifert in his book *Welcoming the Stranger*, is that these communities find an accessible model to embody the public virtues of hospitality for multicultural situations.[15] For Christian hospitality toward other religions on campus, the task that Keifert articulates is especially poignant—and the goal toward which this essay points.

Biblical roots of a Christian theology of hospitality

The primitive custom of hospitality in the ancient Greco-Roman world benefitted the foreigner in ways similar to biblical stories,[16] but in that Hellenistic context the Hebrew Scripture and the New Testament were formative in the understanding about hospitality in these biblical communities of faith and informed both early Christian tradition and our attempts to recover the roots of that tradition for our day. In the Hebrew Scripture it is God and in the New Testament it is Jesus who play special roles of both guest and host and who define the basic rationale for hospitality for people of faith. The Bible is full of references to the command for and the practice of hospitality, but for my purposes here I limit detailed discussion of the biblical roots of hospitality primarily to those classical passages where God and Jesus provide the foundation for Christian hospitality through the role of guest.

Hebrew Scripture. Throughout the Hebrew Scripture God models hospitality by providing a "good" created world, caring for wayward pillars of faith (Adam and Eve, Noah, Moses, David, and others), rescuing the Israelites from Egypt, providing sustenance for the chosen people in the forty-year wilderness journey to the Promised Land, and embracing an exiled people. Much of this Scripture also centers on the reciprocity of welcoming the stranger and sojourner, because the Israelites also were strangers and sojourners in the land of Egypt (Exod 22:21–27; Deut 10:17–20). Widows and orphans, also among the powerless, were frequently included in the categories of those needing welcoming and caring. Although such reciprocity is reason enough for Israel's sensitivity to the needy, the added dimension of God as divine guest offers a special reason for hospitality, a rationale that is captured in the New Testament: "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it" (Heb 13:2 NRSV).

In the classic passage of hospitality in the Hebrew Scripture, Gen 18:1–15, Abraham and Sarah host three men lavishly by nomadic standards, unaware that God is among them. In the heat of the day, Abraham runs to meet the guests, offers to wash their feet, provides shade, instructs Sarah to prepare bread, hurries to choose a calf for the feast and quickly has it prepared with other food, and stays with the guests under the shade of the tree while they eat.

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14. Palmer, *The Company of Strangers*, 130–34.

15. Patrick R. Keifert, *Welcoming the Stranger: A Public Theology of Worship and Evangelism* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 80–81.

16. Gustav Stählin, "*xenos*," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), V: 17–19; Oden, *And You Welcomed Me*, 18.

The surprise comes when God, who is the anonymous guest, takes on the role of host, not merely reciprocating for a gracious meal but offering a blessing far greater: that Abraham and Sarah, despite their advanced age and Sarah's barrenness, would have a son. In spite of the physical, emotional, and spiritual risks that would be evident in providing hospitality in his day, Abraham took the risk and rose above the threat to himself and his household to encounter the ultimate Stranger,[17] and that Stranger and Guest blessed the encounter in a way that was totally unexpected.

This episode, along with the creation theology of Gen 1:27–28, which says that human beings are made in the image of God, provides a profound rationale for hospitality in the Christian community.

The New Testament. In addition to the inherited perspectives and mandates about hospitality in the Hebrew Scripture, the Christian communities that produced the New Testament also had the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth that continued as well as transformed their inherited understandings.

In the Gospels, the custom of hospitality is extraordinarily important. The daily life and work of Jesus were dependent on hospitality being extended to him. In his parables and teachings, hospitality was of great significance. The meals that Jesus shared with outcasts (e.g., Luke 15:1–2) underscored the extravagant welcome that Jesus embodied.[18] The welcoming hospitality of God is the central point of Jesus' proclamation and life.[19] Even the Last Supper and the death of Jesus point to the depths of Jesus' sacrificial sharing.[20] Luke especially emphasizes the theme of hospitality in Luke-Acts with stories like the Good Samaritan, the Prodigal Son, Zacchaeus, the Emmaus narrative, and Paul's missionary journeys.[21]

The letters of Paul—along with 1 Peter (4:8–9), Hebrews (13:1–2), and James (2:1–7)—underscore the linkage between the love of Christians for one another (*philadelphia*) and hospitality (*philoxenia*, literally "love of the stranger").[22] Among the many notable Pauline expressions of this kind of caring are "extend hospitality to strangers" (Rom 12:10 NRSV) and "welcome one another . . . as Christ has welcomed you" (Rom 15:7 NRSV).[23]

However, just as the story of Abraham's hospitality to strangers revealed that the stranger was God (who blesses the host), so also two classical references in the New Testament emphasize the critically important point that hospitality to strangers is hospitality to Jesus, who also blesses the encounters.

The first reference of offering hospitality to Jesus as a stranger is the story of the post-resurrection walk to Emmaus in Luke 24:13–35. Two disciples—only one, Cleopas, is identified by name—are going to the village of Emmaus on the evening after the resurrection, when Jesus as a stranger joins them. The two disciples tell the Stranger about Jesus' life and death and the account of the empty tomb. They are kept from recognizing Jesus until he explains the real meaning of the Hebrew Scriptures and reveals himself in the breaking of bread, a

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17. Keifert, *Welcoming the Stranger*, 76.
18. Keifert, 66; John Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality: Partnership with Strangers as Promise and Mission* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 26–29.
19. Stählin, "*xenos*," 20.
20. Pohl, *Making Room*, 30.
21. Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality*, 85–120.
22. Stählin, "*xenos*," 20–21.
23. See also the discussion of Paul by Koenig, 52–84.

strong eucharistic theme for some interpreters (Lk 22:19), which also recalls Jesus' hospitality in the feeding of the multitude (Lk 9:10–17). Only by inviting Jesus in and offering him hospitality do these two disciples enjoy the blessing of his identity and company. Jesus reverses roles, as God did with Abraham, becomes their host, and blesses the two disciples by his presence in word and action. Not only does this encounter highlight the promise of Jesus' presence in the shared meals of disciples, the Emmaus story also is an anticipation of the Eucharist in Luke's community as well as a foretaste of the heavenly banquet to come.[24]

The other classical reference of offering hospitality to Jesus as a stranger is the Last Judgment scene of Matthew 25:31–46. In verses 35 and 43, Jesus as returning Son of Man asks about the welcoming of strangers by the unsuspecting "sheep," who act according to the higher righteousness (which exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, Mt 5:20),[25] and the "goats," who do not display such righteousness and compassionate behavior. The nations now have been made Jesus' disciples, and, in effect, Jesus is holding the entire world accountable to the criteria of love and care for the "least"[26] in society, the very people to whom Jesus himself was especially reaching out in his ministry. Regarding the welcoming of strangers, Jesus is holding the world accountable for reaching out to the outcast, the marginalized, and other "strangers" who are not perceived to be of one's own kind or kin. Not only are the nations responsible for this kind of outreach and care to the most difficult to love, but when they give such caring help to the "least of these" in society they are doing it to Jesus himself (Mt 25:40, 45).[27] The Matthean Jesus identifies himself with all the needy of the world, including the stranger.

A unique hospitality. In both the Hebrew Scripture and the New Testament there are deep biblical roots for hospitality to strangers. In the Hebrew Scripture, hospitality was closely tied to the reciprocity of caring for strangers and sojourners, because the Israelites themselves were cared for in such circumstances by God, not only in exodus and exile but in an ongoing special relationship.[28] In the New Testament Jesus embodies the welcoming hospitality of God to all in his ministering, in his dying, and in his sending the gift of the Spirit—and he calls communities of faith to exercise that same hospitality.

These are profound reasons for Christians to continue the practice of hospitality, but a deeper calling has also been shown in Scripture: to minister to others is to engage in a divine activity where God and Jesus are the beneficiaries of our ministrations and, later, the benefactors of resultant blessings to those who ministered. If we view the stranger from only a human perspective, we will not see the presence of God through the stranger.[29] In the Abraham story and in the Emmaus account we also find that the divine stranger-guests are the ones with the gifts, bringing the promise of new life to the host[30] as the host grows through the encounter. The Gospel of Matthew also reminds Christians that to minister to the

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24. Pohl, *Making Room*, 31.

25. Regarding the linkage of Matthew 5:20 and 25:31–46 see Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1–7: A Commentary*, trans. Wilhelm C. Linss (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989), 242, 269–70, 446, 459–60.

26. See Sherman W. Gray, *The Least of My Brothers: Matthew 25:31–46, A History of Interpretation* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 255–72.

27. Pohl, 67–69.

28. Ibid.

29. Keifert, *Welcoming the Stranger*, 77.

30. Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 66–67.

stranger is to minister to Jesus himself (25:35, 40), and that is what the angels were doing for a weakened Jesus after his temptation in the wilderness (4:11).[31] In Scripture there is certainly an ethical mandate for Christians to show hospitality to strangers, but the most important reason for such behavior is that to be hospitable to strangers created in the divine image is to offer hospitality to God and God's own Son.[32]

Defining a Christian hospitality toward non-Christians

Christians often misunderstand what hospitality is, what it is for, what its goals are, and how it should be offered. To define Christian hospitality toward non-Christians today, we need to clarify what hospitality is not, understand better what hospitality is, and perceive the blessings inherent in being hospitable to "outsiders" *because* they are outsiders.

What Christian hospitality is not. According to Paul in 1 Corinthians, the Christian community in Corinth was called to respect differences and diversity (chap. 12) in a spirit of mutual care (chap. 13). Palmer emphasizes that the implicit pressure of a familial metaphor for the Christian community can suppress conflict and undermine the community's public life by excluding the stranger.[33] A hospitality that depends on personal ties or a connected history is also opposite Jesus' own inclusive sense of "family" as those who seek to live as God intends, regardless of clan or kin (Mk 1:31–35 and parallels). Christian hospitality can even be "impersonal," not in the sense of being unkind but rather in not demanding friendship as a result[34] nor presuming church membership as a motive.[35] Affirming the shared foundation of a common humanity with a stranger is enough, says Palmer, without having to become friends or family, but instead valuing the very strangeness of the stranger as a gift.[36]

What Christian hospitality is. Christians are called to a hospitality toward others that is based on the foundational reality that the face of Christ himself is in every stranger to whom we can be hospitable (Mt 25:35, 43). Strangers—those outside the community—are also welcome because they bear the image of their Creator (Gen 1:26–27).[37] Biblically, God and Christ have as similar a sense of foreignness as do strangers, and even Christians are seen in later New Testament writings as foreigners who depend on the welcome and hospitality of others in the faith.[38] In addition, the image of God and the image of Christ in others also prompts a sense of wonder and awe as we relate to the stranger.[39]

Along with Palmer and Nouwen, Keifert underscores the public nature of hospitality for Christians. For Keifert, rather than helping the stranger toward a hospitality of feeling "at home," Christian hospital-

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31. Also Mark 1:13, but in Luke no angels minister to Jesus after the temptation.

32. Martin Luther emphasizes the connection between hospitality to Jesus in Matthew 25 with hospitality to God in Genesis 18 in his *Lectures on Genesis, Chapters 15–20, Luther's Works* 3, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia, 1961): 177–80.

33. Palmer, *Company of Strangers*, 130.

34. Keifert, *Welcoming the Stranger*, 80.

35. Palmer, 87.

36. Ibid., 68.

37. Pohl, *Making Room*, 64, shows that the "image of God" concept also undergirded Calvin's comprehensive response concerning hospitality in the sixteenth century.

38. Stählin, "*xenos*," 25–36.

39. Ogletree, *Hospitality to the Stranger*, 3.

What emerges from the biblical foundations and the cries of humanity is a hospitality that is part of our vocation.

ity is centered on "opening one's world to the stranger"[40] in the realm of public life. The Christian community, instead of being only a warm family, embodies Jesus' own posture as a "community of truth."[41] This kind of community includes wisdom, love, and justice as part of the public hospitality rather than only intimacy, warmth, and familiarity.[42]

Palmer notes ten characteristic functions of public life that are the fruit of the kind of public hospitality to which he and Keifert invite us all—especially benefitting campus Christians and the ones to whom they might seek to be hospitable:[43]

1. Strangers meet on common ground (without having to become friends).

2. Fear of the stranger is faced and dealt with (destroying stereotypes and revealing a common humanity).

3. Scarce resources are shared and abundance is generated (because of a public response).

4. Conflict occurs and is resolved (a healthy public life gives daily experience with inevitable conflict and teaches us that conflict is not terminal).

5. Life is given color, texture, drama, a festive air (the foreign and exotic stretches minds).

6. People are drawn out of themselves (in service to others).

7. Mutual responsibility becomes evident, and mutual aid possible (as we learn how intertwined our lives really are).

8. Opinions become audible and accountable (public expression tempers opinion).

9. Vision is projected and projects are attempted (and makes private visions fully real).

10. People are empowered and protected against power (influencing and protecting against excessive power as people stand together).

Opportunities for this kind of public interaction with strangers, especially in a setting of hospitality for people of faith, brings growth to host and guest and community.

For Nouwen, what emerges from the biblical foundations and the cries of humanity is a hospitality that, if it is to be true to our identity, is obligatory for Christians, part of our vocation.[44] For Nouwen, such hospitality invites strangers to a new relationship in which each person can listen with attention and care to the other's voice as well as his or her own voice, each allowing the other to be "sensitive and obedient to their own stories"[45] without trying to convert or coerce or own the other, for that is the opposite of hospitality.

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40. Keifert, *Welcoming the Stranger*, 8.

41. Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 229. See also Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known*, 30–32, 88–105.

42. Keifert, 80. For his theology of public life from the perspective of hospitality to strangers see pp. 76–92.

43. Palmer, *Company of Strangers*, 40–45.

44. Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 65–66.

45. Ibid., 76, 95–97.

In Palmer's view, hospitality is a basic component of the mission of the church, to love the world as God in Christ loved—and loves—the world.[46]

We are blessed in the doing. The act of hospitality for people of faith is a blessing to the giver, who becomes the receiver. The host and guest indeed reverse roles and the host is blessed, not as a manipulative necessity but as an inevitable benefit to those who genuinely open their hearts to the stranger. A God-blessed and God-given opportunity is presented as the host welcomes the guest in the spirit and manner of Jesus' own ministry. The sacredness of the encounter is perceived, as both host and guest are ready to enter the other's world.[47] The host is especially blessed by the gift of the stranger's life and story (as were Abraham and Sarah, and the Emmaus disciples), by the precious blessing that the strangers bring, and by the new life that results.[48]

Part of that gift is that assumptions are challenged, perspectives are broadened by the "intrusion" of the stranger, and familiar things are seen anew.[49] That is what the ministry of Jesus was all about as he stretched and challenged the disciples, the crowds, and his opponents to see the blessing of God more fully in their midst.

Empowering for hospitality

For the Christian, to seek to provide hospitality is to engage in a process that is larger than oneself, a process that can be overwhelming and discouraging. Pohl reminds us that there are "spiritual rhythms of hospitality."[50] Indeed, from a Christian viewpoint, it is the Spirit of God that empowers the process for the host: encouraging the risk of outreach to the stranger, providing a welcoming atmosphere, prompting the sharing of one's own faith story, and respecting the faith journey of the guest. Even the unexpected blessing that the host receives from offering hospitality to the stranger is the fruit of that same Spirit.

The following five points reflect the main emphases from the ninth chapter of Pohl's book *Making Room,* with additional reflections about the Spirit-graced process for each that is fundamental to the perspective that New Testament writers have about Jesus and the early Christian community.

Worship. In worship, the life of hospitality is born as one experiences the grace and generosity of God and is filled with a Spirit-prompted response of love and gratitude. Without such a grateful spirit, hospitality can become a grudging response that injures guests.[51] In worship we again experience the hospitality of God and are renewed and empowered for our task.[52]

Stories. Biblical stories of the hospitality of Jesus are a tool of the Spirit to renew and inspire our opportunities to welcome others. Based on that biblical foundation, the stories of a faith community's experience of hospitality—one's own or another's—can also renew and revive that community's intentionality toward hospitality.[53] Biblical stories and references about the *lack* of hospitality—for example, the situation of using one's spiritual gifts in abusive and hierarchical ways that Paul addresses in 1 Corinthians 12–13—can also help Christian communities today note the need for corrected, Spirit-empowered perspectives.

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46. Palmer, *Company of Strangers*, 87.
47. Ogletree, *Hospitality to the Stranger*, 3–4.
48. Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 66–67.
49. Palmer, *Company of Strangers*, 58–59.
50. Pohl, *Making Room*, chap. 9, 170–87).
51. Pohl, 172.
52. Keifert, *Welcoming the Stranger*, 72–73.
53. Pohl, 173–74.

Experiencing hospitality from others. Children learn from the hospitality of their parents, especially a hospitality where they themselves are included. Travelers learn hospitality in their travels. Habits of hospitality can be formed from the experiences of a lifetime, and those habits are fundamental to our Christian identity as we live out our gospel calling.[54]

As we experience the hospitality of others, we are led to a compassionate understanding of the components of hospitality that we can pass on to others: a warm welcome, good food and drink, focused listening, offering one's full attention, setting aside enough time, respecting the situation of the guest, sharing insights, offering orientation or direction, and gracious farewells.[55] For the Christian, that compassionate understanding and motivation is the Spirit's work.

Rest and renewal. Periods of rest, solitude, and other spiritual nourishment, including prayer, are essential to renew one's spirit for hospitality.[56] In Mark 1:35, one of several episodes of the Markan Jesus finding a deserted place for prayer and renewal, Jesus himself is the model for this important spiritual self-care. Nouwen eloquently connects prayer and solitude to the task of helping strangers feel at home.[57]

Embracing small steps of progress. The opportunities for hospitality can be overwhelming in size and scope. Rather than being put off or paralyzed by the vastness of the task, it is crucial to underscore the importance of small, achievable steps in reaching out to others.[58] Pohl mentions the ministry of Mother Teresa and the Sisters of Charity to exemplify the importance of small acts of hospitality in the face of enormous need. As Christians encourage one another to such realistic, achievable tasks, they are manifesting the Spirit for the common good (1 Corinthians 12:7).

A model for Christian hospitality

Any model for Christian hospitality to other religions on campus must acknowledge the pressures of religious pluralism, the need for students to explore faith in a safe place, the biblical call for Christians to be hospitable, the acceptability of each person's location in a faith heritage as a starting point for conversation, the mandate in the New Testament for Christians to embody the caring love of God in Christ in the process, and a renewed understanding of a genuine hospitality that is a public openness of oneself to others, especially in the multicultural situation of campus life. Christians know that in those from other religious or cultural traditions we are seeing the image of the Divine, who promises to bless the encounter with growth to both host and guest and who continually renews and empowers the process.

Principles of moral conversation. Nash is passionate about the need for unbounded, honest, intentional religious dialogue on campus, so that religion and religious life in the university may not be fragmented and Balkanized but rather revitalized to the benefit of the campus community. In attempting to initiate a process that avoids adversarial discourse about religion and spirituality, Nash offers six principles of moral conversation on campus:[59]

1. Declarations of beliefs are not necessarily conversations about beliefs. Em-

54. Pohl, *Making Room*, 175–77.

55. Pohl, 177–82.

56. Pohl, 182–83. On prayer and solitude see also Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known*, 10–14, 117–25.

57. Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 113–60.

58. Pohl, 184–87.

59. Nash, *Religious Pluralism*, 176–85.

pathy, genuine dialogical encounter with difference, and mutual understanding are key criteria for success.

2. All views in moral conversation deserve at least initial respect. Humility, faith, self-denial, and charity are necessary for respecting, rather than changing, the views of others.

3. The golden rule of moral conversation is a willingness to find the truth in what we oppose and the error in what we espouse before we presume to acknowledge the truth in what we espouse and the error in what we oppose.

4. Either-or, all-or-nothing thinking is always a threat to moral conversation.

5. In matters of religion, we do not live in reality itself. We live in stories about reality.

6. Moral conversation is not without internal contradictions, however, as its basic premises tend to lean leftward toward a liberal-postmodern view of the world.

These six principles of moral conversation complement the ten characteristic functions of public life articulated by Palmer and listed earlier. Nash believes that college students are developmentally ready for this kind of moral conversation[60] and that religion is too basic a part of humanity to exclude it from ongoing dialogue about meaning[61] in the university. For Nash, a liberal education ought to be about such "fearless, open-ended, intellectually stimulating, cross-campus dialogue about religio-spirituality."[62]

Implicit for Christians but unintended in Nash's formulation is the concept of grace, God's magnanimous, all-embracing love and care for humanity, which Christians could model in adopting Nash's principles. Grace for the Christian is a gift from God, modeled by God in Christ, and passed on in Spirit-led behavior (not always consciously) to others. The challenge for Christians in such moral conversation on campus is to be more conscious of the responsibility we have to be bearers of God's grace at every opportunity, embodying the truth of which we speak. That grace-filled, evangelical conversation is part of the servant role of the Christian community in following the example of Jesus.[63]

Grace-filled, evangelical conversation is part of the servant role of the Christian community in following the example of Jesus.

Constructing a model. Conversation with faculty and staff is an important part of a comprehensive approach to hospitable dialogue on campus and should be offered with care and intentionality. However, especially because of the developmental need for students to be engaged in this process, focusing on the needs of young adult students is an ample beginning task.

In her discussion of the features of a mentoring environment for young adults,

60. Nash, *Religious Pluralism*, 189.

61. Nash, 4. Parks emphasizes, in *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams*, 15–20, that faith in the broadest sense is a matter of making meaning.

62. Nash, 54.

63. Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 225; Keifert, *Welcoming the Stranger*, 90–91.

Parks offers some helpful "environmental" components that Christians can adapt for constructing a faithful hospitality to those of other religions as well as those of similar faith traditions on campus:[64]

1. A Network of Belonging: a trustworthy network that facilitates faithful imagination;

2. Big Enough Questions: extending hospitality to questions that stretch students;

3. Encounters with Otherness: constructive, transforming encounters with those outside one's own "tribe";

4. Dialogue: two-way discourse that is essential to relationship;

5. Critical Thought: developing the capacity to step outside one's own thought

6. Connective Thought: recognizing the interdependence of life;

7. A Contemplative Mind: moments of pause for reimagining and reconnecting and repatterning thought;

8. Worthy Dreams: envisioning and reaching for the ideal and congruent vocations;

9. Realistic Images: about suffering, mystery, self, people different from us, renewing the world, and worthy institutions.

For Parks, these features of a mentoring environment must be grounded in "communities of practice" where young adults can pause, reflect, and converse in unpressured hearthside conversation, whether a hearth, or physically and spiritually nourishing table hospitality, or the "commons" of public spaces where diverse people can connect.[65] In these environments, one's particular heritage can be shared,[66] strangers can be sensitive and obedient to their own stories,[67] and those stories can "redirect our seeing and stimulate our imaginations."[68]

Crucial ingredients for this model of hospitality to those of other faith traditions include a safe space, ample time, a relaxed environment, shared food, willingness to share one's own faith story, and respect for the faith story of others. In other words, hospitality requires spaces that model the grace and acceptance of God.[69]

As Christians encounter "otherness," it is not for the purpose of changing the other but for understanding the other and helping one another to honor—even by examining and discussing—the other's experience of faith. The result is often a greater appreciation for the faith journey of others, a respect for and understanding of their faith stories, and a freshly reexamined appreciation for the gift of our own heritage. The change that does happen in oneself or in the other through such dialogue and faith sharing is the result of God's Spirit being at work in the process of a welcoming hospitality, not from pressure or coercion.

To be hospitable and welcoming in the name and manner of Christ is to love the world God created and to appreciate more fully the ones who bear the divine image.

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64. Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams*, 135–57. Perhaps it is those of similar Christian traditions, including parachurch groups, with whom we need especially to be in respectful conversation about faith journeys and misunderstandings.

65. Parks, 154–57.

66. Palmer, *Company of Strangers*, 89.

67. Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 96.

68. Ogletree, *Hospitality to the Stranger*, 2–3.

69. Pohl, *Making Room*, 152–53; Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality*, 124–27.

Christianity and Reparations: Revisiting James Forman's "Black Manifesto," 1969

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On sweltering summer days and crisp autumn mornings I have looked at her beautiful churches with her spires pointing heavenward. I have beheld the impressive outlay of her massive education buildings. Over and over again I have found myself asking: "Who worships here?"

—Martin Luther King Jr.
"Letter From Birmingham City Jail" (1963)[1]

Dr. Nave,
. . . No one living in the United States today has ever owned a slave. I understand that there are still people and certain places in this country where racism and hatred toward minorities is prevalent, but my family, my friends and I personally have never felt superior to people of color because we are white.

—a Luther College student
October 31, 2002[2]

James Forman delivered the Black Manifesto[3] at the meeting of the Black Economic Development Conference at Wayne State University April 25–27, 1969, sponsored by the Interreligious Foundation of Community Organization (IFCO). A clearinghouse founded by major Protestant denominations, it gave money to community organizations. The Manifesto demanded that half a billion dollars be given in reparations from American Christian churches and Jewish synagogues. Forman vowed that the funds would be collected "by any means necessary," including "if necessary, church seizures, disruptions, demonstrations, and force."[4]

When IFCO began in September 1967, it was a cooperative effort, funding local organizations for the powerless. In keeping with the perspective of the directors, it was a racially integrated organization. By June 1969 it had grown to 25 members, with membership dues at $1,000 each.[5]

The National Black Economic Development Conference likewise was intended to bring together black leaders in a discussion of strategies and solutions for black-

1. Quoted in Jerry K. Frye, "The Black Manifesto and the Tactics of Objectification," *Journal of Black Studies* (September 1974), 65.

2. The statement is from an e-mail sent to Guy Nave, a black Luther College religion professor, by a white student.

3. See *http://www.nca.org/images/aboutas/archives/blackmanifesto.pdf.*

4. Frye, "The Black Manifesto," 66; Charles D. Lowery and John F. Marszalik, *Encyclopedia of African American Civil Rights* (New York: Greenwood, 1992), 51.

5. *Black Manifesto: Religion, Racism and Reparations*, ed. Robert S. Lecky and H. Elliott Wright (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1969), 12.

directed community development. Speakers were solicited and invited. The War on Poverty was not working, and the Vietnam War was gaining impetus. At best, the Nixon administration's attitude toward social programs was ambiguous.[6]

The monies collected from the Manifesto were to be used to create a southern land bank in order to fund a farming cooperative, four publishing houses, four black television networks, a research center for training in communications, a grant to the National Welfare Rights Organization, an International Black Appeal, a black Anti-Defamation League, and a black university.[7]

Forman was a former director of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), a prominent civil rights organization in the 1960s. His call for reparations was by no means new. Nor was it the first time that the church had been called upon to address the subject. In 1816, led by a white Presbyterian minister named Robert Finley, the American Colonization Society started the emigration of free blacks to Liberia. The organization's first president was Bushrod Washington, George Washington's nephew; membership included Francis Scott Key, James Monroe, and Henry Clay. Although not exactly reparations as we know them today, it was an effort to establish an all-black free land. However, the society's motives were considered to be quite sinister. They only wanted to send free blacks to West Africa, leaving slaves and slavery in place.[8] Edward W. Blyden, a father of modern black nationalism, arrived in Liberia in 1850 on an American Colonization Society vessel.[9]

There were other similar earlier church-related endeavors. African Methodist Episcopal Bishop Henry McNeil Turner favored the efforts of the American Colonization Society and the paying of reparations. In the 1890s, because of the increase in violence against blacks, Turner came to see emigration as the only solution. He called for reparations to former slaves, the building of a steamship company, and middle-class black support.[10]

In the 1950s the Nation of Islam called for the establishment of a separate black nation. In 1962, Elijah Muhammad, the Nation of Islam's leader, stated that "former slave masters were obligated to provide lands for former slaves. The United States would maintain and support this black state for approximately 25 years. This hopefully would lead to some level of economic and political autonomy."[11]

The Sunday after the meeting of the National Black Economic Development Conference, Forman interrupted worship at Riverside Church in New York City, one of the most prominent white Protestant churches in the nation, and delivered the Black Manifesto. Subsequently, the Manifesto was delivered in white churches across the country. Righteous indignation was expressed on the part of whites and some blacks. Simultaneously, angry debates appeared in newspapers across the country. However, a few people agreed with the Manifesto, including Ernest Campbell, pastor of Riverside Church.[12]

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6. Ibid., 7.

7. Frye, "The Black Manifesto," 66; Lowery and Marszalik, *Encyclopedia*, 51.

8. Frye, "The Black Manifesto," 65; Edwin S. Redkey, *Black Exodus* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), 48–49.

9. Redkey, *Black Exodus*, 48–49; Robert G. Weisbord, *Ebony Kinship* (London: Greenwood, 1973), 12–27.

10. Jack Salzman, David Lionel Smith, and Cornel West, *Encyclopedia of African-American Culture and History*, vol. 4 (New York: Macmillan Library Reference, 1996), 2315–16.

11. Ibid.

12. Frye, "The Black Manifesto," 65.

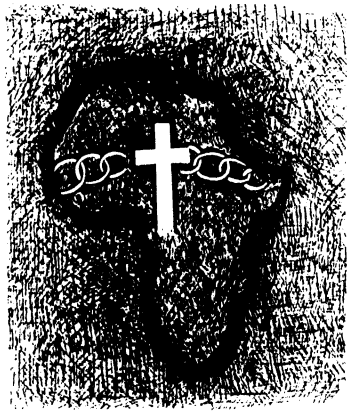
In the week following the disruption of the Riverside Church service, the Manifesto caused "shock" and "outrage," deep concerns, and confusion. Although Riverside got an injunction issued against disrupting worship services, in the aftermath there were copycat disruptions elsewhere. Across the country, church headquarters were taken over. Forman increased his demands to $3 billion. Consultations were also held with the National Council of Churches.[13]

According to Robert S. Lecky and Elliot Wright, the disruption of church services had occurred earlier in the 1960s and even before that decade. There were "walk-outs, walk-ins and scuffles. However, the new ingredient was the militant rhetoric, threatening and revolutionary." Huge claims were made on "the most liberal, though poorest segment of society, religion." Likewise, white religious leaders were shocked and appalled at being told that their goodwill was not enough. "Also new was linking economic reparations to religion in the fight against racism and poverty."[14]

Historically, many churches and synagogues had been in the vanguard of the nonviolent civil rights movement, especially with the outlawing of public school segregation in the mid-1950s. Yet new laws were not good enough to erase centuries of racism. For example, there were the riots in Los Angeles in 1965 and riots in Newark and Detroit in 1967. The Kerner Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders in March 1968 blamed the major urban riots on white racism and stated that the United States was "moving toward two unequal separate societies, one white and one black."[15]

By fall 1968, religious organizations had already pledged $50 million to social programs. According to Charles Spivey Jr., director of Social Justice for the National Council of Churches, "the manifesto told churches to 'put up or shut up.'"[16]

Undoubtedly, Forman was best known as an executive director of the SNCC, but



with the change of leadership under Stokely Carmichael and H. Rap Brown, he became director of international affairs. He also had been an officer in the Black Panther Party.[17] According to C. Eric Lincoln, in spite of being "eclipsed" by Carmichael and Brown, Forman was still "an able civil rights strategist." After spending four years in the Armed Forces, he left Boston University to be an active participant in the civil rights movement. He was an organizer in Brownsville, Tennessee, for black landowners who had been forced from their land for attempting to vote. As a SNCC organizer, he replaced Bob Moses in the famous Mississippi Project in 1964. Holding to a "radical Marxist" position, Forman

13. *Black Manifesto: Religion, Racism and Reparations*, 3.
14. Ibid., 4.
15. Ibid., 6.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid., 66.

also maintained credibility with the Black Church and "respect for black ministers." He was a participant in the Selma campaign of 1965 and was well known by "the white power structure, its lawmen, and jails."[18]

The preamble to the Manifesto was written by Forman himself. Using a Marxist tone, he denounced capitalism and imperialism and proclaimed that the primary purpose of the Manifesto was "to build a socialist society in the United States." This would be a society under the direction of blacks but with worldwide humankind in mind. Forman felt that blacks adhering to capitalism were "black power pimps and fraudulent leaders . . . contributing to the continuous exploitation of black people around the world." He referred to the United States as "the most barbaric country in the world" and spoke of revolution, "which will be armed confrontation and long years of guerilla warfare in this country." For Forman, the only protection against white racism was to seize power.[19]

Just what was James Forman's position in relation to religion and American Christianity? In his autobiography, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*, he stated that "religion and so-called Christianity [messed up] my young life in terrible ways." At the early age of twelve, preachers in rural Mississippi convinced him that he needed to go to the mourners' bench in order to cleanse his soul. His punishment was related to sins against "a blond-haired, blue-eyed Jesus, and his father, a white God on a throne of judgment, giving white people the right to persecute and enslave black people."[20] At school in Chicago, Forman said, white nuns taught that heaven has assigned places for rich and poor, based upon how one acted on earth. By his mid-twenties, Forman had seen the religious "con game." Therefore, he became an atheist.[21]

Forman had been invited to speak at the meeting of the National Black Economic Development Conference by Dorothy Dewberry, a member of SNCC who was working with the conference planning committee. Organizers concluded that such conferences spent large amounts of money and accomplished little in return. With this idea in mind, and as an organization adhering to a Marxist motif, they pushed to develop a more relevant conference. Since the conference was composed of Christians, it was only logical to demand reparations from Christians and Jews from wrongs dating to slavery. At fault also was the system of capitalism and imperialism. Forman did not just take over the meeting without the knowledge of conferees, as was later claimed.[22]

Two weeks after the conference, the Federal Bureau of Investigation interviewed the participants. The Justice Department assembled two special grand juries to investigate the National Black Economic Development Conference. Some conferees cooperated, others did not. According to Forman, the government believed the Black Manifesto to be dangerous. This perception increased, after Forman interrupted the service at Riverside Church on May 4, 1969.[23]

According to Lincoln, the Black Manifesto is not one of the outstanding docu-

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18. C. Eric Lincoln, *Race, Religion, and the Continuing American Dilemma* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1984), 112.

19. Ibid., 113–14.

20. James Foreman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries* (Seattle: Open Hand Publishing, 1985), 546.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid., 544–45; *To Make Our World Anew*, ed. Robin D. G. Kelley and Earl Lewis (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 536.

23. Ibid., 545.

ments of history. Yet sociologist Charles V. Willie had maintained, "The prophetic comes to us sometimes in preposterous wrappings. It presented us with the uncomfortable task of sorting out the meaningful from the foolish."[24]

In a similar manner, Lincoln had said that the Manifesto forced Christians to look into the mirror and see the "blemishes" in American Christianity. And what was then seen "was not complementary to the faith." With the Manifesto in mind, Father Junius Carter, a black priest of Holy Cross Episcopal Church, said,

> Too long, bishops, you have sat on the sidelines and have not acted as our pastors! I urge you to . . . exercise the authority, which has been given to you by our Lord. . . . You've talked about black brotherhood, but forget it, Joe. . . . You don't mean it. . . . It's nothing but a . . . lie. You don't trust me, you don't trust black priests, and you don't trust black people. You say be patient. I'm sick of you. . . . To hell with love.[25]

With black power in mind, the National Conference of Black Christians (earlier the National Committee of Black Churchmen) was organized in 1966, replacing the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) as the leading black ecumenical organization of the period. Martin Luther King Jr. and SCLC were unable to accept black power as a viable alternative, but the NCBC did accept it. Mary R. Sawyer has referred to the NCBC as having the ability to "interpret black power to an outraged white religious establishment, and to more closely align the institutional Black Church with the sentiments of its more progressively inclined leaders." The circumstances required the development of a new language, "black theology."[26]

In the meantime, James H. Cone, a black Union Theological Seminary professor, wrote a black theology, which saw the black power movement as a part of the providence of God. Interestingly, the majority of the members of the NCBC were clergy in predominantly white denominations, in which they felt marginalized.[27]

According to Lecky and Wright, as early as 1966, the NCBC accused white religious leaders of paternalism in their relations with blacks and in their dealing with the situation of poverty. By 1968, the National Conference had loudly denounced paternalism and embraced black power as positive.[28]

The situation led to a call for black clergy in white denominations to "come home." The call was made by blacks in historic black denominations. Instead black clergy in white denominations refused to do so, believing black denominations to be too conservative. As an alternative these clergy chose to form black caucuses in white denominations.[29]

Forman presented the Black Manifesto at Wayne State University in April 1969. Three days later the executive board of the NCBC endorsed the Manifesto. Furthermore, there was speculation that the NCBC's Urban Mission statement had provided the impetus for Forman to deliver the Manifesto in the first place.[30]

However, according to Sawyer, because of Forman's "alienating" approach, no denomination would agree to fund the Black Economic Development Corporation (BEDC) directly. Instead the National

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24. Lincoln, *Race, Religion, and the Continuing American Dilemma,* 116.
25. Ibid.
26. Mary R. Sawyer, *Black Ecumenism* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1994), 67.
27. Ibid.
28. *Black Manifesto,* 6–7.
29. Sawyer, *Black Ecumenism,* 82–83.
30. Ibid., 84–85.

What are the implications of the Black Manifesto for contemporary American Christianity, if any?

Conference of Black Christians became the channel to BEDC and looked forward to serving black caucuses as the conduit for funds from white denominations. Interestingly, Calvin Marshall, a member of the NCBC board of directors, also was elected chair of BEDC. With BEDC now under control of the NCBC, funds to the caucuses increased. Yet funds addressing the issues pertaining to the Black Manifesto decreased.[31]

By the summer of 1970, BEDC had received only $300,000 in reparations. A substantial amount was given to Black Star Publications in Detroit. According to Forman, it was virtually impossible to get black ideas into print, because publishing houses were an extension of "capitalism and exploitation." Instead these new black publishing houses would be open to radical ideas.[32] Then, IFCO withdrew support from the Black Manifesto. It had offered an operating budget of $290,000 for a staff of 50 people for one year. Lucius Walker came under pressure from the IFCO board of directors and resigned as director. According to Forman, earlier IFCO had gotten greedy, seeing the money received as a way to increase their own personal power.[33]

SNCC also rejected the Manifesto. Shortly afterward SNCC was dissolved as an organization. One faction revived the organization, calling itself the Student Coordinating Committee. But Forman was removed as director of international affairs.[34]

Lincoln has powerfully analyzed the importance of the Black Manifesto by concluding, "It showed the world what more than 30 million African-Americans endured at the hands of whites, and . . . dangers related therein." Then he said, "the voice of prophecy is seldom welcome at the dinner table, and for black America it often seems that white America never has time to listen."[35]

What are the implications of the Black Manifesto for contemporary American Christianity, if any? In the June 20, 1995, meeting of the predominantly white Southern Baptist Convention in Atlanta, a "resolution renouncing its racist roots and apologizing for its defense of slavery" was adopted. The convention acknowledged its part in "the historical acts of evil such as slavery" and that it had continuously "reaped a bitter harvest" from it. Approximately 500,000 African Americans now belong to the Southern Baptist Convention, which has a membership of 15.6 million members. On behalf of its African American members, Gary Frost, the first African American vice-president of the SBC, accepted the apology.[36]

The following September, the president of the National Baptist Convention of America, E. Edward Jones, denounced the

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31. Ibid., 85–86.
32. Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries,* 545.
33. Ibid., 549.
34. Ibid.
35. Lincoln, *Race, Religion, and the Continuing American Dilemma,* 116.
36. "SBC Renounces Racist Past," *Christian Century* (July 5–12, 1995), 671.

Southern Baptist Convention's apology for racism. His convention is the second largest African American Baptist denomination. Jones contended that "more action was needed." An apology needed to be more than merely words. "For the civil rights struggle is still going on and we need more than an apology," Jones declared. Moreover, Southern Baptist "voices were silent during the racial atrocities of the past." Then Jones questioned whether an apology would have been forthcoming if the SBC had not targeted the fast-growing black middle class as potential members.[37]

Stephen Long, a religion professor at Duke Divinity School, contends that the problem today is "cheap forgiveness," which "is a sign that we have not taken sin seriously." Instead Long has called for the renewal of the ancient practice of penance: "Without penance forgiveness is cheap." For example, he proposes that the United Methodist Church give to its black sister denominations, the African Methodist Episcopal Church and the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, their most expensive piece of property in Washington, D.C. It should be given with the acknowledgment that the white Methodist denomination had gathered its wealth at the expense of black people.[38] But to my knowledge his suggestion has not been accepted.

There is yet another dimension worthy of exploration. In 1994, Renee Kemp, an African American reporter for a television station in San Francisco, told of her trip to Ghana for the purpose of bringing the "diaspora back to Africa." Attracting 2,000 people, the trip consisted of African Americans and Caribbeans. Late one night they went to see the slave dungeons at Cape Coast, an oceanside city.[39]

These slave dungeons were "cold, damp tombs where millions of slaves were crammed," Kemp said. "This was the place where our forefathers and mothers made the last sight of home. At one point, a middle-aged woman collapsed filled with emotions, and we all cried!"

According to Kemp, the night before, there was a ceremony of cleansing. Tribal leaders from all across Ghana had gathered to apologize—in turn, they "washed stools and skins," the Ghanaian ceremony of apology. They asked to be forgiven on the part of their ancestors, in particular, those who had "accepted guns in . . . exchange for men, women. . . ." They acknowledged that slavery had existed for thousands of years in Africa. However, with proof of the barbaric nature of American slavery, the chiefs wanted to be forgiven."[40]

It was the first time that this ceremony of atonement had ever been made as an apology for the Ghanaians' part in the slave trade. The slave trade would not have worked without their participation in it. Kemp made the point that after watching "the ritual of apology" the message was "there can be no more excuses. Africa's children can no longer afford to do harm to one another."[41] This was one of black Africa's first explicit acknowledgments of its complicity in the African slave trade.

Historians John Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss Jr. have stated that Africa suffered greatly from the slave trade as well. Some of the best people on the African continent were sent into the slave trade, making the situation all the more

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37. "Black Baptists Reject Apology by SBC," *Christian Century* (September 27–October 4, 1995), 879–80.

38. "Recovering the Practice of Penance," *Christian Century* (April 7, 1993), 36.

39. Renee Kemp, *Essence* (October, 1995), 60.

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid.

ready for colonialism and imperialism later in the nineteenth century.[42]

The first Pan-African Conference on Reparations was called by the Organization of African Unity, and the Republic of Nigeria, April 27-29, 1993, in Abuja, Nigeria. The conference produced the Abuja Proclamation, a declaration calling for the paying of reparations to Africa and its diaspora "for damages done because of enslavement, colonization, and neo-colonialism." According to the Proclamation,

> Damage sustained by African peoples is not a "thing of the past" but is painfully manifest in damaged lives of contemporary Africans from Harlem to Harare, in the damaged economies of the black world from Guinea to Guyana, from Somalia to Surinam.[43]

Likewise the conferees called for the international community to recognize that there was a moral debt owed that has not been paid. African peoples have been the "most humiliated and exploited peoples of the last four centuries of modern history."[44]

On a personal note, while I was a student at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, in 1969, James Forman delivered the Black Manifesto. The next few days were filled with expressions of righteous indignation on the part of students and faculty. They were appalled by the demand itself and the method by which it was delivered. I was one of the few African American students at the time, and I do not remember my exact response. Martin Luther King Jr. was my hero, and not those to his left, like Forman. However, when I finished seminary in 1971, I was, at least, a card-carrying member of the NCBC. Earlier, in 1960–1961, the year I finished Louisville Male High School, I had participated in the sit-in demonstrations as a member of the NAACP Youth Council, along with other black youth and a few whites. Martin Luther King Jr. had spoken not only to our movement but also at Southern Baptist Seminary, April 19, 1963.

Although the Black Manifesto failed, its failure was related to more than the Marxist rhetoric used by Forman. It also was related to the American mindset of the period. Forman only demanded "a few crumbs" of "$15 a nigger."

There is another way to interpret the general response to the Manifesto. King once said, "Anything that gets white folks so upset must have some good in it."[45]

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42. John Hope Franklin and Alfred Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 8th ed. (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2000), 49.

43. "The Abuja Proclamation," *http://www.arm.arc.co.uk/abujaProclamation.html.*

44. Ibid.

45. Quoted in Frye, "The Black Manifesto," 74.

Bitterness and Friendship: A Feminist Exegesis of the Book of Ruth

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The Book of Ruth has been an object of contention for many feminist scholars of the Bible. While recognizing the great strides the book makes on behalf of women, scholars also recognize how far the work on a whole has fallen short of some feminist ideals.

Ruth is one of only two books in the Hebrew canon that bears the name of a woman.[1] It is the only book in which the main characters are women, strong women who take some control of their own destiny and situation. The text is filled with instances in which the female protagonists seek out solutions to their tribulations, which, in the end, they succeed in overcoming.

The text does, however, continue to operate within the patriarchal structure of ancient Israelite culture. In this context, these women have limited social standing and power. They persevere through acts of manipulation not only of the societal norms and the men in power but also of each other. This manipulation may include the physical subjugation of Ruth on the threshing-room floor in chapter 3.

There are two predominant ways in which feminist critics approach the Book of Ruth: that of recovery and that of resistance. The reading of recovery raises up the characters of Ruth and Naomi as models of women that can be emulated today. According to this view Ruth and Naomi exemplify friendship, loyalty, and Abrahamic fidelity. In the imagined dialogue that follows between two undergraduate students of the Old Testament, Shannon exemplifies this approach. The reading of resistance sees the text as so steeped in patriarchy that little if anything can be gleaned from it other than to study it as yet another example of the religious tradition's suppression of women. Ruth provides insights into how the biblical tradition is one of the roots of the continued oppression of women today. This is the view of Kara.

Dialogue

Kara: Hi, Shannon! Almost time for Old Testament class. Did you finish the reading?

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[1] The other book bearing the name of its heroine is Esther. The Septuagint Old Testament also includes Judith and Susanna, when the latter is separated from the book of Daniel.

Shannon: Yes, I did. Wasn't it great? Finally we have a story about strong women who take control of their own lives and situations.

K: You're kidding, right?

S: What do you mean, kidding?

K: This story was a step forward, I'll give you that, but it is still steeped in patriarchal language and views of women's roles. It embodies precisely what we need to move beyond. It had such promise. Ruth and Naomi could have been leaving that all behind, but then they have to go and look for a male relative to "redeem" them. I mean, what do they need redemption from?

S: Wait. If we are going to look at this text critically, can we at least start at the beginning?

K: That's fine with me. Look, from the start we are bogged down by the language of this writing. It says, "A man of Bethlehem in Judah and his wife and two sons" (1:1). Right away Naomi is defined by the men in her life. She is the man's wife and is not even listed as any relation to the sons. It's as if they were not even her children. And the situation gets only slightly better as we move on when she is actually named as Naomi, but still in terms of Elimelech as her husband (1:2). [Rosen 1994]

S: Think of how powerful that is. How many women were named in the Hebrew Scriptures?

K: Far too few.

S: I agree. That is why this text is so important. A name is power. The fact that Naomi has a name at all speaks of her strength and importance.

K: Yes, her importance in relation to another man, King David. Were it not for him we would not even have this story. [Hamlin 1996]

S: Come on, Kara, we're getting ahead of ourselves again.

K: All right, back to the first chapter.

S: Right. If you would have kept on reading you would have quickly seen that the tides soon change. In verse 3 Elimelech is called Naomi's husband, and now Naomi is left with "her two sons." It is also here that we first hear of Orpah and Ruth. It would seem that it is Naomi who arranged their marriages, as Elimelech was dead. She took control of her situation. Her sons needed wives and she found them. [Sohn 1994]

K: And then in verse 5 all that we thought we had gained is gone. Naomi is left without her husband, without her sons, and without her name. That tells me that the author saw Naomi's identity as being wrapped up not in who she was as a person but in who she was to the men around her. [Brenner 1999]

S: Yes, but let's look at the times. Most women were defined culturally by the men in their lives. Don't you see how even though the author tries to define them in these terms they still break out of traditional roles?

K: Shannon, as you would say, you're jumping ahead of yourself.

S: Right, sorry. So Naomi leaves Moab with her daughters-in-law . . .

K: Where did their names go?

S: . . . to return from the land of Moab (1:6).

K: And where are they going? In the whole of this verse we don't really hear where they are going until verse 7. Only at the end of that verse is Judah referred to as the place. [Sohn 1994]

S: I did some outside reading and discovered that the rabbis had something to say about that. They said that at the beginning of a journey it is easier to acknowledge what you are leaving than where you are going. Once on the trip you are focused on where you are heading, not where you have been. [Sohn 1994]

K: That makes sense.

S: So now we are at the part where Naomi asks Orpah and Ruth to return to Moab to their Mother's houses (1:8). They are told to go not to their father's house but to their mother's, for only a mother can understand the losing of a husband. [Sohn 1994]

K: Exactly, because not only did they lose their husbands, they lost everything else as well—home, land, name. These women literally had no standing in society. They had to rely on the charity of others. Naomi goes on to say in verse 12, "Have I any more sons in my body, who might be husbands for you?" The societal view of women's roles has been so ingrained into Naomi's way of thinking that she can hardly escape it. [Rosen 1994]

S: But remember that it would have been a brother's responsibility to marry the widow of his brother.[2] That's what she's talking about here.

K: Yes, but it goes so much deeper then that. Naomi sees herself as worthless and now good for nothing. She can't see how her daughters-in-law will be able to survive, because she can do nothing for them. Look at what the patriarchal system does to people. It debases them completely until they cannot see themselves as independently worth something.

S: So Orpah leaves (1:14–15). She knows that at home there is safety. Eventually she will be able to remarry and establish a new life for herself.

K: Do you really believe that someone would marry her? In that culture's eyes she's now an old woman at the age of twenty-three.

S: Tradition says that the Philistine Goliath is Orpah's great grandson. So it must not have been quite as out of the ordinary as we think. Now we get to one of my favorite parts of the book, when Ruth makes her oath of fidelity to Naomi (1:16–17). It is such a beautiful example of female bonds of friendship. No matter what these two women have been through they will stay together because of this unique bond. [Sohn 1994]

K: You could look at it that way, but I have another suggestion. Ruth is out of her mind. Read the text. Naomi says, "The hand of the Lord has struck out against me" (1:13). Now, is this someone you would want to be hanging around with? First her homeland is struck with famine. Then her husband dies. Finally, both of her sons die.

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[2] For variations on this custom, now called levirate marriage, see the story of Tamar and Judah in Genesis 38 and the Torah legislation in Deuteronomy 25:5–10.

I don't think I would stay too close. Orpah had the right idea: She ran! What makes me even more upset, however, at least if this is our reading, is Ruth's statement that Naomi's God will be her God. Naomi has just said how harshly God has dealt with her, and now Ruth is embracing the God of Israel as if nothing has happened?! [Rosen 1994]

S: It also tells us a great deal about what has been going on in Moab. Ruth, although living in an Israelite home, evidently has not adopted Israelite ways. For the ten years she was married to Mahlon she did not worship his God. Now, with Naomi, she accepts this God even if that means accepting a God who deals harshly. I read this as saying, I'm with you, good and bad, harsh God and all. We're in this together. [Sohn 1994]

K: I still don't think the text says much about Ruth. The author is painting her not as a strong woman but as a whiny child whom Naomi is going to have to put up with for at least the rest of the journey, if not for the rest of her life.

S: Well, I admit that when they get to Bethlehem it sure seems like Naomi doesn't want Ruth around. She doesn't even acknowledge her presence. To be honest, this part also made me angry. Here Ruth has come all this way with her, but Naomi will not even introduce her to her family members and fellow townspeople.

K: That's not the worst of it. The author, showing his stereotype of all women as oblivious to the world around them, doesn't even recognize the pain of those in Bethlehem. There is Naomi, weeping about how harshly she has been treated, while she has just entered a town that has been in famine for over ten years. Surely, some of these people have lost family members too. [Rosen 1994; Sohn 1994]

S: So now we move into chapter 2. Ruth asks Naomi if she may go into the fields and glean from the ears of grain (2:2).

K: And just as luck would have it, she happens to pick a field that belongs to one of Elimelech's relatives, Boaz (2:1, 3).

S: Don't be so cynical. Besides, Ruth is able to get some food so that she and Naomi can live. She isn't bemoaning her state, she is doing something about it. I think it says a lot about her as a person. She's a take-charge woman.

K: . . . who first has to ask Naomi if what she's doing is all right!

S: Kara, remember, she is a foreigner in a strange land. Both the storyteller and the characters in the story emphasize that by repeatedly referring to her as "Ruth the Moabite" (2:2, 6, 21; 4:5, 10). She may not know the customs.

K: All right! Now enter Boaz, the kindly employer who, as you mentioned, warmly greets his workers and to whom the workers yell back "The Lord bless you." It all reminds me of movies like "Gone with the Wind," the happy slaves working in the field while the master sips his tea.

S: This is when he first meets Ruth.

K: From the beginning Boaz sees himself in a position of power over her. He inquires as "to whom she might belong" (2:5), as if she might be some other man's possession. Then he calls her "daughter" (2:8), and she throws herself at his feet like one of his

slaves (2:10). I'm guessing this is what the author wanted her to do, just prostrate herself and eat dirt. And do you remember what he says to her? "I have told my men not to molest you" (2:9)! What are these men doing to all the other women in the fields? The women who gleaned were women who had no social standing, because they didn't have a man to speak for them. They were widows and orphans. The workers could have done whatever they wanted with these women, and those who survived the victimization would have had no recourse. In my mind this is a very disturbing part of the story that we often overlook. The all-benevolent Boaz even knows it is happening and obviously does nothing to stop it in the case of the other women. [Rosen 1994]

S: You are forgetting the kindness Boaz shows to Ruth, even though he had not seen her before. We all need to be affirmed as he affirms her when he retells her story of fidelity (2:11). He doesn't even know who she is.

K: Exactly, and that's part of the problem. If he had known it was a relative it would be one thing, but he is just smitten with Ruth. He doesn't care that much about the poor, as is evident from the way he allows his workers to treat them. He is only allowing the gleaning because it is mandated by Torah.[3]

S: Ah! But he does know that Ruth is a relative from the moment he first inquired about her (2:5–6). And you are simply speculating about the state of Boaz's mind and his (now) intervention in the case of the women workers. At any rate, Ruth goes home, and Naomi asks from whose field she gleaned. When she replies that it was from the field of Boaz Naomi sees an opportunity to regain control of her life and that of Ruth who is in her care. She seems to be brought back to life at the name of the kinsman who can redeem both her and her daughter-in-law. Naomi tells her to stay in Boaz's field and not to go into another one (2:19–22).



K: So, precisely here Naomi has bought into the patriarchal structure. She believes that there is no other choice but to operate within the structure that views women as property to be dominated. She even takes on a patriarchal role. She tells Ruth what she is to do. Ruth has no say in the matter. She yields to her mother-in-law's supposed authority (2:23).

S: Naomi now gets a little impatient. She recognizes the good Boaz has done in giving Ruth and herself food, but she believes it's time for action. This is when she sends Ruth down to the threshing-room floor (3:1–6). Once again the women take control of the situation. Yes, they operate within an unjust system, but they use that system to get them what they need to survive.

[3] See Lev 19:9, 23:22; Deut 24:19.

K: So Ruth has to act in the capacity that demeans her completely, that of a prostitute. Why else put on her best clothes and perfumed oil (3:3) in advance of cuddling up to him in the dark? (3:7) Boaz doesn't know her from any other woman in the fields. To him she is just a body (3:8–9a).

S: You're forgetting that they do not sleep together until after he knows who she is.

K: That's debatable. It says that she already has "uncovered his feet" (3:4, 7). Many scholars agree that the feet are a euphemism for the penis. "Your latest deed of loyalty is greater then the first" (3:10). I'll say! Who knows what Ruth has been doing while Boaz was sleeping? The author has done what authors have always done to "strange, foreign" women: made her into an object for sexual gratification. [Sohn 1994]

S: I think you're missing the point of the story. Naomi and Ruth have contrived a means of redeeming their social status as well as their land. Boaz says that there is a closer relative who may redeem her . . .

K: Again she is a piece of property to be obtained by the closest relative.

S: . . . and that if this unnamed relative doesn't redeem her, he will (3:12–13).

K: And then he tells her to spend the night (3:13b). We all know this story. There have always been some men out there who would say anything to get a woman into bed. I would have wanted to see results and a *ketubah*[4] before you would have caught me on that floor. Not to mention the fact that she is still painted as a prostitute.

S: I think it's more than just sex. There's obviously a great deal of affection there.

K: Maybe on the side of Boaz, who keeps calling her "daughter," which is another analysis altogether, but what of Ruth? We are given no information about how she feels. The situation also strikes me as fishy in that Boaz sends Ruth off early in the morning before anyone can tell who she is. He, of course, pays in full for her services with six measures of barley. It is truly a miracle that he follows through on his promises at all. Then she goes home to Naomi, who tells her to stay inside until the dealings are overwith (3:14–18).

S: And Boaz does follow through. The very next day he goes to the town gate and speaks with the other redeemer about Ruth (4:1–6).

K: Wait a minute, Shannon. Boaz talks about the land first. Ruth comes second, because she is attached to the land. If you read on carefully, you will notice that Boaz always talks of marrying Ruth as a consequence of redeeming the land. The other kinsman cares nothing for Ruth and Naomi but only of his own estate, which will be impaired by the redemption. [Sohn 1994)]

S: It is then that Boaz, before all the town elders, redeems Ruth, Naomi, and the land (4:7–10).

K: Which he does so that the name of Mahlon, Ruth's deceased husband, will not leave the land (4:10). Again, there is no mention of Ruth or Naomi's future or well-being. The only concern is for the land. The townspeople then bless Boaz and the offspring which the Lord will give *him* through this young woman. [Rosen, 1994]

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[4] A marriage contract.

S: I agree that this blessing is strange. Evidently, the first child of Ruth and Boaz would not be considered a descendent of Boaz but of Mahlon.

K: And, once again, Ruth is left unnamed. The townspeople refer to her as "this young woman" (4:12) who is "coming into your home" (4:11), a typical male viewpoint.

S: Ruth and Boaz marry. The two women have succeeded in gaining a new life for themselves. They have redeemed the property that belonged to them and have found a means of survival in the marriage of Ruth to Boaz.

K: So, once again, Ruth is defined by the man she is married to. In the end, things are no better than when they started. Maybe they're even worse. To get where they are, Naomi manipulated Ruth, and Ruth played the whore for a dominating kinsman. Not exactly a Disney ending.

S: But it isn't the ending. Ruth and Boaz have a son, whom the women of the neighborhood name Obed. The narrator emphasizes that this son is a divine gift: "the Lord made her to conceive and she bore a son" (4:13).

K: Of course, a son. We never hear if they have daughters, because all that is important is that they have a son who will live on the land.

S: But women are at center stage here. Naomi takes the child and sees in him the future of her family. This future is evident to all the women who see the child. As I said, it is they who bestow upon the child the gift of a name, Obed, which means servant. He will be the restorer of life and a nourisher of Naomi in her old age (4:15a). True, this is another example of a woman's dependence on a man in her life, this time a grandson. Still, in the very next breath the women assert that Ruth, Naomi's daughter-in-law who loves her, is worth more then seven sons! Through the indestructible bond forged between Ruth and Naomi this child is really both of theirs. So the women do not call her Mara, "bitterness," as she had asked (1:20) but restore her original name, Naomi. From the line of this child King David will be born. It is from the love and steadfastness of women that will come forth the greatest king of Israel. More than that: Ruth is specifically mentioned as an ancestor of Jesus in the genealogy of Matthew 1:1–17 (see v. 5). Think of that. Christians say Jesus is from this heritage. Is it any wonder he inherited a vision of the true dignity and worth of women along with that of men?

K: Perhaps. Still, look at the genealogy that closes the book of Ruth (4:18–22). It's Boaz's genealogy, not Ruth's. Even if the book bears her name, at the end she is erased from the family history. That says a lot about what the authors really thought about these women's contribution to the future of Israel.

S: Well, poor old Mahlon, whose name was to be mentioned, also gets elbowed out by Boaz in this genealogy (4:10). . . . Wow, we've been talking a long time. We had better get going or we'll be late for class.

K: Let's go, then. I'm glad we talked about this. I learned a lot from you.

S: And you brought up a number of things I didn't see before.

Concluding remarks

The number of canonical biblical texts in which women are allowed to speak are few. Of these texts, even fewer provide concrete examples in which the God of Israel works through women for the good of the community. While the Book of Ruth is notable for the active women it portrays, it must be remembered that it does not break from the tradition of patriarchy, which, both then and now, often oppresses and denigrates the bodies and spirits of women and often holds men captive in the traditional societal roles as well. The Book of Ruth has been, is, and will continue to be an object of close reading and interpretive debate within the walls of faith communities and the halls of academia. Such a unique story of both bitterness and friendship, indeed, friendship that crossed ethnic and religious boundaries, surely deserves such attention.

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Note: This article is a version of a paper first prepared for the course "Old Testament Poetry and Wisdom" in the Religious Studies Department at the University of Wisconsin, Oshkosh. The course was taught by Professor William J. Urbrock, who also made suggestions for this revision.

Book Reviews

The Common Task: A Theology of Christian Mission. By M. Thomas Thangaraj. Nashville: Abingdon, 1999. 167 pages. Paper. $22.65.

In mission theology, *missio Dei* dominates, with many theologians arguing that mission is ultimately God's and that the church's experience should be patterned on God's will. *Missio Dei* begins with God's action.

Thangaraj challenges this understanding with his creative proposal of a *missio humanitas*, arguing that a genuine dialogue with those from other traditions best proceeds from appreciation of a common humanity. The particularities of tradition—theism, Christocentrism, trinitarianism, incarnation, emphasis on revelation in scripture, etc.—can follow only after participants recognize a common humanity. The "new starting point" of *missio humanitas* is built on responsibility, solidarity, and mutuality.

Thangaraj sees the *missio humanitas* as creating a space in which participants can eventually develop a "specifically Christian theological interpretation" (p. 61). He develops a vision of the sending church, of issues in mission, of ways to read history, and of how to interpret the Bible. The final chapter, "Motivating for Mission," seeks to take congregations beyond the extremes of excessive guilt and overeager "hit-and-run evangelism" and toward a deeper engagement.

The greatest strength of this work is its capacity to bring together divergent streams of mission. Thangaraj chooses a wide range of conversation partners from modern missiology, systematic theology, liberation theology, and a variety of contextual theologies. A danger in many mission studies is a clique mentality that comes from working only with those with whom one agrees. Thangaraj clearly is willing to cull the best from many sources and to see value in their approaches. By weaving in historical examples—from the 1910 Edinburgh Conference to his own pluralistic Atlanta—Thangaraj shows how his interest in mission is profoundly connected to the challenges and opportunities that our changed society offers.

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How Long O Lord? Christian, Jewish, and Muslim Voices from the Ground and Visions for the Future in Israel/Palestine. Edited by Maurine and Robert Tobin. Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 2002. xi and 291 pages. Paper. $16.95.

In 1994 Maurine and Robert Tobin's perspectives on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict were transformed by their month-long course at St. George's College in Jerusalem. The experience prompted them to assemble an impressive set of essays on the topic. The Tobins came to realize that the two sides of the debate are not essentially Israeli or Palestinian; rather, the "sides are those who strive for and wish to live in peace with each other and those who do not" (p. 6).

Part One, "Perspectives on the Past," includes five essays. Sara Roy, Senior Research Scholar at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at Harvard University, provides an astute analysis of the reasons for the failure of the Oslo plan. Elaine Hagopian, Professor Emerita of Sociology at Simmon College, traces the history of Zionist leaders who have sought to empty all Palestine of its Arab inhabitants and concludes that the refugee problem is a direct consequence of an explicit Zionist ideology. Other important contributions are Martin Federman's "Chosenness, Zionism, and the Implications for Occupation" and Andrea Anderson's "Improbable Alliances in Uncertain Times—Christian Zionism and the Israeli Right."

Part Two is titled "Voices from the Ground." Jeff Halper, coordinator of the Israeli Committee against House Demolitions (ICAHD), mounts a convincing argument that the Barak peace offer in 2000 was not as generous as the Israeli

and American press claimed. Other significant essays are those of Naim Ateek, founder of the Sabeel Ecumenical Center in Jerusalem, who provides a Christian Palestinian perspective on suicide bombers, and Gila Svirsky, who describes the "Coalition of Women for Peace" that brings together women's groups working for an end to the occupation and the involvement of women in the negotiations for peace.

The last section, "Visions for the Future," includes a practical essay on "Christian Advocacy" by M. Thomas Shaw, an Episcopal bishop in Massachusetts; a brilliant essay by Michael Lerner, founder of Tikkun Community, titled "Healing and Love for Israel and Palestine"; a thoughtful piece on what makes for a "just peace" by the late Edward Said; and Desmond Tutu's keynote address at the Friends of Sabeel North America's Conference on April 12, 2002.

How Long O Lord? is a valuable collection of essays by Christian, Jewish, and Muslim voices, all advocating in one way or another the end of Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza as the pathway to a more just, peaceful, and secure Middle East. Many of the essays deserve close reading. The book could provide an individual a broad background on the topic or a study group much material for discussion.

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Into God's Presence: Prayer in the New Testament. Edited by Richard N. Longenecker. McMaster New Testament Studies. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001. xiii and 292 pages. Paper. $28.00.

The twelve essays offered here present an in-depth overview of prayer in the New Testament and its religious world. Four essays briefly describe "The Setting": prayer in the Old Testament (Christopher R. Seitz), the Greco-Roman World (David E. Aune), in first-century Judaism (Asher Finkel), and the Dead Sea Scrolls (Eileen M. Schuller). The next four discuss prayer in "Jesus and the Gospels": Luke's Canticles {Stephen Farris), Jesus as example and teacher of prayer (I. Howard Marshall), the Lord's Prayer as model for prayer (N. Thomas Wright), and the names of God and Jesus in Johannine prayers (Andrew Lincoln). The last four essays review the non-Gospel literature: Acts (Joel B. Green), Paul (Richard N. Longenecker), Hebrews to Jude (J. Ramsey Michaels), and Revelation (Richard Bauckham).

I found especially helpful the essays on Greco-Roman prayer, Jesus as model and teacher, and Paul. All of the essays are fitted out with basic English-language bibliographies. A summary article drawing conclusions from the specific discussions would have been helpful. But this is a useful book, clearly written in largely nontechnical language and so open to a wide readership.

Edgar Krentz

Ordinary Saints: An Introduction to the Christian Life. By Robert Benne. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003. xii and 228 pages. Paper. $17.00.

This is a slightly revised edition of Benne's 1988 publication of the same name. The revisions were directed at making the book more useful not merely to its primary audience (undergraduates) but also to church groups and seminarians. Toward this end, there are more subheadings, treatment of concrete issues has been slightly expanded, and helpful questions for discussion have been added to every chapter. It is a well-written and accessible text that should successfully bridge the gap between college and an educated congregational setting.

This introduction to the Christian life is not what one might expect—a systematic treatment of various contemporary "issues." And this is the book's attraction. It is an introduction to the Christian life organized around the notion of Calling. It is a wonderful examination of the vocation of every Christian in every "place of responsibility" (family, work, public life, and church). As such, it promises to stimulate much-needed conversation and offers solid insights to guide such conversation.

It has a distinctly and deliberately Lutheran sensibility to it ("sensibility" because there is little direct citation of Luther or the tradition),

but its insights should resonate with Protestants broadly. It has a profoundly "conventional" sensibility as well. By this I mean that the work is an effort to address a post-Protestant American context by critically renewing the ethos/ethic that accompanied the era of Protestant hegemony. It is clear that Benne still aspires to a church that serves "the American project" as the soul of the nation. Finally, the text is, unsurprisingly, distinguished by the Niebuhrian/paradoxical vision that characterizes Benne's theological perspective.

These qualities are not necessarily drawbacks; they remain minor themes compared to the overarching focus on Calling, which is the book's strength and makes this a gift to the church and academy.

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The Free Church and the Early Church: Bridging the Historical and Theological Divide. Edited by D. H. Williams. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2002. xiii and 183 pages. Paper. $24.00.

D. H. Williams of Baylor University has invited several academicians of the Free Church persuasion to restate, from their perspective, the relationship of their heritage to the church of the first centuries. The essays are written by well-known authors who represent several denominations in the Free Church tradition: D. Jeffrey Bingham, Everett Ferguson, E. Glenn Hinson, Frederick W. Norris, Phyllis Rodgerson Pleasants, Gerald W. Schlabach, William Tabbernee, and Williams himself. The essays were not written for popular consumption but are uniformly of a scholarly level. Indeed, the subject itself requires such an academic analysis.

Being from the Free Church tradition and one who writes often on the early church, I had expected, from the title, a group of essays that pointed, in light of recent research on the New Testament, to new directions for the Believers' Church tradition. I was wrong. The primary intent of the essays is to determine the appropriate function of early patristic writings and the earliest creeds in Free Church thinking. In order to do that, the writers, in various ways, had to address the nature of authority, the function of Scripture, and, of course, the role of Tradition.

It is inappropriate to summarize the primary intent of a book with eight authors, but readers of *Currents* may be interested to know the major motifs without my attempting specific summaries of separate articles.

Regarding authority, the Reformers rejected a single ecclesiastical magisterium in favor of a commission. The radical Reformation (Free Church) insisted that the magisterium was the faith community itself (Pleasants, pp. 94–98).

In regard to Scripture, both the Reformers and the Free Church accepted later tradition (creeds and patristic writings) to a limited extent. It was only in conflict with the Council of Trent that the Free Church insisted on Scripture as the only authority. That post-Tridentine, or post-Reformation, development led to a biblicism, even Fundamentalism, in the Free Church that was not originally intended (Williams, pp. 118–26; Hinson, pp. 150–53). The eight authors wish to correct that distortion.

Granted, most Free Church leaders were willing to accept Tradition up to about the time of Augustine, but they were selective. Most of them accepted tradition and creeds only as they contained and were in agreement with the apostolic witness. Medieval traditions and councils were rejected as pagan (Hinson, pp. 154–61).

Not every essay strictly adheres to these topics. For example, the venerable Everett Ferguson writes on ordination and the authority of the congregation in the early church. Ordination of bishops, and even ministers, was a congregational decision. A bishop could not carry the ordination from one congregation to another or one area to another (pp. 129–40).

This book is not for everyone. It best helps leaders and teachers in the Free Church tradition understand authority and Scripture in terms of their historical and theological roots. These issues are critical for American church life. Leaders and teachers in a variety of churches will learn much about the source of denominational differences.

Graydon F. Snyder
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Briefly Noted

Israel's Messiah. Edited by Richard S. Hess and M. Daniel Carroll R. (Baker Academic, $17.99). The essays in this volume were delivered at a conference at Denver Seminary in 2001. The goal of this conference was to offer a venue in an evangelical setting for considering the biblical text both within its original context and in the modern world. Hence, there are essays (and responses) dealing with the Old Testament, Dead Sea Scrolls, New Testament, and the role of the messiah in the work of liberation theologian Jon Sobrino. I found the OT essay particularly insightful, with two notable exceptions. The author understands Isaiah 53 as portraying the suffering of a Davidic messiah (better: the redemptive suffering of Israel or of the prophet himself), and at the end of a careful, 40-page article he tosses in a line about how the messianic hope "in its broadest terms" starts with the victory over the serpent in Gen 3:15. At least he did not identify the snake with the devil, but the passage states only that the descendants of the woman and the snake will both suffer fatal injuries, with no word about a victory or the messiah. The less said about Irenaeus and his *protoevangelium* the better, in my humble opinion. *RWK*

Morna Hooker's ***Endings: Invitations to Discipleship*** (Hendrickson, $14.95) will prove very helpful as pastors prepare to preach on Easter. She studies the conclusion of each of the four Gospels and Acts to isolate the theology and specific message in each, relating each ending to the entire Gospel that precedes it. This slight paperback gives much more than its size suggests. Each ending offers something for the preacher to mine—and Prof. Hooker provides the ore for one to assay, bringing out unsuspected treasures. Use it, and your Easter sermon will benefit much. *EK*

The third edition of Everett Ferguson's ***Backgrounds of Early Christianity*** (Eerdmans, $36), a standard introduction to the political, social, and religious world of the New Testament since 1987, has increased by 37 pages over the second edition. Although there is no special preface to this revision, the publisher points out that the bibliographies (almost entirely English) are updated and that there are "fresh discussions of first-century social life, of Gnosticism, and of the Dead Sea Scrolls and other Jewish literature." My major criticism is that many of the black-and-white illustrations seem out of focus, and Ferguson makes no real use of them in his text. Still, the text is excellent—rich and amazingly detailed. A standard textbook, it would also be a good addition to a parish library. *EK*

"Like a Bird in a Cage": The Invasion of Sennacherib in 701 BCE. Edited by Lester L. Grabbe (Sheffield-Continuum, $135). The nine essays in this volume attempt to understand the divergent accounts of Sennacherib's invasion of Judah in 701: 2 Kgs 18:13–16, 2 Kgs 18:17–19:37, 2 Chronicles 32, the Assyrian royal annals, the depictions of this campaign in Sennacherib's palace at Nineveh, the excavations of archaeologists, and the account of Egypt's interaction with Assyria in Herodotus. The problems are manifold: Did Sennacherib come once or twice? How does one interpret the self-contradictory biblical accounts? Did Sennacherib capture 205,000 prisoners as he claimed, or were 185,000 Assyrians killed by an angel, as the Bible claims? On the whole the writers give more credence to the Assyrian account than to the biblical accounts, while admitting that 2 Kgs 18:13–16 agrees more or less with the Assyrian data. But all of the sources tell the story from a "point of view," including the Assyrian artistic depictions, the essay on which is the longest in the volume. The editor underscores that Hezekiah's survival on the throne is perhaps the biggest conundrum in all of our sources. If Sennacherib's invasion was in response to Hezekiah's rebellion, why did Hezekiah survive after all? The writers seem to agree that there was not a siege of Jerusalem, as there was of Lachish. Hezekiah was shut up like a bird in a cage (as Sennacherib put it) because his roads

and supply routes were blockaded. After two centuries of intense investigation, a definitive historical understanding of 701 in biblical and Assyrian history remains elusive. *RWK*

The Tel Dan Inscription: A Reappraisal and a New Interpretation. By George Athas (Sheffield Academic, $165). This revised doctoral dissertation (University of Sydney) is devoted to a brief three-piece Aramaic inscription discovered in 1993 and 1994 that has stimulated a rousing controversy in the scholarly world because of its mention of "the house of David," the first reference to David and his dynasty outside the Bible. A common, mainstream interpretation has Hazael of Damascus as the author of the inscription, in which he seems to claim credit for killing Jehoram king of Israel and Ahaziah of Judah. It is dated ca. 840 B.C.E. A. takes issue with all of these positions and arranges the three pieces of the inscription in a radically different manner (the second and third pieces are placed below rather than to the left of the first piece). He dates the inscription to the beginning of the eighth century and concludes that it records a coalition of Jehoahaz of Israel and Joash of Bayt-Dawid against Bar Hadad II of Damascus, the son of Hazael. Bayt-Dawid (House of David), in this reading, refers not to the Davidic dynasty or the dynastic name of the kingdom of Judah but to the city of David. In his judgment Jerusalem in the early eighth century was only a small city-state and not the capital of the wider regional state of Judah. This 331-page volume provides detailed epigraphical, paleographical, archaeological, philological, and historical analyses that seem to echo the Copenhagen International Seminar (often branded as "minimalist"). This is a very important—and expensive—word, but clearly not the last word on this inscription. *RWK*

Warren Carter gives a useful evaluation of the Gospel's trial scenes in ***Pontius Pilate: Portraits of a Roman Governor*** (Liturgical Press, $14.95). The first three chapters detail the sources for reconstructing Pilate's character and role in the trial of Jesus, lay out a method for reading the Gospels, and describe how governors function within the Roman provincial system of government. He then examines the way Pilate conducts the trial in each of the four Gospels, presenting him as cooperating with the local elite, seeing a political threat in Jesus, and skillfully using his authority to elicit the support of the local people. Only in Luke does Pilate find Jesus innocent, but he crucifies him under pressure, acting arrogantly as a representative of Roman power. This volume would be good to read as one prepares to preach in Lent. It inaugurates a new series titled Interfaces, which seeks to make biblical characters understandable and interesting to college students. Other volumes will treat Herodias, King Saul, Joseph, John the Baptist, and the like. If they are as successful as this volume, it will be a very useful series. *EK*

The Jewish Study Bible. Edited by Adele Berlin, Marc Zvi Brettler, and Michael Fishbaine (Oxford, $40 cloth; 29.99 paper). Students often ask me how Jewish scholars interpret certain passages in the OT, and now this study Bible becomes a ready reference. (On Gen 3:14–15: "The serpent is to lose his legs, slither in the dirt, and suffer from the hostility of human beings"). This book provides for all of us a Jewish understanding of the First Testament: the centrality of Torah, the importance of the Masoretic text, the liturgical use of the Bible in Jewish worship, and information about festivals and food laws. The annotators are among the heavy hitters in contemporary Jewish scholarship. Important essays on the history of Jewish interpretation, midrash, biblical poetry, feminist interpretation, and many other topics round out the collection. The translation is that of the Jewish Publication Society, completed between 1962 and 1982. *RWK*

Darrel Bock's ***Jesus according to Scripture: Restoring the Portrait of Jesus from the Gospels*** (Baker Academic, $39.99) is a very conservative commentary on each section of the four gospels. He dates the Synoptics before 70 C.E., John in the 80s or 90s. Detailed, comprehensive, with some interaction with more critical literature. Read carefully, it can enhance one's understanding of Jesus' life and teaching. *EK*

Preaching Helps

Sunday of the Passion—Seventh Sunday of Easter, Series A

Unfinished Speech

The Gospel reading for the Third Sunday of Easter is one of my favorite resurrection stories. Luke recounts the conversation that Cleopas and a companion had with one another and then with a stranger as they returned to Emmaus from Jerusalem (24:13–35). So how do you suppose Cleopas and his companion walked as they made their way along from Jerusalem to Emmaus? Did they meander mindlessly, lost in conversation? Or, determined to get out of town a.s.a.p., did their steps possess a certain spirit? Luke doesn't tell us.

What we do know is that disappointment and despair affect us all differently. For too many of us, the Easter liturgy is followed too quickly by the return of concerns or death or disappointment or despair. Although we may not be ready to join Cleopas and his companion in saying "But we had hoped that Jesus was the one to redeem Israel," we might be ready to admit that we had hoped that this would be the Easter when the whole world was redeemed. Looking for signs of resurrection leaves us wanting. We find ourselves shuffling along aimlessly or swaggering our way elsewhere, determined to get out of town.

It is then that the risen Jesus overtakes us. Wouldn't it be great if the risen Christ would turn the world upside down? But, no, that's never been his style. Instead, Jesus asks us a simple question: "What are you discussing with each other as you walk along?" The question is so simple, so basic, that we don't recognize who is really asking it. Instead we see only a friend, a colleague, a teacher, a student, a parishioner, a loved one, a stranger. "What are you discussing with each other as you walk along?" The question is so basic that it stops us dead in our tracks. "Don't you get it?" we ask. The Middle East is exploding, the church is corrupt, my self-worth is sinking, they're challenging my call. While Cleopas and his companion may not have gotten that "the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory," we sometimes fail to get that Christ's glory may not be in keeping with our expectations either for Jesus or, by baptism, for us. And Christ's glory might not arrive according to when we think that glory should have happened. So, our post-Easter walk home to Emmaus hasn't changed that much in two thousand Easters.

Thankfully, neither has the risen Christ. Beginning not with Moses but with creation and flood, Abraham and Sarah, and all the family stories that we tell at the Great Vigil, Jesus speaks to and through us to declare that God will always, always, always, bring light out of darkness, hope out of despair, speech out of silence, peace out of violence, power out of weakness, dignity out of degradation, and life out of death. Opening the scriptures to us, Jesus risen opens our hearts as well. We feel our hearts burn within us, daring us to trust when trust is stupid; to believe when belief is foolish; to risk when risk is dangerous; to dream when the dream is lunacy. And if words are not enough, the risen Jesus gives us more—bread broken, wine poured, the risen Christ truly present with us, at least for an instant, long enough for us to know that Jesus is really here. Word and Sacrament, the stuff the risen Christ is made of, here and now for us.

That conversation on the road to Emmaus reminds me that reflection on Jesus' passion and death and talk of Jesus' resurrection is always unfinished speech. "What does Jesus' death and resurrection mean?" we ask as we prepare to preach Holy Week and Easter. The question is as old as the church. The minute we answer it, figure it out, sum it up, and conclude that we have plumbed the depth of its meaning to the point that we hit rock bottom, our theology of God dying on a cross and rising from a tomb develops a systemic problem. Every Holy Week and Easter brings new questions, new perspectives, new experiences, and new expectations as death rears its ugly head in new ways and resurrection reveals itself in life that is new and unexpected. Just when we figure out the cross and empty tomb, something happens to remind us that Jesus' death and resurrection are a mystery. Our talk of Jesus' death and resurrection must therefore remain unfinished in order to remain relevant.

Jesus asks the better question—not "What does it mean?" but "What are you discussing with each other as you walk along?" It's not the conclusions we draw that count but the conversations we have. As disciples discuss Jesus' death and resurrection together, in conversation enlightened by their experience, informed by scripture, and nourished by the breaking of the bread, the stranger is revealed to be the Christ, and God's greatest act of love speaks to us and through us to the world.

This set of Preaching Helps is a conversation between two disciples, two companions who journeyed together on the road of death and resurrection, despair and hope that is seminary. Though separated by context and geography, they continue to walk and talk together in ministry. At my suggestion ("Perhaps you could make it more like a dialogue"), **Katrina Holland** and **Tim Knauff**, both 2003 graduates of the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, shared the exegetical and reflection portion of each set of texts. What we have in published

form is a dialogue between two colleagues. Rather than "first readings" and "pastoral reflections," we find Ks and Ts. Our authors decided that Tim would live with and study the first five sets of pericopes for this issue (Sunday of the Passion through the Second Sunday of Easter) and Katrina would live with and study the texts for the remaining five sets of readings (the Third through the Seventh Sundays of Easter). Tim and Katrina describe their conversation this way: "We began to write our thoughts and observations for our respective sections, then shared them periodically with one another. We tried to show how the texts spoke to us and how we spoke right back to the texts and to each other. Some thoughts are incomplete. Some do not flow seamlessly from one to another. Our intent was to show the process of thought preachers may engage in while living and striving to preach the Word of God."

Katrina Holland is one of two pastors called to serve New Hope Lutheran Church in Columbia, Maryland. Katrina actively seeks continuing-education opportunities with a focus on preaching and has participated in the Festival of Homiletics program. She is active in the College of Preachers on the campus of the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C. Along the way, Katrina called to gloat that she had met Fred Craddock, something I have yet to do.

Tim Knauff serves Taylor, Trempealeau Valley, and Upper Beaver Creek Lutheran Churches in rural Taylor, Wisconsin. Tim has a passion for preaching in narrative and has been delighted to discover that in rural ministry stories are a vital way of proclaiming good news—even to Confirmation students. Tim's continuing-education interests include homiletics and biblical studies. He lives in Taylor with his wife, Amy, and his son, Conley.

With Katrina and Tim, we talk of those salvific events as we walk from Jerusalem to Emmaus and back again, from Taylor and Columbia to Chicago, from these pages to your pulpit, where conversation about Jesus' death and resurrection will continue for this Holy Week and Easter Season, for your people and their journey.

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Sunday of the Passion
March 20, 2005

Processional readings:
Matthew 21:1–11
Psalm 118:1–2, 19–29

Isaiah 50:4–9a
Psalm 31:9–16
Philippians 2:5–11
Matthew 26:14–27:66

Tim: This Sunday begins the sweep of Holy Week by presenting us with a whole range of human emotions and experience: victory and excitement, betrayal and confusion, fear, hatred, suffering, death. We begin our processional account with Jesus riding triumphant on a colt *and* a donkey (Matthew was a literalist, it seems). In the eyes of Jesus' disciples, surely this was a high point in their journeys with him: at last, at long last, the people they are ministering to get it! At last, at long last, their ministry would be able to flourish, to reach all the people that needed to hear it! At last, at long last, their efforts weren't in vain.

But we move from the procession to the long narrative for the day, the full Passion from Matthew. We begin, in shocking fashion, with betrayal: one of the twelve, one of Jesus' own, goes to the chief priests and offers to betray his Rabbi to them. But the shock of this betrayal is even greater when we put this reading in its immediate context: just before the start of our Passion narrative, an unnamed woman—not a disciple, not one of the inner circle—extravagantly honors and serves Jesus. How much more shocking that Judas, one of his twelve, immediately plots to betray him!

The full sweep of the story is of course familiar. Wrestling with God in Gethsemane, the arrest, trials that seem largely for appearance's sake, the crucifixion. We close with Jesus' lifeless body placed in a tomb and the stone placed at the entrance. We begin with Judas sealing Jesus' fate; we end with the soldiers sealing the tomb. We've come full circle, but with a marked difference: now the grave is filled.

Katrina: One of our challenges as preachers, then, is to honor the story in its entirety and leave space for the story as it unfolds on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. If we tell the whole story on Palm Sunday, why do we need to come back during the week?

I suppose we come back because we are in the "in between" time. Palm Sunday is the end of Lent, yet it is not time for the celebration of Easter. Today is the day we *hear* the whole story. During this Holy Week, we will *live* the story.

T: It's hard to be in Holy Week! This is really the threshold of some of the most emotionally fraught moments of our church year. To hear, over and over again, about betrayal and pain gets overwhelming. Not to mention that to hear two long narratives in the same week is tiring! Perhaps our task as preachers leading into and through this week is, together with Isaiah's servant, to recall our gift of "the tongue of a teacher, that [we] may know how to sustain the weary with a word" (Isa 50:4a).

K: It's not just any word. And we are looking toward a very specific place. Or, rather, we are once again looking at a very specific person, a very focused Messiah. The journey through Lent has been a journey into and through ourselves. One of the jolting things about Palm Sunday is that we no longer have our eyes trained on ourselves. We are called to look to Jesus. Yes, it is painful and hard and gruesome. It is a story unfolding for us and in front of us.

T: But aren't we back again to that same dilemma? We stand in the foothills of Holy

Week, peering forward at landscape we're going to walk again—walk in excruciating, gory detail with Jesus. But today we're still at that threshold. How can we honor the mixed messages we're given today (victory, betrayal, triumph, suffering, life, death) and still leave space for the journey to come?

K: A message of grace from Philippians is that we do not walk this pilgrimage alone. We are called into a community of believers who may be equally as shocked, fearful, and excited as we are.

T: Above all we do not walk through this landscape alone. Instead, we're there with the woman who is staring at her still-pruny hands and wondering what she has just done for love. We're with the disciples, desperately saying "It's not me who will betray you, is it, Lord?" We're there to hear the irony of Judas calling Jesus "Rabbi," and wondering just what he learned from this one he calls his "teacher"—just before he hands him over to the crowd with a kiss. We're with the masses calling "Hosanna" and later "Crucify." We're with our brothers and sisters sitting in equally uncomfortable silence in the pew next to us, figuratively if not literally holding hands against the dark week to come.

K: That's a big thought, that "Hosanna" and "Crucify" are somehow connected together. Could we have the events of Easter if they were not connected? Or, more deeply, could we come to understand the Easter event without shouting ourselves hoarse with each one? We stop short of preaching Easter, though. There's one more shout—this time of acclamation. But not yet.

Another question to ponder as preachers: Do we preach a sermon on Palm Sunday? What is there to be said after the power of the story, read in its entirety? Are we able yet to see that this is God's fulfillment of God's promises?

T: And if you do preach a sermon today, where do you land it? We could focus on the processional Gospel, and talk about victory and prophecy fulfilled, except that it would necessarily be shadowed by the Passion reading. Or, you could focus on the Passion itself, but that would feel a little preliminary. So where to focus?

K: Our story is not complete. It never will be on Palm Sunday. "Alleluias" must drown out "Hosannas" and "Crucifies!"

T: But not yet. We still have to walk through this week set aside—Holy Week—to get there. Our story is unfinished, like you said. Today, "Hosannas" and "Crucifies" still echo in the air.

K: There's no room for anything this week but trying to follow along with Jesus. We grab coattails, donkey tails, or anything else we can get a hand on.

T: Today we march in procession behind Jesus, watching him straddle the donkey and the colt. But that's really the metaphor for all of Holy Week: Jesus heads into territory where we cannot follow, where we are powerless and overwhelmed. We'll shout "Hosanna!" at the roadside, but when death stalks the land, we are reduced to a whisper. All we can do is trail along, spectators to God's unfolding drama.

Maybe that's why today is hard to preach: It's God's drama, and we are simply spectators. Yes, the drama is ultimately about us, but its reach and scope is so huge, so universal, it dwarfs us into silence. Maybe there's nothing more that needs to be said. But then again, maybe we do need that word of proclamation to connect our lives to the drama. TK/KH

Maundy Thursday
March 24, 2005

Exodus 12:1–4 [5–10] 11–14
Psalm 116:1–2, 12–19
1 Corinthians 11:23–26
John 13:1–17, 31b–35

T: These readings are perhaps some of our most picturesque. What could be a better image than Jesus washing the disciples' feet? Beyond the symbolism and instruction, and the fact that actually having our feet washed can make us uncomfortable (as any pastor who has tried to newly institute a foot-washing ceremony knows), the scene is itself great. Jesus with a towel around his waist, Peter's refusal and then overcapitulation, the instructions to the disciples. What could be better for a skit, an enactment, a portrait?

But in our readings, this expressive scene is attached to the marked hurriedness of Exodus. It gets a little confusing, whether this is the start of the institution of Passover (as in worship, festivals, remembrances) or the real thing. That may be part of the point. In reality it's both, and the reenactment of the Passover *is,* in some sense, Passover itself. We're reminded that when we as God's people do something "in remembrance" of something, or someone, that remembrance is intimately tied with that something or someone. We participate in, and partake of, the original.

At any rate, what's clear in these instructions in Exodus is that the people are in motion. This is not a sitting-still feast, not a holiday to relax and experience and enjoy. The people are instructed to eat with their sandals on, staff in hand, bags packed and ready to go. They are a people on the move, and they need to be ready. These are instructions with motion attached.

K: I cannot help but make the analogy to today. We are fast-food people. We like immediacy. How many times just in the past month have I chosen to drive through any place with the shortest line, all in the name of making it to my next pastoral visit or appointment? For us, it is about convenience. How about the chosen ones of Israel? Is it convenience or expectation that sets them in motion?

T: This hurriedness is matched in the foot-washing from John, something that doesn't always get noticed. While an aesthetic scene, there is motion and direction to this institution as well. "If I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet." "Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another." This is also a scene with directions attached, something to do, not just experience. We're headed somewhere!

K: It is interesting that you've brought up a sense of motion, because Maundy Thursday can feel like a pause in the action. We may be so intent on the cross that we miss the radical messages that get Jesus there in the first place. Jesus turns the world upside down with the most basic and literal action of washing others clean. With an economy of motion, Jesus is direct and instructive. Sit down. Put your feet up. Do this to others. It feels like barely contained energy that is poured into the actions of simple service to honored friends.

T: Energy indeed! In the space of the eight verses (4–12) that describe Jesus washing the disciples' feet, John attributes nine action verbs to Jesus. He uses an economy of materials, too—water and towel, bread and wine. That's it. In Exodus, God makes sure that the people will be able to fulfill these decrees, by allowing them to share a lamb with other families and to choose either a

sheep or a goat. God seems to want to make it as simple for the Israelites as possible, so that it is as *possible* as it might be. Just as Jesus does for us, by using simple materials.

K: So this is Jesus' eucharist in John—God's way of giving thanks for us. It's striking to me that the people of the faith found their most holy physical connection to Yahweh through the soles of their feet. And now, that same God is stooped over, touching and cleansing them.

T: "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground" (Exod 3:5). When we stand on holy ground, God wants to connect directly. But "One who has bathed is clean, except for the feet" (John 13:10). Even our connection with God can be stained by the world, by the dust of everyday life. And here Jesus cleans that debris away, kneeling with a towel around his waist.

K: There is nothing that separates us from the love of God in Jesus Christ. Jesus breaks down every barrier. One of the challenges of accepting Jesus' service is to let go of our inhibitions. Last year, my colleague and I approached people to invite them to receive foot washing during our Maundy Thursday service. One person said that she would have been happy to have her feet washed, but she had pantyhose on. "That's O.K.," I replied, "I'll wash them through your hose." I was a bit zealous, I'll admit. She was patient, thanks be to God. But the barrier still remained. When are those moments when Jesus extends to us his humble service, and we resist?

T: We're about to walk behind Jesus into God's most potent work: the death and resurrection of Jesus. Maybe, in a sense, Jesus wants to help us take off our sandals before approaching holy ground? It is, after all, the night before Passover (at least in John's version), the night of preparation for God's potent act of saving power. Maybe this is Jesus' way of getting the disciples ready for what is to come. Maybe this is how Jesus gets us ready. Are we ticklish? Do we resist Jesus without knowing? TK/KH

Good Friday
March 25, 2005

Isaiah 52:13–53:12
Psalm 22
Hebrews 10:16–25
or Hebrews 4:14–16; 5:7–9
John 18:1–19:42

T: Though it hardly needs to be said, this is probably our most difficult day of the church year. Good Friday is a day that demands solemnity, darkness, piety. It is a day for weeping, for gnashing our teeth. It's a day we face things we'd just as soon look away from, thank you very much. Good Friday presents us with situations and dilemmas to which we don't have easy answers. "Who has believed what we have heard?" Isaiah asks. Who indeed could believe that God hung on the tree? Or who would want to face the gory details of breaking legs and piercing sides, the whole grisly parade of cruelty involved in crucifixion?

The first paragraph of Psalm 22 is the cry of a forlorn soul who has lost all hope. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" This first paragraph is filled with the full pathos of human tragedy, of desperation and despair. "O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, but find no rest." In this paragraph is contained the whole of human loneliness and depression.

The psalmist moves on, though, and the psalm is remarkable for its multiple changes of mood and voice. Immediately we turn to

expressions of hope and faith, of God's history of faithfulness, before turning to words of abjection and humility. Over and over, we turn from despair to trust, from a forlorn cry to hope, and ultimately to triumph.

K: The most challenging task for us as preachers on Good Friday is to leave Jesus on the cross. Or, more succinctly, to preach a word of grace that doesn't resurrect Jesus. Jesus's work is over now. It is time for him to rest. Intent on Jerusalem, Jesus was vigilant in getting to this point. He is dead. The loneliness is palpable. We want to rail against that and rush the resurrection. The pathos of tragedy is tamed by the anesthetic of comfort. But I wonder, has God been silenced? Or is God silent?

T: I would say that's the question, the plea, the desperate call that lies behind that first paragraph of Psalm 22. "Why are you so far from helping me?" Where are you, God? Are you silent? Or have you been silenced? This question is the cry of anyone who has experienced despair, whose hope has seemingly left and been lost. It is the cry of anyone who worries that God is not just delaying an answer, but will never answer.

In John's account of the arrest and betrayal, Jesus speaks very little but seems to direct the whole scene. Judas arrives with police and soldiers and a whole mob, lit threateningly by flickering lanterns and torches. Jesus steps forward and takes the initiative: "Whom are you seeking?" When the crowd answers "Jesus of Nazareth" he replies simply, "I am" (εγω ειμι). At this, the mob steps back and falls on their faces.

One of the puzzles for me for a long time has been the "why" of this passage. Why do they fall? The NRSV translates Jesus' response as "I am he," but strictly speaking, the Greek is "I am." It's clear that they fall because of Jesus' response. But why? Is it because Jesus' answer sounds remarkably like the name of God ("I am who I am")? Is it because they are surprised to have him step forward so readily? Jesus certainly knows what's going to happen (John tells us that explicitly), and so Jesus' answer is made in full awareness of its implications—pain, suffering, death. Yet he says, "I am." Is the crowd simply surprised that Jesus is so ready to be arrested, rather than running away, and thus they trip over each other?

K: A woman who struggled with the debilitating illness of depression once told me that she understood the "Good" in Good Friday. She lived with feelings of inadequacy, brokenness, and shame almost all of her life. Numerous times she attempted to commit suicide. The last time was during Lent, and she was released from the psychiatric hospital on the Friday morning of Holy Week. Her fearful family did not want to let her stay at home while they attended services, but they were unsure also about bringing her to "that type of service" that evening. So they considered sitting with her in the church nursery.

Instead, ashamed and embarrassed, she slid into the very back pew of the church. As she listened to the story of Jesus hanging on the cross, she tells of an epiphany. It was in that moment that she knew what goodness there was to be found in the broken body of the savior. "God knows what it is to be imperfect," she told me. Jesus' perceived imperfections hung him on the cross. Society's labels called him imperfect, and he was extinguished in a way that was only fit for the imperfect. "For the first time," she told me, "I understood that when Jesus stretched his arms out, I was included."

I suppose when God turns your world upside down right in front of you, it may be hard to stand.

A homiletician once said that we must always ascribe the action verbs to God. Too often we make God passive, ascribing the action verbs to us. When we do this, we become the agents of change in a sermon, not God. This is not good, she said, but common nonetheless. There is nothing passive about God today. In fact, this day is all about God's active agency. There is no room for us except to push in the crowds for a better or less graphic view of the cross. Jesus acts alone today. His work will be over before the night is out.

T: Our task today is to stand watch with him, to have the courage to stand still and witness. This is not our work, this is not our drama. Yet we are there, watching and wincing. We must have the courage to face our own culpability in this tragedy, to recognize our own hands holding a hammer, our own mouths cursing and mocking. Silence is hard for us in modern times, and so we may want to hurry past the tomb with its broken occupant. Yet we must leave him there today. As you say, we must preach grace without resurrecting Jesus. TK/KH

The Resurrection of Our Lord March 27, 2005

Acts 10:34–43 *or* Jeremiah 31:1–6
Psalm 118:1–2, 14–24
Colossians 3:1–4 *or* Acts 10:34–43
Matthew 28:1–10

T: After the silence of the grave, Easter Sunday begins with a bang. In liturgies and worship planning, this suddenness is mimicked by the surge of light during the Easter Vigil, but it can be incorporated on Sunday morning as well. Matthew's resurrection account begins with an earthquake, reminiscent of the earthquake on Good Friday. Maybe our pews should shake and move, too!

Matthew narrates two encounters in his resurrection account. Once again, an angel appears first to give a message. Just as in Matthew's birth account the angel spoke to Joseph before Jesus' arrival, telling him not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife, so here the angel appears to tell Mary Magdalene and "the other Mary" not to be afraid. They are given explicit instructions of great joy: "Go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead'" (Matt 28:7).

Of course, faced with something so drastically unknown, the women can hardly help but fear. The second encounter is striking for its similarities with the angel and for one important difference. Jesus encounters them and gives them much the same message—except that this time it's backed up by all their senses: touch, sight, sound.

K: Angels and messages of great joy. As we write this, the church is preparing for the Advent and Christmas seasons. Christmas and Easter—the two greatest Christ days. We whisper the proclamation of Christmas with a lullaby sung to a sleeping baby. It is the warm glow of candles. Soft light, hushed whispers, innocence, nostalgia, hope.

Easter is the opposite. It is an assault to the senses. It is loud and blindingly bright. It is the cloying perfume of spring flowers. We don't whisper the proclamation of Easter; we shout it. It is that assault to the senses that we try to capture on Easter morning. Easter is as much about what God has done for us as it is about what God can do.

T: Maybe that is why the women grab on to Jesus' feet. When confronted with God's power in an earthquake, an unsealed (and empty) grave, and an angel's speech, they

are desperate for a handhold, for something to anchor them amidst God's glory. When Jesus appears, they recognize that he is part of this glory. But Jesus is also someone they've known as a fellow human, even friend. Just as you and I might hold on to friends in the midst of trouble or confusion, so do these two.

I was struck by Jesus repeating the angel's message. The messages are almost word-for-word, with one big difference: Jesus does not refer to his disciples as disciples. For the first time in Matthew, Jesus refers to them as "brothers." Back in chapter 12, we saw Jesus point to the disciples and say "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother." But in all the exchanges since then, they have been "disciples." Except for now. In what ways, then, have they done the will of God in heaven, to become his brothers and sisters and mothers? They are now so in relationship with Jesus that they are family.

K: Is it something they have done? Or is it something that happened only through the cross and resurrection? Here is a little foretaste of the feast to come. All through this great fifty days of Easter we will hear stories of the intimate connection Jesus has with all of creation. Specifically, we will hear about our relationship with Jesus.

I noticed in this Gospel that the only dialogue that is recorded is from heaven's side. We know only what the angel and Jesus said. We know how the women feel when they ran off with the most important message of their lives. We know what the disciples did when Jesus made that message come alive right in front of them. It is the Word of God and our response. Who are the voiceless in our communities to whom Jesus' gives voice today?

T: It's too bad in some ways that our reading cuts off at verse 10. We're left a bit hanging: Mary and Joanna and the other women have the news about Jesus, but we cut off before the other disciples get to hear! And if we could continue, even before the news spreads beyond the scene of the tomb, already the naysayers step in to cast aspersions on the story. Verses 11–15 show the first anti-Christian "disinformation" campaign: the leaders and authorities conspire together, bribe the guards, and spread an alternative version of the resurrection. The resurrection event is only minutes old, and already explanations are offered to mitigate its power.

K: Still a bit like human nature today, isn't it? In the face of the impossible, the unexplained, or the unknown, we fill that void with all kinds of things!

T: But if we could continue, we'd see the culmination of the Easter story: when our stories become connected to the divine drama. Standing with Jesus on the mountain, the disciples are connected once again to Jesus' life and purpose. Finally their long trajectory from their call moments to this mountain fall into a complete whole, and their own lives' meaning and purpose becomes clear. We too will hear that meaning and purpose at Pentecost; but first, our church year allows us to bask in the aftershocks of Easter for a bit. TK/KH

Second Sunday of Easter
April 3, 2005

Acts 2:14a, 22–32
Psalm 16
1 Peter 1:3–9
John 20:19–31

T: Today begins a long trajectory of continuous readings. Our first readings tell the story of the earliest church from the moment of its inception at Pentecost. We begin with Peter's sermon to the crowd on that day, the first Christian preaching event, with its bold restatement of salvation history as it involves Jesus. From there we move forward to the earliest experiences of the church and walk with them through these turbulent, trying, exciting post-Easter times.

Today's Gospel presents Jesus' first appearances to the disciples other than Mary Magdalene. These stories are undoubtedly familiar, as they involve the so-called Doubting Thomas and also show up at other times of the liturgical year. Personally, I've always felt that Thomas gets a bad rap. Thomas simply requests what the others experienced; Thomas wants to be, together with the others, a witness to the resurrected Jesus—to have the same experience that Peter names as his support in his sermon on Pentecost: "This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses" (Acts 2:32).

But Thomas's request goes against what Jesus told the disciples time and again, that true authority in the kingdom comes from service, not status. Jesus gently reminds Thomas that he doesn't quite get it yet. Discipleship is more than following proper doctrine; it is a state of being, and thus Jesus tells Thomas not to be unbelieving (ἄπιστος), an adjective. "Do not be faithless, Thomas, but a faithful person."

Or maybe Thomas wanted the gift given to the disciples in Jesus' appearance. After all, Jesus gives them some pretty incredible gifts, starting with his first words to them. After his sudden appearance (was there a pop?) his first words are "Peace be with you." (That's a gift I could use some days!) Then Jesus breathes on them, and gives the gift of the Holy Spirit.

K: So, is Jesus giving the gift of revelation to Thomas? or the gift of God's self to all? I have known many people, myself included, who think they can cajole, entice, or bully Jesus into revealing his presence. I wonder how we would feel if we stopped to realize that Jesus was already there, right inside us? That Jesus has the power to unlock all of my carefully locked doors both liberates and sobers me. How many of us hide in rooms of guilt, anger, confusion, stress, anxiety, apathy, disillusionment, or fear? How many of us seal these rooms up tight somewhere in the deepest recesses of ourselves, hermetically sealing them off from the rest of the world? Part of the gospel message of Easter is that there is no place where God cannot go. And today, God is going right to the center of us with just one breath. All we have to do to know it is breathe in and breathe out.

T: Now, when the disciples tell him they've received, past tense, the Holy Spirit, Thomas surely feels excluded. From his perspective, would he have known another way to receive the Spirit? In John Jesus promised them an Advocate, the Spirit of Truth, but didn't tell them how they would receive this Spirit. And now Thomas has missed the boat! Perhaps this is why he panics and pouts and is "faithless. Maybe Thomas just wanted to be included. Maybe he wanted to be an apostle, one who had seen the resurrected Lord. Maybe he desperately wanted peace, closure, hope in the midst of life. Or maybe he just was practical and didn't want

anyone pulling the wool over his eyes. For whatever reason, Thomas needed to be included and part of the gang.

It's also important to note that, for the first time in our Easter season, human activity enters into the picture. Last week, Matthew's resurrection account left the message in the hands of the women, with instructions to share the good news with the other insiders. This week, though, Jesus appears in the midst of the insiders, in their frightened space and locked rooms, and gently blows them outward on the whispers of divine wind: "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." Last week left us with an undelivered message. This week nudges us toward action, with a call to live as Jesus lived: in motion, on the go, headed somewhere. For what purpose? To forgive sins.

K: This is such a great story to tell the second week of Easter. Tim, after looking at the trajectory for the entire season, you and I agree that Jesus will show us how intimately connected his real resurrected presence is to all. What better way to turn our attention to who we are with Jesus than to tell a story that hits to the core truths about our doubts and disbeliefs in what seems the sure finality of death? And perhaps doubts and disbeliefs in each other. Thomas didn't seem to doubt Jesus as much as he doubted the story told by his brothers and sisters. I trust you completely, Tim, but I think I'd doubt you if you told me news of this magnitude! I would also be a little miffed that you got to experience and I didn't.

T: The Gospel closes with an affirmation that we may sorely need: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." I say "sorely needed" because we are now beginning our outward movement: in Holy Week we were passive, watching God's work; this week, we begin to receive our own commissions, and, alas, that commission is not to the comfortable, safe confines of our locked room. Instead Jesus blows us out into the world, a world that only ten days ago proved how dangerous it really is!

For this reason, it is somehow comforting to hear Jesus say "Peace be with you" and to call us blessed. 1 Peter seconds this blessing, noting (as our continuous readings will do many more times in the weeks ahead) that the world we're sent to is a dangerous place. Yet, 1 Peter says, this danger is worth it–"for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls" (v. 9). TK/KH

Third Sunday of Easter
April 10, 2005

Acts 2:14a, 36–41
Psalm 116:1–3, 10–17
1 Peter 1:17–23
Luke 24:13–35

K: This week's texts are a matter of the heart. In sermon and in story, Jesus is revealed. There are direct, definitive answers. There also are moments that leave us wondering if what we have seen and experienced was truly the presence of Christ in our lives.

Peter's first sermon comes just minutes after a baptism of the Holy Spirit. It is an answer to the questions of plausibility and incredulity witnesses raise through the loud cacophony of sounds that is now the new church. It is every young pastor's worst nightmare—an extemporaneous prayer before thousands of people, who may or may not believe what you have to say.

Our reading is the end of Peter's sermon—the powerful proclamation that gives witness to the Holy Spirit's Pentecost gift.

"Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified" (v. 36). The response is immediate and seemingly physical. Those listening were, in a literal translation, pierced through the heart by this proclamation. If we are to follow Jesus with our whole hearts, today our life is on the line.

T: The setup may be a nightmare, but the effects of the sermon are what we all dream of: to cut through the babble of dismay and incredulity thrown up by the world and people's history; to simply state, with force and conviction, the truths of God's love in Jesus the Christ; and then to have the entire crowd, some 3,000 people, convert immediately to the faith. Now that's a new member's class to be proud of!

K: Hearts are on the line in the Gospel also. One thing to note: All Gospel readings this Easter season come from the Gospel of John except this Sunday's story from Luke. This Emmaus text historically has been assigned for Easter evening services. And that is when the story is set—on the day of the resurrection, sometime perhaps in the evening—not two weeks after it! One gets the sense that our trajectory is starting to slowly rewind, letting us see the very presence of God right there in front of us. Jesus the Christ is bones and flesh. He is as full of questions as he is of answers. And now he has stood on both sides of death.

Whether separated by geographic distance (like the two disciples) or time (like us modern disciples), the question may be the same. Did it really happen? Our hearts are in danger and slowly crumbling. Perhaps the intensity of the moment is gone. Or is it? This passage, unique to Luke, does have shades of other stories echoing in it: the longer ending of Mark, Abraham and Sarah's inability to recognize the Lord, the disciples in the boat unclear of what or whom they may be seeing. Are there ever times when we are so lost—in ourselves, the events of the world, our emotions—that we fail to recognize who surrounds us?

This is the heart of the problem. Jesus is rebuked by the two disciples for "not knowing" (v. 18). It is ironic that we have just been told in v. 16 that they are the ones who really do not know what is going on. We will see this root word appear often in the coming weeks, *ginosko*, and there is a connection between "knowing" and "hope." The two disciples come right out and say that they have lost hope.

T: Although I know it is dangerous to draw a parallel with another Gospel, when the disciples rebuke Jesus I can't help but think of Peter rebuking Jesus for predicting his own demise. There, too, we have a disciple resistant to the notion of a Messiah who suffers. When Peter acts up, Jesus sets him aside and calls him Satan. This time, he brands their hearts and finally opens their eyes and ears to the real truth of God: God acts in surprising, scandalous ways.

Maybe the connection between "knowing" and "hope," and the difference between them, is one of tense. The disciples don't recognize Jesus in the present tense because he's doing something godly: acting beyond our abilities and our notions. The disciples can't see him because it's beyond their expectations. But Jesus nudges them along, giving them a quick primer on methods of scriptural interpretation. Finally, they do get it, but only in retrospect, as they recount the experience to the other disciples. Only in the past tense do they recognize that Jesus was doing something godly, something spiritual, with them. Why is it that we recognize God's hand at work only when we look back on it? Hope is by definition looking to the future. Knowing or recognizing is looking

to the past. In both cases, it's looking to God. But how about the present? How do we hope/know God in the present?

K: It is curious that the real and physical presence of Jesus is standing right there with them, and yet his mere presence is not enough to restore faith and hope. So, like a heart surgeon, Jesus cracks open the scripture and burns the words of faith on their broken hearts. Then Jesus tears apart some bread and gives thanks as he breaks it. Yes, the disciples had heard and knew the report about the resurrection. Today we learn the true cost of knowing Jesus. Jesus suffered. He was broken. He has the power to burn his words into us, branding us as his. Our triumphant God is also a suffering Messiah.

T: The suffering Messiah is what we learn in the Easter story, what it burns in our hearts. But there is another part: not only do we have a Messiah who suffers, we are the ones who caused it. And that's a hard fact to face, difficult to comprehend, and an impossible one to get around. I think that is what "pierced the hearts" of the Jerusalemites in Peter's sermon: "God has made him Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom *you* crucified."

K: The only "supernatural" thing that happens is Jesus' disappearance. The frustrating thing is that it happens just as soon as the disciples recognize him! But that is not what they choose to tell the others. No, what they tell is how their hearts burned when they heard the words of scripture come alive. And when they looked with Easter eyes at the stranger present with them, they could see the promise come true in broken hands and broken bread.

T: Here is a homiletical question for you. In Luke, I would bet Cleopas and the other unnamed disciple were pretty excited to report their news to the other disciples. Up to this point, they'd had a report from Mary, Joanna, Mary, and "the other women" that seemed to them "an idle tale." Peter sprinted to the tomb, but all he saw was the linen cloths. But Cleopas and his companion actually saw *him*! They've got to be excited to report back to the others: "We've seen him! We've really seen him!"

But when they get there, they're preempted. "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" (24:34) When did this happen? Was this story in there previously and got chopped out at some point? But a more important question for preaching is that the reference to this mysterious appearance is there. Why? And what effect does it have? What did Cleopas and his companion think when they heard this? What do *we* think when we hear this? KH/TK

Fourth Sunday of Easter
April 17, 2005

Acts 2:42–47
Psalm 23
1 Peter 2:19–25
John 10:1–10

K: Today is Good Shepherd Sunday. The images and texts are familiar to the point of being passé. One of the challenges in preaching today is to reclaim the ambiguity and direction of these texts. I am inclined to think that, based on the texts, this Sunday should be subtitled "Coming and Going" Sunday.

Our Acts reading is the immediate continuation of last Sunday's text. What happened to all the people whose baptism date was Pentecost 1? They are a new community centered around the teachings of the Word and the breaking of bread. Their lives became a reflection of the life of Jesus.

They were fed and filled up together. They gave of themselves. They worshiped. They prayed. They lived their lives not for themselves but in the body of Christ and for the community of God. As they did this, more and more people—daily, we are told—came into the community of the faithful. There were four markers to this community with a new identity: they learned, prayed, worshiped, and broke bread together. As they did this, they grew in the numbers of people who joined them. God is leading God's people to one another.

Then there is the beautiful and beloved Psalm 23. God leads us to safety and wholeness. We are restored in our communities and treated as honored guests. Even in the darkness, we are comforted and never abandoned. There is no place we can go that will be outside of God's reach.

We know the psalm, but do we know the shepherd? The first challenge is to read today's Gospel past the images and feelings that inevitably arise. When you do, unexpected parts of this text may stand out. For example, is Jesus the shepherd or the gate?

T: I'm pretty sure the answer to that is Yes. Jesus is the shepherd, keeping us safe and leading us in right paths. But Jesus is also the gate, the one through whom the shepherd the psalmist talked about enters into our lives. It's too bad our lectionary stops at v. 10, because in the verse immediately following, Jesus makes it clear that things are confusing: "I am the gate," vv. 7 and 9. Then he turns around and says, "I am the good shepherd."

K: It is a rhetorical question, of course. Jesus is both, and he makes it clear to us in the Gospel that things today are going to be very unclear! He lets us know that he is using a figure of speech (one of the only times Jesus ever tips his hand about his teaching methods). It is the fourth week of Easter now, but Jesus was speaking during the Feast of Dedication (Hanukkah). There he was, with thousands of others, celebrating the rededication of the temple in Jerusalem. The more devout among them, perhaps in a fit of frustration, perhaps dismay, perhaps confusion, finally said, "Look, if you are the Messiah, just tell us plainly."

What is Jesus? Messiah? Prophet? Lunatic? Gate? Shepherd? To whom do we listen? Today, things are as clear as mud. First, Jesus is the shepherd. But then, in the next verse, who is the gatekeeper? Is that Jesus? Certainly in v. 7 Jesus changes gear and says that he is the gate. Peter is told to shepherd later on in John, and in Ephesians the word for shepherd is translated as "pastor." Am I the shepherd? Truly I tell you, I do not know whether I am coming or going in this passage! Jesus said that he was using figures of speech so that hearers would not know (there is *ginosko* again) what he is saying.

T: Immediately after Jesus' metaphors/figures of speech, it says in v. 19 that "Again the Jews were divided because of these words." It seems we're not the only ones to be confused here.

K: There is an element of danger in this text. Who is standing against Jesus? There are strangers, thieves, and bandits mentioned —people who would snatch away the sheep from the safety of the shepherd. And in the first figure of speech, Jesus is the shepherd. If the sheep are in danger, and there is a pen (which the gatekeeper would be guarding), why does Jesus lead the sheep *out*, not in? We understand that we are the sheep. We are not coming to Jesus here as much as we are going with Jesus. Where?

T: Seems to me that's a question that only a pastor can answer, because it is a contextual question involving vision and discern-

ment. Sure, I can list lots of categories: Ministry. Mission. All the nations. The World. But the reality is, this is the fundamental question of the church, of each parish, congregation, community. Jesus is the gate, leading us out somewhere. Where? And how do we follow, how do we know where he is leading?

K: Out into the world, I imagine. There are billions of people in the world today, so how do we focus on one voice through the din? "The sheep follow him because they know his voice" (v. 4b). The noun translated as "voice" can also be translated as "sound." Are we to listen for a specific voice, or do we know Jesus because of the resonance created by his perfect pitch? There is a more intimate connection, a more profound knowing, when something resonates deep within us.

T: Sometime try sitting at a piano, and hold down the damper pedal (the one on the right that makes it hold notes). Then sing a few notes. If you get the pitch right, the strings will start vibrating because of your voice, and you'll hear a ghostly echo of the sound you made. Maybe that is how we know Jesus' voice, his call, his sound. The strings on the piano are singing because of sympathetic vibrations to the resonance of your voice. Jesus speaks to us, his sheep and charges, and sets our souls vibrating.

K: In the second hyperbole, Jesus is the gate. People who opposed Jesus, who "stood in front" of him and his message, he called thieves and bandits. This time, Jesus is there both coming and going. He is the way in and the way out. One note on verse 9: the Greek verb *sothesetai* is translated by the NRSV as "will be saved." Another translation is "shall be kept safe." Danger is still there. John knew it. The psalmist knew it. But what does faith look like for a community with a shepherd in charge? Teaching, prayer, worship, and meal. And a shepherd's voice that resonates in us, in our coming in and our going out.

T: Psalm 23 catches us coming and going, too. It begins with God as shepherd leading us: in front of us. Then God is with us (vv. 4–5). Then God is behind us (v. 6). So either God is stationary and we're passing by like a parade float, or God's got us surrounded. Personally, I prefer the latter of those two for preaching: God is everywhere we need God to be. Whether coming, staying, or going, God is there. KH/TK

Fifth Sunday of Easter
April 24, 2004

Acts 7:55–60
Psalm 31:1–5,15–16
1 Peter 2:2–10
John 14:1–14

K: Did I hit my head and wake up at a funeral? In the stages of grief, we are finally mourning, but it seems that we are five weeks too late. At first glance, the readings today are all connected to death. Granted, Stephen's martyrdom is not typically read at a funeral, but it does give us a look, however unwanted, at the death of one of the first deacons of the church. I have heard the other texts, even the 1 Peter text, read at funerals. Yes, death connects these texts. But we are standing just this side of the death and resurrection of Jesus, so these texts are about something more profound. These texts are about truth telling.

It is true that Stephen was called into a life of preaching the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection and serving the needs of others because he was transformed by

that news. When charges of disrespect were leveled against him, he preached a vehement, passionate sermon, calling his accusers "enemies of God."

T: Stephen tells the truth of Israel. Throughout salvation history, God has used unlikely instruments and means to accomplish his will. And throughout salvation history, humans have repeatedly rejected God's efforts. This is what gets Stephen killed: he tells them the truth about themselves.

K: Stephen was stoned to death because of it. But two men would lose their lives that day. We are told that one of the witnesses (who were obligated to cast the first stones at the accused) was Saul. He, too, would experience death for the sake of the gospel, but not before he died to his old way of living. He would be renamed and given a new identity as Paul. Today, however, it is not inconceivable that his job is to hurl stones at another man.

When we live our lives so completely in service to Jesus, we begin to sound just like Stephen. His last words are eerily familiar, for they were the words Jesus spoke on the cross. Stones kill, and as these instruments of death were taking his life, his last act was in service to others. It is the only way he knew how to be.

T: Suppose that some of the other disciples followed along behind to see what would happen to Stephen. Not a hard leap of imagination; after all, the same author already had Peter following along "at a distance" (Luke 22:54). And, if nobody followed, who told Luke about what happened so he could write it down? Now, suppose you are one of those disciples, hovering at the fringe of the crowd. You just heard Stephen's powerful, moving sermon and watched the crowd grit their teeth and rush your brother, your friend and fellow follower. You watched the stones fly, watched them strike and break skin and bone, watched Stephen's blood flow and splatter. Then you heard his final words: "Lord, do not hold this sin against them!" Would you have wanted to hear these words from him? Or would you rather have bound that sin to them instead?

K: The truth of the epistle is that stones kill, and stones can build up. In 1 Peter, cold, brutal, life-taking stones have been transformed into the one who is the giver of all life (used through a very feminine metaphor of mother's milk). We also are called to be life-givers, stacked up on top of each other to form "a spiritual house" (v. 5). Can you imagine it? A house that is all arms and legs and hair, flailing all over, trying to keep balance? One body, made from bodies of all different shapes and sizes, mortared together by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus? Not all will choose to stand on his firm foundation. That is a part of truth telling. For those of us who have accepted the invitation into the sharing of his life, death, and resurrection, we become both building and fellow builder.

The Gospel tells another kind of truth. It answers the questions Why did Jesus leave? Where did Jesus go? I have been reluctant to include the ascension as a part of the story of Jesus, for we do not celebrate the ascension in this Easter season for almost two more weeks. The truth of the matter is, John writes his story, in a sense, backwards. He is unapologetically writing from the sure knowledge of the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. By the time John writes it all down, it has already happened, and these are exactly the questions with which John must grapple.

T: We get this text after the death and resurrection have happened. Yet, in the context of John's narrative, it is yet to come.

I call this "ecclesiastical whiplash"—when the chronology of our lectionary doesn't match the chronology of the originals, or of the narrative. Here John explains something that, in a sense, is *going* to happen. Yet, he is also explaining something that's already happened. For John, in a sense, these are both the same. John clearly takes a cosmological view of time: "In the beginning was the Word. . . ." So in terms of John's worldview, this whiplash is maybe not that big a deal. But it certainly colors our proclamation of the text on this day. What does it mean to hear Jesus speak of a future that we have already been through?

K: The first verse of this text has a variant translation. The end of the verse is most commonly translated "Believe in God, believe also in me" (v. 1). The verse can be translated "Believe *into* God, believe *into* me." As in last week's Gospel text, there is a more intimate relationship established. Where is Jesus? Mutually, intimately connected with God. A Confirmation student once said, "So, they are living together!"

Yes, they are. But what does this house to which Jesus is going look like?

I attended a funeral where the preacher spent a great deal of time talking about the promised home Jesus had built for all of those who believed in him. He painted a vivid picture of gold-dripping walls, bejeweled avenues, and velvety beds. Then he sang a song about pearl-encrusted gates of heaven and the platinum throne of God. I remember feeling empty as I listened to this description of where Jesus had gone. I kept thinking that it was a beautiful place, if you liked interior decorating in that style, but it felt void of the presence of Jesus. Would I really want all that grandeur if Jesus wasn't there?

The place of God that we search for is a place in God's family. Jesus did that for us. He secured us a way to that place. We come into, believe into Jesus as the revelation of God in our lives. It is then that we can tell the truth about who we are. We share in the work of Jesus, God's work in the world. We are people who point to the one who reveals Godself to the world, Jesus the Christ. KH/TK

Sixth Sunday of Easter
May 1, 2005

Acts 17:22–31
Psalm 66:7–18
1 Peter 3:13–22
John 14:15–21

K: The texts this week are forthright and honest about the absence of God. This may sound shocking, for we know that God is never absent from us. Perhaps the pursuit is better undertaken if we embrace the words of Paul in Acts. Absence is replaced with "unknown." (Am I being redundant if I once again point to *ginosko*?)

I ask not only every preacher but every person of faith: What if it were all taken away from us? No, not everything mentioned in the last stanza of "A Mighty Fortress." What if our way of talking about God, our commonalities of understanding, our ability to say "Jesus Christ" and immediately have an image of the cross or the empty tomb—what if we did not know anything about God? How would we preach without our shortcuts? No keywords, no catchphrases, no memories or images to evoke? What kind of challenge would this be?

It is exactly the challenge facing Paul. There he stands, looking around at the marbled figures of Greek gods and goddesses, with none of the comfortable Jewish

traditions or the radical Christian ideations to connect the true and living God of heaven and earth with a society that had not experienced the Word of God in their midst. What kind of message does a preacher deliver?

T: What if *we* are preaching into a vacuum again? For thousands of years, preachers had the luxury of assuming a baseline understanding, at least an overhearing, of concepts and words about Jesus. That wasn't so for Paul, of course, who is truly preaching and proclaiming an "unknown God." There are some within mainline denominations who look to the future of Christianity and conclude that, in the United States at least, the twenty-first century is likely to be more like the first century than the twentieth. They point to similarities such as a plurality of religions and truths, highly variegated ethnic populations and cultures, and the loss of an assumed "Christian" cultural foundation. If they are correct, we may find ourselves preaching into a vacuum much sooner than we expected! Is there perhaps a lesson to be learned here from Paul?

K: Paul preaches our interconnectedness, our familial relationship with God. He also honors the search for God. There seems to be less condemnation and more encouragement from Paul, a trait that he does not always show to those who do not know God. For this group of people, he acknowledges that the search for God sometimes involves groping, stretching, reaching, finding. He asks them to think about what is precious, what invaluable commodities they have. Then he tells them of a person more precious and valuable than anything they will ever know and more powerful than anyone their society could ever elevate. Love and judgment are wrapped in words that hit them where they live.

T: He quotes Greek poets to Greek citizens. And even if the twenty-first century isn't like the first, still we have the similar problem of making our proclamation fresh and new every time we preach into the assembly.

K: The Gospel is more specific in dealing with the absence of God. John's community has lived for more than a generation trying to grapple with this loss. Jesus himself talks about it frankly in the section of John that is widely known as the Farewell Discourse. Farewells are commonly used rhetorical tools intended to invite the listener/reader into the moment. They can be simple, grand and sweeping, melodramatic, or emotionally wrenching. (Think about the actor or actress who emotes for ten minutes during a death scene: "Goodbye, cruel world! . . .") Above all, it touches some emotional truth in those who participate in its retelling. What Jesus is doing is inviting us into an intensely private, deeply connected moment with God.

Discourse is teaching, usually following an activity or event. All other discourses in John are told to explain what has previously happened. This discourse is to invite us in and explain what is about to come: the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. Today we are taught that we will not be left alone without divine presence in our lives. But how does one translate *Paraclete*? There are at least sixteen different translations, ranging from "Spirit of Truth" to "Advocate" (vv. 16–17).

T: If our linguistic and philological experts can't come to a consensus or-a definitive answer, maybe as preachers we need to look in another direction. Do we as preachers perhaps define *parakletos* by our experience of it? The Paraclete is that which helps us remember Jesus and helps us to hold to

his teachings. How would your congregation define it?

K: We also could approach it through the root word *parakaleo*, meaning "to call to one's side."

T: Call for backup. Call for reinforcements. Call for company and moral support. Call for testimony and corroboration. Call for advice. In Acts, Paul says, "God made all the nations to inhabit the earth . . . so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us." I think Paul is perhaps talking about our need for a Paraclete, someone we can call to our side for help and guidance. Because, as he says, it feels sometimes like we grope and search for God. We know, because we've been promised, that God is not far from each of us. But sometimes it seems awfully dark, and we're awfully blind, and groping is awfully anxious. We need a guide, a help, a light in the darkness. That's the Paraclete, the Advocate, the Helper, the Guide.

K: Today's Gospel contains a conditional response. When Jesus says "If," I'm not so sure I want to know the "then." There are some translations of this passage that read "If you love me, keep my commandments." It is translated as an imperative. And the love? It is a present subjunctive, which implies a continued act of loving Jesus. So, could we translate this very well known verse as "When you keep on loving me, you keep my commandments"?

It is the "keep" that we have perhaps lost the intensity of. In the Greek-English Lexicon (BDAG), none of the meanings include "obey." Obey would smack more of an ultimatum than a condition; the words for "keep" are more intimate than that. They imply "holding dear" or "placing great importance on." Jesus tells us that it is so important for us to hold onto those commandments of love and respect for God and each other that we are to keep them precious and close to us. We are to live in and follow them. This is the new law, the new condition of being in God's family. We are taught that it is so precious that we cannot help but keep the commandments.

T: In his book *Stewardship and the Economy of God* (Eerdmans, 1992) John Reumann talks about the ancient sense of "steward" as being the highly placed (and highly trusted) slave who knows the mind of the owner/master. This is a slave who doesn't follow rules (that's easy!) but rather is expected to know what the owner/master would wish without the owner/master having said anything on the matter. Perhaps this can provide an entrance into this notion of "keep." If you love me, you will hold to my precepts, my values, my understandings and convictions. If you love me, be of the same mind as I am. (I'm pretty sure I've read that in an epistle, by the way.) If you love me, you will be my steward: living according to my mind, even without instructions, because you know and love me and my mind enough that it becomes *your* mind.

K: One last observation. Keeping and loving are inextricably bound together. In chapters 14 and 15 alone, there are four times when one comes immediately before the other. This is law and gospel. And this is the work of the Paraclete. God confronts us with our sin, our inability to keep Jesus' commandments, and the very real moments of God's judgment. We know of love also. It is the love of Jesus that came to save sinners. Keeping and loving are inseparable.

T: That sounds to me like a Lutheran way of motivating toward social ministry and justice. We cannot motivate through guilt

trips or requirements. But, since "love" and "keep" are linked, it's clear that keeping Jesus' commands to love the enemy and feed the poor are required for us as Jesus' loved ones who love him. KH/TK

Seventh Sunday of Easter
May 8, 2005

Acts 1:6–14
Psalm 68:1–10; 33–36
1 Peter 4:12–14; 5:6–11
John 17:1–11

K: Well, Tim, we are back where we started. It has taken us seven weeks, but here we are, standing on the threshold of something just about to happen. Nothing is as it seems to be today. In our Acts reading, Jesus tells the disciples that they are about to embark on something new and that they themselves will be something new. Then, with a bit of razzle-dazzle, he leaves. Surprising? Yes. But the real surprise seems to be the extent of responsibility that Jesus placed on all of us before his departure. Jesus made it clear: We are empowered to do God's work in the world.

I wonder if the upper room seemed the same when the disciples returned. Jesus was gone again. Did it make a difference that he left this time in glory? Or is his absence just as profoundly empty? The difference this time is that they filled up their time with prayer. God had made them promises. Listen, and you can hear the psalmist shout it. Last time they were in this room, the disciples were shells of the living. This time, they were alive with prayer.

T: Yes, we're back where we started. But, like the disciples, we too have been changed forever. The landscape may be similar, but there's a big difference: now, the tomb is vacated, not unused.

K: As the Easter season unfolded, our lens broadened. During Holy Week we were tightly focused on one person and one mission, Jesus and the cross. We have been pulling ever so slowly back, looking at the early church and ourselves in the story of the Acts of the Apostles. We see today a fuller picture of the story. We *are* empowered to do God's work in the world, because the story travels through Acts into the greater world. A life lived within roughly eighty miles, an event that happened on three square feet of soil, reached out and encompassed the entire world.

T: That is the trajectory of Holy Week and the Easter season: Holy Week is all about God and God's activity, because it's beyond us and anything we can imagine. All we can do in Holy Week is to stand, open-mouthed and empty-handed, saying to ourselves, "This cannot be." Yet the miracle of the Easter season is that it is anyway. Once we get past Easter Sunday, we slowly become part of the story again, until with Pentecost we are truly given our marching orders (and the ammunition to carry them out): head out into the world, from Jerusalem to Judea to the ends of the earth, and let them know what God has done!

K: One could get heady from all of this God-entrusted power if not for the sobering reminder in 1 Peter that this is dangerous work. We stand against the ways of the world. No punches are pulled when we are told to expect persecution in life-threatening big ways and in confidence-chipping small ways. Countercultural revelation by Christians was difficult and dangerous in the Asia Minor of 1 Peter's day. And it is difficult and dangerous in the Asia Minor of today—Turkey, Iran, Iraq—and the rest of

the world. We do it because that is how we praise God. God applauds us, too, and showers us with restoration, support, strength, and a place in God's family and world.

If nothing is as it seems today, the most unexpected moment of all comes in the Gospel. The God who gallops through divine places with the cherubim and seraphim is the same God who changed the world order by simply standing up and walking out of the tomb. So what is the culmination of the most magnificent moments in our faith? Our celebration of Easter's great fifty days ends with a prayer.

T: We began with silence and the rush of an earthquake. We felt the first flickers of hope when we saw a stone rolled away. We end with a whispered prayer, a rush of wind, the lick of flames. This is our God, praying for us. And here is the sobering reality: we need to be prayed for.

K: We are back in the moments that preceded our Easter celebration. Jesus is praying before his arrest and crucifixion. I wonder if we are now at a place to be able to hear him more clearly. The murmur of death was so loud back in Holy Week that we may have missed it when Jesus told us that we were to continue to work together and live in unity. Perhaps we were busy praying that it would not have to happen this time. Perhaps we were resigned to praying for a short suffering. Perhaps we felt sorrow and pain for Jesus' prayer.

T: Maybe we missed it because that whisper from Jesus is about *our* work. Standing at the verge of Holy Week, knowing what is to come, we were overshadowed and overpowered by the specter of God's work: suffering, death, resurrection. In the face of that divine activity, our simple work so pales in comparison that it seems meaningless. In truth, it *is* meaningless until God has done the work of the cross. Only then can our work begin, because it branches out from and is motivated and "meaninged" by, God's work.

K: Jesus is praying for himself. He is also praying for "them" (v. 9) and "those" (v. 20). Are these the disciples and the converts to Christianity? Or are they all believers of the past and present, as well as the believers who, because of our work of witnessing to the Good News, will come after us? Either way, it is a prayer for the faith community and for the future of that community.

What's unexpected? There has never been a moment this Easter season when the future has been in our own hands. Look back over the texts. In the Gospel readings, Jesus openly and honestly talks about his time of leaving. Every time that reality of the future is discussed, he fills up a potentially fatal hole with the waters of baptism, with the Word of God, with bread, with a community of people singlemindedly committed to revealing God's love to the world. Listen to his prayer with Easter ears. "God, the future is ours, yours and mine. They belong to us and we belong to them. They know (there's *ginosko*!) you because they have seen you in me. I have given them all of us. They believe in us. Their future is ours. Now keep them safe as they live out that future—as they try to live their lives in the same unity, the same completeness in which we live our lives."

Jesus does not rest after conquering death. He waits and walks patiently with us as we discover again the life he lives in us.
KH/TK

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are welcome!

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