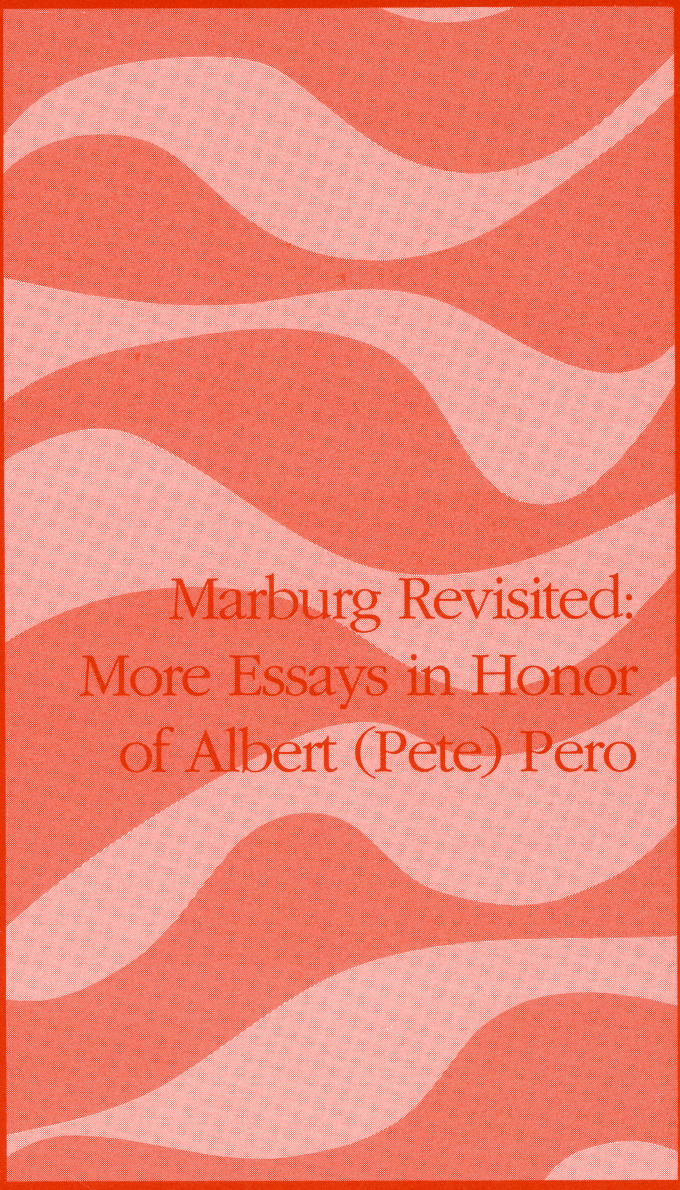
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Marburg Revisited: More Essays in Honor of Albert (Pete) Pero

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Marburg Revisited: More Essays in Honor of Albert (Pete) Pero

I first visited Marburg, Germany, about twenty-five years ago. I was a tourist then, but now my wife and I have come back for a six-month sabbatical, and we daily climb up and down the hills of this old medieval town, the home of the oldest Lutheran university in the world and the site where Protestantism experienced one of its largest schisms. Each day I sit in the theological library that is within a stone's throw of the castle where Luther and Zwingli battled it out—and split from one another—nearly five centuries ago. As luck would have it, I lectured in Zürich, Switzerland, last week and saw there a huge statue of Zwingli near his home, a home which he left two years after Marburg to die in battle for the faith.

Some years ago North American colleagues reflected on the religious history of this town in a book titled *Marburg Revisited.* As I have been pondering what to say about Pete Pero in this editorial, I have wondered what he would have said if he had been up there in the castle, with Martin and Huldrych, for the gospel's side, for humanity's side, for God's side. What would Pete bring to the table, leave on the table, or take from the table? The following essays suggest some possible answers. My hope is that Pete might provide his own answer to that question in the future.

Mark P. Bangert provides an extensive history of the origins and characteristics of Gospel music, noting its roots in African, African American, and revivalist circles. He also names and offers perspectives on some of the problems perceived in this music. Theological assumptions behind the texts can be troublesome when conversion is overemphasized or double predestination lurks in the background. The entertainment value of Gospel music is at once its strength and a potential weakness, especially when Gospel music is exploited for commercial gain today. Bodily involvement in this music and related worship may at times imply romantic notions of the "primitive" being better or more natural, and use of Gospel music has at times been used as a litmus test for determining how committed persons are to anti-racism. Finally he explores the "ring shout" for its potential in articulating the gospel and a wholistic ecclesiology in a powerful way. The ring is well suited to express and even "enact" Christian eucharistic assembly.

Kathleen D. Billman describes Pete Pero as a person called to a world house. He has always tried to articulate the African American Lutheran contribution to the world house and to contend (not just intellectually but with his very life) that African American Christianity has always had a "world house" dimension. Pete has taught generations of students that ministry is not just about keeping house but about engaging the brokenness of the world. As Walter Brueggemann has reminded us, "To divide things up into the pastoral and the prophetic is to betray both." Pete's witness is a reminder that lament and hope are not opposites but, rather, presuppose each other. LSTC is all the richer for having had and in many ways still having Pete Pero among us.

Philip Hefner offers an interpretation of the nonviolent movements of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. and focuses on five areas: clarifying the terms *passive resistance, nonviolent resistance,* and *militant nonviolence;* militant nonviolence as a process of double conversion; militant nonviolence as a process of spiritual transformation; the larger human significance of militant nonviolence; and militant nonviolence as a process of love and altruism. Gandhi and King both wrote that militant nonviolence is the response of strong men and women, not weak ones; nonviolence is not for cowards. Double conversion refers to the conversion of the militant nonviolent confronter to trust in the one who is confronted. This takes the risk that the opponent will undergo a conversion that will enable him or her to respond in a reciprocal trust. Hefner follows the theories of Gandhi and King in their confrontations with oppression and then turns to an exploration of the terms *altruism* and *love*. For King nonviolent resistance emerged as the technique of the movement, while love stood as the regulating ideal. Today, violence is at the center of our attention as an American nation. It has never been clearer that Gandhi and King were right in their judgment that violence is not eradicated by counterviolence.

Ralph W. Klein cuts a cross section through the sixty-five chapters of the Books of Chronicles and asks particularly about the Chronicler's knowledge of Africa and Africans and how Africans related to and interacted with Israel in the Books of Chronicles. The land of Israel has strong ties with Africa in Chronicles. The genealogies in 1 Chronicles 1–9 show the Chronicler's openness to marriage with outsiders, and Solomon is praised by neighboring royalty, Huram of Tyre and the queen of Sheba, both of whom are connected in one way or another with Ham/Africa. Shishak of Egypt and Zerah the Cushite/ Ethiopian figure prominently in the story line of Chronicles. The Chronicler turns the African Pharaoh Neco into a prophet. Neco warns Josiah that God had commanded him to hurry toward Mesopotamia and that Josiah should therefore cease from opposing Neco or he would be destroyed. Naturally we

would like to know more about the relationship of Israel to Africa and Africans in the fourth century B.C.E. The Chronicler needed information about Africa and Africans to tell his story about Israel completely. As Pete Pero has demonstrated many times, no one can tell the story of Lutheranism credibly either without including Africans and African Americans in the account.

David Rhoads points out that the purpose of Galatians is to reclaim the gentile believers of Galatia as children of Abraham and therefore as children of God. They became such children by God's grace through faith and not by observing the Law of the Judean nation. To become a child of Abraham in a metaphorical sense was to be like Abraham, to do as Abraham did. Faithfulness is what made Jesus the seed of Abraham who was able to fulfill the promise. If Christ suffered the curse for Paul in a representative sense, then Paul has been "crucified with Christ." Jesus' life established the *pattern of faith* and, at the same time, freed others to be able to follow that pattern by having *faith in Jesus*. Jesus' death established the conditions that would enable everyone, Judeans and gentiles alike, to be justified before God by faith in the promise. The metaphorical incorporation into the children of Abraham includes and transcends the identity of those who are physical descendents of Abraham (Judeans) and those who are not (gentiles). A study of metaphorical kinship helps to explain how Paul's gospel transcended ethnocentricity and embraced all nations as potential children of God.

José David Rodríguez stresses the importance of popular religion and seeks its traces in the works of the Afro-Puerto Rican author Piri Thomas. This author wants to stimulate a critical examination of the religious and spiritual expression of traditionally underrepresented constituencies in North American society. The myths, utopias, and faith expressed in literature may help us overcome the messianic drought in which we now live. Thomas's writings have been described as the literature of "lower case" people. His works express protest and an unequivocal confession of the faith. Such a witness of faith demands integrity and showing respect for the dignity of human beings, who are *all* a product of God's gracious creative initiative. Those living in the ghetto are not litter or inferior. Hanging on a ghetto cross, rendered by the scorn and deceit of evil forces, Thomas encountered once again the gracious initiative of God he had experienced in the past through the loving care of his mother. His writings give eloquent expression to the vital and enduring contribution of the spirit of Protestantism from a popular perspective.

Linda E. Thomas tells the story of her own theological education and ministerial service and sets forth a number of theses on ministry and theologi-

cal education in the third Christian millennium. The church needs to face the challenge and necessity of normalizing diversity within theological education and of creating avenues for justice to recast power imbalances. We must learn to accept the constructs of our own tradition and appreciate at the same time the validity of other ways of viewing Christianity and faith in general. Theological education must recognize and take seriously the contextual, local, and multicultural conditions of our intellectual environment. Theological education in the third millennium must have bishops, presidents, and deans who understand the nuances of their own particular culture and remember that we construct truths from our local contexts. Moving from hegemony to valuing differences provides a great opportunity for theological education to shift from rationalist paradigms to more imaginative theological models.

Mark Thomsen reflects on an African proverb: To be or to be human is to belong. Western society, by contrast, often focuses on thinking or doing to claim its identity. Experience as a missionary in Africa showed how corporate responsibilities can take priority over personal desires. Experience with a gravely ill granddaughter, who never grew enough to think but who surely belonged to her family and to her God, expanded the sense of the African proverb. Two of the greatest insights of the New Testament advocate love for the enemy and justification of sinners. Everyone belongs and is cared about—that is the gospel. Jonah, that reluctant missionary to ancient Assyria (modern Iraq), learned the hard way that everyone belongs, no one is "out." I belong; therefore, I am. I am loved; therefore, I am.

I remember, no doubt somewhat inaccurately, the lyrics from the song "The Gambler" of some decades ago: "You've got to know when to hold them, know when to fold them, know when to walk away, know when to run." There's much food for thought in that song about the choices one makes in Christian life and ministry. Pete Pero has taken his turn at the table/altar with distinction, with much energy, and with many new perspectives. Yet we are still, or even especially, within the church a divided people in need of some "action" at the table.

Pete, go to Marburg!

Ralph W. Klein, Editor

The Gospel about Gospel—The Power of the Ring

Mark P. Bangert
John H. Tietjen Professor of Worship and Church Music
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

"I told them today," Albert ("Pete") Pero would often say to me as I met him in the hall coming from one of his classes, "I told them that it's all about ritual."

Never did we go beyond that friendly exchange to test his words of wisdom, but, walking away, I always mused how Pete is one of those who "does" theology to better understand doxology.

When Pete joined the faculty of the Lutheran School of Theology in the late 1970s he began to create a kind of magnetic field in which things African and African American could find energy, be extolled, debated, contextualized, and, above all, embraced, especially since he seemed to contain all of those dynamics within himself. During his early tenure at the seminary African American ritual patterns in community worship came with increased and welcomed regularity. By the end of the 80s, manifestations of the climate he helped to create included black preaching and the emergence of the LSTC Gospel Choir, a group that provided regular injections of its lively music into the campus worship life.

Perhaps because of its seeming distance from what some might consider customary worship music, because it asks of its hearers immediate reaction, and because of its ritual (and therefore very personal, deep, and potentially contentious) dimensions, the Gospel Sound, as Gospel music is often labeled, seems to be a good place to test out formulations regarding the foundations of worship music.

What follows is chiefly propelled by Luther's admonition in the opening paragraphs of his 1523 *Formula missae*, "we must dare something in the name of Christ."[1] In this case the "something" goes to print for two reasons: (1) as a testimony to Pete's expansive heart, which in matters of culture and ritual always meets questions not with reproof but rather with patient tutoring; and (2) as an attempt to offer a critique of a powerful, deeply meaningful style[2] of music by taking on the role of a critic in the

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1. *Luther's Works* 53: *Liturgy and Hymns*, ed. Ulrich Leupold (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965), 19.

2. The word "style" is a deliberate choice, since Gospel is less about a specific form or repertoire and more about individual performance, a point that figures largely in what follows. Any form of music can be "gospelized," as attested recently by the Gospel version of Handel's "Hallelujah" chorus. See Melva Costen, "African-American Liturgical Music in a Global Context," in *African-American Worship: Faith Looking Forward, The Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center*, 27 (Fall 1999/Spring 2000): 84.

sense musicologist Joseph Kerman[3] proposes, that is, one who does not stop short at repertoire description but considers all the factors involved in the *doing* of music.

Offspring of a family wide

To discover the gospel about Gospel means sorting through the roots of this music. Origins are many and diverse, including music of populations both white and black.

When Dwight Moody and Ira Sankey took their fledgling program of urban evangelization to Sunderland, England, in 1873, Sankey there devised the phrase "to sing the Gospel" as a way to market their campaign.[4] Advance notice let it be known that Dr. Moody would preach the gospel and Mr. Sankey would sing the gospel. A year later Philip P. Bliss published a collection of the songs used at these gatherings, giving it the title *Gospel Songs*.[5] From then on, songs that contained a heavy dose of good news for whatever oppressed situation or singer came to be known as "Gospel." Harry Eskew and James Downey offer this succinct definition of Gospel music:

> A large body of American religious song with texts that reflect aspects of the personal religious experience of Protestant evangelical groups, both white and black. Such songs first appeared in religious revivals during the 1850s but they are more closely associated with the urban revivalism that arose in the last third of the 19th century.[6]

But origins of Gospel are far more complicated than such description suggests. Early American settlers, especially New England Protestants, adorned their Calvinist-styled worship with psalms taken from metrical psalters brought along from the old country. Lack of musical instruments in their new surroundings reinforced their traditional conservative inclinations about music in worship. Delivery of the psalms thus relied on a practice known as "lining out." In this method, a leader sang a phrase from the hymn-like psalm in a rather sprightly tempo followed by the rest of the group singing the same phrase but at a much slower tempo. Depending on the situation, untrained singers together often produced heterophony (simultaneous divergent versions of the tune) while a gathering of more gifted ones provided harmony of sorts. Other surprise variations on the tune were derived from occasional ornamentations offered by the musically adventuresome (perhaps as a way to escape the boredom of the slow tempos).

These marks of improvisation themselves probably originated in the folk-song traditions of the immigrants.[7] More significant is that lined-out psalmody shares distinct characteristics with processes inherent to African and African American music. Lining out is nearly identical to the call-response pattern everywhere present in African music, while improvisatory ornamentation serves to give life to both spiritual and Gospel. It is fruitless, if not pointless, to determine who did what first.[8] Rather, the emergence of these practices in

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3. Joseph Kerman, *Contemplating Music: Challenges to Musicology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), chap. 1.

4. Costen, "African-American Liturgical Music," 85.

5. Philip P. Bliss and Dwight W. Whittle, *Gospel Songs* (Cincinnati, 1874).

6. *The New Groves Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 7th ed., s.v. "Gospel music," by Harry Eskew, James C. Downey, and H. C. Boyer, 172. Hereafter this encyclopedia is abbreviated *NGDMM*.

7. *Die Musik im Geschichte und Gegenwart, Sachteil*, rev. ed., s.v. "Sacred Singing," by Bernd Hoffmann, 797. Hereafter this encyclopedia is abbreviated *MGG*.

8. See a balanced discussion of this in *NGDMM*, s.v. "Spiritual," by Paul Oliver, 192.

several venues reveals an important root of the Gospel style.

Lining out of psalmody lasted well into the eighteenth century, when advocates of "regular singing" devised widespread programs of music education for all levels of psalm singers so that the practice of lining out and its aberrations might fall out of use. In the long run, campaigners for regularity are remembered more for their achievements in music education than for altering practices of psalmody. Lining-out techniques persisted in spite of these attempts at reform, for call-response patterns were alive and healthy in the growing body of African American music called "spirituals."

In the early part of the eighteenth century the importation of slaves from Africa commenced.[9] Newcomers arrived with embedded experience of African musical techniques, repertoires, rhythms, dances, poetry, and patterns of use. There was then, as there is now, no general African music but rather the musics of many nations or tribes.

Yet, common characteristics were shared by nearly all of the subgroups, among them the unity of dance and music, the call-response pattern, layered rhythm, the importance of improvisation, and voice quality groomed for outdoors.

The crucible of slavery forged new materials from these musical impulses. Long, difficult hours in the field gave rise to work songs, sorrow songs, and field hollers, not to mention moans and cries. Time away from the field yielded other musical developments. For some slaves a spiritual home of sorts could be found in the worship gatherings of their masters. Psalms sung at these occasions as well as hymns from the pen of Isaac Watts, soon known among them as the "hymns of Dr. Watts," entered the musical vocabulary of bonded African Americans. For most of the others, spiritual relief could be found only apart from the masters, giving rise to the more informal and sometimes clandestine gatherings of blacks in "praise houses" and "brush (or, hush) arbor" meetings.

Here, in the "invisible church," as it is sometimes called, the "black spiritual" underwent significant shaping. Cries and moans were shared, then expanded and contextualized with phrases from other materials. The "ring shout," a kind of shuffled dance, elicited improvised song fragments, later combined in ever more creative ways. Preachers birthed new texts and tunes by way of highly inflected stories and sermons. Conditions that spawned these meetings discouraged lengthy poetic forms in deference to short phrases that could be repeated and recontextualized to ease the specific plight of those gathered. Meanwhile, of course, these songs came to life via the musical patterns brought from the homeland.

In the 1930s George Pullen Jackson, a professor of German from Vanderbilt University, published several collections of what he called "white spirituals,"[10] concurrently proposing that this repertoire served as model from which black spirituals were formed. His views have since been capably refuted,[11] even though most scholars acknowledge his pioneering discovery of a significant body of music consisting of folk

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9. Jacqueline Cogdell Djedje, "African American Music to 1900," *The Cambridge History of American Music*, ed. David Nichols (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 115. In the prior century most slaves came from the West Indies.

10. See, for instance, *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1933).

11. John Lovell, *Black Song: The Forge and the Flame* (New York: Macmillan, 1972), 92–98 passim.

hymns, religious ballads, and camp meeting spirituals, all of which coexisted with, influenced, and were influenced by the black spiritual.[12]

One of the places where cross-fertilization occurred was in the "camp meeting"—mostly southern rural gatherings that brought together diverse people for several days at a time so that they might be renewed in faith, awakened, or converted. At their peak during the years 1800–1830, these meetings of the "Great Awakening" consisted of much preaching, evangelizing, singing, and sometimes communion. Often whites and blacks met conjointly though divided into separate camps. Side by side they could hear one another's singing. At specified times they came together. Because of the purposes of the gathering, songs often stressed conversion or the fears connected with double predestination. Baptismal themes were rare, because slave masters were known to discourage baptisms of slaves. On occasion a convert chose to fulfill the requisite testimony after conversion by composing a song. Usually these took the form of a ballad (such as "Wayfaring Stranger" or "Wicked Polly"). So that everyone could sing, camp meeting music had to be simple and repetitive. Song leaders had no recourse to keyboards or other accompanying instruments, so they relied on variations of the call-response pattern thereby strengthening its role as a common denominator for much of the sacred singing occurring during these years.

Not all origins of Gospel were rural. Some African Americans living in the northern urban areas of the east coast in particular centered their efforts in developing a hymnody that was built on the foundations of both the spiritual and the gospel songs in the tradition of "Dr. Watts." A pioneer in this effort was Richard Allen, founder and first bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. In 1801 he arranged to make available a collection of hymns for his congregation.[13] Not only was his printed collection the first of its kind, but also he set in motion the publication of materials, which gave rise to yet more spirituals as well as providing for the worship of established African American churches.

By the middle of the 19th century, most of the roots of Gospel were established. Stages of growth followed. For instance, the tendency to provide songs in a popular style with musical connections to marches and parlor music and with textual anchors in personal experience and straightforward expressions of the "good news" flourished in the songs of William Bradbury ("He Leadeth Me"), intended by him to be used in the increasingly popular Sunday School, and in the thousands of hymns by Fanny Crosby ("Blessed Assurance"), to name just two of many sources.

As cities expanded, urban growth from Gospel's roots increased in tandem. The revivals led by Moody and Sankey succeeded because of the popularity of the gospel hymn, a staple at the events. Sankey both sang these songs as solos and developed ways to lead others in song. The Moody/Sankey formula proved to be productive and led to further pairings of evangelist/musician. Bliss also worked with Moody, but after the latter's death William Sunday and Homer Rodeheaver expanded on concepts and repertoire developed earlier. Later still, under the guidance of Charles Alexander, these revivals took on a new informality, with Alexander using the

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12. See *NGDMM*, "Spiritual," 192, and Costen, "African-American Liturgical Music," 85.

13. Richard Allen, *A Collection of Spiritual Songs and Hymns Selected from Various Authors* (Philadelphia, 1801).

piano instead of the organ, employing sweeping gestures, and filling the atmosphere with banter and jokes.[14]

Among African Americans, the emancipation of the slaves seemed also to elicit an emancipation of the black spiritual. Collections began to appear, which in turn supplied the grist for choral arrangements eagerly sought by prestigious choral groups such as the Fisk Singers in the 1870s. The Fisk group and its many imitators brought a certain respectability to the spiritual even if certain important characteristics of this music were lost in the process. Meanwhile, matters were not as settled as these arrangements suggested. While slavery technically ceased at the conclusion of the Civil War, transplanted African Americans continued to experience oppression, particularly in northern cities. The lack of economic opportunities made things worse. From the midst of those conditions arose a new yearning for hymns of comfort, satisfied in part by the urban revivals but also by an expanding African American gospel hymnody typified and perhaps best represented by Charles Albert Tindley ("Stand by Me").[15]

Tindley's texts and tunes resonated well with African Americans and soon gained popularity among those churches that emerged from the Azusa Street Revivals in Los Angeles (1906–1909). The excitement generated by these intensely personal and powerful worship experiences created a link to both black and white gospel hymns, particularly as they were "African-Americanized" through syncopation, interval alteration (following African models), and call-response delivery. But even this kind of growth required yet more maturation before it could be recognized as Gospel:

> The basic performance style of 20th-century black gospel music originated in Memphis in about 1907 when the founders of the Sanctified Pentecostal Church of God in Christ, inspired by a revival they had attended in Los Angeles, instituted their own services, characterized by speaking in tongues (glossolalia), shouting, trances and visions, and suitably emotional music, often improvised and sung in a highly charged style. Performances by skilled songleaders evoked from the congregation bodily movement . . . rhythmic responses . . . and occasional shouted interpolations in the tradition of 19th-century ring shouts and circle dances.[16]

Traditional Gospel in these early years evolved often from a fruitful combination of evangelist and musician(s), such as (male) quartets or (female) trios. One such combination was that of Theodore Frye, Thomas Dorsey, and Reverend Smith at Ebenezer church in south Chicago. Dorsey came to Chicago from Atlanta where he had made a name for himself as a blues singer. His personal life was full of complications, but he was always convinced that whatever the difficulties there was good news, which could be expressed through techniques at the hand of the blues singer. The death of his wife and child in 1930 set him in a desperate search for some good news. He found it as he shaped the famous song, "Precious Lord."[17] Dorsey's influence upon Gospel and gospel singers together with his organizational abilities were far reaching. Blues linked to Gospel yielded a sound ripe for exploration.

Such a merger serves as an early example of how Gospel musicians engage in

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14. *NGDMM*, "Gospel music," 174.

15. Tindley's *New Songs of Paradise* (Philadelphia: Paradise Publishing Company, 1916), went through seven editions, according to Costen, 87.

16. *NDGMM*, "Gospel music," 179.

17. The story of Dorsey's life and contributions is brilliantly told by Michael Harris in *The Rise of Gospel Blues: The Music of Thomas Andrew Dorsey in the Urban Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

an enriching interchange between idioms of the church and those outside of church. Sometimes the dialogue eventuates in significant new alterations to the form. To sing the blues adequately, for example, requires a soloist; otherwise the personal dimensions of the idiom are diminished. Dorsey's reformulation, therefore, coupled to an established practice of (personal) improvisation in the musical roots of Gospel, led to a new focus on individual performers and a search for new ideas in music outside of church. In the subsequent history of Gospel, as a matter of fact, individuals and small ensembles figure largely.

Fascination with individual performers reached a new level in 1969 when Gospel singer Edward Hawkins recorded "Oh Happy Day." The recording met with almost instant success across the charts. Most historians agree that Hawkins gave birth to "contemporary Gospel."[18]

In summary, Melva Costen offers this description of traditional Gospel Sound:

1. Texts are often subjective and filled with hope, thanksgiving, and lamentation; some texts speak objectively of the Triune God with a strong focus on Jesus.

2. Texts are strophic in form, tending to be sixteen or thirty-two measures long.

3. Improvised manner of the style of delivery is as important as what is sung. Delivery often includes spoken vocal injections and chanted testimonies.

4. Melodies often utilize flatted thirds and sevenths, as in the blues tradition.

5. The use of marked syncopation and highly improvised instrumental accompaniment serves as a driving force of the music.

6. There is careful utilization of techniques to "fill in" measures of rests, such as arpeggios, passing tones, runs, chromatics, or glissandi.[19]



Gospel sound—for some it's just so much static

"It's not necessarily a pleasurable experience for the uninitiated," writes Viv Broughton of the Gospel Sound.[20] Indeed, down through the years there have been those, African Americans included, who have protested the introduction of any kind of music into worship that displayed signs of African origins. In 1841 the AME Church passed a resolution urging their preachers to "strenuously oppose the singing of . . . tunes and hymns of our own composing."[21] In our own day strong reactions from Euro-Americans against the introduction of Gospel into worship usually go undocumented (for obvious reasons), but they nevertheless exist. Carefully researched apologies

18. *NGDMM*, "Gospel, " 179, and Tony Heilbut, *The Gospel Sound* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971), 30.

19. Costen, "African-American Liturgical Music," 91.

20. Viv Broughton, *Black Gospel: An Illustrated History of the Gospel Sound* (Poole: Dorset: Blandford Press, 1985), 7.

21. Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1971), 131.

for the music increase in number but nevertheless reveal a perceived need to keep on making the case for its inclusion in mainstream thinking about worship music.[22]

Too often reasons for continuing resistance to Gospel are advanced with little or no recognition of its roots or its innate potential, resulting in few paths towards resolution. Unfortunately, the real gospel about Gospel is overshadowed by entrenched views and an unwillingness to understand its origins. Here the proposal is not to ignore the perceived problems but rather to name them, understand them, and move on to the potentials of gospel about Gospel.

Four such problems arise from the review of Gospel's roots: (1) theological assumptions behind texts; (2) dominance of entertainment values; (3) implied call to holistic worship; (4) the use of Gospel as a shibboleth for anti-racism.

Theology. While for many people the intensely personal, heartfelt lyrics and the ecstatic delivery of Gospel provide a means to express their own spirituality, for others the theological assumptions behind and in the text appear to be contrary to many of their most deeply held convictions. The latter would be true especially of those whose catechetical training consisted of deliberate delineation of positions regarding certain areas of Christian teaching.

That the theology of some Gospel might be bothersome should come as no surprise. Origins in the camp meetings and in situations where baptism, for instance, was discouraged produced emphases on conversion (and/or double predestination) and one's experience of coming to faith. Further, rural contexts of earlier Gospel suggest that texts originated from people who were prevented from or had no access to formalized catechesis (often true of the spiritual leaders as well), so that formulations of Christian belief grew chiefly from experience or handed-down folk belief. In addition, later Gospel emerged from the holiness churches and naturally bears the marks of Pentecostal tenets.

In Gospel, more often than not the "cry" came first, poetry second, and musical formulation last. Other repertoires of music evolve differently. That said, Gospel texts tend to express things that upon further thought are more complicated than presented. "Lead me, guide me along the way; for if you lead me, I cannot stray."[23] Well, yes—but then again, no. Does that mean that, should I stray, God is no longer leading me? Given my straying, does God pop in and out of my life? What kind of capricious God is that? Or does it mean that I am praying for God's hand in my life in spite of all my straying? Well, yes—but then again, no.

It is to be noted that Gospel-music scholars recognize how some texts can skew understandings of the faith in unhelpful ways. In a 1993 workshop on multicultural church music Costen reflected on how she incorporates Gospel music into her

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22. See, for instance, Costen, Heilbut, and Broughton, who writes in *Black Gospel*, p. 9: "I'd like to hope that the world would begin to listen to black gospel. Not for its excitement, not for entertainment, not as an anachronism, not as a precursor of other music, not as a collector's obsession, not as a primitive art form, not as a folk music (though it may be all of these); not even necessarily for the lyrics of the songs, for they are frequently banal in isolation. Gospel deserves to be heard for the depth of its prophecy out of the mouths of its prophets . . . great wisdoms and jubilations, pulsing through the music quite apart from what is actually being articulated."

23. "Lead Me, Guide Me," *This Far By Faith* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1999), #70.

worship planning by selecting songs that are in line with community creedal affirmation.

Favorite Gospel songs often evolved from theological climates unaware of more critical readings of the Christian sources. John Spencer, in turn, has issued a call for a new ethnic hymnology, one that is both exegetically responsible and faithful to scriptural visions of the place of women and the equality of races. "The problem *is* our hymnody,"[24] he writes, and then issues this invitation: "I am calling for a reformation, a renaissance, comprised of a renewed look at the history, cultures, and cosmologies of Africa in order to create a hymnody that, somewhat like the poetic and narrative literature of the Hebrew Bible, esteems Africa."[25]

There is no way to resolve all the issues of theology and Gospel text, especially if such theological issues are presented or imagined as gates to a full embrace of Gospel as worship music. A better path is to acknowledge problematic areas, discuss them, attempt to understand them, and see where the path leads. To ignore theological difficulties fosters dishonesty and the kind of relativism that muddies the apostolic faith and spirit.

Meanwhile, getting to the gospel about Gospel may in fact moderate theological concerns that are so often troublesome for the "uninitiated."

Entertainment. "In the 1960s, gospel music became entertainment," writes Samuel Floyd,[26] confirming what others both inside and outside the Gospel culture have either said or felt. The aura of the entertainment mode comes naturally to Gospel. As one looks to its origins, the profile of the solo singer gradually expands, probably because the role of improvisation is at the core of early psalmody, the spiritual, and the Gospel blues. Like it or not, the Gospel idiom encourages the display of an individual's abilities; if any should happen to appreciate those gifts, they naturally reward such talent with applause. Applause leads to fame, and fame leads to demand.

Like it or not, the Gospel idiom encourages the display of an individual's abilities.

Individuals or ensembles therefore look for those signs of achievement in order to affirm their own sense of mission and purpose.

One of the marks of Gospel and its roots has been the interchange between Gospel and its precursors and popular music. Commentators have not hesitated to take notice of what sorts of repercussions such an alliance has yielded. Boyer points out that in the 70s Gospel let itself be disconnected from the "black church" and then found it had to recreate for itself a kind of sense of church in the performance space.[27] And soon thereafter, he continues,

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24. Jon Michael Spencer, *Sing a New Song: Liberating Black Hymnody* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 20.

25. Spencer, *Sing a New Song*, 23.

26. Samuel A. Floyd Jr., *The Power of Black Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 196.

27. *NGDMM*, "Gospel Music," 180–81.

The response to gospel singing changed from soft weeping, fainting and speaking in tongues to that of a rock concert, with applause in recognition of vocal pyrotechnics. And, as in rock concerts, high-volume amplification now became a part of the performance.[28]

So it is that almost concurrent with its emergence the history of Gospel becomes a history of individuals and groups: Sister Rosetta Tharpe, Willie Mae Ford Smith, Mahalia Jackson, Marion Wilson, Roberta Martin Singers, Clara Ward Singers, Sallie Martin Singers, Barrett Sisters, the Winans, and so on.

Those deterred by this seeming preoccupation with the entertainment dimension of Gospel can discover company among Gospel practitioners and scholarly fans themselves. Anthony Heilbut, in his much-quoted study of Gospel,[29] devotes a major section of his work to describing the tension, if not chasm, that exists between those of the old school of Gospel—practitioners predating the lure of public popularity—and those of the new school. Slightly more pointed are recent comments from Obery M. Hendricks Jr., president of Payne Theological Seminary in Wilberforce, Ohio:

As the result of the "clowning" that has become normative and its pervasive performance-orientation, its emphasis on "wrecking the house," and shameless appeals to emotion, the contemporary Gospel music genre has come to function as an opiate for the masses of African American people. . . . Like a drug, its goal is not to empower its users to change reality, but simply to change the way they feel.[30]

A differing view comes from Clara Ward, one of the earliest proponents of contemporary Gospel. She defends the use of the popular venue by pointing out that God intended the message of the gospel also for those who "in many cases never attend a house of worship."[31] Costen, too, though worried that Gospel will belong no longer to the church but to an increasingly large business corporation, nevertheless wants to have faith in Gospel's long and beneficial history of interchange.

For those put off by these tendencies it should be noted that currently most styles of worship music are subject to the dangers of commoditization and, worse, the dynamics of entertainment. One cannot wait around until these issues are completely fixed before taking on the culture that accompanies a new idiom.

Holistic worship. When a musical worship encounter is "gospelized," expectations are that participants become totally involved. Depending on the local context, such bodily investment translates into swaying, clapping, audible interjections, moaning, even screaming, swooning, and trancelike modes of behavior. Total body involvement is endemic to African musics. In that context it finds release in the dance, itself a sign of the dancer's connection to the earth since most dances from Africa originated as outdoor cultic activities. Music and dance together then ritualize the correlation of body, voice, mind, and the earth.

Displaced African musics provided fertile ground for the development of the black spiritual, one of the progenitors of Gospel. Slave culture made possible the support of certain syncretistic elements[32] that evolved naturally from the displacement process. Among those was the wel-

28. *NGDMM*, "Gospel Music," 180–81.

29. Heilbut, *The Gospel Sound*, 320–25.

30. Obery M. Hendricks Jr., "'I am the Holy Dope Dealer': The Problem with Gospel Music Today," *The Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center* 27 (Fall 1999/Spring 2000): 55.

31. As quoted in Costen, "African-American Liturgical Music," 93.

32. *MGG*, 793, 795.

come extended to trancelike behavior.[33] Openness to physical involvement in worship thus came naturally and could be linked to similar features. From Pentecostal environs, consequently, the Gospel enterprise began to assimilate an appreciation for the importance of intense emotional response to the music.[34]

More recently, proponents for the whole body at worship point to the concept of *participatio actuosa* (active participation), a new pattern of worship that is liberally treated by the Second Vatican Council in *Sacrosanctum Concilium.*[35] Meant to encourage Roman Catholics to take a more active role in the liturgy, the directive resonated far beyond that church, causing liturgical reformers everywhere to advocate for increased action in worship. African models helped to grasp the possibilities. But for some an invitation to "gospelizing" matters liturgical translated into an invitation to a kind of conversion, to a completely new mode of behavior which meant reprogramming nearly everything they held to be dear about worship. What is more, the invitation came with the implications that more bodily involvement actually represented a more natural state and that what they were accustomed to represented a lesser system of negotiating life and worship.

There are two issues here in need of address. First, the reluctance to enter the Gospel music arena may represent more than a simple fear of programmed bodily involvement such as "passing the peace." Behind invitations to loosen up in worship may in fact be the questionable assumptions that things African (and hence Gospel) are more primitive, more natural, than habits European and that African and African American music is hence more directly in touch with the body and consequently better. Simon Frith, without naming Gospel, has raised concerns about such a typically Romantic notion, and, citing John Chernoff, he approvingly iterates that "African music and dance are not performed as unrestrained emotional expression but are rather ways of realizing aesthetic and ethical structures."[36] Frith notes that "ecstatic" is the most "inappropriate adjective to apply to African music"[37] because the feelings associated with this music, while intense, are not intended to be overwhelming or out of control. Invitations to Gospel, therefore, fare best when they avoid guilt-inducing exhortations to return to a more primitive state supposedly unbridled.

Second, holistic worship can manifest itself in a variety of ways. Clapping and swaying are not necessarily the only marks of whether or not one's body is "into" the worship moment. While some clap, interject, and sway, others might be thoroughly invested in and aware of the visual effect such bodily investment creates.

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33. The classic study on music and trance is Gilbert Rouget, *Music and Trance*, rev. Brunhilde Biebuyck (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985). Rouget maintains that music's role in trance is mediating and that the person experiencing the trance is a willing and active partner in the event.

34. See Judith Becker, "Anthropological Perspectives on Music and Emotion," *Music and Emotion*, ed. Patrik N. Juslin and John A. Sloboda (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 150, where the author discusses "Pentecostal arousal" as an example of religious ecstasy which is used to confirm the salvation of the worship.

35. "Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy," *Documents on the Liturgy 1963–1979* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1982), 4–27. Pertinent articles are 14–20.

36. John Chernoff, *African Rhythm and African Sensibility* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 150.

37. Simon Frith, *Performing Rites* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 131.

Embracing Gospel as worship music can occur much more easily without burdening it with extraneous agendas, even though it is hard to imagine anyone not moved to some physical response to the driving rhythms.

Shibboleth. In Judges 12:6 the writer recounts how the password *Shibboleth* was used by the sentries of Gilead to detect boundary crossings by Ephraimites. The Ephraimites were unable to say the word and were thus reckoned as outsiders. It may not be too great an exaggeration to say that Gospel has often been held hostage by political agendas with the result that the use (or nonuse) of Gospel in a given worshipping assembly is thought to be a mark of how deeply the gathering is committed to anti-racism and other African American causes.

To be sure, it is difficult to document such tendencies—Who would want to declare such motivations? On the other hand, there *is* a history of linkage between a commitment to African American agendas and the use of Gospel. Cheryl Sanders writes that Gospel has been a key factor in attracting young people to corporate advocacy of equality among the races.

> Indeed, black gospel choirs are present at public and private colleges and universities all over the U.S., including those whose student bodies are predominantly white. To designate the proliferation of collegiate gospel choirs as a movement seems appropriate, since they emerged as student-initiated organizations during the peak period of black student involvement in public protests, political organizations, and demands for black studies programs, outlasting many other institutionalized expressions of black awareness among college students.[38]

Those reluctant to feign receptivity of Gospel music reach that condition not because of the linkage of public program and music. Rather, it seems, they resist manipulation around hidden agendas. It is one thing to explore a musical expression as part of a total self-examination of local ministry and mission; it is another to use Gospel as proof of something that does not yet exist. Tokenism of this sort may in fact lead to greater negativism toward ministerial hopes and foster division within a worshipping assembly.

Power of the ring

Issues latent in its customary use sidetrack the potential contribution of Gospel for Christian assembly. But it need not be so. Already it has been noted that the roots of Gospel reach back to the ring shout. Samuel Floyd believes the shout to be not only the single most important foundation of black music but also the source of its power. He writes:

> The shout was a distinctive cultural ritual in which music and dance were merged and fused. In the ring the musical practices of the slaves converged in the Negro Spiritual and in other African-American musical forms and genres. In this way, the ring helped preserve the elements that we have come to know as the characterizing and foundational elements of African-American music.[39]

From George Washington Cable's 1886 description of a Sunday recreation on Congo Square (Place Congo) in New Orleans we discover some of the dynamics inherent to most ring shouts, even though he described an Americanized, if not partly fictionalized, version of an activity born in former times. Cable describes how the people gathered together according to their national ancestry (tribes), forming rings

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38. Cheryl Sanders, "Resistance, Rebellion, and Reform: The Collegiate Gospel Choir Movement in the United States," *The Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center* 27 (Fall 1999/Spring 2000): 202.

39. Floyd, *The Power of Black Music*, 6.

that circumscribed rhythm makers while others stood outside the ring to support and interact with those of the circle. He writes of call/response patterns, hand clapping as substitutes for drumming, dancers entering and leaving the ring, individuals inserting improvised variations on song patterns, and occasional moments of trance.[40] Because those who formed these rings represented different national origins, several rings tended to emerge at the same time, creating a kind of ecumenical communion of assemblies.

Slipping into ecclesiastical metaphor here is not a stretch, for among the slaves the ring served also religious purposes. It was an easy transition to move from the ring that referenced the African High God to a ring that honored the Christian God. But then the ring did change to accommodate its new purposes among slaves adjusting to faith practices of their masters. For these participants, Eileen Southern writes, "the shout was not under any circumstances to be construed as a dance."[41] They sang only songs of a religious nature ("running spirituals"), and some participants were careful not to cross their feet by lifting them from the ground lest they slip into nonreligious versions of the practice. "Dancers" characteristically joined these circle formations by confining movement to the head and upper parts of the body and by moving the circle along with a kind of shuffle. Exhibitions of individual skill were welcomed, and, if there were drummers in these rings of new purpose, they would be located in the center, while others stood on the outside of the circle offering handclapping. Reports indicate that these versions of the ring shout often followed formal gatherings in the praise houses or constituted the core of late-night gatherings in the bush arbor. Because the ring enabled the people to ventilate their innermost feelings and needs, this mode of assembly was widespread and common.

Use of the ring at the camp meetings of the Great Awakening poignantly illustrates its deep meaning and enduring potential. On the last day of these revivals, it was reported, the African Americans present began knocking down the plank partitions that separated the white quarters from those of the blacks, and then the blacks would encircle the entire assembly to begin the farewell march around the gathering.[42] The ring signaled, if only momentarily, the vision of new orders.

Where's the power? The power lies partly in the pervasiveness of the ring and in its august roots in the homeland from time immemorial. Floyd marvels at how performers and listeners together explored, affirmed, and celebrated their culture in the ring, thereby fulfilling the marks of a good performance.[43] In this single activity individuals sought out the traditional collective religious experience, and the ring did not let them down; it provided that kind of continuity which stood firmly against the forces that would tear them down as well as apart.

But its power resides more forcefully in the activity constituting its existence. The ring *enacts* the community its members both deeply remember and presently seek. It is flexible. The ring can always expand—easily. It welcomes the individual and the individual's gifts. Its very movement inscribes the changes that are forced upon it, but it does so by creative adaptation

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40. Floyd, *The Power of Black Music*, 35–37.

41. Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 169.

42. Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 88.

43. Floyd, *The Power of Black Music*, 228.

while being sustained by its own power. The ring does not exclude because of heterodox station but rather expects some to have a part by being outside the ring; yet even those in such liminal space are needed for the enactment, too. In points of entrance, in the circular movement, and in places in between, the ring offers individuals an opportunity to find a way to "explore, affirm and celebrate their feelings of who they are,"[44] which, for the slaves, it seemed, was subjected at every juncture to attempts at obliteration. The ring enacts and in some respects suspends the tensions and negotiated resolutions that exist between the individual and the larger cultural community. The ring is therefore a metaphor for the worshiping Christian assembly.

Nowhere is that better perceived than in the invitation to improvisation. Recalling, for example, the lining-out practice of early American psalm singing, it is easy to appreciate how improvisatory participation is central to the American experience of religious singing. It is also central to the processes of the ring shout. Spaces exist for one to take up the song and give it an individual twist. In the case of Dorsey, maintains Floyd, such gaps for improvisation were purposely introduced in order to invite personal testimony.[45]

The meaning of such implied invitation is clear in the ring—it enacts the very relationship the individual has to the ring, the individual both receiving its ordination while affirming loyalty to the community's song, and therefore its existence. The meaning and place of improvisation in other kinds of musics are less well understood, though recent attempts are to the point. In a study that seeks to navigate around the notions of "work" as fixed composition and composer as priestlike dispenser, Bruce Benson strikes a case for the mediating function of improvisation, that is, the interpretive activity of both performer and listener while a "piece" of music comes alive. For Benson, the musical event is one that includes composer, performer, and listener, and at each level there is a kind of improvisation going on. Compositions are living organisms, he proposes, "pieces" of a whole that exists partly in conception but also in performance and in a history of listening. The musical experience is therefore a dialogue, which means—and here is where the argument becomes pertinent—that musical events happen in community,[46] they require an "infusion of life" in order to be music, and they are endemically ethical.[47] What drives this understanding of music is the notion of improvisation—the individual shaping of what is already provided.[48]

From a related perspective, Andrew Cyprian Love has made a case for the importance of improvisation as a tool for setting in motion the experience of "becoming" as described by Heidegger.[49] While Love's concern grows out of his skills as an organist, he recognizes its usefulness in broader strokes, advocating for more spontaneity in liturgical act.

Is that it, then? Improvisation finds a musical home in the liturgy because it manifests a quirky need of liturgy to show some spontaneity? The significance of these

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44. Christopher Small, *Music of the Common Tongue* (New York: Riverrun Press, 1987), 416.

45. Floyd, *The Power of Black Music*, 128.

46. Bruce Ellis Benson, *The Improvisation of Musical Dialogue* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 48.

47. Benson, *The Improvisation*, 164.

48. Benson describes eleven different kinds of improvisation, pp. 26–30.

49. Andrew Cyprian Love, *Musical Improvisation, Heidegger, and the Liturgy: A Journey to the Heart of Hope* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellon Press, 2003).

appeals for improvisation are, I suspect, much more profound. Both Benson and Love point to an appreciation for music that includes far more than the process of rendering chart into sound. Improvisation throws its weight to the significance of music as process. By introducing the neologism of "musicking," Christopher Small has called attention to the radical implications of music in this new light.[50] Musicking, Small advances, is a political matter in the widest sense; it is "an important component of our understanding of ourselves and of our relationships with other people and the other creatures with which we share our planet."[51] Small wants us to grasp the significance of how the musical act establishes a set of relationships and that it is in those relationships that the meaning of the act lies.

The ring, its invitation to improvisation, its affirmation of the old communal bonds, is an enactment of things far beyond anything that might be captured on an iPod. The ring enfolds deep relationships and energy for living. It takes no large leaps of the imagination to perceive how the ring is well-suited to express—no, the word is *enact*—Christian Eucharistic assembly. For it is in Eucharistic assembly that the Holy Spirit calls believers together again and again to shape them into the body of Christ. That shaping remains incomplete idea unless it is somehow enacted, so that individual members might gain a vision of what the body is like even outside specified time and space. The musicking of the ring enacts holy ensemble, set in motion by the Master of the ring himself.

By reclaiming its roots and power in the ring, Gospel as style does what Eucharistic liturgy asks of its participants: to manifest the bodily energy provided by its Head. The good news about Gospel is that its origins set it free from theological positioning, the lure of entertainment, the lonely burden of soliciting holistic worship posture, and enslavement to racist agendas. The good news about Gospel is that the dynamics of the ring are a friendly call to other styles of worship music as well, so that all the musicking of the assembly be an enactment of holy ensemble.

The power of the ring, finally, elicits practical questions that are at the very foundations of worship music of all kinds, including Gospel. What to do with the bystanders? Are they secondary to the event or integral to the ensemble? Will they be welcomed in the ring should the Spirit call them there? Where will the singers and "drummers" be placed in the assembly? Will they be able to shape the ring easily and naturally? In the larger unfolding of parish worship renewal, is it time for the people of the ring (Gospel musicians or any musicians, for that matter) to "make a grand march round de encampment,"[52] inviting those within the camp to join them at the margins in order to be the body of Christ in the world?

Ah, but now we are back to the classroom. The truth of the matter is that it *is* all about ritual.

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50. Christopher Small, *Musicking* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1998), 13.

51. Small, *Musicking*, 13.

52. Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 88.

Albert (Pete) Pero: Called to a World House

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Dr. Albert (Pete) Pero's dreams have always been big, so I was not surprised when his last sabbatical request (for a leave in Winter/Spring 2002) listed three major projects, which I suspect set the agenda not only for the limited time frame of that sabbatical leave but for the future adventures of his productive life. The working title of one of these projects, "Ecumenism: The Vocation of the Theologian/Minister within the World House," came to mind immediately when I was asked to give a title for this tribute. In particular, the phrase "world house" caught my attention.

Pete's theological imagination has been inspired in no small measure by the work of Martin Luther King, Jr., in whose company he struggled on behalf of God's dream of freedom and equality for all and whose theological legacy he continues to teach LSTC students. In his project proposal for "Ecumenism: The Vocation of the Theologian/Minister in the World House," Pete quoted from King's final major writing, *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?*

> We have inherited a large house, a great "world-house" in which we have to live together—black and white, Easterner and Westerner, Gentile and Jew, Catholic and Protestant, Moslem and Hindu—a family unduly separated in ideas, culture and interest, who, because we can never again live apart, must learn somehow to live with each other in peace.[1]

Taking the phrase "world house" from King as a description of the locale in which all theologies are ultimately situated and to whose good they are ultimately directed, Pete set a course heading for the culminating projects of his theological career. His agenda for what he referred to in his last faculty review as the "twilight of my ministry" is characteristic of the theological purpose he has articulated and embodied throughout his ministry as a teacher, pastor, and scholar—to articulate the African American Lutheran contribution to the world house, and to contend (not just intellectually, but with his very life) that African American Christianity has always had a "world house" dimension. In the words of Peter Paris, "the parenthood of God and the kinship of all peoples" has historically been at the core of the social teaching of Black churches amidst the suffering of slavery and enduring scars of racism in/on the United States—an affirmation which is simultaneously an act of resistance to all that negates the humanity and dignity of African Americans.[2]

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1. Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), 167.

2. Peter J. Paris, *The Social Teaching of the Black Churches* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985).

In the short paragraphs of this tribute, however, I speak not as a reviewer of Pete's scholarly contributions to theology and the church, past, present, or future. That has been and is being done far more eloquently than I could ever hope to do through other essays in this and the preceding *Currents* issue. Instead, I focus my remarks on the impact of Pete's witness as a "theologian/minister within the world house" as I have personally experienced it at LSTC. Because of Pete's witness, I am challenged to wrestle more significantly with some mysteries of what it means to work together as colleagues in and on behalf of a "world house." This witness has many dimensions, but I'll focus on three ways Pete's voice will ring in my ears, urging me to remember not to put asunder what God has joined together.

World and house belong together

Several months ago a tragedy occurred in a particular house on the south side of Chicago. The story told by newspapers focused on the murder of certain family members by one of their own kin who had become terribly distraught. There are many such stories in newspapers published all over the world every day; the details vary, but the story is often told as if it is but one story, endlessly repeated. The story is particular, however, to the persons who experience it—to members of the suffering family, neighborhood, and congregation who feel the agony in their bodies, minds, and spirits; whose labor it is to wrest, discover, and/or receive meanings from such experiences of extremity.

I remember the day Pete interrupted a discussion of some sort going on at the seminary (it is telling that I remember the interruption more than the original subject of discussion!) by giving voice to this very ministry situation, with which he and Cheryl were personally involved at the time. I remember the silence in the room as he spoke; the palpable sense, for a few moments, that ministry has everything to do with the encounter between life and death, with what God is doing in us and among us in that interface.

Pete has taught generations of students that ministry is not just about keeping house but about engaging the brokenness of the world.

Pete has taught generations of students that ministry is not just about keeping house but about engaging the brokenness of the world. In ministry the church seeks to embody, albeit in frail and limited ways, God's hope for the world and God's resistance to every power of destruction. We can't be the church if we don't get out of the church "house" into the world. We can't be Christ's church if the world for which Christ suffered to redeem does not inform how we understand the central activities that go on in the house among its family members, such as baptism, Eucharist, Word, prayer, song. When sanctuary and street, world and house are rent asunder, whatever ecclesiology is left after that is probably of the "noisy gong or clanging cymbal" kind. When things get too esoteric in seminary conversation, I think I'll see Pete begin to fidget and imagine his interrupting the con-



versation, in the kind of impatient tone his colleagues learned to recognize as a call to "break it down" and "get real."

Pastoral and prophetic belong together

Such tragedies as the one just alluded to are at once deeply personal and deeply corporate. They take place in a web of socioeconomic-political relationships as well as intimate relationships; thus, analyses and interventions that are limited to explorations of intrapsychic and interpersonal dynamics are insufficient for theologians/ministers in the world house. From my first months as a new professor of pastoral care and pastoral theology more than a decade ago, Pete, a systematic theologian who was deeply interested in the ministry of pastoral care and counseling, let me know in no uncertain terms that any pastoral theology that didn't take the impact of racism, sexism, and other dimensions of systemic oppression seriously in theologizing about human experience and pastoral response was not only going to be irrelevant but also damaging to persons, especially persons of color. In one of the post-retirement conversations I hope to have with Pete, I covet the opportunity to hear his reflections on some of the new developments in pastoral theology over the past decade, thanks in no small measure to the contributions of Homer Ashby, Archie Smith, Carroll Watkins Ali, Lee Butler, Edward Wimberly, and other African American pastoral theologians, whose work has had a tremendous theoretical impact on the field of pastoral theology,[3] especially in exploring the interface between personal and social transformation in pastoral ministry.

That there has been a deep divide in theological education and Christian ministry between the pastoral and the prophetic has been lamented by scholars in many disciplines who would agree with the pointed critique of Walter Brueggemann about the way much ministry is conducted: "To divide things up into the pastoral and the prophetic is to betray both."[4] But the move between the recognition of a corrosive division and learning to resist its familiar traps is a complicated one. If it were true that insight alone creates the conditions for all the change we need, lots more would be different from what it is. Pete,

3. See especially Homer U. Ashby, Jr., *Our Home Is Over Jordan: A Black Pastoral Theology* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2003); Carroll A. Watkins Ali, *Survival and Liberation: Pastoral Theology in African American Context* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1999); Archie Smith, Jr., *Navigating the Deep River: Spirituality in African American Families* (Cleveland: United Church Press, 1997); Lee H. Butler, Jr., *A Loving Home: Caring for African American Marriage and Families* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2000); Edward Wimberly, *Relational Refugees: Alienation and Reincorporation in African American Churches and Communities* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000).

4. Walter Brueggemann, *The Hopeful Imagination: Prophetic Voices in Exile* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 18.

along with others, resisted a paradigm that separated personal and social transformation and sought to bring them together theoretically before it was fashionable to do so, and my generation of pastoral theologians is richer for that resistance. One of the first things Pete ever said to me was in response to an early effort of mine to explore the relationship between personal and public worlds in pastoral care and counseling: "Do you really believe this? Because if you do, it's radical." I hope I'll always hear the question—and wrestle with the implications.

Confrontation and consolation belong together

Making meaning amidst experiences of extremity is no easy task, especially when one is positioned amidst a storm rather than at a distance from it. Deeply concerned about the lack of progress in the recruitment and placement of a substantial number of African American Lutheran Ph.D. graduates to succeed his generation of seminary professors (there are fine candidates, but they are few in number), and keenly aware of the threats to the survival and flourishing of African Americans in the United States at the turn of the century,[5] Pete's voice has reflected on many occasions the fierceness of the concerns that need to be addressed and the frustration that we still have so very far to go.

Yet Pete's witness is a reminder that lament and hope are not opposites but rather presuppose each other. The disappointment of a great hope gives rise to the pain and protest of a great lament. As Colin Murray Parkes wrote of grief in the days when lingering grief was thought to be a sign of pathology, grief is not a disease; "it is perhaps the price we pay for love, the cost of commitment."[6]

I'm sure I will never know the cost of bearing all the hopes Pete brought to LSTC and to the Lutheran Church as a tribe within the world house. The pages of two editions of *Currents in Theology and Mission* spell out some of the impact of Pete's hopes, faithfulness, and achievements. I know that to live in this "house" on 55th and University with Pete has meant that confrontation was never detached from the healing and consoling power of laughter and friendship; Pete's frequent laughter and constant warmth and teasing were as constant as his challenges to us. These dimensions of his witness coexisted and perhaps made each other possible.

Grief and gratitude belong together

Perhaps it's right to conclude this tribute with a word about grief and gratitude. Dr. Albert (Pete) Pero's retirement marks, in a very real way for LSTC, the end of an era. Although we expect Pete to continue to teach courses, fill the halls of LSTC with laughter, and eat French fries in the refectory when Cheryl isn't looking, retirement is still a fork in the road. It isn't business as usual—new occasions teach new duties for us all. Pete occupied a large "space" in so many ways, and we won't be the same. But we *will* be the richer for life together. If Pete said anything about a hundred times in the years I've known him, it's that "God is a God of abundance."

Thank you, Pete, for being a witness to that abundance through our life together.

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5. See Homer U. Ashby, Jr., *Our Home Is Over Jordan,* especially pp. 1–8, for a powerful and troubling overview of the plight facing African Americans in the early twenty-first century.

6. Colin Murray Parkes, *Bereavement,* 2d ed. (Madison, Conn.: International Universities Press, Inc., 1987), 26.

Spiritual Transformation and Nonviolent Action: Interpreting Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr.

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Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr., each in his own time and place, altered the course of a society through actions of militant nonviolent resistance in behalf of marginalized groups. Gandhi's primary work was in India between 1915 and his assassination in 1930. King's activity was chiefly but not exclusively in the Southeastern United States between 1955 and his assassination in 1968. Gandhi was a Hindu, who on occasion criticized Jesus for not showing love for nonhuman life but who also expressed admiration for Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, which he said "went straight to my heart."[1] King was a Baptist Christian, who said his movement was an expression of Christ's love, specifically as it was stated in that same Sermon on the Mount. King also affirmed that the method of this love was provided by Gandhi.[2]

I do not present here a scholarly analysis of Gandhi and King. Rather, I offer an interpretation of their nonviolent movements as ventures for reforming society that are rooted in altruism and spiritual transformation. My entree to the theme is Erik Erikson's 1969 psychobiographical and psychohistorical work, *Gandhi's Truth: On the Origins of Militant Nonviolence*. I make no claim to represent the intuitions or self-understanding of either Gandhi or King. Rather, I offer a proposal for understanding their significance, focusing on five areas of concern: (1) clarifying the terms *passive resistance, nonviolent resistance,* and *militant nonviolence*; (2) militant nonviolence as a process of double conversion; (3) militant nonviolence as a process of spiritual transformation; (4) the larger human significance of militant nonviolence; and (5) militant nonviolence as a process of love and altruism.

The terminology

The idea on which I focus is the name Gandhi chose for his way of life and action—the Sanskritic combination *Satyagraha*. Literally, this translates into English as "truth force."[3] Gandhi titled his autobiography "My Experiments with the Truth." Although no English term conveys the richness of the original's spiritual courage, Erikson suggests the term "leverage of truth." He writes:

1. Erik Erikson, *Gandhi's Truth: On the Origins of Militant Nonviolence* (New York: Norton, 1969), 151.

2. Martin Luther King Jr., *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. James Melvin Washington (New York: HarperCollins, 1986), 17.

3. Erikson, *Gandhi's Truth*, 198.

I want to suggest the skillful use of a sensitive instrument. For it must be obvious that is the challenge of our generation to understand what Gandhi calls truth as an actual force in mental life, the kind of force that "moves mountains." [Lever is a technological term]. . . . Satyagraha did have its origins in a technological imagery in which the body was still part of the truth; and it will be seen that even today the more direct uses of Satyagraha always include the body and the meeting of bodies: the facing of the opponent "eye to eye," the linking of arms in defensive and advancing phalanxes, the body "on the line": all these confrontations symbolize the conviction that the solidarity of unarmed bodies remains a leverage and a measure even against the cold and mechanized gadgetry of the modern state.[4]

"The force of mental life that moves mountains"—this is the idea. Erikson's focus on bodies is echoed in King's description of the March on Washington that he planned for later in 1968. He describes how 100 poor people from Mississippi would begin protests in Washington. Another 2,900 poor people from fifteen different areas would join them. They would begin with the 100 from Mississippi:

This group "begins walking. They would flow across the South, joining the Alabama group, the Georgia group, right on up through South and North Carolina and Virginia. We hope that the sound and sight of a growing mass of poor people walking slowly toward Washington will have a positive, dramatic effect on Congress. We believe there will be spontaneous supporting activity taking place across the country."[5]

"The sound and sight of people walking"—"the force of mental life that moves mountains"—that is Satyagraha.

Gandhi and others also used the term *passive resistance*, but this hardly expresses what is at stake. King preferred the term *nonviolent resistance*. Gandhi and King both wrote that militant nonviolence is the response of strong men and women, not weak ones; it is not for cowards. Nonviolent resistance is contrasted to acquiescence and violence, as a third alternative.[6]

Keeping in mind Erikson's point, that Satyagraha is mental truth but that it moves mountains and involves putting one's body on the line, I will most often use the term *militant nonviolence*, as well as Martin Luther King's preferred term, nonviolent resistance. However, in order to remind us of the deep original etymology, I will also refer to Satyagraha.

Militant nonviolent process and "double conversion"

The Satyagraha way is described by Erikson as that of a "double conversion." By double conversion Erikson means that in the militant nonviolent encounter the marginalized person,

by containing his egotistic hate and by learning to love the opponent as human, will confront the opponent with an enveloping technique that will force, or rather permit, him to regain his latent capacity to trust and to love. In all these varieties of confrontation, the emphasis is not so much (or not entirely) on the power to be gained as on the cure of an unbearable inner condition. [Gandhi was ready to] die in the pursuit of his conviction that there are ills in the human condition which an insightful person must not tolerate. Gandhi could sympathize with proud and violent youth; but he believed that violence breeds violence from generation to generation and that only the combined insight and discipline of Satyagraha can really disarm us, or give us a power stronger than arms.[7]

Double conversion, then, refers to the conversion of the militant nonviolent confronter to a trust in the one who is confronted. This trust is a willingness to take the risk that the opponent, the marginalizer, will in turn undergo a conversion that will

4. Erikson, *Gandhi's Truth*, 198.
5. King, *A Testament of Hope*, 66.
6. King, *A Testament of Hope*, 25.
7. Erikson, *Gandhi's Truth*, 437–38.

enable him or her to respond in a reciprocal trust. The confronting nonviolent activist is converted to a desire to elicit the best from the one who is confronted, while that confronted person is converted to respond in ways that express his or her own best self. Both Gandhi and King said that they aimed at promoting a consciousness in their opponents that would enable those opponents to say after the confrontation, "I did what was right and good." The opponent was to be left with integrity intact, with the sense not that they had acted in fear or in response to threat but rather that they had done what any good person would do, with the sense that to have rejected the confrontation or to have met it with violence would have left them ashamed.

If we were to put a Kantian rhetorical spin to this idea of double conversion, it might be this: "So act in a confrontation as to elicit the best self of the other."

Five stages of satyagraha

Double conversion actualizes itself in a process of five stages. I derive these stages from Erikson's analysis of Gandhi's action against mill owners, in behalf of mill workers, in Ahmedabad in February and March 1918. The issue was a living wage for the workers. This engagement was successfully concluded, even though Gandhi himself was ambivalent about its results.

Stage 1: Engagement grounded in empathy. Gandhi did not wait for the mill owners to make the first move so that he could resist positively. Rather, he "moved right in on his opponent by announcing what the grievance was and what action he intended."[8]

Gandhi had done his homework ahead of time. He told the workers to keep their demands fair but to then be prepared to die rather than accept less than a fair wage. He argued that the mill owners and the mill workers possessed equal assets—money and equipment on the one side, capacity to work on the other. He thus established a situation of equality; neither side could act paternalistically or as dominator. Here Gandhi promotes what Ronald Green calls a "generic humanity"[9] that encompasses both owners and workers. Sharing this common humanity, Gandhi said, set the stage for a potential relationship of empathy between the two. Green holds that moral behavior is impossible except within such a context of empathy.

Stage 2: Eliminate bad conscience and moralism. In this context of common human identity Gandhi established what we might call a level playing field. He prohibited either side from threatening or maligning the other. He insisted that the bad practices and errors of the owners lay in their misunderstanding of their own self-interest, namely, in their failure to recognize the mutual obligations and functions of employer and worker. Thereby he appealed to their better selves and demonstrated that he trusted the owners to act on a better understanding.[10]

Stage 3: Accept suffering. The "truth force" which is Satyagraha recognizes that trust in the opponent may be misplaced. Rather than acting as their best selves, the persons who are confronted may lash out violently. The Satyagrahi recognize this possibility and announce their willingness to suffer the consequences, even death.

> This is at once a declaration of non intent to harm others, and . . . an expression of a faith in the opponent's inability to persist in harming others

8. Erikson, *Gandhi's Truth*, 454.

9. Ronald Green, *Religion and Moral Theology: A New Method for Comparative Study* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 139–43.

10. Erikson, *Gandhi's Truth*, 434.

beyond a certain point, provided, of course, that the opponent is convinced that he is not only not in mortal danger of losing either identity or rightful power but may, in fact, acquire a more inclusive identity and a more permanent share of power."[11]

Stage 4: Give the opponent the courage to change. The very scale of the risk that the nonviolent agent takes and exhibits to the opponent also intensifies the possibility that the change will take place. The mutuality of the common generic humanity that has been established must lead to a mutuality of risk taking in behalf of change, if the process is to proceed to fruition. Courage is engendered in the risk taking.

Stage 5: Ritualization. The manner in which the militant nonviolent process is carried out constructs a ritual of engagement. The character or ritual is made possible because the process is both public and clearly articulated. This public, ritual character intensifies the challenge to both parties, the confronting and the confronted. Although they do not know the outcome of the engagement, they know what the possible outcomes are, and they know the stages of the engagement in which they will be confronted. They also know what challenges they face and what is required of them if they are to meet the challenges: clarity of engagement, a level playing field, the willingness to suffer, the necessity for change—and the stakes: self-respect, integrity, or shame.

The import of ritualization extends further, however. Because the action is in a sense stereotyped, it can become a template for future ritual practice. To quote Erikson, if "truth" is carried by this instrument of leverage, "it can and must become actual in entirely different settings. . . . If truth is actuality, it can never consist of mere repetition of ritualized acts or stances. It calls for reconstitution."[12] Martin Luther King Jr., forty years after Gandhi, did in fact engage in such reconstitution. Both men seemed to recognize instinctively that they were constructing rituals that could and should be reconstituted at other places and in other times. They and their followers were putting themselves at risk in particular situations for the benefit of specific opponents, but they were aware that their self-sacrifice was also reaching beyond the particular places where they stood.

Spiritual transformation

If we are to relate Gandhi and King to the process of spiritual transformation, we must adopt a working definition of this transformation. I suggest starting with the definition adopted by the Metanexus Institute's *Spiritual Transformation Scientific Research Program* to guide its initial efforts. The working definition, in part: "dramatic changes in world and self views, purposes, religious beliefs, attitudes, and behavior." An elaboration of this definition speaks of "profound changes" in the way people understand, approach, experience, and relate to whatever they hold as "sacred."[13]

Although these definitions are not necessarily authoritative, they offer a reasonable framework for discussion.

I suggest that Satyagraha, militant nonviolence, is a process of spiritual transformation. Erikson speaks of a double conversion; I speak of a *double transformation* or, perhaps better, a *mutuality of transformation.* Both the person confronting and the person being confronted undergo transformation.

Gandhi's own spiritual transformation is a topic in itself. A few observations will suffice here. Gandhi's ambition, according

11. Erikson, *Gandhi's Truth*, 434–35.
12. Erikson, *Gandhi's Truth*, 436.
13. See the Program's Web site: *www.metanexus.net/spiritual_transformation.* Click on "Request for proposals."

to Erikson, "was to personify a purified India and to overcome with the means of Satyagraha" the evils of India's political and social system, without himself holding political office.[14] He sought to liberate his country. In Erikson's view, he may be a type of *Homo religiosus*, in that he knew himself, like a woman in the act of conception, to be birthing something new in which his own inner voice coincided with the movement of history.[15] Erikson classifies Gandhi as a "religious actualist," by which he means that the man internalized his Indian culture and its religious heritage and absorbed from it a conception of truth which he attempted to make actual for all of life.[16] His religious depth lay in his awareness that he was walking the line between life and not-life. His offer to die if need be in order to usher in new life might be taken up, with death for himself and his movement the result. In this definition of himself, Gandhi made transformation a requirement also for the followers, the Satyagrahi.

The vital core of Satyagraha, the very soul of its effort, is *Ahimsa*, "the readiness to get hurt and yet not to hurt."[17] Joan Bondurant writes, "the only dogma in the Gandhian philosophy centres here: that the only test of truth is action based on the refusal to do harm."[18] In the heat of the Ahmedabad struggle, Gandhi wrote to his followers, "that action alone is just which does not harm either party to a dispute."[19] Gandhi carried *Ahimsa* farther: not only must there be no harm done, there must be "respect for the truth" in the other. The essence of the other must not be violated.[20] This is spiritual transformation.

Gandhi struggled with his own transformation, but he recognized that any militant nonviolent action would have to include spiritual direction for the participants as well. If the Satyagrahi were truly to participate in Truth, that truth "could not depend on individual impressions and decisions alone"; it has to be extraordinarily disciplined, with a "commitment to suffer the opponent's anger without getting angry and yet also without ever submitting to any violent coercion by anyone."[21] This is the worldview into which Gandhi and his followers were transformed.

During the Ahmedabad action, Gandhi wrote leaflets to his followers, the mill workers, every day, and every evening he would gather them around him "under the famous babul tree on the banks of the Sabarmati outside the Shahpur gate."[22] He would arrive at 5 p.m. every day. These workers, always at least five thousand persons and sometimes closer to ten thousand, would walk two or three miles to meet Gandhi. These sessions of explanation and exhortation were sometimes religious in character. Gandhi required that the workers take a pledge with two provisions: not to resume work until they were granted a 35 percent increase, and "not to cause disturbance, resort to violence, indulge in looting, damage property, or abuse anyone, but remain peaceful."[23] The strikers would march through the streets shouting "Keep your pledge!" and improvise songs. After two days, in light of the pledge to remain peaceful, the police withdrew from any special security measures at the site of these meetings.

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14. Erikson, *Gandhi's Truth*, 224.
15. Erikson, *Gandhi's Truth*, 401.
16. Erikson, *Gandhi's Truth*, 396.
17. Erikson, *Gandhi's Truth*, 412.
18. Joan Bondurant, *Conquest of Violence—The Gandhian Philosophy of Conflict*, rev. ed. (Berkeley: Univ. of Calif. Press, 1965), 25.
19. Erikson, *Gandhi's Truth*, 342.
20. Erikson, *Gandhi's Truth*, 412.
21. Erikson, *Gandhi's Truth*, 416.
22. Erikson, *Gandhi's Truth*, 330.
23. Erikson, *Gandhi's Truth*, 332.

King also recognized the need for spiritual transformation. He writes about the Montgomery boycott,

> From the very beginning there was a philosophy undergirding the Montgomery boycott, the philosophy of nonviolent resistance. There was always the problem of getting this method over because it didn't make sense to most of the people in the beginning. We had to use our mass meetings to explain nonviolence to a community of people who had never heard of the philosophy and in many instances were not sympathetic with it. We had meetings twice a week on Mondays and on Thursdays, and we had an institute on nonviolence and social change. We had to make it clear that nonviolent resistance is not a method of cowardice. It does resist. It is not a method of stagnant passivity and deadening complacency. The nonviolent resister is just as opposed to the evil that he is standing against as the violent resister but he resists without violence. This method is nonaggressive physically but strongly aggressive spiritually.[24]

Elsewhere he wrote that his weekly meetings brought together different kinds of Christians who otherwise did not know each other. Thus, these meetings "accomplished on Monday and Thursday nights what the Christian Church had failed to accomplish on Sunday mornings."[25] The spiritual vision of his movement is clearly set forth:

> In my weekly remarks as president of the resistance committee, I stressed that the use of violence in our struggle would be both impractical and immoral. To meet hate with retaliatory hate would do nothing but intensify the existence of evil in the universe. Hate begets hate, violence begets violence; toughness begets a greater toughness. We must meet the forces of hate with the power of love; we must meet physical force with soul force. Our aim must never be to defeat or humiliate the white man, but to win his friendship and understanding.[26]

He enumerates six traits that the nonviolent resister must internalize, often referring to Gandhi as his guide.[27]

First, spiritual resistance—"the nonviolent resister is spiritually aggressive, since "his mind and emotions are always active, constantly seeking to persuade his opponent that he is wrong."

Second, militant nonviolence "does not seek to defeat or humiliate the opponent but to win his friendship and understanding. "The end is redemption and reconciliation."

Third, the "attack is directed against forces of evil," not persons. "We are out to defeat injustice and not white persons who may be unjust."

Fourth, willingness to accept suffering without retaliation. Why not retaliate? Because "unearned suffering is redemptive." The resister must realize that suffering has "tremendous educational and transformative possibilities." He quotes Gandhi: "Things of fundamental importance to people are not secured by reason alone, but have to be purchased with their suffering."

Fifth, internal violence of the spirit must be avoided as much as external physical violence.

Sixth, nonviolent resistance "is based on the conviction that the universe is on the side of justice." In other words, a worldview, a metaphysics, if you will, is involved. He writes,

> This faith is another reason why the nonviolent resister can accept suffering without retaliation. For he knows that in his struggle for justice he has cosmic companionship. . . . Whether we call it an unconscious process, an impersonal Brahman, or a Personal Being of matchless power and infinite love, there is a creative force in this universe that works to bring the disconnected aspects of reality into a harmonious whole."[28]

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24. King, *A Testament of Hope*, 12.
25. King, *A Testament of Hope*, 17.
26. King, *A Testament of Hope*, 17.
27. King, *A Testament of Hope*, 17–18.
28. King, *A Testament of Hope*, 20.

Our definition of spiritual transformation speaks of profound change in our worldviews and our views of self as well as in our purposes, attitudes, and behavior. This transformation is required of the nonviolent resister, whether the ritual action is in India 1918 or the American South 1958.

Transformation is required of the one who is confronted, as well, although this often cannot be tested except through behavior. The aim, Gandhi said, was actualization of a common humanity. King spoke of it as redeeming the opponent, reconciling with the opponent, and creating a blessed community of confronter and confronted. This transformation of the opponent does happen on occasion. Behaviors do change. But transformation of purposes and attitudes often lags behind, as people are satisfied with minimal behavioral change.

The larger human significance of satyagraha

Erikson offers tantalizing and much too brief suggestions concerning the larger human significance of Satyagraha. He questions how deeply aggressive violence is rooted in human nature and how manageable it is with techniques such as Gandhi's. Is Satyagraha *against* nature? is Erikson's major question. He also asks related questions: Are aggression and killing instincts? Are they matters of passion and obsession? When does "natural" aggression turn into senseless murder? He finds resources in the thought of Freud and also in the research of the ethologist Konrad Lorenz. Lorenz's major work, *On Aggression*, appeared in English at approximately the same time as Erikson's book on Gandhi did.[29]

In the work of ethologists, those who study the behavior of animals, Erikson finds evidence for aggression and killing as adaptive instincts, particularly between different species. He also finds many examples of nonhuman animals controlling their aggression. Erikson selects wolves and stags for special note, describing what he calls their "rituals of pacification" or their "ritualized disengagement."[30] These are rituals in which two animals confront each other and engage in harmless wrestling until a victor emerges. The ritual includes the lover's submission and the victor's refusal to do harm to his opponent.

Erikson and Lorenz make the profound point that human violence often takes place when we in fact relate to the "others" as if they were a different species altogether. They use the term "pseudo-speciation" in this connection, to describe

> the fact that while humans are obviously one species, we appear and continue on the scene split up into groups (from tribes to nations, from castes to classes, from religions to ideologies) which provide their members with a firm sense of distinct and superior identity—and immortality. This demands, however, that each group must invent for itself a place and a moment in the very centre of the universe where and when an especially provident deity caused it to be created superior to all others."[31]

Pseudo-speciation may be imposed by a dominant group, but, even worse, it may be internalized by the subordinate group and incorporated into its own self-estimation, with the suppression of the rage that is thereby engendered.

Erikson's suggestion is that Satyagraha is a ritual of pacification which "may derive some of its obvious strength from an *evolutionary* potential" that is illustrated in the rituals among animals that the ethologists record. Satyagraha constructs a revo-

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29. Konrad Lorenz, *On Aggression*, trans. M. K. Wilson (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1966). See Erikson, *Gandhi's Truth*, 423–36.

30. Erikson, *Gandhi's Truth*, 426.

31. Erikson, *Gandhi's Truth*, 431.

lutionary ritual that expresses pacification in ways appropriate to human beings and thus restores to humans "the dignity of nature."[32]

Altruism and love

Are altruism and love involved in the Satyagraha process? These questions deserve attention. Although I distinguish between the two ideas, they are often linked.[33]

Altruism. I use its scientific definition: "Altruism is behavior on my part that puts my welfare at risk in order to promote someone else's welfare." Stephen Post in his book *Unlimited Love* cites approvingly Daniel Batson's definition of altruism: "a motivational state with the ultimate goal of increasing another's welfare." Post adds that, although "altruism does not necessarily involve self-sacrifice, it seems to be inherent in altruism to some degree."[34]

Ahimsa—the refusal to do harm and the imperative to benefit others, linked with the acceptance of suffering and the belief that unearned suffering is redemptive—is a central idea for Gandhi, and he interweaves this idea with love. At times he invokes the teachings of Jesus, particularly in his insistence on universal and unconditional love. Gandhi writes:

> The law of the survival of the fittest is the law for the evolution of the brute, but the law of self-sacrifice is the law of evolution for the man. . . . The basis of self-sacrifice is love. . . . It is no non-violence if we love merely those that love us. It is non-violence only when we love those that hate us.[35]

Satyagraha is clearly a process of altruism, and an expansive one. Gandhi and King both acted in particular, concrete situations, relating to specific persons and projects. Both of them, however, recognized a larger context. Gandhi was epitomizing a "pure India." He knew that his



actions, such as the one in Ahmedabad, would be replicated and have influence elsewhere. King spoke of redeeming the white race as well as transforming Black America. His trips to India and Africa convinced him that his movement was benefiting people globally. Both men knew that their movements had significance for subsequent generations. They spoke often of the value of nonviolence for the children of the next generation. Violence would produce, in their view, a legacy of violence for the children, with dire consequences, whereas nonviolence could offer constructive possibilities for children.

Love. Gandhi does not write at length about love, but he does equate it with his

32. Erikson, *Gandhi's Truth*, 455.

33. See Emma Y. Post, "Profiles in Unlimited Love," in *Research on Altruism and Love*, ed. Stephen Post et al. (Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation Press, 2003), 199–203, 206–9.

34. Stephen Post, *Unlimited Love: Altruism, Compassion, Service* (Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation Press, 2003), 63.

35. *The Essential Gandhi*, ed. Louis Fischer (New York: Vintage Books, 1962), 89, 331.

central ideas of *ahimsa* and self-sacrifice. He understands it to be a law of life, "a higher law than that of destruction."[36] In contrast, King wrote extensively about love. He reiterates often that the Christian doctrine of love operated in his movement *through* the Gandhian method of nonviolence. He writes: "Nonviolent resistance

It has never been clearer that Gandhi and King were right in their judgment that violence is not eradicated by counterviolence.

had emerged as the technique of the movement, while love stood as the regulating ideal. In other words, Christ furnished the spirit and the motivation, while Gandhi furnished the method."[37] King was deeply influenced by Swedish theologian Anders Nygren, whose monumental study *Agape and Eros* was published in English in 1953. Nygren argues that the New Testament concept of love, *agape*, is "the most powerful creative force in the universe. It is God's love for humanity." It "does not recognize value, but creates it."[38] Nygren's work is still influential, even though it has been thoroughly criticized and its inadequacies revealed; some have argued that King misinterprets Nygren.[39] Nevertheless, the Nygren-King concept of love is powerful, as evidenced in the following:

Agape does not begin by discriminating between worthy and unworthy people, or any qualities people possess. It begins by loving others *for their own sakes*. It is an entirely "neighbor-regarding concern for others," which discovers the neighbor in every man it meets . . . the best way . . . is to have love for the enemy-neighbor from whom you can expect no good in return, but only hostility and persecution. Another basic point about *agape* is that it springs from the *need* of the other person—his need for belonging to the best in the human family. The Negro must love the white man, because the white man needs his love to remove his tensions, insecurities, and fears. *Agape* means a recognition of the fact that all life is interrelated. All humanity is involved in a single process, and all men are brothers.[40]

Both Gandhi and King placed their action in the context of community. They worked in communal contexts and understood that individual nonviolent resisters emerged from a community, drew their support from a community, and sought to create an even larger community that included their opponents. For King, *agape*

is insistence on community even when one seeks to break it. *Agape* is a willingness to go to any length to restore community. . . . The cross is the eternal expression of the length to which God will go in order to restore broken community. The resurrection is a symbol of God's triumph over all the forces that seek to block community. The Holy Spirit is the continuing community creating reality that moves through history. He who works against community is working against the whole of creation. I can only close the gap in broken community by meeting hate with love.[41]

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36. Gandhi, *Non-Violent Resistance* (New York: Schocken Books, 1951), 383, 387.
37. King, *A Testament of Hope*, 17.
38. King, *A Testament of Hope*, 16.
39. See editor's comments in King, *A Testament of Hope*, 16; and Thomas Oord, "Religious Love at the Interface with Science," in *Research on Altruism and Love*, 216–19.
40. King, *A Testament of Hope*, 219, 20.
41. King, *A Testament of Hope*, 20.

Militant nonviolence: an option for our time?

Today, violence is at the center of our attention as an American nation. We experience violence, we fear violence, and we threaten others with violence. We depict our enemies as a different species from ourselves, a species of evildoers. In these times, militant nonviolence as practiced by Gandhi and King is seldom recognized as an option. It has been rejected as naive, impractical, and unsuited to our world of high-tech weaponry.[42] On the other hand, it has never been clearer that Gandhi and King were right in their judgment that violence is not eradicated by counterviolence. Violence breeds only more violence, and hatred only more hatred. They also were correct in their sense that the future of our children is threatened by such fostering of violence. They understood clearly that nonviolence cannot be left as a matter of individual conscience and practice; it must become the practice of groups and nations.

Our times call for a reconstitution—not a repetition—of the rituals of militant nonviolence. In our present circumstances, it is a daunting challenge to imagine that all people share a common humanity and stand in relationships of empathy. We require new strategies, to be sure, and even more we require a spiritual transformation among us all, a genuine conversion. If we do not undergo transformation ourselves, we cannot expect our alleged enemies to be transformed.

With these thoughts, I pay tribute to Albert "Pete" Pero on the occasion of his retirement. He has devoted his life and professional career to the transforming vision of Satyagraha, not only among individuals but also to the transformation of cultures. He has called it cultural *transcendence*, and he is surely right. God's transcendent presence becomes actual in this transformation. It is a work of the Holy Spirit among us.

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42. On the very day he was assassinated (January 30, 1948), Gandhi was asked by journalist Margaret Bourke-White how he would respond to the atom bomb. His response: "I will not go underground. I will not go into shelter. I will come out in the open and let the pilot see I have not a trace of ill-will against him. The pilot will not see our faces from his great height, I know. But the longing in our hearts—that he will not come to harm—would reach up to him and his eyes would be opened. If those thousands who were done to death in Hiroshima, if they had died with that prayerful action . . . their sacrifice would not have gone in vain. Non-violence is the only thing the atom bomb cannot destroy. Unless the world adopts non-violence, [the atom bomb] will spell certain suicide for mankind. . . . The moral to be legitimately drawn from the supreme tragedy of the bomb is that it will not be destroyed by counter-bombs even as violence cannot be by counter-violence. Mankind has to get out of violence only through non-violence. Hatred can be overcome only by love. We have to make truth and non-violence not matters for mere individual practice but for practice by groups and communities and nations." *The Essential Gandhi*, 334–36.

Africa and Africans in the Books of Chronicles

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Pete Pero has been a pioneer among Lutherans of African descent in naming and claiming his spiritual and cultural heritage and in reminding us that the church transcends all cultures even as the gospel manifests itself in the particularities of every culture. Ancient Israel lived in the land bridge between Africa and Mesopotamia and was involved in a complex network of learning from its neighboring cultures and distinguishing itself from them. Its relationships with these other cultures affected its own self-understanding and the legacy it has left us in the Bible.

For the last twenty years or so I have been immersed in studying and writing an extensive commentary on the Books of Chronicles, composed in the fourth century B.C.E. by a writer who focused on the past and future of worship at the temple at Jerusalem but who also knew that his tiny community in the Persian province called Yehud was only a prototype of an all-inclusive Israel. His empirical Israel was part of the Persian Empire, with no prospect for liberation from that ancient superpower. The Chronicler's Israel was chosen by Yahweh, but its life took place in the context of, and in interaction with, the whole world. This article cuts a cross section through the sixty-five chapters of Chronicles and asks particularly about the Chronicler's knowledge of Africa and Africans and how Africans related to and interacted with Israel in the Books of Chronicles.[1]

The opening genealogies

Instead of narrating the history of humankind, from creation to the time of King Saul, the Chronicler begins his work with nine chapters of genealogies that (a) situate Israel within the family of nations (ch. 1), (b) describe via genealogy the wholeness of the twelve tribes of Israel (chs. 2–8), and (c) give a snapshot of the Israelite community at Jerusalem in the Chronicler's day (ch. 9).

In chapter 1, the Chronicler incorporates almost all of the genealogical material from Genesis, beginning with Adam, and

1. At the time of the Chronicler there was a Jewish military colony at Elephantine in Egypt, and many documents have been preserved from this colony that show interaction with Egyptians and with the authorities in Jerusalem. For general background on the question discussed in this article, see Edwin M. Yamauchi, *Africa and the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), and Peter T. Nash, *Reading Race, Reading the Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003).

ending, in 1 Chr 2:1-2, with the twelve children of Israel. While genealogies on the surface seem to talk about who was the physical parent of whom, they in fact are ways of expressing political, social, and economic relationships, often among clans, tribes, and nations more than individuals. These genealogies are fluid in that genealogies change as human conditions change; that is, as nations advance or decline, they move up or down the genealogical tree.

The human family after the flood is divided into the descendants of Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Ham's first-generation descendants are Cush, Egypt,[2] Put, and Canaan. Cush[3] is Nubia, modern-day Sudan, and Put[4] may be Somalia or Libya. Canaan in this genealogy included modern Lebanon, southern Syria, and most of Palestine west of the Jordan—that is, in large part, Israel's homeland. The language of Canaan was Semitic, and so we might expect Canaan to be descended from Shem, but the land of Canaan was one of three Egyptian provinces in Syro-Palestine, and that is expressed genealogically by making Canaan a son of Ham and a brother of Egypt. So the land of Israel has strong ties with Africa in Chronicles.

Chapter 1 runs through all the nations genealogically[5] before coming to Israel, strongly implying without actually mentioning the election of Israel. But it also implies that Israel is to understand itself within the circle of all the nations. This first chapter of 1 Chronicles emphasizes the diversity *and* the unity of the world. Israel understood its role within the family of nations and as a witness to all humanity.[6] Among the seventy nations of the world, thirty are associated with Ham (Africa)—more than Japheth (fourteen) or even Shem (twenty-six).

The genealogy of Judah in 1 Chr 2:3–4:23 is enormous and reflects the importance of the tribe of Judah in the postexilic community. Judah, of course, is the ancestral tribe of David and the kings (1 Chr 3:1–24). There are also connections with Africa in the tribe of Judah. Sheshan in the tenth generation after Judah is the ancestor of a person called Elishama, fourteen generations later (1 Chr 2:31, 34–41). The length of this genealogy makes Elishama a very important person; only the genealogies of David, the high priests, and the descendants of Saul are longer in Chronicles. Sheshan had only daughters, and to keep his line from dying out he married his unnamed daughter to Jarha, his Egyptian slave.[7] Note that there is not a word of criticism of such a mixed marriage, in sharp distinction to Deut 7:3–4, 1 Kgs 11:1–13, Ezra 9–10, and Neh 10:30 and 13:23–27. In fact, this openness to marriages with others is one of the most significant differences between the Chronicler and the au-

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2. Egypt or the Egyptians are referred to twenty-seven times in Chronicles.

3. The descendants of Cush are in northeast Africa or Arabia. Sheba is a grandson of Cush in v. 9, but in v. 22 he is a grandson of Eber the great-grandson of Shem, and in v. 32 he is a grandson of Keturah the concubine of Abraham. Such fluidity is common in ancient genealogies.

4. Put is the only son of Ham who has no descendants. Put is mentioned in Jer 46:9; Ezek 30:5; 38:5. Nahum associates Put with Libyans (3:9).

5. Note that the sons of Noah are given as Shem, Ham, and Japheth in v. 4, but their descendants are listed in reverse order—Japheth, Ham, and Shem, putting Shem, and Israel his descendant, in the last, favored position.

6. See Ralph W. Klein, "The Faith and the World," *Currents* 28 (2001): 335–40.

7. Israelite law makes descendants of such a marriage true heirs of Sheshan (Lev 25:39–54). If Jarha had been an Israelite slave, his descendants would not be credited to Sheshan.

thor of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. Other mixed marriages reported without censure from the tribe of Judah include Judah himself with Bath-shua, a Canaanite (1 Chr 2:3); Jether the Ishmaelite with Abigail the sister of David (1 Chr 2:17); David with Maacah the daughter of Talmai king of Geshur (1 Chr 3:2); a Judahite Mered with Bithiah the daughter of Pharaoh (1 Chr 4:18);[8] and some of the descendants of Judah's son Shelah with Moabites (1 Chr 4:22). The Chronicler omitted the indictment of Solomon's foreign wives from 1 Kings 11, and he included, without judgment, Solomon's moving his own wife, who was the daughter of Pharaoh, from the city of David to his palace (2 Chr 8:11//1 Kgs 9:24).[9] Jarha, an Egyptian, in any case is an ancestor of a very important person named Elishama, remembered with reverence in the ancestral records of the tribe of Judah.

The Exodus

In Chronicles the Exodus tends to be downplayed or deemphasized.[10] In Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple in 1 Kgs 8:21 and 8:53, the king refers to the Exodus. In 1 Kgs 8:21, the king mentions the covenant Yahweh made with the ancestors when he brought them out of the land of Egypt, but that becomes simply the covenant Yahweh made with the Israelites—with no mention of the Exodus—when it is cited in 2 Chr 6:11. The Chronicler does not include 1 Kgs 8:53 at all but substitutes for it 2 Chr 6:41–42, which consists of quotations from Psalm 132 containing a dynastic promise to David and reporting David's efforts on behalf of the ark. The reason for the Chronicler's reticence in regard to the Exodus is disputed.[11] It may be related to the fact that talk of such a revolution against imperial power would have been anathema to Persian ears, and the Chronicler had no desire to be detoured from his main agenda which was support of free and unfettered worship in Jerusalem.[12]

The Queen of Sheba and Huram[13] the King of Tyre

Solomon is portrayed in glowing colors in Chronicles as is fitting for the king who built the temple. His wisdom is shown primarily in his work on the temple, not, as in 1 Kings, in his judicial brilliance in solving the dispute between the two prostitutes (1 Kgs 3:16–28), his administrative

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8. It is difficult to locate this marriage chronologically because the Pharaoh's name is not given. Genealogically, this marriage shows a relationship of at least one clan of Judah to a counterpart clan in Egypt.

9. The Chronicler does not include the other passages from 1 Kings dealing with this queen (1 Kgs 3:1; 7:8; 9:16; 11:1). Kings reports that Solomon made a marriage alliance with the Pharaoh, and such alliances are regularly rejected by the Chronicler as evidences of trust in military power for defense rather than on the help of Yahweh.

10. But see 1 Chr 17:21; 2 Chr 5:10; 6:5; 7:22; 20:10.

11. Japhet, *The Ideology of the Book of Chronicles and its Place in Biblical Thought* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1989), 104–5. Japhet argues that the Chronicler did not think that the people of Israel became the people of God through a single act at a particular point of time.

12. At least some of the accusations made about the oppression of the Egyptians in the Old Testament may be projections on Egypt of afflictions suffered by Israelites under their own kings, such as Solomon. The accusations made against Egypt are about its misuse of imperial power, accusations that the prophets also made against Israel itself. See Rainer Kessler, *Die Ägyptenbilder der Hebräischen Bibel. Ein Beitrag zur neueren Monotheismusdebatte* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2002), 157–60.

13. This king's name is Hiram in Kings and Huram in Chronicles.

abilities (1 Kgs 4:1–19), or his knowledge about nature or his composing of proverbs (1 Kgs 4:29–34). Solomon's high status is confirmed by his recognition by foreign kings. King Huram of Tyre sent a letter to Solomon that read: "Because Yahweh loves his people he has made you king over them" and "Blessed be Yahweh the God of Israel, who made heaven and earth, who has given King David a wise son, endowed with discretion and understanding, who will build a temple for Yahweh, and a royal palace for himself" (2 Chr 2:11–12). Huram is made to sound like an adherent to the Israelite religion and, most important, an international advocate of Solomon. According to 2 Chr 8:2, Huram had ceded a number of cities to Solomon.[14] While Huram is, of course, a Phoenician king, his neighboring city of Sidon is related genealogically to Canaan, the son of Ham the African (1 Chr 1:3). Tyre was considered part of Canaan in any case.

At the end of Solomon's reign he was honored by a visit by the queen of Sheba, who came to Jerusalem to test him with hard questions.[15] Modern historians believe that her trip also involved securing trade relations with and through Israel and with guarding her trade with East Africa. The location of Sheba (ancient Saba) is disputed. Most would associate it with the region now occupied by Yemen in the southwest Arabian peninsula,[16] although the Ethiopian church retains a legend of her as a person who bore a child to Solomon, who was the ancestor of Haile Salassie.[17] Sheba in the genealogies is associated with both Cush (Nubia; 1 Chr 1:9) and Hagar, Abraham's Egyptian concubine (1 Chr 1:32). The queen of Sheba matches Huram in her endorsement of Solomon: "Blessed be Yahweh our God, who has delighted in you and set you on his throne as king for Yahweh your God. Because your God loved Israel and would establish them forever, he has made you king over them, that you may execute justice and righteousness" (2 Chr 9:8). The queen of Sheba is a person of fabulous wealth and generosity in Chronicles. She gives the king one hundred twenty talents of gold and incomparable spices and precious stones (2 Chr 9:9).

Hence, foreign kings at the beginning and end of Solomon's reign, both of whom

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14. The parallel text in 1 Kgs 9:11 reports that Solomon gave Hiram twenty cities, apparently in payment for help with his building projects or because he needed money for something else. The Chronicler may have been embarrassed because Solomon disposed of some of the land of Israel or because he was in debt.

15. See Stephen D. Ricks, "Sheba, Queen of," *ABD,* 5:1170–71. Note Jesus' reference to the visit of the Queen of Sheba in Matt 12:42//Luke 11:31. While Solomon is said to have had three hundred wives and seven hundred concubines, we know the name of only one of these women, namely, Naamah, the Ammonite, the mother of his son and successor Rehoboam (2 Chr 12:13).

16. K. A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 116. Kitchen doubts that she was a regnant queen but supposes she was a queen by marriage. Cf. Isa 45:14; 60:6; Jer 6:20.

17. The earlier part of this claim is recorded in Kebra Negast, the national saga of Ethiopia (13th or 14th century C.E.). The saga claims that the queen, who was called Makeda, converted to Solomon's religion. Their son Menelik, as an adult, visited his father, stole the ark of the covenant, and took it home with him. The Selassie connection is a 20th-century phenomenon. When asked about his origins, Selassie said, "This is not a legend. It is based on the most universal book in the world—the Holy Bible." See discussion in Yamauchi, *Africa and the Bible,* 90–105. An offshoot of this tradition is the Rastafarian religion. The Jewish historian Josephus calls her Nikaulis, the Queen of Egypt and Ethiopia (*Ant.* viii. 165).

have connections with Ham/Egypt/Africa, attribute Solomon's kingship to Yahweh's love for Israel.

Wars with Africans

Two accounts of battles with the Hagrites are recorded amid the genealogies of 1 Chronicles 5. The Hagrites, a tribe that traced their ancestry back to Hagar, the Egyptian concubine of Abraham,[18] had migrated to northern Transjordan where they were defeated by the Reubenites in the days of King Saul (1 Chr 5:10). On another occasion, the Reubenites, Gadites, and the half tribe of Manasseh defeated the Hagrites because they had prayed to God before this battle and because they trusted in him (1 Chr 5:19–20). The spoils of this victory were enormous: fifty thousand camels, two hundred fifty thousand sheep, two thousand donkeys, and one hundred thousand human captives. The Chronicler loves big numbers! They show the size of the God-given victory.

Benaiah, a war hero under David and later general of the army under Solomon, earned his reputation by deeds of valor (1 Chr 11:22–25//2 Sam 23:20–23). One of his victories was over an Egyptian, described as handsome in 2 Sam 23:21. According to the Chronicler this anonymous Egyptian was seven feet six inches tall, and his spear was like a weaver's beam. People who know their Bible well would immediately see this as comparable to David's victory over Goliath, who was nine feet six inches tall (1 Sam 17:4)[19] and whose spear was also like a weaver's beam (1 Sam 17:7).

The attack of Shishak (Shoshenq I, 945–925 B.C.E.), king of Egypt, was recorded briefly in the Book of Kings (1 Kgs 14:25–28). There we learn that Shishak came up in Rehoboam's fifth year and raided both the temple and the royal palace. Special note is taken of golden shields made by Solomon that were taken by Shishak and had to be replaced by shields of bronze. Shishak (in Egyptian Shoshenq I, 945–924 B.C.E.) founded the twenty-second Egyptian dynasty and hailed from Libya.

The Chronicler's account of this event is both longer and more theologically motivated (2 Chr 12:1–12). Shishak came in divine reprisal for the fact that Rehoboam had abandoned the law of Yahweh and had forsaken Yahweh (2 Chr 12:1–2). Thus the Chronicler drew a cause-and-effect relationship between the sins mentioned in 1 Kgs 14:22–24 (false worship at high places and committing the same abominations that were practiced by the pre-Israelite inhabitants of the land) and the war with Shishak, the agent of Yahweh. The Chronicler provides information on the troops of Shishak—twelve hundred chariots and sixty thousand cavalry—and the makeup of his army—Libyans,[20] Sukiim, and Ethiopians. Shishak himself was a native of Libya, and his allies were the little-known Sukiim (probably from some Libyan tribes) and the Ethiopians, who are better understood as people from Nubia, modern Sudan. Shishak captured the fortified cities of Judah, a reference to the fortresses Rehoboam had built (2 Chr 11:5–10), thereby giving Israel a reminder that trust in military preparations do not necessarily make a nation strong. The prophet Shemaiah's one-sentence sermon during this crisis drew

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18. David's contact with the descendants of Hagar is seen in his appointing Obil the Ishmaelite to be over his camels and Jaziz the Hagrite to be over his flocks (1 Chr 27:30).

19. The Septuagint and the Dead Sea Scrolls set his height at about six feet four.

20. Libyans also appear in the army of Zerah (2 Chr 16:8). See the discussion of Zerah below.

a clear connection between Israel's abandonment of Yahweh and Yahweh's abandonment of them (2 Chr 12:5).[21] Then both the king's officers and King Rehoboam himself humbled themselves (repented) and confessed that Yahweh was right. A divine oracle through Shemaiah then granted them a partial reprieve: Jerusalem would not be taken, although Shishak's attack and partial victory would show the clear difference between serving Yahweh and forced servitude to foreign kings. Serving Yahweh is not a burden, and therefore it was really foolish for Rehoboam to forsake Yahweh (v. 1). Solomon eventually bought off Shishak by giving him the gold shields from the temple. Shishak (Sheshonq I) recorded this campaign on a temple wall at Karnak, listing cities in the north and in the far south of Israel, but conspicuously absent from this list is Jerusalem itself, indicating that his taking of booty from Solomon may have been sufficient to meet his military goals.

The Chronicler often divides his story of kings into good periods and bad periods. Late in his reign Asa, for example, did not call upon Yahweh but put Hanani the prophet in the stocks, treated the people cruelly, and sought physicians instead of Yahweh when he was diseased in his feet (gangrene? venereal disease?). His last years were plagued by unwinnable wars (2 Chronicles 16).

Early on, however, Asa did what was right in the eyes of Yahweh and got rid of foreign altars and high places (2 Chr 14:2–3). His seeking Yahweh led to his success in recruiting an army of some 580 thousand men (2 Chr 14:4–8). But then he was invaded by Zerah the Ethiopian/Nubian who brought along a million-man army and three hundred chariots (2 Chr 14:9). The odds were enormously against Asa, but he showed the nature of true strength by relying not on military equipment and number of soldiers but solely on divine aid: "O Yahweh, there is no difference for you between helping the mighty and the weak. Help us, Yahweh our God, for we rely on you, and in your name we have come against this multitude. Yahweh, you are our God; let no mortal prevail against you" (2 Chr 14:11). Asa's victory was as easy as it was complete since Yahweh defeated the Ethiopians/Nubians and give Israel much booty from the battle (2 Chr 14:12–13). While the numbers for the armies on both sides are unrealistically large[22] and the identity of Zerah quite uncertain,[23] the point of the



21. Other references to abandoning Yahweh occur at 1 Chr 28:9 and 2 Chr 15:2; 24:20.

22. A very large army in antiquity might number thirty thousand.

23. There are at least four opinions defended in current scholarship: (1) He was in fact a Nubian general of the Egyptian Pharaoh Osorkon I; (2) Shishak had established a buffer state around Gerar, protected by Nubian mercenaries [the inhabitants of Gedor=Gerar in 1 Chr 4:40 are called Hamites], who eventually attacked Judah; (3) Cush does not refer to Nubia but to an otherwise unknown bedouin group living in the vicinity of Judah (note the reference to tents, sheep, goats, and

The Chronicler needed information about Africa and Africans to tell his story about Israel completely.

story is clear: Reliance on Yahweh prepares one well for every challenge. By this victory Yahweh answered Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple: "If your people go out to battle against their enemies, by whatever way you shall send them, and they pray to you toward this city that you have chosen and the house that I have built for your name, then hear from heaven their prayer and their plea, and maintain their cause" (2 Chr 6:34–35). However modern scholars might reconstruct the historical circumstances behind this battle, the Chronicler's fourth-century readers would have seen it as another interaction with Africa.

Neco the king of Egypt makes his appearance during the reign of Josiah. This Neco is known to Egyptologists as Neco II, 610–595 B.C.E., from the twenty-sixth or Saite dynasty.[24] Neco was actually on his way to prop up the tottering Assyrian empire as a buffer against the rising power of Babylon (2 Chr 35:20). His intention was to help Asshuruballit retake Harran from Babylonian troops (ANET 305).[25] This corrects the impression given in 2 Kgs 23:29 that Neco was going up to fight against the Assyrians at the Euphrates. Modern historians conclude that the Chronicler has correctly understood Neco's strategy. In any case, Neco was intercepted by Josiah at Megiddo, leading to Josiah's death (2 Kgs 23:29–30//2 Chr 35:20–25). This death of Josiah is actually extremely problematical for the author of Kings, who had lavishly praised Josiah: "Before him there was no king like him, who turned to Yahweh with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses" (2 Kgs 23:25). But if Yahweh rewards the righteous, why did Josiah die at Megiddo when he was only forty?

The Chronicler solves this theological problem and turns the African Neco into a type of prophet. Neco warns Josiah that God had commanded him to hurry toward Mesopotamia and that Josiah should therefore cease from opposing Neco or he would be destroyed (2 Chr 35:21). Josiah tried to disguise himself during the battle (a detail not mentioned in Kings), a trick that did not help him any more than it helped Ahab, who had tried the same strategy in another ill-fated battle (1 Kgs 22:30). The Chronicler notes: "Josiah did not listen to the words of Neco from the mouth of God, but joined battle in the plain of Megiddo" (2 Chr 35:22). Josiah was *therefore* struck by archers and taken to Jerusalem where he died. Neco, like Huram and the queen of Sheba before him, acknowledges the God of Israel, who sent him on a military campaign. Josiah gets his just reward for disobeying an oracle of Yahweh, delivered by Neco, and his death no longer raises ques-

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camels in 2 Chr 14:15); or (4) Zerah is largely fictitious, but this battle may represent a skirmish in the vicinity of Mareshah in the postexilic period.

24. Neco's capture of Gaza may be reflected in Jer 47:1–7. See Herodotus, *History,* 2.159.

25. Egypt and Assyria were eventually routed by Babylon in 605 at Carchemish (cf. Jer 46:2–12).

tions about Yahweh's reliability. A few verses later Neco deposes Josiah's son Jehoahaz and replaces him with his brother Eliakim, whose name he changes to Jehoiakim (2 Chr 36:3–4).

Trade with Africa

The Egyptians were neighbors of Israel,[26] and therefore the two nations were of economic importance to each another. Both Chronicles and Kings record international trade that involved both Israel and Egypt in the time of Solomon (2 Chr 1:16–17, 9:28 //1 Kgs 10:28–29).[27] We are told in these passages that Solomon imported horses from Egypt and Cilicia.[28] The royal traders of Solomon seem also to have been involved in ancient wheeling and dealing. They imported chariots and horses from Egypt and traded them on to the Neo-Hittite and Aramean kingdoms to their north and northeast.[29] Solomon seems to have included chariots in Israel's military arsenal, whereas his father David hamstrung chariot horses that he captured in war (1 Chr 18:4//2 Sam 8:4).

Conclusion

Naturally we would like to know more about the relationship of Israel to Africa and Africans in the fourth century B.C.E. But the Chronicler does show that these neighbors were no strangers to one another, that genealogically at least their territories were related to one another (through Canaan the son of Ham), that God could use an Egyptian as his agent of judgment (Shishak) or as his mouthpiece (Neco), and that Egypt and Israel were economically dependent on one another (Solomon's trading with Egypt). The kingdoms that befriended Solomon—Tyre and Sheba—both had African connections.

The Chronicler needed information about Africa and Africans to tell his story about Israel completely. As Pete Pero has demonstrated many times, no one can tell the story of Lutheranism credibly either without including Africans and African Americans in the account.

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26. The borders of Israel were set from Lebo-Hamath or the Euphrates in the north to the Wadi of Egypt in the south (2 Chr 7:8; 9:26; 26:8). The latter is usually identified with the Wadi el Arish in the Sinai peninsula.

27. Trade with Africa may also be involved in the references to Ophir (1 Chr 1:23; 29:4; 2 Chr 8:18; 9:10, but its exact location is uncertain. A major goal of Christopher Columbus's expedition was to find Solomon's Ophir (Yamauchi, *Africa and the Bible*, 89).

28. The latter is a Neo-Hittite state in southeast Turkey.

29. Ancient prices are hard to compare with modern money, although it makes sense that a chariot was worth four times as much as a single horse (600 shekels to 150 shekels).

Children of Abraham, Children of God: Metaphorical Kinship in Paul's Letter to the Galatians

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Pete Pero has been a wonderful friend, an affirming colleague, and a powerful mentor. Most of all, his whole life has been a witness composed of pioneering efforts to overcome racial discrimination, generate respect for every culture, and foster intercultural relationships of mutual love. Theologically, he continually lifts up baptism as the means by which we have become children of God, giving us all an identity that affirms and at the same time transcends our cultural particularity. Because of this latter contribution, I thought it would honor Pete to discuss a similar theological dynamic in one of the letters of his brother Paul.

Introduction

Commentators often have interpreted Paul's Letter to the Galatians using "justification by faith" as the primary lens and organizing principle. In this article, I instead interpret Galatians using "children of Abraham" as the primary lens and then to organize other dynamics of the letter around this focus.[1]

The purpose of Paul's letter was to reclaim the gentile believers of Galatia as children of Abraham, as inheritors of God's blessing to Abraham, and thereby as children of God. His method was to re-preach the gospel that he first preached to them, namely, that people from gentile nations become children of Abraham by God's grace through faith and not by observing the Law of the Judean nation. Paul had founded the Galatian churches on the principle that they had become children of Abraham and had inherited the blessing of Abraham *as gentiles* without becoming Judeans, that is, without becoming circumcised and keeping the Judean Law.[2]

After Paul left Galatia, other early Judean Christian missionaries came to Galatia and claimed that Paul had not given them the full message of the gospel. They

1. The translations in this essay are based on the translation of Hans Dieter Betz in *Galatians* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979).

2. In this essay I refer to Jews of the first century as "Judeans" in order to avoid the implication that Paul is referring to Jews of every time and place. "Judeans" was the ancient designation for all who lived in and originated from the province of Judea and who embraced the Judean way of life. Efforts to avoid contemporary anti-Judaism are complicated by the likelihood that Paul has misrepresented his "Judaizing" opponents and has portrayed the beliefs and attitudes of non-Christian Judeans in ways that they themselves most likely would not have agreed to or appreciated. From his perspective as a believer in Jesus and as part of his rhetoric of persuasion in this letter, Paul has depicted Judeans as a foil for new relationships in Christ.

told the Galatians that they could not be fully justified as children of Abraham unless they became circumcised and followed the Law. After all, God had given the Law to Moses on Mount Sinai, and it was the expression of God's will for God's people, the children of Abraham—the Judean people who had made a covenant with God. Apparently some of the Galatians had become circumcised and were observing some Judean holy days.

When Paul learned of this, he wrote to the Galatians to reclaim them for his gospel of grace as the means to become children of Abraham. He told them that they had already become children of Abraham by virtue of the fact that they had heard the gospel with faith, received the Spirit, and been baptized—and that they would be undermining God's justification by grace if they were to adopt a practice of doing works of the Judean Law.

The "present evil age" and the "new creation"

Paul was adamant about this gospel, because he was convinced that the new relationships of grace (foreshadowed by Abraham and set in motion by Jesus' death) were a stark contrast to the "present evil age" (1:4). "The fullness of time" had come (4:4), beginning the process to bring creation to fulfillment in a new age. The relationships of this apocalyptic new age constituted, in Paul's view, a "new creation" (6:15). Paul uses himself as a death-and-life example of the transition to the new creation when he says: "I died to Law so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ, so that it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (2:19–20). Later he writes that, by means of the cross of Christ, "the world was crucified to me and I to the world" (6:14).

There are obvious and crucial continuities between the "old age" and the dawning "new age." The God of Israel is the God of Jesus Christ who has called the Galatian community into being (1:6). The Law is not contrary to the will of God expressed in the Spirit that guides believers (3:21; 5:14). Abraham is the figure by whom all nations are being blessed (3:6-9). The promise by God to Abraham is the promise that is fulfilled in Jesus Christ (3:29). In fundamental ways, there is continuity.

Nevertheless, in Paul's view, this apocalyptic "new creation" was different from the "present evil age"—different from the relationships of physical descendency from Abraham, different from the relationships established by the Judean Law, and different from the relationships engendered by gentile idolatry. In the new age, Judeans and gentiles alike become children of Abraham (and thereby children of God) through God's grace in Christ and the believers' acceptance of this grace by faith. By contrast, what characterized the previous age (apart from the covenant with Abraham) represented allegiance to secondary forces and not to God directly—slavery to "the elemental spirits of the cosmos" (4:3, 8–9). Paul believed this about his own heritage among Judeans. Allegiance to the Law was slavery to the elemental spirits of the cosmos, because, in Paul's view in Galatians, the Law (in contrast to the promise to Abraham) was not given directly by God but through the mediation of angels (3:19–20). And Paul also believed this about gentiles. Their allegiance to idols constituted slavery to the elemental spirits of the cosmos, a slavery to "beings that by nature are not gods" (4:8–9). Paul was convinced that Jesus gave himself up for our sins "in order that he might snatch us out of this present evil age" (1:4) into the new world of grace. He wrote to tell the Galatians that they could not live in both worlds and that

any adoption of the Judean Law and any return to idols would be to "drop out of grace" (5:4) and to revert back to a "yoke of slavery" (5:1).

Paul also contrasted the two worlds in terms of "flesh" and "Spirit." In the letter to the Galatians, these terms represented a contrast between an orientation that originates from the world (from what is human) and an orientation that originates from the Spirit (from God). Whatever does not originate directly from God/Spirit is flesh. Hence, to flesh belongs all that is related to the elemental spirits of the cosmos (the Judean Law and the gentile idols, both temporal), as well as the destructive "works of the flesh" that originate from human passions and desires (5:19–21, 24). To the flesh belongs also physical descendency to Abraham and conversion to the Judean people by circumcision. In Paul's view, to be oriented to the flesh is to be rooted in that which is temporal and will not endure. Hence, to sow into the flesh is ultimately to "reap a harvest of corruption (dissolution/death) from the flesh" (6:8). To the Spirit belongs all that comes directly from God: the promise, the gospel, the new life "in Christ," the "fruits of the Spirit" (5:22–23), and guidance for life together in community (5:25). To the Spirit belongs also the identity as children of Abraham by faith. To be oriented to the Spirit is to be rooted in that which is eternal, and those who are led by Spirit will endure. Hence, to sow into the Spirit is ultimately "to reap a harvest of eternal life from the Spirit" (6:8).

This apocalyptic contrast between the present evil age and the new creation, between flesh and Spirit, gives focus to the kinship language in Galatians in crucial ways. Without it, we will not grasp the full import of what it means to be "children of Abraham."

Kinship language in Galatians

Within the context of this new world of the Spirit, those who have faith become "children of Abraham." The relationship with Abraham, the relationship among believers, and the relationship with God are depicted by Paul in terms of familial/kinship/household language now used in the service of relationships that are not blood relationships. The semantic domain of this language in Galatians includes words such as Father, forefathers, children, sons, sonship, brother, blessing, inheritance, heirs/inheritors, descendants, seed of Abraham, coming of age, adoption, mother, birth pains, giving birth, barren, slave, slavery, freedmen, freedom, minors, guardians, administrators, Abba. This is a considerable amount of kinship/household language in one brief letter, and it signifies the importance of this motif in the letter. The issue is: Who are the true children of Abraham—physical descendents of Abraham who follow the Law or metaphorical descendents of Abraham who live by faith?

Sociologists refer to the analogical use of kinship language by various terms. One such term is "fictive kinship relationships"; that is, these relationships are fictional and not blood relationships. Another term sometimes used is "surrogate family," suggesting that the relationships are an alternative family to blood relations. Another term is "metaphorical kinship." I prefer this last term. "Fictive kinship" implies that the relationships are not real, when in fact Paul would say that they are more real than blood relations. "Surrogate family" implies that the new family is just a substitute for the real blood relations, when Paul would argue that the new family is the real family. "Metaphorical kinship" is a more neutral, descriptive term. I use it to suggest that the family of God is very real but that the language of kinship is being used by

Paul in a metaphorical way to talk about non-blood relationships. Kinship relations were the strongest bonds in antiquity. To use them to depict relationships with people who were not blood relatives was to use the strongest possible analogy to depict their relationships.

The first part of the letter: setting the stage

The greeting of an ancient letter often foreshadowed significant themes that would be developed in the letter. In the greeting of Galatians, Paul anticipates the theme of metaphorical kinship when he uses the "father" metaphor three times to refer to God: ". . . and God the Father who raised him [Jesus Christ] from the dead" (1:1), "Grace to you and peace from God our Father" (1:3), and ". . . Jesus Christ, who snatched us out of the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father" (1:4). This is an unusual number of references to father imagery in this brief greeting. Father was not a common designation for God. As such, its implications would not be taken for granted by hearers of the letter. The references to God as "our Father" would have evoked all the associations of the role of children in relation to fathers as well as the nuances of familial solidarity and kinship commitments that this involved. The establishment of this motif in the greeting alerted hearers to the fact that Paul would develop this motif of metaphorical kinship in the letter that followed.

Without the usual thanksgiving, Paul immediately follows this greeting with a scathing attack that suggests some Galatians were abandoning their place as children of God (1:6–9). He accuses them of having abandoned the gospel he preached, and he pronounced anathema on those who were leading them astray. Both the abandonment by some Galatians and the pronouncement of an anathema by Paul would threaten to place people outside an identity as children of Abraham and outside the relationship to God as "our Father." Such a warning put the recipients of the letter on notice as to the specific issue this letter would address.

In the early part of the letter, Paul does not develop the kinship relationships. Rather, he sets up the conditions and presuppositions that will allow him, as the letter develops, to address the Galatians as children of Abraham. First, he defends his gospel by saying that he himself is a true apostle (1:1), that he stands by the gospel he proclaimed to them as the only true gospel (1:6–11), that he got his gospel directly from the risen Jesus and not indirectly from humans (1:1, 11–16), that his gospel was independent of (1:16–24) and subsequently confirmed by the pillars of the church in Jerusalem (2:1–10), and that he, Paul, had defended the truth of that gospel in response to Peter's hypocritical violation of it in Antioch (2:11–14). In the course of these arguments, Paul also gives an initial definition of the gospel he proclaimed, namely, that Judeans and gentiles alike "are justified before God by faith in Christ Jesus and not by works of the Law, since it is not by works of the Law that any flesh will be justified" (2:15–17). For Paul, then, the gospel of grace received by faith is the basis for the new metaphorical kinship relationships.

In Galatians, the entire range of God's actions are a matter of grace. The promise to Abraham was an act of grace (3:18); and this promise offered the gift of justification to gentiles. The act of Jesus on the cross that liberated people from the curse and fulfilled the promise to gentiles was an act of grace (2:20–21). Paul was called through God's grace to proclaim the gospel to gentiles (1:15–16). The Spirit was a gift of

grace (3:14, 18). The whole letter is framed by grace: "Grace to you" begins the letter (1:3), and "May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit" ends the letter (6:18). This grace is to be received by faith. Faith receives the promise of the blessing (3:6–9), the liberation of the cross (2:16), the proclamation of the gospel (3:1–5), and the Spirit (3:14). And God reckons such a reception by faith "as righteousness" (3:6). So, instead of justification by Law and the response of obedience, there is justification by grace and the reception by faith. Grace and faith as the basis for a relationship with God are precisely the conditions that enable the gentile Galatians to become children of Abraham/God without having to follow the provisions of the Judean Law.

Paul gives two examples of this justification by grace: himself and the Galatians. Regarding himself, Paul explains that God, "who set me apart from my mother's womb and called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his son in me" (1:15). In regard to his relation to the grace of God's act in Jesus, he writes, "through Law, I died to Law, so that I might live for God" (2:19). He adds, "I have been crucified with Christ so that it is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me" (2:19–20). Paul was justified before God by the crucifixion of Jesus, and he now lives no longer by Law but by "the faith of the son of God who loved me and gave himself up for me" (2:20). As a Judean, Paul lives now by faith and not by following the Judean Law (1:13–14).

Regarding the Galatians, Paul rebukes them for forgetting their own experience in coming to faith (3:1–5). "Did you receive the Spirit," he asks, "because you did works of the Law or because you heard the proclamation with faith?" (3:2). Here he is arguing that the Spirit was given to the Galatians as a gift in the process of believing the gospel and not because they had been circumcised and followed the Law. So, at this point, they should not begin to do works of the Law. Paul places the contrast between works and faith in the categories of flesh and Spirit, saying, "Having begun with the Spirit [received as grace by faith], are you ending up with the flesh [being justified by doing works of the Law]?" (3:3). As gentiles, the Galatians had become children of Abraham by faith and not by doing works of the Judean Law.

After these stories and appeals, all of which serve to set up the points that follow, Paul turns to a series of arguments in which he draws upon scripture and the work of God in Jesus as means to show how the Galatians have become children of Abraham by faith.

The core of the letter: children of Abraham by faith

The possibility of a metaphorical designation of Abraham's descendents comes from the idea that what makes a person a child of someone is that they are *like* the father. The father-son relationship in the ancient world was all about imitation. The child was to be like the father. Therefore, to become a child of Abraham in a metaphorical sense was to be like Abraham, to do as Abraham did. We find this imitation of Abraham in other New Testament writings. The Letter of James argues that one becomes justified as a child of Abraham by imitating the fact that Abraham did works; that is, he was willing to offer Isaac as a sacrifice (James 2:21–26). The Gospel of Luke presents people becoming children of Abraham by "bearing fruit worthy of repentance" (3:8). In Luke, John the Baptist warns against presuming upon Abraham as blood descendent: "Don't begin to say, 'We have Abraham as father,' for God can raise up children for Abraham from these stones" (3:8). In both James and Luke, we see a similar

conception to Galatians, namely, that people can become children of Abraham by imitation apart from physical descendency.

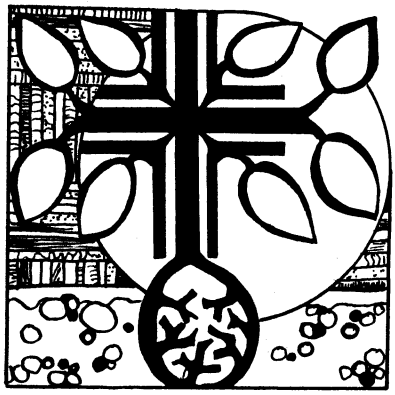
In Galatians, the imitation of Abraham comes in the expression of faith. "As it is written, Abraham had faith and God reckoned it to him as righteousness [= justification]" (3:6). Abraham had faith in the promise to him that all nations would be blessed through him, and this faith was counted to him as acceptable righteousness before God. Since this was true for Abraham, Paul adds, "Recognize therefore that it is people of faith who are children of Abraham" (3:7). By implication, those who now imitate Abraham by having faith in the promise (now fulfilled in Christ) will likewise have this faith reckoned to them as righteousness and will thereby be justified before God. Because they have faith *like* Abraham had faith, they can be considered children of Abraham. This imitation is what enables those who are not physical descendents of Abraham (gentiles) nevertheless to be metaphorical children of Abraham. And it enables those who *are* physical descendents of Abraham (Judeans) to be metaphorical descendents of Abraham as well. In this way, Judeans and gentiles alike who have faith in Christ will have the same status before God (as Judeans and gentiles) and will be in mutual relationship (as "brothers") with each other.

Paul presents this argument as if the idea of metaphorical offspring was inherently necessitated by the very nature of the promise itself—given the fact that those to whom the promise was directed were not physical descendents. Paul writes: "And scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the gentiles through faith, proclaimed the gospel ahead of time to Abraham: 'Through you shall all the gentile nations be blessed'" (3:8). Blessing is something one gives to one's progeny. Blessing is the means of conveying an inheritance, as Isaac gave his blessing (inheritance) to Jacob. But the gentile nations are not and cannot become Abraham's physical progeny. Therefore, in order for the gentile nations to receive the blessing/inheritance, the promise requires that they be metaphorical progeny, that is, people who are Abraham's children by imitation rather than by blood. This logic is why Paul prefaces his quotation of the promise to Abraham with the explanation that scripture foresaw "that God would justify the gentiles by faith" (3:8)—because the promise was such that the only way gentiles could receive Abraham's blessing would be as metaphorical children to him. Thus, Paul adds, "It is those who have faith who are blessed along with Abraham who had faith" (3:9).

This declaration, then, *is* the gospel Paul preaches, namely, that all the gentile nations will receive the blessing of Abraham through faith. Paul saw the promise to Abraham as an act of grace by which people would be justified by faith (as Abraham was so justified) because God promised to give the blessing/inheritance of Abraham to gentiles as gentiles, without expecting them to be physical descendents of Abraham and without requiring them to be circumcised or to do works of the Judean Law in order to receive it.

How people become children of Abraham

What is the process by which people can become metaphorical children of Abraham? The key is that the promise was made to Abraham and to his seed, that is, to *one* seed, to one offspring. Paul writes: "Now the promise was given to Abraham and to his seed. It does not say 'and to his seeds,' as of many, but as of one, 'and to your seed,' which is Christ" (3:16). So, the promise went straight from Abraham to



Christ as the seed/offspring who was to bring about the fulfillment of the promise.

How did Jesus Christ qualify to be the one who enabled the promise to be fulfilled? The answer is that, like Abraham, Christ had faith. Here Paul somewhat equivocates on the meaning of the Greek word for faith to convey the idea that Christ was "faithful" in his obedience to God; that is, Christ was righteous (innocent) before God. This depiction of Christ's faithfulness is the significance of several references in Galatians to the "faith *of* Christ" (e.g., 2:20); that is, to the "faithfulness" that Christ had. This faithfulness is what made Jesus the seed of Abraham who was able to fulfill the promise. Christ was faithful, even to the point of being crucified for it. This crucifixion of an innocent person had special meaning. Paul quotes scripture to the effect that "Cursed is everyone who hangs upon a tree" (3:13). However, as an innocent person, Christ must have been bearing not his own curse but the curse of others. Who might these other people be? Paul cites another passage, which says that people who live by the Law are under a curse: "Cursed is everyone who does not stay with everything that is written in the book of the Law to keep it" (3:10). Because no one keeps the whole Law (3:11), everyone who lives by the Law must be under a curse. This is the curse that Jesus has taken upon himself. Paul writes, "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the Law by becoming a curse for us" (3:13). This faithfulness of Christ was an expression of love. As Paul says, "I now live by the faith of the son of God who loved me and gave himself up for me" (2:20).

To explain how this act of Christ was effective, Paul says "I have been crucified with Christ" (2:19). The hanging on the tree and dying such an ignominious death *was* the curse on others that Jesus bore for all those under the Law. So, Paul is able to say that Christ became a curse for him; that is, Christ was crucified in his place, such that Paul can say (metaphorically speaking) that he, Paul, was crucified with Christ. If Christ suffered the curse for him in a representative sense, then Paul has been "crucified with Christ" (2:19). When Paul says this about himself, he is speaking on behalf of all Judeans who have come to be in Christ. Christ took upon himself the curse on all people under the curse of the Law. And those who have now accepted this act for themselves confess by faith that they have been crucified with Christ.

All of this explains how Christ enabled the promise to Abraham to be fulfilled. By being a person of faith, Jesus could bear the curse that was placed on others. By removing the curse of the Law (by means of the ignominious death), Jesus enabled other Judeans, like Paul and Barnabas, who lived under the Law, to then also be reckoned as righteous *by their faith (as trust) in this act.* This is the significance of references in the letter to the believers' "faith *in* Christ" (e.g., 2:16). Jesus' life established the *pattern of faith* and, at the same time, freed others to be able to follow that pattern by

having faith in Jesus. Notice that the removal of the curse applied only to Judeans, for they are the ones who were living by the Law. However, once the Judeans were freed from the Law to be justified by faith, gentiles could also be justified by faith without following the Judean Law. So, Paul writes, "the purpose [of Christ redeeming us from the curse] was that the gentiles might receive the blessing of Abraham in Christ Jesus and that we [all, Judeans and gentiles alike] might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith" (3:14). The death of Jesus broke open the boundaries of Judaism, such that the promise to Abraham could be fulfilled to gentiles. This was possible because Jesus' death established the conditions that would enable everyone, Judeans and gentiles alike, to be justified before God by faith in the promise. If people have faith like Abraham had faith, they are Abraham's children and thereby receive Abraham's blessing/inheritance—the gift of the Spirit.

Paul goes on to show that this prior promise reveals the temporal limits of the later Law. The Law was added 430 years after the promise to Abraham, and its appearance did not nullify or add to the promise that the gentiles would be justified by faith (3:17). In Paul's view, the Law was given in order to discipline and guard people from the power of sin during the time before Christ came: "The Law was our disciplinarian until Christ" (3:24). He argues that "Now that Christ has come, we are no longer under Law" (3:25). The Law was a temporary measure for Judeans, and now all people (Judeans and gentiles alike) are justified through faith in Christ Jesus (3:24). Hence, the inheritance (the blessing of Abraham, the Spirit, the kingdom of God) comes not by Law but by the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham in Christ. And all who are "in Christ" are children of Abraham and, hence, children of God.

Incorporation into the seed of Abraham by baptism

The incorporation into Christ as children of Abraham involves a ritual. By baptism, people are incorporated "into Christ." Paul writes: "You are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. For in Christ there is neither Judean nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus" (3:28). By baptism, people "put on Christ," which means that they take on the familial identity of Jesus. In the ancient world, slaves took on the identity of their lords (Paul calls Jesus "Lord" and refers to himself as a "slave of Christ"—1:10). Similarly, sons (children) have their identity in relation to their father. Here in 3:28, the emphasis is on imitation of a father by sons/children. By putting faith in the gospel, people become like Christ in imitating behavior characteristic of Christ and of Abraham. Taking on this familial identity is equivalent here to being "in Christ." By baptism, then, those who have faith are "in Christ," and they therefore become part of the "one seed" that is Christ. By being incorporated *into Christ* by baptism, those who have faith *become part of the seed of Abraham*—"which is Christ" (3:16). Thereby they become children of Abraham: "And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed [offspring]" (3:29).

By virtue of being children of Abraham, believers become children of God. In fact, Abraham is never called father in this letter. Only God is Father. So, in a sense, by becoming children of Abraham, people of faith become inheritors of God. The promise is God's promise. The blessing is God's blessing. The inheritance is God's

inheritance. The Spirit is God's Spirit. If you are Abraham's seed, Paul argues, then you are "inheritors according to the promise" (3:29) and "an heir through God" (4:7). The Spirit seals this identity as children of God, by leading believers to cry out to God: "Abba, Father."

Paul uses the phrase "in Christ" often to depict the identity of believers and their oneness. In this regard, note how the incorporation "in Christ" overcomes differences that Paul deals with throughout the whole letter. For example, "There is neither Judean nor Greek [gentiles]" (3:28). Here Paul refers to the two key groups at stake in the letter. One group is circumcised, the other not. But for those who are in Christ, "neither circumcision nor non-circumcision is anything" (5:6; 6:15). So the metaphorical incorporation into the children of Abraham includes and transcends the identity of those who are physical descendents of Abraham (Judeans) and those who are not (gentiles). In both cases, they become related to Abraham in a metaphorical sense, because both groups are children of Abraham now by virtue of having faith rather than by blood kinship.

Consider also "There is neither slave nor free" (3:28). Paul uses the slave/free metaphor in several ways in Galatians. In some places in the letter, Paul refers to two categories of people as analogies/metaphors for the situation of people before (slaves to Law and idols) and after incorporation into Christ (free, as children). By contrast, in this passage, Paul is making a different point. People who are literally slaves (non-persons in the eyes of Roman law) and people who are literally free (freedmen/women who are not slaves) are both able to be "children of Abraham" by virtue of being in Christ by faith. Nothing prevents even slaves from being children in the metaphorical sense.

Finally, Paul refers to the fact that in Christ "There is no male and female" (3:28). Here, his choice of groups relates very much to the issue of circumcision. In Israel, women were not circumcised. So, when "neither circumcision nor non-circumcision counts for anything," women have the same status as men. Furthermore, Paul uses female figures to talk about giving birth in a metaphorical sense. In a metaphorical family, women who are barren (4:27) as well as men (4:19) can give birth, as we shall see, by virtue of bringing others to faith. Again, the point is that anyone, regardless of gender or social status or nationality, can now become children of Abraham by faith.

In Christ, all these groups are one: "You are all one in Christ Jesus" (3:29). Being "one" means that they are all of the same status. This common status is conveyed also by the image of "putting on Christ" or "being clothed in Christ" (3:27). It may be that candidates for baptism in Paul's churches all wore white robes as a symbol of their new identity in Christ. In general, in the ancient world, the clothes people wore identified them as Judean or gentile, slave or free, male or female. If in baptism all wear the same white robe, they show their common identity in Christ and at the same time relativize their other identities as Judeans/gentiles, slave/free, and male/female. Even if Paul is using the phrase "putting on Christ" only as a metaphor, the point is the same. They are all "one" in Christ Jesus.

Granting equal status to all of these groups under a common solidarity "in Christ" at the same time serves to address the dynamics of power/privilege and oppression/marginalization. Among each of the pairs listed in 3:28 are the primary categories of oppressor and oppressed in the ancient world: free over slave, male

over female, and Greek over Judean. Of this last category, clearly it was the gentiles in the Roman Empire who lorded over the Judeans as one of the many subject peoples of the ancient Mediterranean world. But at the same time, from Paul's point of view, the Judeans had the God of all life and the promise to Abraham and thereby also the means to bless all gentile nations in a new creation. For all of these groups, the incorporation by baptism into Christ generated this new creation, an alternative society in which there were no oppressors and no oppressed, no privileged and no marginalized: "For you are all one in Christ Jesus" (3:29). All are children of "our Father" and "brothers"/"sisters" in solidarity with one another.

"Coming of age" and "adoption" as children of Abraham

We see the shift from being slaves to becoming children in another analogy that Paul adds here—the shift from being male minors under the custody of slaves to attaining status as adult children. The analogy is with an heir who is under the custody of a slave (4:1–7). The slave serves as disciplinarian for the child until he comes of age, a time set by the father. The child is, in a sense, the "lord of all" (owner and master, as heir); nevertheless, as long as he is still underage, he is "no different than a slave" because he is "under guardians and administrators until the time fixed by his father" (4:1–2).

Similarly, Paul argues that before people came to be "in Christ" they were enslaved to the elemental spirits of the cosmos. The Judeans who became Christians were under the custody of the Law (which was mediated by angels) until the fullness of time came (3:23–25; 4:1). The gentiles who became Christians were enslaved to idols, "beings that by nature are no gods" (4:8). At the point at which they came to be "in Christ" (had faith, received the Spirit, were baptized, took the identity of Christ), they became sons (children) of Abraham/of God with all the rights of sons; that is, they came into their inheritance (4:7). The metaphors here are mixed. The passage refers both to coming of age and to adoption. On one hand, the Judeans were "no different than a slave" (because they were under the slave guardianship of the Law) and have now "come of age," like the heir who was lord (owner of all) but was no different than a slave "until the time fixed by his father" (4:2). On the other hand, the gentiles were slaves to idols, and when they came to faith, they received "sonship" as adopted children (4:5).

The point is that both groups, who were once "slaves" or "no different than a slave," are now children: "You are no longer slaves but sons [children] and if sons [children] then inheritors through God" (4:7). Paul includes an explanation of what this inheritance is, namely the Spirit. "And since you are sons [children], God has sent the Spirit of his son into our hearts crying 'Abba, Father'" (4:4:6). So, those who are children of Abraham by their faith are at one and the same time children of God. And they are receiving God's blessing, God's inheritance of the Spirit. They have the Spirit of God's son "in your hearts, crying 'Abba, Father'" (4:6). And this Spirit from God is God's claim on the believers as children and the means of solidarity among the children of God. This dynamic brings us to the full meaning of the opening address of God as "our Father" (1:3–4), and it fulfills the gospel promise to Abraham that "in you shall all the gentile nations be blessed" (3:8).

Allegory of the mothers of the children of Abraham

Paul now turns to another analogy, an allegory about mothers that is related to Abraham and the promise (4:21–31). Once Paul had articulated the contrast between Spirit and flesh, he could interpret scripture allegorically. By an amazing (and disturbing) twist, he now sets up a contrast in which he argues that, metaphorically speaking, the present Judeans are children of Abraham's slave Hagar, because they, like Hagar, are enslaved to the Law and are thereby living according to the flesh. In turn, metaphorically speaking, the gentile believers (along with Judeans who believed as Paul did) are children of the free woman Sarah, because they, like Isaac, have become free children of God by the promise and are living according to the Spirit. Because Isaac was a child of the promise, Abraham's descendants represent those who receive the inheritance by faith. They were born not of a slave woman but of a free woman. Below is a table of the contrasts evident in this allegory.

Metaphorically, there are two mothers—the actual city of Jerusalem and the Jerusalem from above. The actual city of Jerusalem is mother of the present Judeans, who are enslaved under the Law. They are represented by Hagar, Abraham's maidservant. This Jerusalem that is oriented from below is life according to the flesh, because it represents the elemental spirits of the cosmos—insofar as the Law was given through the mediation of angels (on Mount Sinai) and not directly from God. By contrast, the Jerusalem that is oriented from above, the spiritual (metaphorical) Jerusalem, is mother of those who are free. And the Jerusalem above is directly from God (the source of the Spirit) and therefore not part of enslavement to the elemental spirits of the cosmos.

Now we see clearly the overall pattern of Paul's thinking in this letter. He looks back at the history of Israel and sees two covenants. The one to Abraham is earlier, comes by promise directly from God, is fulfilled in Christ, and has opened out to encompass gentiles by faith without the

Children of Hagar	**Children of Sarah**
Slave woman	Free woman
Born according to the flesh	Born according to the promise/Spirit
Covenant from Mt Sinai in Arabia	Covenant from above
Jerusalem that lives in slavery with all her children	Jerusalem above that is free, and this is our mother
Has a husband and few children	Barren but with more children
Children of slavery	Children of promise, like Isaac
Persecuted the son born according to the Spirit	Persecuted by the son born according to the flesh
Son of the slave woman will not inherit	Son of the free woman will inherit
Therefore, slaves	Therefore, free

need to follow the Judean Law. By contrast, Paul sees the covenant from Mount Sinai (he never mentions Moses!) as a later covenant that does not nullify Abraham's covenant, was indirectly mediated through angels, was a temporary measure until Abraham's covenant would be fulfilled in Christ, and was limited to Judeans. In the allegory about Abraham's two children, he is now able to bring together his historical argument with the categories of flesh and Spirit, as a means to reinforce the superiority of the Abraham covenant over the secondary, limited, and restricted covenant of Law from Mount Sinai. In this way, he can say to the Galatians: remain part of Abraham's covenant of freedom given directly from God, because the covenant from Mount Sinai is an enslavement of the flesh that is not even valid any longer now that Christ has come.

Paul may have used the allegory of the two covenants to counter an argument that gentiles were indeed physical offspring of Abraham—but through Hagar rather than Sarah. But Paul wants to connect the gentiles directly to the *promise* that led to the birth of Isaac by Sarah. Hence, by means of a metaphorical reversal, he is able to assure the Galatians that "You are children of promise, like Isaac" (4: 28) and that "We are children not of the slave woman but of the free woman" (4:31).

"Giving birth" to children of Abraham

The metaphorical mother language also enables Paul to contrast the offspring of those who have children by physical birth and those who have children by a metaphorical mother. He quotes scripture to the following effect: "Rejoice, O barren one, who does not bear; break forth and shout, you who are not in labor pains, for the children of the desolate one are more than the children of the one who has a husband" (4:27). Paul is saying that the children of the Jerusalem that is from above can produce more children than the earthly Jerusalem marked by blood kinship. The women who are not in birth pains (who give birth metaphorically to children of Abraham by faith) can have many more children than the women who give physical birth (the Judeans who count descendency from Abraham in terms of blood relationship).

Earlier Paul had applied the same birth metaphor to himself as a woman in labor pains. He refers to the Galatians as "My little children" and adds, "with whom I am in labor pains again until Christ takes shape in you" (4:19). As metaphorical mother, Paul can talk about giving birth (again) to the Galatians as his children. In Galatians, Paul does not depict himself as Father, for God is the only Father. Paul sees his role as that of a mother who gives birth to children of God in whom "Christ takes shape."

The idea of a male who has metaphorical offspring without intercourse may also be the best context to understand Paul's cryptic remark about those who are agitating the Galatians, when he says, "As for those agitators, I wish they would go all the way and cut it off" (5:12). The point is that if they went beyond circumcising the foreskin of the penis and castrated themselves, they would not be able to be circumcised, nor would they be able to make children of Abraham by blood relations. As eunuchs, they would be in the same situation as that of the gentile believers; namely, they would be in relation to God by faith apart from Law, and they would be seeking to expand the children of Abraham by metaphorical kinship.

The freedom of the children of Abraham

The metaphor of being born of a free woman emphasizes the motif that children of Abraham are free people. Here again, Paul is using language in a metaphorical way. He is not talking about actual slaves and freedmen but is referring to the dynamics of a relationship with God. At the end of the analysis of the allegory of the two women, Paul writes: "For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery" (5:1). Later, he adds, "You, my brothers [and sisters], were called to freedom" (5:13). There are two forms of slavery from which Paul believes justification by faith frees one: slavery to the Judean Law and slavery to idols.

The first form of slavery is the slavery of the Law, which is over Judeans. In Paul's view, the slavery dynamics of Law are twofold. First, those who live by the Law are obligated to follow the Law in order be justified before God. As already noted, the Law itself says that people are cursed who do not observe "everything written in the book of the Law to keep it" (3:10). So, people are enslaved to a comprehensive keeping of the Law—a "yoke of slavery" (5:1)—and are therefore at risk of being cursed (5:3). The second slavery dynamic of the Law is that the Law serves the function of being a custodian and disciplinarian (3:23-24). As we have said, this was a slave who looked after youths to keep them from getting into trouble until they reached adulthood. In this dynamic of slavery, the Law can prohibit certain destructive behaviors but cannot empower positive righteousness that brings life (3:21).

The second form of slavery is the slavery to idols on the part of gentiles: "Formerly," Paul writes, "before you knew God, you were enslaved to beings that are by nature not gods" (4:8). Paul does not explain what comprises this slavery to idols. We can infer that idolatry involved carrying out certain ritual practices and observing certain times in order to appease the gods or to please the gods and thereby to win favors.

But now those who have faith and who are justified by grace are freed from these requirements for justification. To revert to any of them is to drop out of the relationship of grace established by God through Christ (5:2–4). To revert to a situation in which one needs to fulfill the Law or to offer sacrifices as a basis for justification before God is to become estranged from Christ. It is "to drop out of grace" (5:4). When people receive justification as children by grace, they are directly related to God by the gift of the Spirit rather than indirectly by means of the "elemental spirits of the cosmos" (4:3, 9). In this new immediate relationship with God, not only do people come to know God, but also God knows them. As Paul says, "now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back to the weak and impotent elements of the cosmos, whose slaves you want to become once more?" (4:9).

Paul warns the Galatians about reverting to slavery. The gentiles who were enslaved to idols are in danger of falling back into slavery by following the Judean Law—by becoming circumcised and by observing special days (the Sabbath) and months (new moon) and seasons and years (4:10). Paul is afraid for them, "lest I have spent my labor on you in vain" (4:11). Paul asks them to become as he is, because he has now become as they are (as one who now follows the Spirit by faith rather than the Judean Law). He points out that the life of grace is a matter of freedom, a matter of "faith working through love" (5:6). Paul concludes his arguments for justification

by grace at the end of chapter 4, in the confidence that his arguments warning them against slavery will win the day: "I have confidence in you, in the Lord, that you will take no other view" (than the gospel of grace Paul had proclaimed from the first) (5:10). For, Paul affirms, "You were called to freedom" (5:13). This, in Paul's view, is what it means to be children of God rather than slaves.

Yet Paul wants to make sure that the new freedom manifests itself in behavior toward one another that is an appropriate expression of the grace the Galatians have received. Paul argues that the result of receiving grace should be grace toward others. The fruits of being made righteous should be righteousness toward others. So Paul says, "Do not use your freedom as an opportunity/pretext for the flesh" (3:13). Paul warns against the "works of the flesh," manifestations of the passions and desires of the flesh (5:16–21). He urges them as brothers and sisters who are children of God to walk by the Spirit, to be led by the Spirit (5:18, 25). When this occurs, people manifest "the fruits [not the works] of the Spirit: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility, self-control" (5:22). Wryly, Paul adds that "If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under Law" (5:18), because "there is no Law against such things as these [that is, the fruits of the Spirit]" (5:22). Freedom lies in the capacity to be led and empowered by the Spirit to live lives of righteousness—willingly and joyfully, quite apart from any need for Law, even Law that serves as a guardian.

The ending of the letter: the new kinship community

What does the new community of metaphorical kinship look like? Here Paul's language throughout Galatians is relevant. Paul refers to the Galatians as "brothers" (1:11; 3:15; 4:12, 28, 31; 5:11, 13; 6:1, 18). This is the language of mutual relationships of solidarity. The relationship between brothers was the strongest bond in ancient familial relations. The father-son relationship was one of identity, imitation, and obedience. The brother-sister relationship was one of protection. The mother-son relationship was very strong but, like the sister language, was a relationship of subordination to males and therefore embeddedness in male protection. But the brother-brother relationship was that of persons who shared mutual status and power and who had great loyalty to each other. Paul's kinship language was that of collateral solidarity and common commitment to one another.

While the kinship language of "brothers" was used to express the solidarity of the new community as "one in Christ," the *role* of the community members in relation to each other was expressed by the household language of "slaves." Although those in Christ are not to submit to the yoke of slavery of the Law, they are voluntarily to become slaves of one another in the household of faith. Paul exhorts the Galatians: "through love become slaves of one another" (5:13). This is God's will, summed up by the statement from the Law: "Love your neighbor as yourself" (5:14). Paul is not reverting to the Law here. Rather, he is calling upon the Galatians to follow the principle of love that lies behind the Law, the "law of Christ," which is precisely what the Spirit in freedom leads them to do as an expression of God's will. The Galatians are free from the Law and free to fulfill God's will behind the Law by direct guidance from the Spirit. And whereas the Law could only discipline without bringing life, the Spirit can lead and empower as well as give life.

These relationships of "brother [sister]" and voluntary "slave" among believers are not characterized by hierarchy—no authority by some over others and no gradations of importance in roles—because these would lead to either arrogance or envy (5:26). Paul gives several examples of such mutuality in service: when you discover another person in a transgression, restore that person in gentleness, aware that you too might transgress (6:1, 2); bear one another's burdens (6:1); do not thinking more highly of yourself than you ought 6:3); do not compare yourself with others 6:4); and bear one's own burdens (6:5), such that if one person teaches, the one being taught will share material goods with the teacher (6:6). In all of these mutual relations, the Galatians are admonished not to flag in doing good for those of the household of faith (6:10).

As brothers and as children of Abraham, God is their Father. They have the Spirit of the Son Jesus in their hearts, and they call God "Abba" (4:6). They are inheritors of God (4:7). In this regard, they have received the blessing of Abraham, they have been justified by faith, and they have received the Spirit by grace. They now live by the guidance of the Spirit (5:25). And they will inherit the kingdom of God when it comes fully (5:19–24). In the end, those who live by the Spirit will reap a harvest of eternal life (6:8).

The metaphorical Israel of God

This new community of the children of Abraham is "Israel"—not the Israel of the flesh made up of those who are blood descendents of Abraham and who live by the Law but the Israel created by the Spirit and living by faith. Just as the Judean nation was called "the house(hold) of Israel," so Paul calls the new community "the house/household of faith" (6:10). The new community of Abraham's metaphorical offspring is Israel composed of Judeans and gentiles who live by faith rather than by Law. At the very end of the letter, Paul says that "In Christ, neither circumcision nor non-circumcision is anything, but only new creation" (6:15). Then he adds, "As for those who keep this principle, may peace be upon them and upon *the Israel of God*" (6:16). The new community is the manifestation of the new creation. They are the children of Abraham, Judean and gentile alike, who are "in Christ." They are therefore "the Israel of God"—the metaphorical Israel.

With this reference to Israel, we are dealing not simply with metaphorical kinship language but also with metaphorical *nation* language. In the ancient world, nations were thought of primarily as ethnic groups, people who shared kinship by blood relations and who lived by the culture distinctive to them. So it was natural to refer to the nation of Israel, for example, as a family—as the household of God and the children of Abraham, along with many other phrases that conveyed blood kinship among those of Israel. So, when Paul was using metaphorical household language throughout the letter, he was at the same time using metaphorical nation language. Here at the end, Paul makes this explicit, depicting those who are in Christ as "the house of faith" and "the Israel of God."

After all, Paul was giving to the Galatians a new identity as children of Abraham. In so doing, he was giving them a new God, a new ancestry, a new history, a new set of kinship relationships, and a new national identity—an identity that, by virtue of being metaphorical, did not nullify their identity as Galatians. By implication, it did not nullify the identity of any other ethnic group, as gentiles. Neither circum-

cision nor non-circumcision means anything in this new Israel, because it is a new creation in which such distinctions are transcended. In addition, distinctions as a basis for power and privilege—Judean/gentile, slave/free, male/female—are nullified. They are nullified by virtue of the fact that this household of faith is created by grace from an action of God external to all these groups and not on the basis of distinctions that separate and divide human individuals and groups and that serve to justify domination.

Concluding reflections

The language of metaphorical kinship is extensive in Paul's Letter to the Galatians. A study of it helps to explain how Paul's gospel transcended ethnocentricity and embraced all nations as potential children of God. To contemporary readers, there are disturbing aspects to Paul's ideas and expressions: the male-preference language, the embeddedness of women in male identity, the negative portrait of Judeans who were not Christians, the depiction of Judeans as children of Hagar, the claim that being "in Christ" represents the true Israel, the methods he used to interpret scripture passages, the understanding of curse in relation to the Law, and the pronouncement of anathema on any who would preach a different gospel. Nevertheless, some glistening dynamics shine forth brilliantly from this letter—the proclamation of a gospel that generates righteous justice, the priority of God's grace, the power of the Spirit, the impulse toward inclusion of all, the ringing call to freedom from any form of enslavement, the invitation to serve one another with mutual love, and, not least, the formation of strong familial bonds among people from many nations, races, and cultures who have been grasped by God's grace to be God's children.

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Hanging on a Ghetto Cross: Piri Thomas and Latino Protestant Popular Religion

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My interest in popular religion has led me to search for those resources that witness to the spiritual and religious expressions of the Latino people in the United States and its territories. This area of interest has captured the attention of an increasing number of Latino scholars, providing a rich and provocative documentation.[1] This knowledge has challenged important tenets of traditional epistemological and theological reflection as well as dominant trends in the past and present mission and ministry with Latinos by mainline expressions of the Christian church in North America.

In this study I explore some valuable contributions of the Latino Protestant religious perspective by analyzing a selection of examples from the literary work of the Afro-Puerto Rican author Piri Thomas. My preference for the contributions of this author stems from the fact that his work is an important and provocative example of what is labeled Latino literature. Thomas is also one of the few Latino authors who have written about personal experience and convictions with the intention to stimulate a critical examination of the religious and spiritual expression of traditionally underrepresented constituencies in North American society.

Literature as a locus of religious expression

In several of his recent publications, Luis N. Rivera-Pagán regrets the negligible attention given to literature as a focus of our creative and spiritual imagination.[2] While the homiletical exposition of religious leaders has paid attention to images of humanity and the sacred in literature, modern theological reflection has been mostly nurtured by the intellectual dialogue with representatives in the fields of philosophy and the social sciences. With few exceptions, theologians have neglected to reflect on the contributions of literature in exploring the dilemmas, enigmas, and yearnings of humanity.[3]

1. Among the many Latino and Latina scholars engaged in this area of studies are Virgilio Elizondo, Ana María Pineda, Alejandro García-Rivera, and Harold J. Recinos. One of the most important works addressing this topic is Orlando Espín's *The Faith of the People: Theological Reflections on Popular Catholicism* (New York: Orbis, 1997).

2. See Luis N. Rivera-Pagán, *Mito, Exilio y demonios: Literatura y teología en América Latina* (Hato Rey: Publicaciones Puertorriqueñas, 1996), and *Essays from the Diaspora* (Chicago: Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, 2002).

For Latin American theologians, this disregard of literature becomes unacceptable, given the significance of literature as the focal expression of the Latin American drama in all of its manifold complexities. For Rivera-Pagán, the need for a serious theological exploration of Latin American literature derives not just from the relevance that the creative symbolic expressions of this literature provides in response to the queries of religious and ecclesiastical concerns but also from the fact that the exploration of the myths, utopias, and faith immersed in this literature might be one of the ways to overcome the difficult predicament in which Latin American liberation theology finds itself. We live in a historical period aptly described by Elsa Tamez as one of messianic drought in which the horizons seem to close.[4]

Hispanic/Latina religious leaders in the U.S. view this dialogue between literature and theology as an important source of Hispanic/Latino theology. Yet, given the recent emergence of this theological perspective, the number of studies available in this area are few and mostly from a sociological or literary perspective.[5] In addition, while Latino authors usually follow an interdisciplinary approach, most of the studies of Protestant popular religion explore this topic from a theological perspective, or a viewpoint that takes one's own denominational tradition as a lens from which to

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3. For Rivera-Pagán, some of these attempts have been unfortunately limited to a mere rhetorical decoration (*Mito, exilio y demonion,* 8). The following are a number of publications that explore the dialogue between religion and literature. See their suggestions for significant literature in this area of research. *Art/Literature/Religion: Life on the Borders*, ed. Robert Detweiler (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983); David Jasper, *The Study of Literature and Religion* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1989); *Religion and Literature: A Reader*, ed. Robert Detweiler and David Jasper (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000). Among the works focusing on the Latin American context see Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Entre las calandrias: un ensayo sobre José María Arguedas* (Lima: Instituto Bartolomé de Las Casas, 1990); Reinero Arce Valentín, *Religión: Poesía del mundo venidero. Las implicaciones teológicas en la obra de José Martí* (Quito: Consejo Latinoamericano de Iglesias, 1996); Raúl Fornet Betancourt, *Filosofía, teología, literatura: aportes cubanos en los últimos 50 años* (Aachen: Concordia Reihe Nonographien, Band 25, 1999); Antonio Melo Magalhães, "Notas introdutórias sobre teologia e literatura," in *Cuadernos de Pós-Graduaçâo,* no. 9 (São Paulo: Instituto de Encino Superior, 1997): 7–40.

4. *Essays from the Diaspora,* 27. Also, Vítor Westhelle and Hanna Betina Götz, "In Quest of a Myth: Latin American Literature and Theology," in *Journal of Hispanic/latino Theology,* vol. 3, no. 1 (August 1995): 5–22; and Elsa Tamez, "Cuando los horizontes se cierran: Una reflexión sobre la razón utópica de Qohélet," in *Cristianismo y sociedad* 33: 123 (1995), 7. The above-mentioned works by Rivera-Pagán are important contributions in addressing this challenge. They provide a valuable historical and analytical survey of mostly, but not limited to, Latin American authors, bibliographical resources, and significant stages in this area of study. They also stand as some of his constructive contributions in provoking and moving forward this area of research. My goal in this study is to join Rivera-Pagán, Götz, Westhelle, and others in this important effort by highlighting the contributions of Latino/a authors in the U.S.

5. See for example the suggestive study of Ana María Diaz-Stevens, "In the Image and Likeness of God: Literature as Theological Reflection," in *Hispanic/Latino Theology: Challenge and Promise*, ed. Ada María Isasi-Díaz and Fernando F. Segovia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 86–103, or Elena Olazagasti-Segovia, "Judith Ortiz Cofer's *Silent Dancing:* The Self-Portrait of the Artist as a Young, Bicultural Girl," in *Hispanic/Latino Theology,* 45–62.

interpret the significance of this religious expression.[6]

My choice of the literary work of Piri Thomas aims at enriching these efforts, not just by selecting a Latino author for whom literature becomes a preferential vehicle of expression, but because his particular contributions challenge not only a dominant literary genre in Latino literature but other theological efforts at this task.

Piri Thomas and his literary contributions

Born of Puerto Rican and Cuban parents in New York City's Spanish Harlem in 1928, Piri Thomas's struggle for survival, identity, and recognition began at a very early age. The vicious and cruel street environment of poverty, racism, and street crime experienced in New York City's ghetto streets led to his own involvement with crime. In 1955 he ended up in prison for armed robbery. After serving seven years of incarceration and hard labor, he rose above his violent background of drugs and gang warfare, using his street and prison experience to reach out to young people and turn them away from a life of crime. In 1967 he published *Down These Mean Streets*, now considered a classic of its kind. This provocative and psychologically penetrating autobiographical novel launched his career and fame as an author, winning him instant and lasting acclaim.[7]

Thomas's literary contributions are part of what Puerto Rican cultural critic Juan Flores describes as the literature of "lowercase people." In U.S. Latino literature, "lowercase literature" is a literature deriving from sources other than those identified with formal education and cultural literacy. While authors of this literary genre are clearly familiar with the works of classical and contemporary literature, their perspective never leaves the Latino world that borders on destitution and is intricately associated with blackness and the African American experience. For Flores, there is a significant distinction between this type of literature and other variants of Latino literary expression. The distinctive feature of Latino "lowercase literature" lies not on its thematic concerns or stylistic features but on the differential sociological placement and grounding of the writing and social identity of its subjects. For "lowercase" Latino writers, their work stands face to face with social experience, however harsh and saturated with mass culture, with its characters, voices, and story lines, all recognizable inhabitants of the mean but real streets.[8]

My interest in Thomas's work originated in the late 1980s when I read Antonio

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6. See Samuel Soliván, "Sources of a Hispanic/Latino American Theology: A Pentecostal Perspective," in *Hispanic/Latino Theology,* 134–48; Angel Santiago-Vendrell, "Popular Religion as a Unifying Factor in the Latino/a Religious Community: A Pentecostal Proposal in US Latino/a Ecumenical Theology," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 12:1 (2003), 129–41; and the important study edited by David Maldonado, *Protestantes/ Protestant: Hispanic Christianity within Mainline Traditions* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999).

7. For more detailed information about his life and writings see *www.cheverote.com.*

8. Juan Flores, *From Bomba to Hip-Hop: Puerto Rican Culture and Latino Identity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 167–88. In an earlier study on this subject Flores provides a history of Puerto Rican literature in the United States in which he argues that the contributions of Piri Thomas, Nicholasa Mohr, and others including Edward Rivera and Pedro Pietri belong to a literary genre that he calls *popular, ethnic, minority, testimonial,* or *non-canonical* literature. This literature produced by Nuyorrican authors (Puerto Ricans living in the United States) shares with the literature of other traditionally

M. Stevens Arroyo's excellent anthology of writings, speeches, prayers, hymns, and other documents that summon the Latino people in the U.S. to a new articulation of their faith.[9] In my estimation, the particular contribution of Thomas in this continuing project lies in provoking a more comprehensive exploration of Latino Protestant popular religious beliefs.

One cannot assume that Thomas's literary work is a clear and undisputed representation of mainline Protestantism in the U.S. While in several interviews he has affirmed the importance of spirituality for his life and his respect for all religious expressions including a preference for Pentecostalism,[10] his bitter and pervasive experience of discrimination led him to part company with institutionalized forms of religion. However, one of the most significant contributions of Thomas's works is his ability to communicate what Vítor Westhelle describes as the two particular and important dimensions of the word *Protestant,* from a popular perspective. For Westhelle, one of these important dimensions is an expression of protest, and the other is an unequivocal profession of faith. Concurrently they communicate the good news through the dynamics of the pain produced by this proclamation.[11] In this regard Thomas's legacy is an important witness to the enduring contribution of Latino Protestant popular beliefs in the US.

Confessing the faith, nitty-gritty

In his anthology, Stevens Arroyo places passages from Thomas's writings in a section where he highlights some crucial challenges for the development of a Hispanic Church in the U.S. For Stevens Arroyo, one of these fundamental challenges is articulating a theological perspective that in its affirmation of the faith and cultural identity of Latinos provides grounds for the recognition of a sociohistorical subject both challenging and enriching the witness of the whole church in North America.

The selections from Thomas's writings are taken from his second book, *Savior, Savior, Hold My Hand,* where he continues his autobiographical narrative focusing on his religious conversion to Pentecostalism and concluding with a description of his present commitment to people rather than institutionalized forms of religion.[12] These segments recount some vivid encounters of the author with the arrogant and racist attitudes portrayed by representatives of the religious establishment, along with his painful yet determined efforts toward a witness of faith that is true to his understanding of the gospel.

In one of the stories he is challenged by Lenny, a young white minister from the South coming to work with the youngsters in the ghetto. Thomas is asked to introduce

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underrepresented communities in the United States (Chicanos/as, African Americans, etc.) its resistance of assimilation to the social, economic, political, and cultural values of the dominant sectors of North American society, along with an intentional interchange and collective affirmation of the complementary nature of their struggles. Juan Flores, *La Venganza de Cortijo y otros ensayos* (Rio Piedras: Ediciones Huracán, 1997), 131–55.

9. Antonio M. Stevens Arroyo, *Prophets Denied Honor: An Anthology of the Hispanic Church in the United States* (New York: Orbis, 1980).

10. See the interview Piri Thomas had with Dorothee von Huene Greenberg available at *www.cheverote.com.*

11. Vítor Westhelle, "Prefacio," in José D. Rodríguez, *Justicia en nombre de Dios: Confesando la fe desde la perspectiva hispano/Latina* (Chicago: Lutheran School of Theology Hispanic/Latino Ministry Program, 2002), xii.

12. Piri Thomas, *Savior, Savior, Hold My Hand* (New York: Doubleday, 1972).

him to the kids and their families. Lenny's attitude in relating with Puerto Rican and Black kids of the neighborhood raises the concern of the author who confronts him.

"For God's sake, Lenny," I continued. "The Bible and Christianity aren't nothing new here in El Barrio. We got more storefront churches than Carter has liver pills. They may be poor but they are beau-coup sincere. The trouble is with the outside people from nice well-to-do churches who sincerely send people to work among us armed with all the knowledge of the Bible and a complete lack of understanding about what makes us tick. Christ sakes, Lenny, if you come to spread God's word, then just come and let us teach you about our humanity, and don't look on us like something that lived in the Stone Age."[13]

Another and more crucial encounter takes place with John, originally his partner in a project with hard-core teenage gangs, aimed at changing their lives by way of Christian practice and teaching. Taking the kids from the club to worship services at churches in the suburbs led the author to experience both the piety and the contempt of the middle class and white church in relating to the faithful from the ghetto. His reaction is to confront John, who encouraged this evangelistic initiative, with the racist and contemptuousness of its approach. John reproves what he perceives as the author's insolent comments and suggests bringing his angry feelings to God in prayer. The author responds,

Prayers gotta be strengthened with some kind of action, John. Without disrespect, amigo, if you've read history, too, you'd know many people have been taught to pray and when they finished praying and looked around, their land and respect was gone—taken away by the ones who had taught them to pray.[14]

In a witty and penetrating reflection on the nature of this predicament, the author points to the heart of the problem. Those from the ghetto are treated with disdain because they are considered inferior.

I had noticed things I hadn't dug before or perhaps hadn't wanted to dig in the white Christian/ghetto relationship. It was like we weren't equals. It was as if they were the chosen ones—despite the teachings in their Bibles—like they were sent to save us by getting us a hearing with Christ. But like it had to be on their own terms.[15]

For the author, our witness of faith demands integrity and showing respect for the dignity of human beings, who *all* are products of God's gracious creative initiative. Those living in the ghetto are not *basura* (litter) or inferior. They are rather the ones suffering the consequence of human greed and injustice. They should be considered as equals and treated with fairness. They are our brothers and sisters and, as such, deserve our love and affection. In fact, their witness of faith is not merely informed by the gospel, but their integrity and endurance under the severe context of the ghetto recover the fundamental confessing dimension of Christianity characteristic of its emergence as a marginalized and persecuted community in the first century. Prophetic leaders throughout history have challenged the church to remain faithful to God's Word in the midst of ideological manipulation, oppression, prejudice, and idolatry.

Hanging on a ghetto cross

The last part of the book reveals some valuable insights of the author in responding to this difficult condition. As the narrative continues, the relationship between him and John keeps deteriorating. Thomas decides to leave the job, as he becomes aware of the growing animosity between himself and his partner. His decision to resign leads to a climactic experience with

13. Thomas, *Savior, Savior, Hold My Hand* 325–26.

14. Ibid., 259.

15. Ibid., 257.

John, who resents what he conceives as the author's irrational and insolent attitude.

"Look, if you are angry at something, we can talk it out. Haven't we always been able to reason things out?"

"John," I cried, putting all kinds of brakes on my voice 'cause it was jumping into all kinds of different angry octaves. "I didn't mind you copping credit every time I turned in some guns. I even accepted a lot of the other crap you were putting down as long it helped the kids. But it's game time now. . . . Pure and simple, I QUIT."

"You never had it so good Piri." John's voice lost its cool. "Well I'm going to have it better, man. I QUIT."

"If you quit, I'll see to it you never work around this area again."[16]

John's sinister threat escalates as he fails in his various attempts to change the mind of the author. Shortly after leaving his job, Piri receives a call from the mother of one of the kids. Her son has been taken to the police station, and she has just discovered some guns in his room. She asks Piri to dispose of the weapons. Even though he isn't with the club anymore, he decides to help her. He calls John to bring the guns to the club so they can be taken to the police station. John responds with contempt:

You're not with the club anymore, so you don't have our backing. You're violating the law by having those weapons in your possession." His voice had a lot of innuendos in it. ". . . I'll be home. Bring all of them." His voice sounded like some friendly undertaker.[17]

Piri gets the weapons and drives to John's house in the suburbs. John is waiting for him. He gives the guns to John, who responds by surprisingly turning them back to him.

"Why are you giving them back to me for? You said it was the club's responsibility and I brought them to you. Where you at, John?"

"I've already notified the state troopers and also the precinct in New York that you are carrying a bag full of weapons. So I would advise you to turn yourself in with them."

I stood there stunned. Checking out my hearing, like I couldn't believe what was coming out of his mouth. His face had sheer hate on it. And I knew my face had contorted into some mask of hurting rage. My voice came out between my teeth, "You know I'm on parole. You know I owe over six years to the state."

"You should have thought of that before you picked them up."[18]

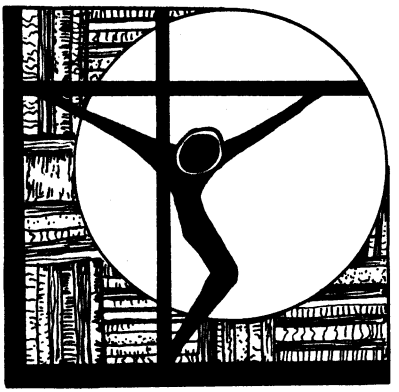
John's betrayal provokes Piri to rage, but containing his anger he responds,

"You got it your way up to now, John, but it won't always be like that. People will know where you are at some day." My words just bounced off his door closing behind him.[19]

Realizing his dilemma, Piri calls Carl, the producer of a Christian film crew with whom he had made a documentary to promote the club's work with the kids of the neighborhood, and asks him for help to bring the weapons to the police station. Upon their arrival, the officers in charge take the guns and hand Piri a summons for a court appearance to respond to his participation in this incident. The thought of being imprisoned for parole violation drives Piri into a frenzy. His earlier prison sentence had been the consequence of embracing the violence of the streets, and now he is being punished for doing something right. For him, that seems wrong.

The day of his appearance Piri is tormented with anxiety as he makes his way up to the judge when his name is called. Listening to the magistrate, he wonders if he is in the wrong court. The judge surprisingly commends him for his fine civic performance and bades him continue with his good work. Still shocked by the gracious and unexpected outcome, Piri's mind leads him to reflect:

16. Ibid., 333–34.
17. Ibid., 343.
18. Ibid., 344–45.
19. Ibid., 345.



I swear to the hole in my one shoe, I just nodded and said something like *chevere* to the judge and walked out of that court, mucho tall and knowing deep inside me that for a short while there, I had hung between walking out of that court with my pride and dignity as a man intact and being sent back to prison for some more years of dehumanization. And I knew that not everybody, except those like me, could ever fully understand the agony of what had gone down for me these last seven days.[20]

Deliverance comes as a gift. It is not the product of our own doing. For Piri, this central teaching of faith became true at the point when he felt destined to return to the horrible experience of prison. Hanging on a ghetto cross rendered by the scorn and deceit of evil forces, he encountered once again the gracious initiative of God he had experienced in the past through the loving care of his mother. Rather than seeking revenge from John and from those whose religious commitment cannot hide their prejudice, he went back to the streets walking tall, to continue in his struggle of love against racism, poverty, and injustice.

Hanging on the cross as a practice of faith

Westhelle argues in a recent publication that the most significant contribution of Protestantism in Latin America is its witness to what Luther understood as *theologia crucis*. For Luther, this central understanding of the gospel depicts a fundamental experience of the gospel. In fact, Luther preferred the phrase "a theologian of the cross" to "a theology of the cross" to emphasize that this theological notion referred to a theological praxis rather than a theological locus.[21]

Furthermore, it is Westhelle's conviction that the *Protestant* nature of Latin American liberation movements provides a more adequate understanding of Luther's teaching of the cross, as a theological perspective enabling our comprehension of God's self-revelation in history. His claim is that the 16th-century Protestant reformation and these Latin American militant movements share a common eschatological vision in which their mutual experience of exclusion and condemnation leads to the possibility of a true liberating experience.[22]

The final section of Piri Thomas's book serves as a powerful and persuasive witness to this conviction of faith. The concern of his wife Nita for Piri's irregular and decreasing participation in church services leads her to perceive in him an apparent spiritual decline produced by his unfortunate experience with John. A final conversation with her husband, however, helps clarify his unwavering expression of vital and resolute faith.

"John really has messed up your feelings about God, eh, Piri?"

"No, Nita. He's just been instrumental in opening my eyes to where the reality is at."

. . . "Wow, honey, don't you dig that to us people of the Barrio the ghetto is our church, and

20. Ibid., 348–49.

21. Vítor Westhelle, *Voces de Protesta en América Latina* (Chicago: Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, 2000), 111–20.

22. Westhelle, 107–27.

the only way we're going to make a heaven out of this hell is by getting together. Jesus honey, ain't I right?"

Nita smiled. I could tell she knew where I was coming from. "Nita, there ain't no such word as defeat. Diggit. Like them blind churches better get to see where it's really at."[23]

For most of those who read Thomas's autobiography from a pious religious perspective, the author's rejection of institutionalized forms of religion may stand as a setback or a type of reversal to his old ways. To be sure, his experience with Lenny, John, and other churchgoing Christians from the white middle class was more than wanting. It led to a prejudiced, intolerant, and dehumanizing relationship for those who were considered of lesser value and treated as inferior.[24] For Piri, this was a sort of Babylonian captivity of the church, its leaders, and its institutional forms that needed to be changed and radically transformed. His strong belief in the gospel, mediated through a variety of religious institutional forms and living witnesses,[25] sustained him from the temptation of falling into this hypocritical stance, a return to the violence of his former life, or the downfall of nihilism. Having experienced the gracious and liberating gift of God's love in his own life, he was committed to a faith active in love through traditional or nontraditional forms of institutional religion. His choice to continue his witness of love through his street ministry with kids and their families and friends, as well as with those already in prison, led to creative forms of being the church as a sign and proleptic anticipation of God's eschatological reign in history.[26]

At the end of the book, as Nita leaves for a church service, Piri remains in their house along with their son looking out the window, reflecting on the future ahead. "We are going to walk tall or not at all, World," I told myself. Then I smiled and half aloud whispered, "Hey, Jesus Christ, I betcha' there must be a million ghetto crosses out there."[27]

Piri eloquently expresses what I believe is the vital and enduring contribution of the spirit of Protestantism from a popular perspective.

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23. Thomas, 359–60.

24. In a recent conversation with the Puerto Rican anthropologist and MCC pastor Rev. Dr. Pablo Navarro, I was persuaded that today we need to add to these differences gender, sexual orientation, and non-Christian religious convictions.

25. In his first autobiographical book Thomas describes his experience with the religion of Islam. See Piri Thomas, *Down These Mean Streets,* 288–97. In the second he narrates his conversion to Pentecostalism. In both books he mentions his appreciation for a number of religious leaders that supported and inspired his spiritual life. In an interview with Humberto Cintrón, Thomas provides a brief assessment of his understanding of and hope for the future contribution of religious institutions for the well-being of human beings. See "An interview With Piri Thomas by Humberto Cintrón," at *www.cheverote.com/reviews/cintroninterview.html.*

26. In his thoughtful study on the church as a sign and present anticipation of God's reign, José D. Rodríguez-Rivera provides a persuasive and provocative study from a Latino Protestant perspective on the temptation felt by church leaders throughout history to confuse institutional forms of the Christian Church with God's promised reign in history. For this author the experiences of grassroots Christian communities emerging in Latin America and other Third World countries constitute creative forms of being the church today led by the power of God's Spirit, challenging institutional forms of religion and its leaders to a new reformation. José D. Rodríguez, *La Iglesia, signo y primicia del reino: Reflexiones pastorales desde el Caribe y América Latina* (Chicago: Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, Hispanic/Latino Ministry Program, 2003).

27. Thomas, 361.

Into the New Millennium: The Impact of the Academy on the Church

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Issues of race, gender, and economic and political ideologies exploded in 1968. That historic and tumultuous year included the unforgettable experiences of King, Kennedy, Resurrection City, Howard University, the National Women's Caucus, the Democratic National Convention, and many more. As a twelve-year-old, I witnessed these politics of difference and diversity rocking the country. That very year, the Spirit called me into a life of witness, specifically as an ordained minister. The politics of difference and diversity that defined the United States in 1968 also define the core of my ministry. The Spirit has impeccable timing.

I am grateful to the generations of African-American ministers, scholars, and elders whose hard-won accomplishments made my vocation possible. I lift up Dr. Albert ("Pete") Pero as one of the minister scholars. He kept diversity and difference on the agenda in the classroom and at the heart of his ministry. Over the course of his career, he developed a remarkable style that integrated his front-line experience in the 1960s movements with his passion for theology and his essence as a pastor. I recently became his colleague in the theology department at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. Dr. Pero taught theology to a predominantly affluent white student body for about thirty years. Not of small consequence, he taught black and womanist theologies to decades of seminarians. I admire his devotion to keeping diversity at the center of his call. His career and faith inspire my call and strengthen my commitment to do the same.

Like Pete, my life's experience has become central to my particular call. As a senior in college in 1978, I began the formal process of theological training. In my search for a seminary I invited several people to help me find an outstanding place to study. One advisor, Bishop Woodie White, at that time General Secretary of the General Commission on Religion and Race, enthusiastically directed me to the thirteen United Methodist seminaries. Others directed me to prepare a list of factors that I considered essential for my theological education.

I carefully examined each seminary according to my criteria. I looked intentionally for a seminary whose faculty had an extensive publishing record and an environment that cultivated creative and critical reason as well as a passion for prophetic interaction. I wanted to work with people who demonstrated a commitment to prepare women and men to be unabashedly

and critically Christian. I needed a seminary that gave high priority to multicultural diversity. Key factors included diversity of race, gender, tradition, life experience, and country of origin among faculty and students.

Diversity ranked especially high on my list because my undergraduate studies failed to provide any courses with or about persons of color. I spent four long years in courses that ignored categories and perspectives critical to communities of color. I did not have access to mentors or role models who looked liked me. The experience convinced me that my choice for seminary needed to reflect integrated diversity. The criteria that I established could not be found in any United Methodist seminary in 1978.

I chose to study instead at Union Theological Seminary in New York City. The faculty at Union included five well-published African American men, four highly respected white women scholars, and one Asian male. Although no women of color served on the faculty, Union still offered tremendous diversity and a commitment to excellence that met the criteria that I needed to prepare for ministry. Indeed, I received an excellent education. Throughout my formal and informal theological education, I felt celebrated, affirmed, and transformed significantly for ministry.

My development continued as I left the academy and entered the ministry. My first call invited me to serve as sole pastor with an inner-city mission congregation in Brooklyn, New York. I learned to manage the challenges that accompany being a young woman pastor who taught black theology and used gender-neutral language for God. What had played well in the seminary classroom met an ambivalent audience in this congregation. I loved the people and respected their resistance. I celebrated and affirmed people even with their negativity. I worked with their children and youth and stood by folks during their life struggles. Change happened over time by the power of the Spirit made present in Jesus Christ. The call transformed both the congregation and me.

My second appointment secured my call to minister with attention to diversity and difference. From Brooklyn, I moved into a predominantly white and very affluent congregation in White Plains, New York. I was the first African American minister and the first woman on staff. I encountered little resistance because members felt they needed a diverse staff in order to thrive. They were right. The benefits came quickly as more African American families came to the church. In addition, two women in the congregation accepted their calls to ministry. (They currently serve as pastors in the New York Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church.) My experience demonstrated to me that diversity fosters Christian transformation in a way that brings forth God's commonwealth.

Over the years, my ministry shifted from the church proper into the academy. My belief in the power that comes through difference continued to grow. No longer did I believe that diversity "fosters" Christian transformation. My language shifted, and I began to proclaim that Christian transformation *requires* diversity. I began to preach that diversity is not a luxury; it is the essence of the commonwealth.

The first few years of the new millennium indicate that our exposure to different ideas and people will continue to increase. In college I had no professors of color. I serve now on a seminary faculty that comprises almost 50 percent women and 30 percent persons of color or persons whose first language is other than English. The presence and proliferation of diversity

within the academy has shaped not only my generation but also an entire generation of young scholars—and pastors. How will these students and leaders of the new millennium impact the church? What lessons have we learned about theological education and the Christian ministry in the second millennium that may assist us as we move into the third? I will show that the ideas, beliefs, and sociocultural issues associated with theological education and the Christian ministry in our time will develop an increasingly inclusive vision for theological education in the decades to come.

Theological education and diversity

The first major lesson that we can learn is the challenge and necessity to normalize diversity within theological education. The church in all ages has proclaimed, "Behold, I make all things new." This verse offers hope and pushes us into the future. Likewise, the church across the centuries has pondered a question raised by the ancient Greek philosopher Socrates, "How should one live?"[1] Socrates's query corresponds to a question that anthropologists ask and that the church has asked during the modern period, How do (and should) we live together? Anthropologists also ask, Who are we? The church has explored this through the ages and continues to contemplate it today. A final set of questions emerges for both anthropologists and church leaders: How do we live with each other? What do we do? Anthropologists ask these questions out of a social-scientific interest in diversity and comparative studies. Christians ask them because living together is the central tenet of the gospel and because it is theologically correct for diverse people to be able to be together in the church.

The third millennium challenges theological education not only to be together in the church catholic in ways that acknowledge our relatedness to each other but also to live with full awareness of our responsibility for each other. This last principle becomes more difficult as we consider the tremendous variety that exists among people locally and globally. We live in a world where very different societies change constantly. Anthropologist Ruth Benedict suggested that we have devised a "great arc" of assorted procedures through which we labor, express, direct households, rule and command others, and encourage our fascination with unknown things.[2]

For anthropologists this "great arc" symbolizes the challenge that diversity brings to human social life. Theological education of the last century rarely succeeded in cultivating the gifts inherent in diversity. The new millennium continues the rapid proliferation of diversity. Seminaries, schools of theology, divinity schools, and churches must face the pressing and rising presence of diversity.

As Christians, we sing, "As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. . . ." We have reason to wonder about this claim. The HIV/AIDS pandemic continues to destroy entire generations. We understand that if the world continues on present course, the earth will not sustain life as we know it. Wars rage on local and global turf, and the United States owns more than enough weapons of mass destruction to inflict irrevocable damage on the world. Theological education faces stark questions of survival. God's people

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1. This question and the others that follow in this paragraph are drawn from Michael Carrithers, *Why Humans Have Cultures: Explaining Anthropology and Social Diversity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 1.

2. Ruth Benedict, *Patterns of Cultures* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1935).

bring to theological education a tangled mixture of hope in the ancient doxology and valid anxiety about our future. Theological education must revisit the historical traditions and assumptions of Christianity. In light of the so-called progress of our world, some traditions will offer refreshment and others will require reformation.

Learning from the past

The church and theological education operate within and contribute to a world organized primarily by dominance and subordination. The binary parallels that emerged during the European Enlightenment laid the groundwork for the scientific method. They also supported rigorous and destructive imperialism. Written texts superceded oral traditions. The search for universals overrode the importance of the particular. Local concerns gave way to general considerations, and temporal categories shifted from regard for timeliness to respect for timelessness.[3]

During this influential time period, the church made use of ideologies and technological advances in order to proselytize in new locations. The church sent missionaries into the world with unbridled evangelical zeal. Even now, Christian history texts fail to record adequately, if at all, the damage done by missionaries. Too many missionaries considered indigenous peoples to be less than human, dismissed the value of indigenous cultures, condemned indigenous spirituality, and committed countless acts of violence against the bodies and souls they sought to "save."[4] How will theological education in the new millennium handle this scarred history? How can education be infused with Christian histories told from indigenous perspectives? How will educators manage the varieties of multicultural scholarship, honor differences as vital for the body of Christ, and give "equal air time" to emerging educational processes and epistemologies?

The third millennium calls theological education and Christian ministry to create avenues for justice to recast power imbalances. Trends among emerging generations in the United States reveal increased skepticism of power—political, corporate, and religious. They know first hand about multicultural concerns, religious pluralism, and the historical church practice of covering up scandalous behavior. Theological education can expect tough questions from students who demand open answers. How will theological education welcome such questions in ways that respect well-rooted hermeneutics of suspicion?

Education must adapt rather than restrict. We must question the ways we view histories and traditions of theological education and the academy in light of diversity. Louise Lamphere in *Structuring Diversity* poses the question, How do we structure diversity for positive results?[5] Finally, we must ask, how do we associate with each other in the midst of compelling diversity?

These paramount concerns require educators to apply principles of diversity in order to develop adequate strategies. Diverse perspectives add value and authenticity to the task of developing theological education. Whether from a global perspective or from a North American perspective, we must engage the vast assortment of human cultures and the enormous depth

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3. Stephen Toulmin, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* (New York: Free Press, 1990), 186–92.

4. See Eric Wolf, *Europe and the People without History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

5. Louise Lamphere, "Introduction," *Structuring Diversity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 1–34.

inherent in individual and community systems related to communication, local issues, and to the monetary, political, and spiritual aspects of life.[6] With all of this complexity, theological educators must ask, What different perspectives are available to help develop a recipe for significant ministry that emphasizes diversity? What do I need to understand about my own culture and the cultural assumptions I bring to theological education as a carrier of a particular culture?

I offer from my own social location the following response: We will be equipped best if we understand theological education as a dynamic unfolding of events that, according to Michael Carrithers, involves

> change, creation and re-creation, interpretation and re-interpretation . . . these are not processes which occur occasionally and exceptionally, but are rather the very stuff of human social life. Even when we do something that seems traditional, we do so in new conditions, and so are in fact re-creating tradition rather than simply copying it.[7]

A significant theological education in the third millennium will embrace diversity in order to realize the fullness of the commonwealth that God with us calls into existence. A significant ministry in the third millennium will demonstrate in its practice that we are not bound solely by our own traditions or our own unreflective views of human "nature." We can and must learn to accept the constructs of our own tradition and also appreciate the validity of other ways of viewing Christianity and faith in general. Only then can a tolerant church emerge.[8] We must have a change of focus that de-centers the academy and seminaries so that we recognize the vitality at the peripheries. We must move from a static meaning of ministry to dynamic flexible processes that thrive through diverse participation.

Signs that change is necessary

The second lesson from the second millennium involves the relationship between modernity and the European Enlightenment epistemology. The close of the previous century offered signs that indicate cracks in the prevalent belief in scientific positivism and that traditional theological understandings are no longer the only consideration for growing segments of the academy and the church. Whether we call this the "end of modernity" or the demise of the European Enlightenment's grip, this movement pushes us into postmodernity. Our communities will expect new interpretations of reality, call for new epistemological approaches, and demand more fluid sharing of power.

The Enlightenment and its influence upon many academic disciplines and the church continues to recede. Moreover, various communities, particularly peoples of color, have pressed against the essential claims of modernity because it was built on the backs of the peoples that Europe conquered and colonized. In my view, historically oppressed communities of color have always lived out of a reversal of Enlightenment epistemology. During the postmodern period, particular segments of the European and Amer-European[9] community find affinity with these convictions. Many European descendants of the Enlightenment, as Stephen Toulmin suggests, now

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6. Carrithers, *Why Humans Have Cultures*, 2.

7. Carrithers, 9.

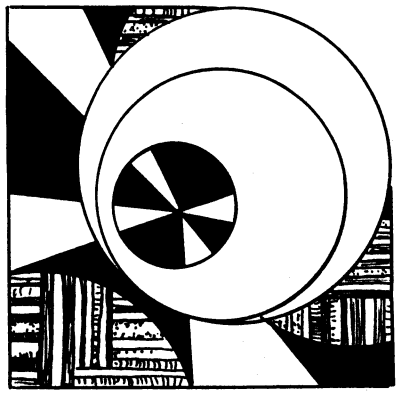
8. For a comment on what is required in order to have tolerant civilizations see Carrithers, 190–20.

9. This term was coined by Dr. Tink Tinker, Professor of Native American Religion and Culture at Iliff School of Theology.

accept as plausible that which is oral, particular, local, and timely[10]—categories that marginalized communities have found central for generations.

Langdon Gilkey outlines four reasons for the movement toward postmodernism.[11] First, knowledge obtained in a future-shock world has yielded much technology that has shown itself to be ambiguous and potentially destructive to humankind and the earth. Technology offers both generative possibility and destructive potential. Second, the political guarantees of the Enlightenment have not brought shalom; in its place came repression fueled by dangerous convictions and executed by vain leaders. Third, Gilkey claims, we have caused God's saving activities in history to cease because Western culture failed in its attempt to triumph against evil. The Enlightenment developed from this perspective and over and against the salvation history portrayed in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures.[12] In other words, the assumptions about progress are questionable. Fourth, Gilkey suggests, the formative presence of world religions has loosened the controlling claims of Western religion.

Thomas Kuhn also questions claims asserted by Western religions as he calls into question the category of "objectivity" in the scientific community.[13] Kuhn argues that objectivity in the scientific community means that prominent scientists in a particular field support a specific idea/project. Once endorsed by the scientific community, the idea/project results are conveyed to the general public as objective fact. Michael Polanyi asserts in *Personal Knowledge*[14] that scientific knowledge builds on a previous knowledge base that generations hold in trust. The "truth" handed to new generations has been constructed by previous generations and may not contain any real sense of objective truth.



Kuhn and Polanyi both maintain that this liminal stage in which knowledge faces deconstruction offers a creative potential. We have the opportunity to offer new interpretations and develop new geometric paradigms that assume mutuality and the value difference among people. The church and the academy of the third millennium have a new task. Walter Brueggemann puts it this way:

> It is clear on many fronts, not only in theology but in very many disciplines, that the old modes of knowing that are Euro-American, male, and white, no longer command respect and credibility as objective and universally true. Indeed, older modes of assertion about reality have an increasingly empty ring, even if we do not understand all the reasons for change.[15]

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10. Toulmin, *Cosmopolis*, 186–92.
11. Langdon Gilkey, *Society and the Sacred: Toward a Theology of Culture in Decline* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 3–14.
12. Gilkey, 8.
13. Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1962).
14. Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974).
15. Walter Brueggemann, *Texts under Negotiation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 8.

Theological education in the third millennium

Theological education in the third millennium must recognize and take seriously the contextual, local, and multicultural conditions of our intellectual environment. While Descartes sought to objectify knowing and considered social context irrelevant, we understand that our knowing relates directly to our social location, an understanding that historically oppressed communities have always known.

Liberation theologians and ethicists, both female and male, articulate consistently the critical relationship between social location and understanding. These theologies argue that our particular histories, geographies, religions, races, genders, and so on impact the way we construct knowledge and subsequent understandings. All knowing is partial and particular. A contextual approach claims that the knower helps to construct what is known and that the material reality of the knower influences what and how something is known.

> Contextualism calls off the search for universal, all-encompassing truth.

Contextualism calls off the search for universal, all-encompassing truth. Instead, scholarship focuses on local truth that might be applicable to other places. Localization of truth defies long-held assumptions about an omnipresent, infinite, and boundless knowledge base. Access to limited and local knowledge calls for a reorientation, reconstructed methods of theological education.[16]

I am confident that theological education in the third millennium will recognize knowledge as contextual, local, and diverse. Globalization brings ever-increasing exposure among widely diverse perspectives and dismantles those paradigms that stick with the myth of objectivity and ignore the impact of diversity. The broad entrance of voices once excluded or dismissed in the academy and the church will de-center the way we approach theological education.

Theological education and hegemony

The relationship of theological education and hegemony provides a third lesson for the new millennium. Theological education in the third millennium must have bishops, presidents, and deans who understand the nuances of their own particular culture and remember that we construct truths from our local contexts. Our truths collide or cooperate with other diverse knowledge bases so that no single system carries ultimate privilege. Old ways of knowing are in transition. Brueggemann makes this point persuasively:

> We are now able to see that what has passed for objective, universal knowledge has in fact been the interested claim of the dominant voices who were able to pose their view and to gain either assent or docile acceptance from those whose interests the claim did not serve. Objectivity is in fact one more practice of ideology that presents interest in a covert form as an established fact.[17]

Each person who finds her- or himself in theological education lives out meaning

16. Brueggemann, *Texts under Negotiation*, 9.

17. Brueggemann, 9.

from a particular perspective that coexists in a world with perspectives that differ. In the new millennium, it will be prudent for us to learn from such differences and to appreciate perspectives that vary from our own. The knowledge created from our particular experiences will be as diverse as the world's peoples. Even as we orient our lives around our particular beliefs, we must refrain from the temptation to claim access to universal or objective truth. Rather, we must open ourselves and expect to be transformed by knowledge systems that come to us from others.

In the third millennium we must move from a unilateral assertion of hegemony to one that takes local context seriously. For instance, people from marginalized communities in the U.S. know that many Amer-Europeans fear the demise of the "white, male Western world of colonialism."[18]

Occasionally I am invited to give workshops on diversity in the corporate sector. More often than not top management decides that employees need to understand diversity in order to work with an increasingly multicultural workforce and customer base. Those at the top of the organization, white males, decide that employees need this training. My experience reveals that white males most strongly resist the diversity workshops. I find it interesting that some white males call for diversity training and others resist it.

I conclude four things from this important experience: (1) great diversity exists among white males; (2) white males hold tremendous power over others, despite the rhetoric claiming that reverse discrimination affects white males unfairly; (3) corporate leaders are beginning to acknowledge the significant benefits of a diverse work force as well as to recognize that commitment to diversity and multiculturalism creates a strong customer base; (4) white males do have a voice or power in every aspect of American society. Theological education in the third millennium will continue to articulate the voice of white males, but it will no longer be privileged or go unchallenged.

The new millennium questions boldly the credibility claims of white-male perspectives. This reality means that many dominant folks will feel threatened, which correspondingly means that marginalized communities, particularly communities of color, will be even more at risk. Racism, sexism, and heterosexism will be more blatant. This shifting paradigm will affect the economy and impact jobs, business, law enforcement, and health care. Patterns in homes, relations between people of different genders and sexual orientations, and the family will be affected. Brutality will be justified in local and global arenas. The collapse of the old system will be profoundly potent, and backlash will consist of rhetorical and physical tools mobilized by the old system in reaction to the threat of its imminent demise.

The passing of the old order not only has pragmatic effects, it also has theological implications for the academy and the church. Cornel West's comment on prophetic vision expresses well the emerging politics of valuing diversity in theological education:

> . . . we promote a prospective and prophetic vision with a sense of possibility and potential, especially for those who bear the social costs of the present. We look to the past for strength, not solace; we look at the present and see people perishing, not profits mounting; we look toward the future and vow to make it different and better.[19]

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18. Brueggemann, 11.

19. Cornel West, "The New Politics of Cultural Difference," in *October 53* (Summer 1990), 109.

Imagining theological education in the third millennium

The final lesson I share here poses a direct challenge to the leaders of our institutions. Moving from hegemony to valuing differences provides a great opportunity for theological education to shift from rationalist paradigms to more imaginative theological models. The collaborative work of Angie Current and Kathy Sage offers an example of imagination applied well. More than ten years ago, they noticed the problematic absence of women-of-color scholars among the thirteen BHEM (Board for Higher Education and Ministry of the United Methodist Church) seminaries. They imagined a different future and responded by developing a proposal for a women-of-color scholarship program that made its way through the ranks and received approval from the BHEM board.

The scholarship program supports women of color who imagine a change for their lives, in the academy and across the church. I suggest that environments that encourage imagination help people conceive, envision, picture, and fantasize about reality. When Current, Sage, and later Karen Collier, Lynn Scott, and my mentors Katie Cannon, Jackie Grant, Rita Nakashima Brock, and Renita Weems imagined a productive and successful program that would graduate women of color (the daughters of foremothers, many of whom did not have the opportunity, support, or encouragement to pursue higher education), they dreamed a world into reality. They imagined a world that celebrates, affirms, and is transforming theological education. These women developed the opportunity to live into the fullness of their call to the ministry of the church. Their presence in our seminaries and other institutions gives new life to the academy and our church. I believe that we must move with bold imagination into the future to which God's history is moving.

Justo Gonzalez imagines the church of the third millennium this way:

> . . . our church and our witness must be multicultural, not simply because our society is multicultural, not simply because the future from which God is calling us is multicultural. We must be multicultural, not just so that those from other cultures may feel at home among us, but also so that we may feel at home in God's future. We must be multicultural because, like John at Patmos, our eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord; because we know and we believe that on that waking-up morning when the stars begin to fall, when we gather at the river where angel feet have trod, we shall all, from all nations, and tribes, and peoples, and languages, sing without ceasing: "Holy, holy, holy! All the saints adore thee, casting down our golden crowns before the glassy sea; cherubim and seraphim; Japanese and Swahili; American and European, Cherokee and Ukrainian; falling down before thee, which wert, and art, and evermore shall be!" Amen![20]

Gonzalez offers a compelling image of the church and theological education in the third millennium. The image takes seriously God's call to us today for a future that will push us to new dimensions. We must free ourselves from any notion that the present systems of the world are fixed. Other worlds can be imagined.

The "I Dream a World" photo exhibit that toured museums in the U.S. in the latter half of the 1980s reminded me of the ways that vision and imagination create reality. The exhibit presented one hundred black women who changed America. Because of the way that history continues to exclude women of color, it may be hard for some people in our society to even consider that there were/are one hundred black women

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20. Justo Gonzalez, Convocation lecture given at Iliff School of Theology (September 13, 1995), 22–23.

who transformed this country. Where U.S. history fails to attend to black history, the "I Dream a World" exhibit brought front and center the women whose lives helped imagine this world in which I and other women and men can strive forward to transform the world.

People who have been historically oppressed constantly imagine, vision, and dream a new reality. King's "I Have A Dream" speech brought this message to the world in 1963. The dreaming that he articulated inspired the founders of this program, the women-of-color scholars, and more extensively the academy and the church. We continue birthing this dream. The "I Dream A World" exhibit, King's dream, and BHEM's Women of Color Scholarship and Mentoring Program imagine and bring into existence a new world for the new millennium.

Garrett Green suggests that the imagining process flourishes when a distinction is made between Paul's appeal to the Corinthians to live "as if" and the contrasting view to live "as."[21] To live "as if" suggests that we put energy into opposing the current reality by trying to live differently within it. Alternatively, to live "as" means that we live the reality we imagine, thus making our vision of reality the only one to consider. If I live as a free person, then I am a free person. Nelson Mandela used this strategy to survive his 27 years as political prisoner on Robbin Island. Women-of-color scholars do the same. Translating imagination as reality moves Green's argument one step further. Instead of "living as" we can "take action as" and claim the things we want to exist.[22] Theological education in the third millennium requires that we either "live as" or "take action as" —approaches that differ from Paul's injunction to live "as if." We inherit this lesson from the imaginative voices that brought new life into the academy during the second millennium.

> "We must be multicultural, not just so that those from other cultures may feel at home among us, but also so that we may feel at home in God's future."

Theological education in the third millennium offers significant possibilities. Will we dare to imagine into reality diverse seminary faculties that include *several* women-of-color scholars? Will we create opportunities for women of color because we consider their/our gifts to be critical to the process of training future leaders of the church and academy?

May we be bold enough to imagine new ways of doing theological education. May we also be committed enough to dream into reality a new millennium marked by rich diversity and mutual transformation.

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21. Garrett Green, *Imagining God: Theology and the Religious Imagination* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989).

22. See David J. Bryant, *Faith and the Play of Imagination* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1989).

Reflections on the Priority of Belonging

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There is an African proverb, "To be is to belong" or "To be human is to be in family."[1] This perspective contrasts to a world in which the focus is on thinking or doing rather than belonging: "I think, therefore I am" or "to be human is to be a co-creator with God." A yellow sign board on Interstate 90 coming into Chicago shouts out in large letters: "I do therefore I am." In North America, to be is to think and do. Western theology sometimes reflects these two perspectives by distinguishing between the search for truth (faith as doctrinal truth) and the search for love and speaks of the tension between the two.[2]

It seems self-evident that being human necessarily includes belonging and also includes thinking and doing. In this essay I reflect on the priority of belonging. This reflection began for me when I was teaching in Nigeria from 1957 to 1966. It was immediately apparent that within African culture belonging and family had a priority I had not encountered before. Individual interests were again and again subordinated to the well-being of the family and the community. Families made decisions about who should receive an education and for what vocation people should prepare in order to benefit the whole community. Students often came to seminary because their church and community had decided that was to be their vocation. Within the tribe, clan, or family, persons had corporate responsibilities that took priority over personal desires.

There were times when it appeared to me as an outsider that individual gifts and dreams were needlessly sacrificed. Nevertheless, I was always deeply impressed by the solidarity within communities and by the reality that echoed the early church, in which the early Christians had all things in common (Acts 4:32–35).

A recent personal family experience made belonging even more real to me. In 1998 our daughter Sheree gave birth to a beautiful little girl, Mary Rose. Shortly after her birth it became evident that she had been born, in one doctor's words, "with a horrible disease." Tests indicated that she had some form of mitochondrial malfunction. Her beautiful body's cells were not able to adequately process nutrients into energy to enable her mind and body to develop. In order to be near a facility with qualified medical staff, we purchased a

1. See Judah Kiwovele, "An African Perspective on the Priesthood of All Believers," in *Theology and the Black Experience: The Lutheran Heritage Interpreted by African & African-American Theologians,* ed. Albert Pero and Ambrose Moyo (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988), 56ff.

2. Langdon Gilkey, *Through the Tempest: Theological Voyage in a Pluralistic Culture,* selected and ed. Jeff B. Pool (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 22.

duplex in Milwaukee, and our daughter and family lived on the first floor while my wife Mary Lou and I lived upstairs. Government grants made it possible for nurses to be with Mary Rose for portions of the day. Sheree, who worked as a nurse, slept with Mary Rose by her side nightly for three years. Mary Lou and sometimes I cared for her during the day and night. Mary Rose never developed beyond a baby and at times was tormented by seizures. However, in our caring for Rosie it became amazingly clear that she belonged. She was held, loved, bathed, suckled, talked and sung to, laughed and wept with. She was born into and died in her mother's embrace. Mary Rose was valued, loved, and affirmed as she was.

Her baptism signified that not only did she have a human family where she belonged, she also belonged to God. As a child of God she belonged to the human family that through her genetic structure reached back into antiquity and also belonged to God's future, where all tears will be wiped away in a new heaven and a new earth (Revelation 21–22).

It became evident in loving and holding Mary Rose that belonging preceded thinking and doing; love and care affirmed that belonging preceded her awakening individuality and her capacity to think creatively. Rosie appeared never to have thought rationally, although she knew how to nestle down on my shoulder and go to sleep. Without thought and creativity she transformed our lives. She brought family together; she raised within our lives a sense of belonging; she enabled us to love more deeply, and the holes in our lives after two years of her absence testify to her continuing presence in us. Mary Rose helped me to capture a deeper sense of belonging. "To be or to be human is first to belong."

It is possible to account for belonging on the basis that we all participate in an intricate web of creation. One of the insightful and profound facets of Buddhism is that reality is dynamic—a dynamic totality of experiences and events that are in constant flux and flow. Within that cosmic pulsing reality, configurations of events and experiences emerge into an experience of self in the midst of other selves. Truth is the awakening to the fleeting temporality of the self and insights into the mystery that "I" am simply an aspect of the cosmic dance.[3]

Belonging is fundamentally a cosmic fact. Mary Rose belonged to a dancing cosmic flow that emerged in a genetic code for the human family. She was born into that reality. Because of some unknown quirk or mutation in the cosmic dance her genetic code did not enable her cells to make a full life possible.

A variety of philosophical, theological, and religious expressions focus on the fundamental cosmic unity of reality, affirming belongingness within the web of life. Hinduism, Sufism within Islam, forms of mysticism, and theological formulations related to idealism or process thought articulate that reality. Transcending the subject/object dichotomy places all selves including Mary Rose in Paul Tillich's ocean of "the Ground of Being."

The biblical tradition, however, does not focus on metaphysical or cosmic webs of existence to speak of belonging. Rather, communal and personal human values—images—create and affirm belongedness.

The Old Testament prophets as well as the Torah focus on belonging to community. The Torah intends to affirm and

3. For a good description of Buddhist understanding of reality see Wolpola Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught* (New York: Grover, 1974), 51ff.

enhance human family and community in the presence of God. Dishonoring parents, taking life or seizing property, committing adultery, bearing false witness, and coveting all violate the value of every human life. Everyone belongs; everyone has value. No member of the community may violate another member. To be human is to be a participant in a caring community.

This absolute assertion of the value of every member of the family is reinforced by the prophets.

> When you fast, you make yourselves suffer, you bow your heads low like a blade of grass and spread out sackcloth and ashes to lie on. Is that what you call fasting? Do you think I will be pleased with that? The kind of fasting I want is this: Remove the chains of oppression and the yoke of injustice and let the oppressed go free. [Everyone belongs, and everyone counts.] Share your food with the hungry and open your doors to the homeless poor. Give clothes to those who have nothing to wear, and do not refuse to help your own relatives. [Everyone belongs; everyone counts.] Then my favor will shine on you like the morning sun. (Isaiah 58:5ff.)

Numerous New Testament images echo the belonging and counting of everyone. The Jerusalem temple had a series of courts around the Most Holy Sanctuary. The outer court was designated for the Gentiles; the next court, a little closer to the Holy of Holies, was for the Jewish women; then the men; then the Levites and priests; and finally the place for the High Priest, who once a year entered the most holy realm and sprinkled blood on the Ark of the Covenant. The early Jesus movement testified that the gigantic drape that enclosed this inner sanctum of God's presence was torn from top to bottom when Jesus died—a proclamation that everyone belonged within the presence of God. God was loose in the world, and the inner sanctum was open to even women and the nations.

The story of Jesus' own ministry is the story of the one who lived for others, every other. Lepers and unclean women were touched by Jesus and healed; the possessed were addressed and freed to sit at the messianic banquet table; Gentiles were listened to and their daughters healed; a city bent on the death of a Galilean prophet was wept over because it belonged within the broken heart of Jesus and Jesus' Abba; Roman soldiers driving spikes into Jesus' hands and feet were forgiven in spite of themselves. Everyone was embraced and loved, everyone belonged. Love that was willing to walk with a wounded heart bore the sins of those who rejected, despised, or crushed that love. All were embraced and belonged to the Abba and Spirit of Jesus and the universe.

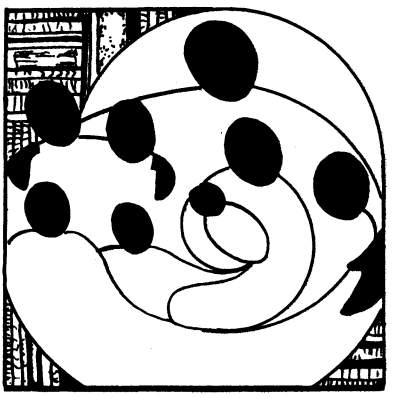
True belonging derives from human community created by human capacities for caring, for love, for affirmation, for life. Faith trusts that this capacity, this potential and power for love and caring, emerges from, is created and empowered by, and is grounded in God, "the beating heart of the universe." This love embraces the totality of reality. The Christian faith has seen, touched, and felt that caring power concretized in Jesus and trusts that that love incarnate in Jesus is the love that is active in shaping all reality. Caring love that bubbles forth from the depths of reality is the love that affirms and embraces the whole of creation and the whole of humanity. Ultimately, in the depths of the mystery of the universe is that power that makes everyone belong, everyone count. It is the mystery enfleshed in Jesus as love of every person, which embraces our Mary Rose and all the tragic brokenness of the human story.

This affirmation of the priority of belonging leads to two of the most radical theological formulations within the Christian tradition, namely, the call to love the

enemy and the justification of the sinner. It is noteworthy that the members of the Jesus Seminar, whose historical skepticism is remarkable, almost unanimously agreed that the words "Love your enemy and pray for those who persecute you" are from Jesus. The criterion of dissimilarity, something foreign to both the world in which Jesus was born and to the world in which the Jesus movement moved, signified that these words are the words of Jesus.

What makes these words so radical? That they announce that everyone belongs! Human community is divided in innumerable ways: male and female, Jews and Gentiles, slave and free, white and black, Palestinians and Israelis. However, the primary divide is between those who are friends or fellow citizens and those who are despised and hated—enemies who in turn despise you and desire your suffering and death. Love of enemy transcends the gaping divide between those who belong and those hated ones who never will. Love of enemy profoundly asserts that absolutely everyone belongs, everyone is loved and cared about.

The gospel grounds this love that transcends the friend/enemy chasm, the love of God made flesh in Jesus. We encounter chasm-bridging care in Jesus when he weeps over the city that will crucify him, when he hangs in the darkness and the terror of death and says "Father, forgive them." After being raised he encountered the disciples who had denied and betrayed him with the haunting words "Peace; as the Father sent me so I send you." Jesus in Matthew finds chasm-bridging love within the very heart of creation. For verification of loving the enemy Jesus did not point to the law or the prophets but to the sun and rain, which gracefully pour down on both the just and the unjust (Mt 5:45). Jesus pointed to the creator who loved with perfection.



Love of enemy is the message of the miraculous book of Jonah. Called to preach to the eighth-century B.C.E. Assyrian terrorists, Jonah took flight to the west, beyond the arm of Assyria or God. Was he frightened by terrorists? No. He was terrorized by the grace of God! This becomes the climax of the Book of Jonah when, trapped in the jaws of death, the prophet reconsiders his calling and goes to preach in Nineveh. As he had suspected, the Ninevites turn to God, and God graciously forgives them. God's forgiveness becomes a reality despite Jonah's protests of the stupidity of grace for the enemy! The divine voice replies, "Are there not 120,000 people in Nineveh who do not know their left hand from the right?" and Jonah, "are there not precious animals there?" Over the prophet's protests of a disgusting grace, the Book of Jonah preaches "Everyone counts; everyone belongs." The human family is incomplete if anyone is left out or cut out.

In the words of Professor Duane Priebe, "If you draw a line between those who are 'in' and those who are 'out,' Jesus is always on the other side of the line." In the world of contemporary global politics, that also holds true with regard to the "axis of evil."

In God's world and God's family everyone belongs.

Justification by faith also speaks powerfully to the priority of belonging. In Galatians and elsewhere Paul understands the gospel as that power which creates a new community where everyone belongs. "For in Christ Jesus you are all children of God, through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:26–28).

Everyone belongs, everyone counts. The letter of Paul to the Ephesians sees this bridging of the chasm between Jew and Gentile as the mystery which was not made known to humankind in former generations (Eph 3:5). Now it is revealed to the holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. The Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise of Jesus Christ (3:5–6).

Theology often emphasizes that justification by faith means that our relationship with God is sheer gift. Paul saw the law to be the factor which separated Jews from Gentiles. It created a yawning chasm, separating the human community from one another and the sinner from God. For Paul, God in Christ overcame the power of the Law which condemned the sinner, whether Jew or Greek, and offered both Jew and Greek justification, or right standing with God. Salvation was to be received by Jew and Greek through faith/trust in Jesus Christ. All persons now belonged to Christ and belonged to God. The mystery is revealed that everyone now belongs to the same Christ, the same God, and the same family.

Lutherans are fond of saying that justification by faith is that reality upon which the church stands or falls. This is our unique way of stating that belonging takes priority over thinking and doing.

Two black theologians writing in the volume *Theology and the Black Experience* claim this for their people and the whole human family. Richard Perry writes: "Accepting, through faith, God's gift of grace means we are equal to and with all of God's other children" (p. 18). Justification by grace means that everyone counts, everyone belongs. Simon S. Maimela, Lutheran South African theologian, writes:

> The theological name for this unconditional acceptance of the unacceptable (unlovable) sinner by God in Christ is what Luther referred to as "justification by faith alone." God's unconditional acceptance of us is the sole basis for Christian ethics and mutual acceptance. And it is the basis on which all South Africans, especially those who call themselves Christians, can begin to work toward overcoming the division that threatens to destroy us all (p. 40).

Unconditional acceptance, justification by faith alone, speaks to our peace with God and speaks powerfully of our unity in Christ, where everyone belongs, everyone is accepted, everyone is loved, everyone is affirmed, everyone is reconciled, and everyone is an instrument of reconciliation. In Christ the priority is on belonging and being instruments of belonging, ambassadors of Christ for the reconciliation of the world (2 Cor 5:18–20).

"I think, therefore I am" and "I do, therefore I am" are formulations that distort the reality of human well-being. "I belong, therefore I am" and "I am loved, therefore I am" recognize that my genetic heritage, my physical, psychological, and spiritual well-being are all gifts of the nurturing care of the human family, to whom we all belong, and to God, who is the origin of life and who insists on being Immanuel, God with all of us. *I belong, therefore I am enabled to think and do.* Place *that* on the yellow sign on Interstate 90!

Preaching Helps

Proper 18—Thanksgiving Day, Series C
First Sunday in Advent, Series A

In Search of the Spirit

Though these Preaching Helps take us the rest of the way through the Sundays after Pentecost, past The Reign of Christ and Thanksgiving, into our next liturgical year, they were written during the Easter Season and edited in the weeks before Pentecost. During these weeks, our First Readings in worship came from the Book of Acts. The church recorded in Acts seems to drip with the Holy Spirit. Everywhere you turn, the Spirit is doing something. And the Spirit is not subtle, vague, or tentative. I quickly count forty verses in which the Holy Spirit instructs, empowers, fills, witnesses, emboldens, comforts, sends, forbids, testifies, and converts countless numbers to Christianity using what seems to be hastily prepared preaching.

All this talk of the Holy Spirit led one of those who listen to my preaching to ask, "Where is the Holy Spirit active in the church today?" I gave the standard answers, which I wholeheartedly believe: in word and water, bread and wine, the gathered assembly, in acts of justice in the world. I tell my students that, rather than sitting passively by, waiting for the Holy Spirit to pour a sermon into their heads, it is my experience, as well as that of the vast majority of preachers I know, that the Holy Spirit works in and through a method of preaching. I talked to this parishioner of similar disciplines of faith.

But she wanted more. She wanted something concrete that I could point to. She wanted me to say "Here is the Holy Spirit" as clearly as did the writer of Acts. After a good bit of reflection, I came up with three things that I could point to. First, now that the Lutheran Church is pretty well out of the business of threatening people with hell fire and eternal damnation (You *are* preaching the gospel as good news, right?), the fact that people show up for church is nothing less than the activity of the Holy Spirit. Second, the Spirit's activity becomes all the more remarkable each fall, when, more than showing up for worship, students show up for seminary. When I hear of what they are giving up, the sacrifices they and their families are making, and the debt they are taking on, there is no explanation for it other than the nudge of the Holy Spirit.

For me there is no clearer sign of the Holy Spirit's activity in today's church than when young preachers proclaim the gospel with insight, passion, and

articulation that takes my breath away. I recently heard a seasoned preacher complain that interns, seminary graduates, and rookie pastors lack the experience to really preach. I agree that they lack experience. And I am convinced that the Holy Spirit uses their inexperience to instruct, empower, fill, embolden, comfort, and convert through their preaching. These preachers are discovering texts; they haven't yet made up their minds about what texts mean. They are trying to find their voice and develop their method, so they spend a lot of time and energy at the preaching task. Yes, young preachers have a good bit of growing to do. But for me, there is no surer sign of the Spirit's activity in our church than when they get it, and when they know they've got it—the gospel, that is.

I'm delighted to introduce you to three young pastors who work very hard to get the gospel. Time and again, I have heard them preach in ways that make me hopeful and confident about the Spirit's activity in the life and future of our church.

Sarah K. Bunge is serving her first call as pastor at New Life Lutheran Church in Bolingbrook, Illinois. A candidate from the South Dakota Synod, Sarah graduated from LSTC in June, 2003. Sarah spends lots of time talking to and listening to kids and young adults. She has a passion for connecting the gospel with their lives and with their world. Sarah and her husband Adam reside in Lisle, Illinois. Sarah guides us through the Sundays in September.

Robin K. Brown, who leads us through October, also graduated from LSTC in 2003. Robin is co-pastor of Grace and St. John Crane Creek Lutheran Churches in Tripoli, Iowa. After fifty years in Chicagoland, Robin experiences the Holy Spirit active in Northeast Iowa when she sees the thousands of stars in the night sky, listens to the silence of the country, and inhales the sweet dustiness of gravel roads. Robin's big question about Preaching Helps: "How will I write before planting what will be read during harvesting?"

Seth Moland-Kovash is Associate Pastor for Youth and Family at Our Saviour's Lutheran Church in Arlington Heights, Illinois. Seth graduated from LSTC in 2001 and served Gloria Dei Lutheran Church in Downers Grove, Illinois, until June, 2003, when he accepted the call to Our Saviour's. Seth's wife Jennifer is a 2004 M.Div. recipient from LSTC and is a frequent "preaching help" to Seth. I know Seth best through his probing questions and keen sense of humor.

I am delighted to introduce you to these leaders whose preaching is for me proof of the Spirit's promise to be as active in our church as she was in the Book of Acts. And these are not isolated instances. I am grateful to report that, in my relatively short time teaching preaching at LSTC, the list of places I can look when I am searching for the Spirit continues to grow; they are congregations served by young preachers.

So where do you look when you're searching for the Spirit?

Craig A. Satterlee, Editor of Preaching Helps

Proper 18
September 5, 2004

Deuteronomy 30:15–20
Psalm 1
Philemon 1–21
Luke 14:45–33

First Reading

Allegiance seems to be our common thread in these readings. Deuteronomy advocates for allegiance to the commandments, the psalm to the law, Philemon to "the duty," and Luke to Christ in faith. Each reading markets this allegiance by identifying the quite unattractive alternatives: death, adversity, curse (Deuteronomy); being wicked, chaff, scoffers (psalm); an implied betrayal of authority, though the appeal is made in love (Philippians); not being a disciple, embarrassment, ridicule, and defeat (Luke). All the readings present these seemingly Frostian "two roads diverged in a yellow wood" to the readers, with the invitation to "choose this day whom you will serve."

If allegiance is the theme, the task for today's disciples to discern is how exactly we are to pledge our allegiance to this God. "Delight in the law—meditate on it day and night," is the psalmist's response. "Love the Lord your God, walk in his ways and observe his commandments. . . . Obey the Lord and hold fast to him," Moses cries to the people. "Live and share the faith; welcome and forgive," offers Paul. And Jesus urges us to keep our relationship with God as the highest priority, to carry the cross, and most simply "Follow me!"

Pastoral Reflection

The first reading of these lessons in public worship will generate confusion and wonder over what appears to be Jesus encouraging hatred of family members. People can easily take this text out of its context and way too far. They may wonder: Must I hate my parents? Doesn't Jesus care about my marriage, or my kids? Suicidal thoughts are good? Whatever the congregation may be wondering, preachers can be certain that they have everyone's attention as they begin the sermon this day. Most biblical scholars agree that Jesus' discourse on discipleship is not intended literally but rather as a sort of hyperbole. Jesus employs a literary technique for showing importance of love for God—the absolute most important relationship in one's life! "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind"—love God so much that by comparison it would be as if you hated those people to whom you are closest, those you honor, those you love.

The Greek word used to convey Jesus' teaching here, *miseo,* does not convey the same violent emotions as the English word *hate* but more closely aligns with our word *conflict.* Knowing the Greek helps me to rationalize these abrasive words, and I suppose the literary-technique explanation is understandable. Yet, I have a nagging feeling that Jesus' words should not be softened or explained away in this manner. We all need the harshness of this lesson. When the Holy Spirit transforms us we cannot help but live the radical Good News. The love of God alters our lives, changes our perspectives, realigns our priorities. People will not like it; change is always resisted. Be prepared to face resistance, and understand the costs of discipleship, Jesus warns in this text. Such conflict is not to be invited, but calculated; not to be solicited, but expected.

Conflict shows itself in the spouse who resents increasing the tithe the family makes to the church or becomes upset when asked to make a special offering. It's revealed in the kids who put up a fight screaming, "Why do we have to go to church *every* Sunday?" There's the high-school student who is teased

or criticized by her friends for spending more time at church than with them. There is the child who wants to stay for a midweek Lenten service, but her father drags her out of the church. Imagine some families' reaction when their daughter brings home a hom*eless* person for dinner. Consider some families' resistance to going to church on a holiday weekend (like this one). Reflect on the struggle to practice grace and forgiveness in the workplace when competition and revenge is expected. Yes, this *miseo*/conflict will take on many and various forms.

But the conflict does not contradict God's law. "Honor your father and your mother" is commandment number 4. No, Jesus came "not to abolish [the law], but to fulfill." Jesus' warning is only to keep it straight! The protection of the nuclear family unit and the respect of elders in commandment number 4 is just that, *number 4.* We must not forget what comes before that! Our highest calling is to our God, the One God, before whom we have no other gods, whose name we do not take in vain, and whose sabbath day we keep sacred.

God must come first in our life, heart, mind, schedule, and budget. The scriptural context becomes important here, as we recognize where this teaching lies in Luke's Gospel. Just before this text, we have the Parable of the Great Dinner, where the invitation is refused because of land, oxen, and marriage. Not too much has changed in these two centuries. A new house, new wheels, or a new relationship remain what the survey says are our top three excuses and false idols. "We have a lot going on right now; just as soon as things settle down we'll come back to church." What do we put before God's name, before Christ's invitation, before the Spirit's movement?

The Good News for us is that, regardless of our proficiency in pledging our allegiance to God, God has allegiance to us! The greatest pledge of God's allegiance to humanity happened on a hill called Calvary. It is because Jesus took up a cross for us that we are not afraid to take up our crosses and follow him. Conflicts considered, ramifications recognized, consequences calculated, and implications identified, we follow. We follow the God who so loved the world . . . the Christ who gave himself for our forgiveness and salvation . . . the Spirit who transforms us into disciples . . . oh yeah, we follow, all right. Experiencing God's amazing, radical love in Christ Jesus our Lord, we want to show this Good News with our lives!

"The table over there has picked up your tab," the waitress said. This random act of kindness seemed to me a great way to live out one's allegiance and faith, especially as I tallied the cost of our dinners. "Charge it to my account," Saint Paul writes to Philemon. Whatever it is that he has done wrong, whatever he owes, put it on *my* card. Paul makes this appeal in love, on behalf of a slave, now new believer, Onesimus. This is no small story. Onesimus' story might help to illuminate the whole salvation story, for we are the runaway slave that has done wrong, broken the law, and deserves death. Our Owner/Creator is no doubt angry with us. But Jesus' intervening, loving action allows us to become beloved children, and we have the promise of being welcomed home. As we fathom from what God's love in Christ has rescued us, we consider how we, in faith, could intervene for others. In the legal system, in the workplace, in our family, in our community, and in the world there are Onesimus-like folk for whom we should "do our duty"—our intervening, faithful, loving, Christian duty. The kind of dedication, sacrifice, love, allegiance, and devotion with which God challenges us through these texts—can we even imagine it? Hardly, but God can! God does! God loves! SKB

Proper 19
September 12, 2004

Exodus 32:7–14
Psalm 51:1–11
1 Timothy 1:12–17
Luke 15:1–10

First Reading

Mercy. "Haye mercy on me." Cognizant of our sinfulness, we cry the psalmist's words. Moses begs God's mercy for the Israelites. Saul has experienced God's mercy in a very personal, transforming way, and for this he gives thanks. We understand in Luke's Gospel that God's mercy extends to and is indeed intended for the lost. God's mercy is radical and does not exclude.

There are some texts that should never be just read but require some delicate pastoral processing. Our reading from Exodus is one of them. Preachers must wrestle with its underlying assumption. Do we believe that God's mind can be changed? Is this a story reflecting an archaic or at least more anthropomorphic understanding of God, like an upset father? If we believe that God cannot change God's own mind, are we limiting, or boxing in, our transcendent God? If God's mind *can* be changed, how is that done? Is God's mind changed by prayer?

As I write these words, I am in an uncomfortable place. Literally, I am sitting in what has to be close to hell—a surgery waiting room. My newborn nephew is having open-heart surgery. What will the result be? Will it be champagne and tears, or funeral planning and more tears? Can my prayer make a difference? My theology does not lead me to believe that God caused this heart problem or that God approves of this suffering and pain; but, perhaps God can intervene. Surely, the Omni-everything, Creator God could intervene here. Is God waiting to be persuaded? Does God want me to do the persuading? I scream inside my head with Moses "Change your mind, God! Intervene! Remember your promises? Your reputation is at stake here!"

While you may not be preaching in a hospital waiting room, everyone is waiting for something—be it results of a biopsy, a diagnosis, a reevaluation, the next chemotherapy treatment, a child's decision of what she will do with God's gifts, reconciliation in a relationship, a son to come home from Iraq, death, a cure, a sermon to end, our lost loved ones to hear and believe the Good News, vacation, Jesus. Three years ago our entire nation waited in tremendous fear for the next attack, another building to crumble, the world to end. We all have had occasions where we wanted, like Moses, to straighten God out, to persuade God to "Intervene already!" or to direct God's attention in a particular direction. So what are *you* waiting for? Better yet, what are your people waiting for?

Pastoral Reflection

Perhaps the changing of the mind is not the main point at all but rather God's mercy. Distracted by Moses' delayed hike up the mountain, the Israelite people lose the vision, forsake the mission, forget the ways of the Lord. The church likewise becomes distracted when the mission and vision are not clear. We easily become enchanted with worshipping false idols, we think there might be a better option out there, we're just "gonna look around a bit."

God's wrath is understandable. The Israelites deserve to be punished. They have violated the very covenant God made with them. Yet, ultimately, after considering some other options, God has mercy on them. Paul is a good example of a once-was-lost-now-is-found sheep. Paul's conversion story is remarkable, his turnaround

incredible. But Paul's conversion did not occur without some conflict. You can just imagine (or read Acts 9) people of the time saying: "Who is this leader rising out of nowhere, running around starting churches? He wasn't a disciple, and he didn't even follow Jesus around! What's up with the fast track?—he should have to start in Parables 101 where we all did. I don't believe he's really changed." Paul showed what a lost-and-found sheep could do. We all agree there surely was joy in heaven over that! But it's not so easy for the other 99, the flock, to understand, to participate in the celebration.

Rejoice! Celebrate! Jesus invites us to the party. Unfortunately, more often we respond to God's merciful acts with jealousy or judgment rather than with celebration. Can your church celebrate and rejoice? Get over your resentment at that young family that takes a summer vacation from worship; celebrate their return with open arms. Forget that the man at coffee hour was in prison; celebrate that he has been found. Who cares if that new family has not been around as long as you; rejoice at their energy and ideas. Do not focus on the alcoholism but on the image of God sitting in the row behind you. Stop criticizing the person who you have previously witnessed not acting very sheep-like, and just rejoice that she is in worship. Look not to those with the greatest seniority but to those whom the Holy Spirit is preparing for leadership positions in the church.

We pastors can be among the worst offenders. We have all heard stories of shaming the loved ones of the deceased with their worship attendance during a funeral sermon. We have all felt twinges of bitterness that the pews or chairs are full today, wondering where those people were the whole summer when we were working just as hard on our summer sermons. Stop it. Get over it. Rejoice! Celebrate!

In the words of Cool & the Gang, "Cele-brate good times, *Come on!*" Or maybe you prefer the timeless mantra of Prince—"Party like it's 1999." Join in the party. Be big enough and secure enough to get over yourself so you don't miss the party. Celebrate with others God's merciful acts. If we think this parable is tough to hear, imagine if we read the version of this parable from the Gospel of Thomas: "The kingdom is like a shepherd who had a hundred sheep. One of them, the largest, went astray. The shepherd left the 99 and searched for that one until he found it. After he had labored he said to the sheep, "I love you more than the 99" (107). God's preferential option for the lost is not as overt in Luke as it is in Thomas. Luke's version never looked so docile.

When held all together, there's an obvious tension in these texts. They illustrate the classic Lutheran tension: both/and. We are both precious and prideful; gifted and guilty; saint and sinner; follower and fumbler; valuable and vicious; disciple and dope; loved and lost. Perhaps that is the tension God felt in our first lesson, faced with being both just and merciful.

God bringing disaster on people would have been justice, but God showed mercy. Justice for Saul would have been death, but God showed mercy. Justice would be equally distributed attention to each of the flock, but God shows mercy to the lost. Justice for us is something we do not even dare imagine. As Lutherans, we are make-no-mistake-about-it clear that *only* by the grace of God can we bask in God's loving presence. Thank God, God is merciful rather than just, or we would all be lost . . . to sin, to doubt, to the devil, to death. Ultimately, God is merciful. God's purpose was revealed to us in Jesus who showed, lived, taught, personified, and died God's mercy. Jesus clarified God's

intention of mercy to humanity. And Jesus allowed us entry into that mercy, love, and covenant.

Today will be Rally Day for many congregations—a day of new beginnings, restarting programs, reinvigorated children, reenergized congregations, and the refreshing Good News caught and taught through Christian Education. These texts speak clearly to the hungry who come for worship and education. The parables give clear, unmistakable Good News. The radical, merciful love of God is for each of us in Jesus the Christ. Teach it! Share it! Learn it! Live it!

The No Child Left Behind Act is our current administration's attempt to bureaucratize and institutionalize Jesus' parable. More important than test scores or teacher performance, there is a God whose love reaches all. God's mercy has already made sure that none of God's children will *ever* be left behind, none will be lost, none is forsaken; each one is precious. This initiative, originally articulated by Jesus (not the Bush administration), can be more accurately and boldly lived out by our Sunday schools, sharing God's love with one another and living together in God's gracious mercy.

God is merciful. God remembers promises and holds to covenants even when we fail, forget, or fall short. God is merciful. The Good Shepherd cares for us, actively searches for us, finds us, holds us, waits with us, and celebrates! God's love is greater than wrath, larger than disasters, more profound than suffering, transcendent of our selfishness and pride, our hypocrisy and tendency to judge. God *is* love. God's grace and mercy is for us. We are precious—each one of us, whether newborn or new to the church, still lost, or never left the flock—we *are* precious in God's sight! SKB

Proper 20
September 19, 2004

Amos 8:4–7
Psalm 113
1 Timothy 2:1–7
Luke 16:1–13

First Reading

God's attention to the poor and needy continues, as was the case with last Sunday's attention to the lost sheep and coin. In the psalm, God is the helper of the needy and poor. The subject of Amos's fourth vision warns would-be or current tramplers to leave the poor and needy alone. God will not tolerate unjust actions, oppression, or social injustice; God will punish such bad business practices with disaster. Our epistle reading does not fit into this theme directly. Although the chart of succession implies that we are all under God's judgment and it is only Christ that can mediate, only Christ makes suitable ransom for us, desiring that all of us be saved.

How in the world can we preach the dishonest manager? Occasionally, a sermon that offers ambiguity rather than answers can be powerful. You may choose to offer your congregation the various options of interpretation and let them choose their own adventure. Are we the manager entrusted with God's precious gifts? Are we the rich man who has so much and still hoards? Or are we the debtors whose bill has been significantly reduced (not very Lutheran) through Christ's ransom? Is God the rich man who has everything and entrusts us with little? Is Jesus the manager who extravagantly shares God's grace with the world? Or, connecting it with the other lessons and to Matthew's last judgment, are the equitable or gracious actions done for the debtor actually actions done to God?

In *The New Interpreters Bible*, R. Alan Culpepper does a nice job of describing the manager's action in the three possible scenarios and accessing the likelihood of each: (1) Continue on that path of irresponsibility, concluding the job in the same dishonest way. Reveal to the hearers the exact dishonesty. "Forget this stupid job—I'm out of here anyway." (2) Exclude the (dishonest) interest the Master added to each sale. Thereby the manager was dishonest to the master but faithful to God's law, as legislated in Deut 23:19–20. (3) Forsake his share of the profits, eliminating his commission. Thus, the manager gains favor with debtors while not losing more with the master.

The problem with this parable is that, unsure of the manager's actions, we do not know what example Jesus is trying to set. Thus the whole point of the parable is lost with these missing pieces. Was the manager a wise steward and applauded by Jesus because he (a) continued in his same, sinful ways, (b) did not charge interest like the law teaches, (c) eliminated his commission, or (d) came up with a clever way to win friends and influence people?

When scholars spend whole careers studying Luke's Gospel and do not presume to know the answer to this multiple-choice question, it is presumptuous for us to preach as if we knew exactly what the steward did to be wise in Jesus' eyes and exactly what Jesus meant to teach us with this confusing parable. We have a choice to explain the ambiguities of this parable to people, perhaps gaining new insights in the process, or to just read the lesson and let it stand on its own. Fortunately, when this text is read, it does carry power (being scripture and all). With simple reading, the main point comes across: Money or God? The use of the Greek word *mammon*, meaning money or wealth, in this context carries a sort of personification. Contrasted with serving God, *mammon* becomes the Evil Master. Thus, the NIV translation is more helpful as it concludes: "you cannot serve both God and Money." Capitalizing gives the word *money* a sort of character: the enchanter, deceiver, devil. As Jesus poses the parable there are two masters and two lords to choose from. Which will it be?

Pastoral Reflection

Time and again we are the dishonest manager, found irresponsible in our task. One of our greatest fears is realized through this parable, being called out by The Superior. This is my fear—being confronted with my irresponsibility, facing the music of my selfishness, learning that I've been caught doing my most embarrassing action. No hard-working person with any amount of pride wants to be found irresponsible or dishonest. But we are all corrupted, irresponsible, and dishonest—it is our age-old rebellion; it is our sinfulness. There is the fear that strikes any American receiving a letter from the IRS—No, not an audit! We fear being found irresponsible or dishonest. Yet how much more should we fear God's audit?

God's auditing powers far surpass any human institution. God knows our budgets, what we put in the plate, what we give to our unemployed neighbor, our widowed colleague, our homeless friend. God knows! And this is no small audit. The hundred *batos* of oil and hundred *koros* of grain help us to understand that this man is rich indeed. This is no small family-operated business. These huge amounts reveal a scandal on a corporate scale. Money trading. Embezzlement. Insider trading. We are all too familiar with these terms. Dishonesty pervades our capitalistic system. "Audit requested!" God calls out.

Stewardship is an obvious place to take your congregation this week, but take caution in your pursuit. While the manager

example certainly deserves points for creativity, he is probably not the kind of giver you want your parishioners to emulate. This text is not completely stewardship-friendly. Generosity should not be motivated by social security but by the awareness of God's generous love and forgiveness toward us. We should not give to make friends but as a matter of faith. Our offerings to Christ's church should not be to save our spot in the eternal home but to help the poor and needy in our midst; not buying some indulgence, assuring our welcome into God's family, but out of recognition that God already welcomes us into the family.

"Help us to order our lives by your wisdom," we will pray this Sunday. We need God's help to be prudent, shrewd, wise, logical, skillful stewards of God's gifts to us. "I will and I ask God to help and guide me" should be our response to stewardship campaigns. The Evil Master lurks and sneaks around us, trying to corrupt our priorities.

The ELCA's Web site estimates the average annual giving per confirmed ELCA member at $534.24, proving that we cannot be trusted to be faithful with a little. One look at environmental statistics or the International Monetary Fund and World Bank operations proves that we also cannot be trusted to be faithful with much. Yet somehow, for some reason, God continues to trust, to give, to bless, to provide.

Having been welcomed into the family, splashed with promises and marked with the cross of Christ from this time on and forevermore, we want another chance. Experiencing the amazing grace of our God, we desire to be given another shot at being stewards—real ones, faithful ones. Will we do it? Can we ever be found faithful? No. We will never fully meet God's expectations or rise to God's challenge. But we can be found faithful in little. Get our budget to jive with our beliefs, our pocketbook with our piety, our checkbook register with our Christian faith. We can make changes in our calendar that show what master we choose: teach Sunday school, tutor a neighborhood kid, pray, visit an Alzheimer's unit, join a Bible study, serve at a soup kitchen. . . . In these little ways we show our Master's identity. SKB

Proper 21
September 26, 2004

Amos 6:1a, 4–7
Psalm 146
1 Timothy 6:6–19
Luke 16:19–31

First Reading

"There was a rich man. . . ." When you start reading this Sunday's Gospel, people might think you have accidentally repeated last week's. Unfortunately, this parable is not quite as vague or nearly as ambiguous as last Sunday's. This week's is clear—crystal clear and awfully scary. Faced with these condemning texts, our challenge (from Amos) is to have our faith claim "not be an idle song." Jesus' intent in sharing this parable was not to scare the daylights out of everyone, even though he did a good job of that, but to motivate them toward equitable distribution of the world's resources. Our proclamation this Sunday must help people move from the place where the parable leaves them to a place of hope and invitation. We must accompany our people from a place of guilt to absolution, fear to repentance, shame to sacrifice.

Our epistle reading offers many good vantage points for faithful stewardship: set your hopes on God; God provides; we came to this world with nothing, we will leave with the same; be content with the simple

bare necessities of life; fight the good fight. Ever wonder why stewardship is so tough? Just look back at that list! Each of those ideas flies smack in the face of our capitalistic nature and national rallying cry of competition. Capitalism is so totally ingrained in the hearts, faith, dreams, and priorities of the American people that Timothy's letter and Jesus' parable will seem downright ludicrous. How do we accompany the movement from "what's mine is mine" to "God has given graciously to me; I want to give to others"? In our nation the bumper sticker and t-shirt slogan "He who dies with the most toys, wins" gets far more airtime than Timothy's "we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it."

Fighting the good fight is precisely the battle we have between our two vying masters: God and *Mammon*. We can scarcely grasp the concept, barely imagine what life would be like if we did not concern ourselves with material issues and store up treasures, pensions, and savings accounts here on earth. This is more than a ten percent tithe; this is total, radical commitment. Our commitment to our master must be clear—in our pocketbook, our calendar, our house, our family, all that we do. The rich man chose his master; he serves Mammon. He lost the good fight, maybe never even fought. What would the rich man need to have done to change his fate?

The rich man does not have a name in this story, but surely everyone in the town knew his name. He was the one the boys wanted to be like, the one the women wanted to marry. I imagine he was the Gordon Gecko of his time, swallowing up farms, carpentry businesses, and fisheries with reckless abandon, disregarding the people who formed them. The no-name rich man is contrasted with the named beggar, Lazarus—a form of the Hebrew name Eleazar, meaning "God has helped." While unrelated to the Lazarus character found in John's Gospel, the two name-twins are both helped by God and raised up to new life. For this diseased beggar, Jesus departed from his standard operating procedure of not naming parabolic characters. This sore-infested homeless man is the only parable character given a name.

By naming Lazarus and not the rich man, Jesus' story completely contrasts with worldly understandings of who's who. As was his style, Jesus again reminds us that heaven is the opposite of this world in many respects, especially when it comes to rating an individual's worth in society. "Bill Gates, Donald Trump, the Middle Eastern oil guys, and Oprah" were some of the names my high-schoolers listed for rich people in our society. The room went silent when I asked them for names of the people in our town who beg, or are homeless. Vague references to "that one guy who sleeps behind Menards" and "that crazy lady always asking for change when I come out of McDonalds" were sounded around the room, until one young man said "my real dad." Mouths quickly turned off and light bulbs of cognition simultaneously turned on. We all understood what Jesus was saying: God cares about everybody, even and especially those that society would rather not notice and definitely not name.

Lazarus the sore-infested named beggar does not ever speak in the parable, illustrating the communal silence we like to maintain for the socially rejected. Homeless are not to be seen or heard, do not have value, do not need to vote, do not have rights. The poor are viewed as a menace to society whose only talent is lowering the property values of their neighbors.

Pastoral Reflection

Gorgeous irony and a beautiful reversal of agony and comfort take place in this story. How much the rich man wants just a small sip of water after denying similar simple comforts to the man he now envies. I imagine if Lazarus were quoted in this story, his request from the gate would have been the same as the rich man's: "Dip the tip of your finger into water and cool my tongue." The imagery of this story provides the most powerful illustration of the lesson "Do to others as you would have them do to you" found earlier in Luke 6:31.

With which character do we identify? "I feel most like the rich man," high-school senior Tony said. Youth can be so honest (yet another reason why Jesus urges us to have the faith of a child). Adults have a much harder time coming to terms with or at least verbalizing a negative image of themselves. Whenever I have read or heard this story, I have always cheered: "Go get him, God! Enough with the 'love even your enemies' stuff; let's get down to business and go Old Testament on the greed monger!" But I can already notice a difference in my reaction to this parable. It was easier to read this story when I was in seminary, a poor graduate student tying together odd jobs and depending on the generosity of others for many things. Now that I am a pastor of a suburban congregation, I struggle with issues of poverty and plenty, attempting to recognize my place in this unjust society.

Realizing his mistaken life, the rich man finally considers someone other than himself when he asks for Lazarus to go warn his brothers. The fictional rich man did not have the opportunity to hear this story. Through Jesus the warning is given to us. Do we heed it? We are the rich man's brothers. Do we get the message? Do we have a clue? We get to answer. Because of Jesus, we have the privilege of knowing, reading the story. We have been warned; we must heed.

The torment and agony Lazarus must have felt in life—peering through a locked gate at his only hope for survival, having his sores licked by dogs as he attempts to feed off the few crumbs the rich man inadvertently and carelessly allows to fall to the ground where Lazarus lies, and seeing a lavish lifestyle taken for granted. Now the rich man feels the torment and agony Lazarus experienced. The worst part of the rich man's hell must be seeing Lazarus in paradise. Despite this chasm in life and death, it does appear that the rich man knew Lazarus by sight and name. The chasm remains, however, as it is clear that knowing Lazarus' name did not inspire the rich man to help. The Good News is that God has helped Lazarus.

But it is not true that only God could help Lazarus. Some two thousand years of Christianity and we *still* have not figured out a means of equitable distribution so that this chasm can be filled. Here in the U.S., there is a colossal chasm between the lifestyles of the rich and famous and those of the poor and needy. Christ, the great mediator, bridges the chasm. In Christ we are all one.

The church is one of the very few places where the chasm can be nearly closed. I have witnessed this most powerfully in small communities where the rich and poor, the wealthy and the needy, all go to the same church. The church has a role in closing the chasm. One powerful way we can do this is to follow Jesus' example and name each immigrant, refugee, homeless person, and beggar in our community. Provide opportunity and challenge folks to move beyond their comfort zone, and come to know and help these folks that God has helped. SKB

Proper 22
October 3, 2004

Habakkuk 1:1–4; 2:1–4
Psalm 37:1–10 (37:1–9 NRSV)
2 Timothy 1:1–14
Luke 17:5–10

Habakkuk, the eighth of the twelve minor prophets, is merely three chapters long but powerful in its theology. Similar to the book of Job, Habakkuk is a dialogue with God, packed full of questions, complaints, and concerns over the seeming lack of God's presence in a world filled with violence and evil, a world bent on its own destruction. "How long, LORD?" the prophet cries, and "Why?" In verse 4, he concludes the first segment with the certainty that "The wicked surround the righteous."

But that is only one of the realities of his Babylonian world and our post-9/11 times. The other is that God listens and answers. Habakkuk did not understand why God waited so long to destroy the Babylonians; he may not even have lived to see that day. Neither do we understand the terror and injustice that exist in our time, but God does listen and answer.

And there, embedded in the LORD's answer, is the mustard seed, the small kernel that not only brought hope to Habakkuk but caught the ear of St. Paul (Gal 3:11) and inspired Martin Luther (Rom 1:17), "the righteous live by their faith" (2:4b). The deeds of the wicked, the slackness of the law, the spirit of the proud—they will not prevail. God will. At the appointed time, God will fulfill the prophecy.

"Write the vision," the LORD says. Get indelible markers and print it on tablets the size of the banners at the Boston Marathon so that the heralds and proclaimers like St. Paul, and us, don't lose sight of it as they zoom through their ministries.

The prophet concludes with a beautiful and stirring hymn, "though the fig tree does not blossom, and no fruit is on the vines . . . yet I will rejoice in the LORD . . . GOD, the Lord, is my strength!" (3:17–19) Faith, in spite of the evils that surround us. Faith, whether God appears present or not. The time has been appointed. The righteousness is sure, and worth waiting for.

2 Timothy holds a kernel, as well—a personal mustard seed that spoke to me of faith well before being called to the ministry, when I was raising my daughter alone after being divorced. I can't remember the author or book, but it was so powerful and surprising at the time that I have kept it with me, moving the tiny piece of paper with the quote on it from bulletin board to bulletin board for the last 25 years:

> He looked at her with a gentle frankness, "As Paul wrote to Timothy, 'God has not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.'"

This faith of which Paul writes flourishes through the generations. It may shrink to mustard-seed size from time to time. We may fear it lost, but it only needs rekindling, for the flame, the spirit, the gift of God, given before the ages began, is always with us. And we are reminded that faith is a holy calling accomplished not through our works but through grace given by Christ Jesus.

Faith is what Jesus wishes for his disciples. Jesus doesn't command or expect faith like that exhibited in Habakkuk, merely faith the size of a mustard seed, and we all know how little that is! The black mustard plant had the smallest seed of any plant then cultivated, and Jesus contrasts this tiniest of beginnings with a full-grown tree. Some scholars translate *sykamino* as "mulberry," which was distinctive for its widespread root system, others as "sycamore," which grew over 60 feet tall. Either way works. A tree transplanting itself from land to sea is

beyond the possibility of the disciples, something only God could do.

In last week's Gospel we heard that it was too late, not only for the rich man in agony and flames but for his five living brothers: "If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone rises from the dead" (16:31). Jesus immediately follows that prophecy with "Occasions for stumbling are bound to come, but woe to anyone by whom they come!" (17:1) When the disciples say to Jesus, "Add to us faith!" (*prosthes*) they are looking for more faith, or for stronger faith, or are they just plain scared after all they have heard?

And what does Jesus' response mean? A seed and a tree. A simple seemingly insignificant seed vs. a full-blown, full-grown tree with root and vascular systems, bark, branches, leaves. A tree able to provide food and shade, not only comforting and life-giving but able to transport itself to wherever it is needed.

Is it Jesus' intent to rebuke the disciples or to comfort them with these sayings? Is this a reprimand because their faith is not yet even the size of a mustard seed? Or is this a teaching that their faith, no matter the size, is sufficient? It's probably some of each. Most important, it's the promise that in God the tiniest seeds become the largest, most active trees. One could argue that our mission as Christians is exactly that, to plant and water seeds that God will develop into full-grown forests.

How is the second part of the Gospel related to the first? These three questions about how a master would act with his slave would have been shocking in Jesus' day. No! A slave would never come home to find dinner prepared and a place ready at the master's table. Yes! A slave would be expected, after a long day's work in the field, to immediately cook for and serve the master. No! A slave would not be thanked for his or her labor. There is no dialogue in this text; there are no named characters, no colorful adjectives. Its starkness underlines its message. The three questions are issued in boot-camp–like manner, the answers to be immediate, loud and clear. It's all about obedience. We are to work hard and expect no reward. We are to move from field to table, from workplace to workplace, always serving.

Some scholars would have us notice that in v. 10 *achreioi*, translated "worthless," does not mean "of no value" but "to whom nothing is owed." We are not useless, but we will not be praised or paid for our works, nor are we to boast or count our accomplishments. From our obedience, from small, repetitive, constant acts of faithful service, God grows groves of trees. RKB

Proper 23
October 10, 2004

2 Kings 5:1–3, 7–15c
Psalm 111
2 Timothy 2:8–15
Luke 17:11–19

Faith, foreigners. Ritual, conversion. Praise, thanksgiving. This week's texts continue the exploration into discipleship and answer questions about what it looks like to follow Jesus.

The first example is the young girl in the first lesson. Not named, not thanked, a woman's servant in a strange land, she speaks her faith, saying that Elisha the prophet could cure Naaman the mighty warrior of his leprosy (2 Kings 5:2–3). Is her suggestion one of those mustard seeds Jesus spoke of in last week's reading?

In case we miss that example, another one is provided, but again we have to read

carefully not to miss it. When Naaman, the powerful commander of the king of Aram, feels slighted by Elisha's lack of personal contact, lack of flair, and proposed method and place of healing, he is enraged! His servants (also Israelites?) dare to approach and encourage him with a tactful question. Again, an echo from Luke 17:5–10; there is great power in small obediences to God.

Much more detailed and dramatic, therefore more memorable, are the faith examples of Naaman and of the Samaritan. They hold in common not only their leprosy and miraculous healing but also their Gentileness and the clarity and exuberance of their faith. Naaman not only returns but brings his whole company and stands before Elisha to proclaim, "Now I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel" (v. 15). What makes this extraordinary is Naaman's initial fury when Elisha would not come and stand before him to do the healing.

And of course, the Samaritan is the only one to return to Jesus when ten lepers are healed all at once. His praising of God with a loud voice and lying at Jesus' feet thanking him are legendary, as are the stories of faith shown by two other Samaritan people: the woman at the well (John 4:1–42) and the man on the road (Luke 10:25–37). Note that only we, from the perspective of faith and history, would call this man the *Good* Samaritan. In his own day, he, and the woman, were members of an avoided, despised minority group.

Back to the healing story, we often hold up this Samaritan man as the only faithful one of the ten. Evidently the other nine, when they discovered themselves healed, continued on to the priests as Jesus had directed, and as their tradition, if they were already God-fearing people, dictated.

It may be hard for us to understand the force and intensity that the concept of cleanliness exerted over the faithful of that time and place, much less the constraints and complexity of the laws that governed cleanliness. I'm not sure that there is any one thing we can point to in our faith tradition that grips us as firmly as the purity laws ruled the lives of the ancient faithful. (For a review of the identification of leprous conditions, see Lev 13:1–46, and for the purification rituals see 14:1–32.)

Could it be that the Samaritan was the only one who either didn't know the rules or didn't feel bound by them? Did the others go forward not in careless disregard but in faith, believing they were doing exactly the right thing, what they had been taught by the priests, and what would restore them to holiness in God's eyes and to their places in their families and community? Viewed from this perspective, it's hard to imagine that the nine would do anything but what they did.

And yet, Jesus noted their absence. He expected them to return to him to praise God. Jesus had broken the rules to heal them. Did Jesus expect them to break the rules in return? How does this apply to us? Jesus' praise of the worship of the Samaritan begs the question of our worship. Are there times when we are rule-bound? What would happen if we broke some of our molds? Are there ways we could worship more abundantly, more vibrantly, imitating the energy, enthusiasm, and movement of the Pharisee?

In her book *A Royal "Waste" of Time* (Eerdmans, 1999), Marva Dawn explores the splendor of worshiping God for no purpose other than worship—not teaching, not evangelism, not mission—solely for the praise of the holy and almighty God. Even the dedication she wrote is inspiring and thought-provoking. In it she speaks of composers and poets creating "new forms, new images, new sounds . . . musicians offering . . . artists sculpting and dancing and paint-

ing to the glory of God, worship participants yearning for depth and excellence. . . ."

This is such a rich text; there are many other sermon options! The preacher could choose to tackle the question of Jesus' power. Is it possible that it was growing, or that he chose to show more of it, even as the Pharisees closed in? Note that in Luke 5 Jesus healed one leper with a touch; here in Luke 17 he heals ten lepers, and from a distance.

Or, we could look at this from a justice perspective. Perhaps the move from one to ten could be seen as indicative of Jesus' wish to heal all people, Jesus' intention to bring everyone out of their pockets of contempt and isolation into the glory and fellowship of wholeness in the kingdom of God.

Another point: When we consider how personally and socially infectious leprosy was, we can be amazed that Jesus did not "catch" it from those condemned unclean. Even more miraculously, through his physical and spiritual healing touch, Jesus stemmed the tide of impurity and actually spread cleanliness!

There may be a sermon in verse 14, "And as they went, they were made clean." The lepers hear the word of God; they go in peace and are healed, made whole, through Jesus' mercy and through their faith. This spring, representatives of our synod did an immersion trip through the Lutheran Center in Mexico City and visited the homes of squatters in nearby Cuernavaca. Living on borrowed land in cobbled-together, dirt-floor dwellings without benefit of power or running water, their thankfulness to God was beyond belief! "And as they went, they were made clean." These faithful are walking with God through lives in places forgotten by most of the world. Truly Jesus is at work in all the corners of the world, healing and creating wholeness.

"Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well" (17:19). A discussion of the examples of faith in Luke would include Jesus commending and praising the faithful: those who carried the paralytic (5:20), the centurion (7:9), the woman who anointed Jesus' feet (7:50), the hemorrhaging woman (8:48), and, of course, the grateful leper (17:19). It would also include Jesus challenging the faith of the disciples: during the windstorm on the lake (8:25), following the parable of the widow and the judge (18:8, in the reading for next week), and predicting Peter's denial (22:32).

One final idea is to see this text as confirming last week's text. In the story about faith as the tiny mustard seed begetting power as great and multifaceted as a full-grown tree, the question being answered seems to be, "How much faith is needed?" Today Jesus answers us again. Any amount of faith will do. Faith expressed in quiet suggestions and questions or in loud praise "works" equally well. Here we have been treated to four fine examples of God working through the faith of God's people to accomplish miraculous things. RKB

Proper 24
October 17, 2004

Genesis 32:22–31
Psalm 121
2 Timothy 3:14—4:5
Luke 18:1–8

This week's texts view faith through the lens of conflict, persistent conflict. In these readings, it is not the "meek who inherit the earth." Those who wrestle, persevere, and cry out receive God's holy blessing, God's speedy justice.

Who taught us that we always have to be "good" in the presence of God? How was it we learned that meekness and manners matter most to God?

Last night the beginning confirmation students wondered what would happen if we prayed without bowing our heads and folding our hands. "And what if we prayed with our arms stretched to the ceiling and our hands facing heaven?" some asked. "Or what if we prayed lying on the grass under the stars with our arms resting at our sides?" Others wanted to know, "Would God hear us? Would God answer those kinds of prayers?"

And then at lunch at the nursing home today, a woman admitted softly, "I would like to go home to God. What do you think will happen if I ask that? What will God do if I say that I am too sick and too sad to stay here any longer?" When I encouraged her to share her every question and prayer with God, she asked about the anger. "Sometimes I hurt so much I get really angry. What about that?" Before I could respond, the man next to her shook his head. "Oh, no," he said, with more animation and words than I have seen in six months of weekly visits. "No, I don't think so! We're not to ask questions or to be angry with God. Ever."

What awesome texts these are to explain the different "positions" of prayer and what happens when we unburden ourselves in any way to almighty God. Is this not the most wonderful message to proclaim, assuring God's chosen that God wants to be fully and wholly in relationship with each of us, at all times and in all places—with those beginning their faith journeys, with those ending their time on earth; with Jacob the wrestler, Paul the experienced preacher, Timothy the new pastor, the widow, and even the judge?

Yes, it is, and yes, God listens to prayer. God listens when there are problems and God listens when *we* are the problem. God wants to hear from us when we're out of joint, when we're afraid, when we're crabby. And not only does God listen. God answers, God blesses, and God grants justice.

There is much in the Genesis text to speak to family members who have quarreled, succeeded at a sibling's expense, or just become disjointed over the years. Jacob's story includes all of these and more. Later, Jacob's story will include being blessed to be the father of twelve sons, and he will become the patriarch of a "company of nations" (Gen 35:11). The highlights of his story now, though, are stealing his brother Esau's birthright, getting his father Isaac's blessing (again meant for Esau) deceitfully, and running away from the rest of the family for twenty years.

No wonder he was scared to meet Esau and sent his wives, slaves, children, and earthly belongings on ahead over the Jabbok. Note that in Hebrew, Jabbok makes a memorable three-way play on words with Jacob and wrestled. (Consider for another sermon that children are at the end of the list, after the "worthless" slaves. See Luke 17:10.)

The overnight sweaty, painful grappling with God, alone and in the dark, has no doubt been used a hundred times, yet it

continues to be powerful. Who among us has not tossed and turned, and even after a long hard night still tenaciously held on to a dream or a prayer near daybreak, not wanting to let go until resolution is certain, until peace has been given?

Another talking point is that, while it is certainly important to focus on the blessing at the end, before we get to that satisfying finale let's be sure to take note of what happens in between: God stays with Jacob all night. As long as it takes for the light to dawn, that's how long God stays with Jacob. That's how long God waits with us.

What about seeing God face to face? We all remember Exod 33:20, God saying to Moses, "But you cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live." Jacob believes he has seen the face of God that night! And he does not just survive the experience; God preserves him through the striving. Jacob comes away changed in body and in spirit, blessed in that moment and for generations to come.

Along with the wrestling and blessing there is naming, the all-powerful and therefore unnamed one giving to Jacob the faithful a new name, which brings new life to him and populates God's world. He had been Jacob, "to seize at the heel" or "to supplant," names that describe his birth immediately following his twin, Esau, and his later success in stealing the birthright and blessing of his firstborn brother. Now, though (and at 35:10), Jacob becomes Israel, "he who strives with God." And it is this name that through his twelve sons and the twelve tribes will come to describe the whole people of God.

The reading from 2 Timothy is a perfect bridge between the Genesis and Lukan passages. Proclamation, persistence, and patience are needed to equip the saints. Preachers, pastors, teachers, you must be as relentless and determined as the wrestling Jacob and the bothering widow. "Proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable" (4:2). There will be unfavorable times; people will fall away, and they will turn down wrong paths. Do whatever it takes to get the attention of God's people turned back toward the truth, literally, the God-breathed scripture.

Moving finally to Luke: About whom is this parable, and what good news is Jesus proclaiming? Calling it The Parable of the Widow and the Unjust Judge, as some biblical editors do, focuses our attention on the judge, his lack of faith and wisdom, and his eventual yielding. Titling it The Parable of the Persistent Widow pinpoints the vulnerable woman and her faithful determination to get her case heard and her needs met. The best name is The Vindication of the Widow, for that concentrates our awareness on the granting of justice—and that's the good news!

This parable is only about prayer inasmuch as our cries to God are for the justice of God, which is what we beg for in every prayer, isn't it? "Come into our lives and make things right again for us, O God! Deliver us! Do justice!" While human persistence is important and is, in fact, modeled in all three readings today, it is the divine response that is the good news. How much greater is God's love than ours! How much more surely, how much more quickly will God execute justice and bring righteousness! The legal authority and surrendering of the unrighteous judge is only a tiny trail marker on the path to God's limitless power, compassion, and desire to put love into action for the sake of the kingdom. RKB

Proper 25
October 24, 2004

Jeremiah 14:7–10, 19–22
Psalm 84:1–6 (84:1–7 NRSV)
2 Timothy 4:6–8, 16–18
Luke 18:9–14

This week's texts speak of prayer and worship in their many perspectives. The people of Judah lament, knowing that their repeated sins have brought on a crushing drought. The psalmist reflects on the joy of worship, when the faithful, traveling through the desert to Zion, are bathed in springs of cool water. Paul speaks of the crown of righteousness given with faith. Jesus tells a prayer parable about our relationship with God and with others.

What you are reading at harvest time I am writing during planting season, a period of abundant spring rain. Over Sunday dinner, the farmers wonder if even this much rain will be enough, and then the talk turns to other, drier years. "We prayed so hard for rain," they said. "Really, really prayed, harder than you can imagine, Pastor!" And they are right. Those of us with lifetimes in the city and suburbs, where abundant produce, bright flowers, and fat green grass are as easy as securing a parcel of dirt and hooking up a garden hose—we can't imagine drought and its desperate partner, prayer, for we live a far cry from the reality of the browned fields, the acres of short dried ears of corn or empty bean pods, and the bare cupboards and thin wallets that come from a summer with no rain.

Visualizing all this, hear anew the frenzied pleas of the ancients during their time of drought. They believe the covenantal curse from Deut 28:22, "The LORD will afflict you with consumption, fever, inflammation, with fiery heat and drought, and with blight and mildew; they shall pursue you until you perish." They also believe the covenantal promise. And so, after they cry out to God in anger, "Does your heart loathe Zion?" (Jer 14:19), they confess, "We have sinned against you" (v. 20); and then they pray for salvation, "Remember, and do not break your covenant with us. . . . We set our hope on you!" (vv. 21–22).

From these pained drought pleas, we move to the confident, joyful worship of the psalmist, thought to be celebrating the October harvest-time Feast of Booths. During this festival, the Hebrews dwelled in booths or tabernacles made of branches, which symbolized God's protection during their wilderness travels. Hear the words of joy, happiness, and praise at being in the presence of and being at home with God. Soul, heart, flesh; sparrow, swallow—all desire to dwell in the house of the LORD.

And once again, water is a blessing provided by God. As the pilgrims travel through the desert, the LORD "makes it a place of springs, and the early rain covers it with pools" (v. 6). There is not only beauty but life. Not only sustenance but hope. When the travelers "go from strength to strength" (v. 7), are they going from spring to spring, from pool to pool? If so, they recognize that they are moving under God's protection from oasis to oasis on their journey, from blessing to blessing through their lives. No wonder their devotion is so joyful!

These first two readings may point out an interesting sort of polarity in the reality of our worship. In our weekly gatherings, we bring before God the details of the stark circumstances of our lives. Like the people in Jeremiah's time, in praise and pleading, in confession and lament, we pray asking God to be present and help us. Then, on festival days, we set to the side for a moment the painful realities, be they of personal anguish or of drought on the land, and we

devote ourselves totally to the praise of God. We focus on a particular event in the history and future of our faith, like the psalmist focused on the Festival of Booths, and we celebrate God's presence and work in our lives. We are at once anchored by remembering the past, at one with believers of all times and places, and at the same time set free by the hope of our future in Christ. Both the lament of Jeremiah and the praise of the psalmist are important to God and integral to the worship life of God's people.

Moving on to Timothy, while Paul's letter is full of liturgically rich words, it doesn't speak to us of worship in particular but, in the broadest and most glorious strokes, of a life of faith lived and now close to ending. Beginning in September, the Timothy texts have been directions, exhortations, and charges from Paul to Timothy, and therefore to us, on obedience, faithfulness, and ministry. The concluding instruction last week was a nutshell description of the most Christlike ministry possible: "As for you, always be sober, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully" (4:5).

Now, as we come closer to the end of the church year, we hear Paul's final greetings and, as he draws closer to death, his perspective shifts. "As for me," Paul begins, and in three sentences he sums up his faith and his life—he has fought and he has finished. From his confession we understand that we are not called to be spectacular (although certainly Paul and Timothy were, in many ways), that being patient and steady wins the crown. Fighting, keeping the faith, and finishing—those are the things that count. And what kind of crown is this? Not earthly, but eternal. Therefore, not the crown of fresh leaves given to athletes; those leaves wither and die. The crown of Jesus' righteousness lasts forever. And it goes not to one winner alone but to many. The crown of Jesus' righteousness is for all who have longed for Christ's appearing.

And what do the men praying in Luke's Gospel long for? Justification? Righteousness? Yes! That same beautiful, eternal crown that Paul looks forward to is the goal and delight of the praying Pharisee and the praying tax collector. They just go about it in different ways, and that of course is Jesus' point in telling the parable. Both go to the temple, both stand to pray. And there the similarities end. We are told that the Pharisee is praying to himself, *pros eauton tauta proseucheto.* To give him some credit, he does address God, but his next word is "I," and the whole rest of his prayer is a litany about himself and his accomplishments under the law. "I . . . I . . . I . . . I . . . ," he says.

The tax collector, on the other hand, expresses his entire situation by hanging his head and beating his chest. His entire prayer is "God, be merciful to me, the sinner!"

Of course there is more to this parable than what to say and how to pray. Righteousness is the gift of God for all who believe; it does not come to those who live by the letter of the law. And those who believe depend on God for everything; they pray "Thy will be done" or "God be merciful to me." The Pharisee asks for nothing and may get it. The tax collector asks for everything, and Jesus says he will be exalted.

Note one final and important component of this teaching, how we regard others. In God's kingdom there is no such thing as a despised Pharisee or a hated tax collector. Only those who fancy themselves righteous by their own works would dare to have contempt for others. Faithfulness to God includes compassion for all of God's creation. RKB

Reformation Day
October 31, 2004

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

A new covenant, not like the old one! A new church, not like the old one? Reformation Sunday is a festive day of red, a day we honor not only the reformers of the sixteenth century but the re-forming of the church up to the present day and on into the future, guided by the fire of the Holy Spirit. Much has been realized; much remains to be faithfully discerned and accomplished.

These words from the book of Jeremiah are certainly its high point. Believed to have been written after the exile, when (or after) the prophet remained in Jerusalem to help the remnant rebuild, they are powerful words of prophecy and of hope. Our text is set near the end of The Book of Consolation, a collection of prose and poetic oracles in chapters 30 and 31, which proclaim restoration and salvation for Israel and Judah alike. Woven throughout are the sins and hurts of the people, punctuated by their cries. Intertwined are evidences of the wrath and punishment of the LORD, right alongside the promises of the compassionate God to be faithful and to restore the people and directions on how to rejoice when that is accomplished.

"Thus says the LORD." Ten times we hear this call to attention, leading up to the text about the new covenant. Unlike the previous covenants with Noah, Abram, Abraham's descendents, and David, this covenant cannot be broken, because it will not be based on the law. People will not have to teach one another or to know right from wrong. The new covenant will not include rituals or sacrifices; the LORD will put it in our human flesh and blood, will write it directly on the hearts of the people. All the people will belong to God, and God will know their sin no longer.

Sins forgiven and forgotten—Here we have the definitive prophecy, then the ultimate gift, given through the body and blood of Jesus Christ. Through Christ's flesh, the covenant is written on our flesh. By Christ's promise and presence, we taste the covenant at the table, we taste the forgiveness on our tongues. Oh, but we're getting ahead of our ourselves. . . .

Before the celebration of the Eucharist, we chant together the majestic Psalm 46, "God is our refuge and strength," from which Martin Luther wrote "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God." Filled with images of God's saving power triumphing over the forces of change and chaos, of war and desolation, the psalmist provides wonderful respite. We find comfort in streams which make glad the city of God; we feel the waters of the river of life washing blessings over us; we rejoice that God will help the city at morning's light; we find the ultimate rest in the stillness of God's perfection and God's covenant relationship with God's people, "Be still, and know that I am God!" Peace and quiet in God is the extreme opposite of human fear. Death, sickness, the nation at war, or the congregation in conflict; no matter what the trials, we can be certain of God's love and eternal protection, for God has written the covenant on our hearts. We know that we belong to God, we are God's chosen people.

The second reading is one of the famous passages from Romans about faith and about God's righteousness. This concept may seem second nature to us, even if we sometimes struggle with Paul's rhetoric or arguments. To them this was brand new, Faith 101. Talk about changes happening in

our church, or in the church in Martin Luther's day, the early Christians were used to rituals and sacrifices that kept them right with God. There had been rules to follow and centuries of waiting to be endured until God would send a savior.

(Note that there are Old Testament references to faith and to the failure of the law to justify. Remember our text from Habakkuk 2:4 the first week of September, "The righteous live by faith"? Psalm 143:1–2 also speaks of our inability to earn justification with our works, "Hear my prayer, O LORD . . . answer me in your righteousness. Do not enter into judgment with your servant, for no one living is righteous before you.")

But now the promised Savior had been sent. He had been given in life, and then in death, and after three days he had risen from the grave. On that third day the law had lost all of its power to save. It served only to identify sins and to make us painfully aware of our inabilities and failures to be in right relationship with God by our own reason or strength. Only Christ's sacrifice, once and for all, is effective, and only through faith.

One final thought about this second reading and how it underscores, by contrast, the texts proclaimed earlier this month. Verse 28 concludes this pericope, "For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law." Perhaps works are necessary, but we will surely not find our righteousness in or near them. *Apart from* in this context teaches us that works and righteousness are at opposite ends of the spectrum, like the master and the slave (Luke 17:7), the lepers and their community (17:12), the unjust judge and the persistent widow (18:2), and the Pharisee and the tax collector (18:11–13). All of these begin diametrically opposed, and Jesus brings them together in healing, love, and justice through the power of faith, the gift of God.

As we close the door on October and move to this year's final weeks, Martin Luther and the doors of the Castle Church in Wittenberg come to mind. When I visited there the September before 9/11, the doors were under construction, a project whose goal was to commemorate in a permanent way the 95 Theses that may have been posted on them back in 1517. Those doors opened the way out of worthless indulgence purchases into belief in salvation through faith. Think of all the other doors to celebrate today. Jesus is the door out of slavery into freedom, the eternal door out of sin into truth and permanent sonship. The Rite of Confirmation being celebrated in many congregations today is the door out of childhood into affirmation of faith.

And there are the doors of Transfiguration Lutheran Church on the corner of East 156th Street and Prospect Avenue in the South Bronx. In *Breathing Space: A Spiritual Journey in the South Bronx* (Beacon Press, 2003), Heidi B. Neumark describes a wasteland of a city literally and figuratively dumped on and then deserted by its government, a place where the "intense concentration of overcrowded housing and poverty that resulted led to increased crime, drug use and gang violence" (p. 5). It is a place where God is working, so that church doors, once bolted and daily covered with crude graffiti, are now "spray-painted with a bright mural [that] shows an open fire hydrant with water splashing down into a baptismal font. Water brims and spills from the bowl onto the grass below as new buildings rise up from the sidewalk. An arm reaches out from the altar, with bread to place on a plateful of food—turkey, greens, and rice for the hungry" (p. 3).

Doors under construction, doors swinging wide, doors opening to new pathways in faith and truth; may the Holy Spirit continue her reforming and renewing work among us all forever and ever. Amen RKB

All Saints' Sunday
November 7, 2004

Daniel 7:1–3, 15–18
Psalm 149
Ephesians 1:11–23
Luke 6:20–31

First Reading

The First Reading for this Sunday abounds with images that are uncomfortable for this preacher and I am sure for many of you. To step into the dangerous world of Daniel's visions and prophecy and attempt to explain and interpret them is intimidating work, especially in a North American "popular religious" context ripe with images of those "Left Behind" and fears about what might happen "The Day After Tomorrow."

Daniel receives an interpretation of his vision in verses 17–18 of our pericope: "As for these four great beasts, four kings shall arise out of the earth. But the holy ones of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever—forever and ever." These verses contain the key to this passage for us, especially if we allow them to be interpreted by Scripture, using the other readings from the lectionary.

Daniel speaks the truth of this world, a truth that remains for all time and is not reserved for some future (or imminent) end-times. Kings, beasts, destructive forces, and structures of evil arise out of the earth. They are a reality. They were a reality in Daniel's time as they are a reality in our own. Daniel's interpreter says simply and powerfully that they are not the final answer. The holy ones of the Most High shall receive the kingdom in the end. The forces of destruction represented by four kings are not the final answer for the world of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of Daniel, the God of Paul, and the God of Jesus Christ.

In the Ephesians reading, Paul (or pseudo-Paul) also proclaims the superiority of the power of God revealed in Jesus Christ for life (v. 20) over the powers of this world that would pretend to exercise authority and dominion (v. 21). This immeasurably great power was made real in the world by the resurrection of Jesus *and* the seating of Jesus at a position of power and honor in the heavenly places. This movement of Jesus from a place of degradation and shame (the crucifixion) to a place of power and honor is the demonstration of the power of God and the victory of God over the structures of evil in our world. Paul reminds us that this victory of God in Jesus Christ is done "for the church" (v. 22). On behalf of the church, for the sake of the church, for the sake of those who have obtained an inheritance (or been chosen as God's own people: ἐκληρώθημεν) in Christ (v. 11), God has defeated the powers of destruction and death.

Here then is the key to our Daniel passage. We are now part of the promise, we who have been ingrafted into Israel, who have been ἐκληρώθημεν by God's grace in our baptism into Christ. We are the holy ones of the Most High who shall receive the kingdom. This should be a word of hope of us, not a word of fear. Into this place come the familiar words of Jesus and his Beatitudes. Just as Daniel and Paul have told us, Jesus says that the powers and the priorities of this world are not the final answer in God's kingdom.

Jesus proclaims a kingdom and a reality with upside-down priorities (More clearly, perhaps, Jesus proclaims that our world's priorities are upside down). The poor, the hungry, the weeping, the hated are lifted up just as Christ was lifted up from the grave to a place of power and honor in the heavenly places. And just as Paul proclaims Christ's place of honor over the powers and authorities of this world and Daniel told us that the

four kings would not rule forever, Jesus himself tells us that the rich, the full, the laughing, and the popular will be brought low.

Pastoral Reflection

Many of the readers of these Preaching Helps will have preached the Beatitudes dozens and dozens of times. Have you gone back and forth between emphasizing the "blesseds" and emphasizing the "woes"? Or have you tried to balance the two in one message? There's so much grist for the mill in the Gospel lesson, have you ever reflected with your congregation on Daniel or Ephesians?

As I reflect on these passages and think about preaching a word of hope and promise, the context of preacher and of hearers takes center stage. These passages carry us through All Saints' Sunday. Most congregations use some liturgical form on this day to remember the saints of God, most often those of that congregation who have died in the past year. These include naming them in the Prayers of the Church or at some other time in the service, tolling the bell, lighting special candles, and other practices. Whatever the liturgical practice of your congregation, consider how your preaching might become part of the integrated whole of this day. Perhaps you could preach in specifics about some who have died, sharing stories from their life and ministry in the church. How did these saints of the church feed the hungry, laugh with the weeping, or share joy with the hated during their lifetime? Proclaim how we the church can now laugh with joy even as we weep knowing that it is on behalf of these, our brothers and sisters, that God raised Jesus from the dead and seated him in the heavenly places.

This year, All Saints' Sunday is also the first Sunday following presidential elections here in the United States. Perhaps there would be room in this sermon to thank God for those who are willing to guide and lead nations in service to the common good, to pray for wisdom and justice, and to remind us that no kingdoms or systems of governance are of God and that, ultimately, the power of God rules over all kingdoms and authorities.

Ultimately it seems to me that there are two dangers worth avoiding in these texts. One is to focus on the "woes" of Luke 6:24–26 and to proclaim God's judgment on the lives of our congregations. While there is surely a place for the law as a mirror to show us the ways in which our lives do not conform to God's plans and designs for the world, the ultimate task of the preacher is to proclaim God's good news. "Woe" without "blessed" can produce just as much hopelessness and paralysis based in fear as "blessed" without "woe" can produce the complacency of "cheap grace."

The other danger to be avoided is triumphalism. When we hear Daniel's proclamation that the holy ones of the Most High will receive the kingdom and the call to wars of vengeance and justice of Psalm 149, we risk a proclamation that God is on our side exclusively. However, Paul tells us that Christ is seated in heavenly places over the powers and authorities "on behalf of the church." It is not the church seated over the powers and authorities. This should help us avoid triumphalism. But do not be so afraid that you neglect to proclaim God's victory over death and over the forces of evil in our world. Take a risk toward triumphalism. Proclaim that the military-industrial complex, movies and music that celebrate violence and misogyny, and the abuse and exploitation of children (to name a few) are not God's will and that the resurrection and ascension of Jesus mean that God has defeated them. That seems like good news worth proclaiming! SM-K

Proper 28
November 14, 2004

Malachi 4:1–2a
Psalm 98
2 Thessalonians 3:6–13
Luke 21:5–19

First Reading

The final Sunday of Ordinary Time gives us texts that continue to usher us into the proclamation of God's ultimate victory in Christ over the forces of this world that defy God. This movement of our lectionary texts is geared to bring us through the end of the liturgical year into the culmination in the new beginning of the First Sunday in Advent and its proclamation of the Lord's coming. This Sunday, while being "Ordinary," is no different. The Gospel lesson provides us with the beginning of the Lucan Apocalypse. Luke places Jesus' prediction of the destruction of the temple in context as the beginning of his teaching about the utter destruction of Jerusalem (vv. 20–24) and the coming of the Son of Man with power and glory (vv. 25–36).

But even within our own portion of this Apocalypse for this Sunday, there is a series of predictions about destructions and calamities. The movement is from the destruction of the temple (vv. 5–6) through false prophets (vv. 7–8) through human and natural disasters (vv. 9–11) and finally to the persecution of the followers of Jesus (vv. 12–19). This literary movement is actually backward in terms of the time (the persecution of Jesus' followers will take place "before all this occurs"), but the timing is not of ultimate significance.

What is important here is that the terrors and the persecution are presented by Jesus as necessary and as opportunities. They are not things to be feared or avoided. When Jesus tells his followers that they will be arrested and persecuted and dragged before kings and governors, it is "because of my name" (v. 12). "This will give you an opportunity to testify. So make up your minds not to prepare your defense in advance; for I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict" (vv. 13–15). The prediction of the persecution comes with the "good news" that this provides an opportunity for the followers to give an accounting of the hope that is in them and that God will give them powerful words with which to do so.

In Thessalonica, Paul (or pseudo-Paul) was presumably dealing with some believers who looked on the coming of the end with a different perspective. Rather than seeing opportunity for witness and hope for vindication by God's hand, some in Thessalonica seemed to believe that the imminence of the end-times meant that it was time for a party. "No need to work, I won't be around to use my savings anyway!" Paul provides the same advice as Jesus to believers faced with the coming of the end: Brothers and sisters, do not be weary in doing what is right (v. 13). As Jesus says to his audience, not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your souls (vv. 18–19). In other words, Christians, confident in our adoption as God's children and ultimate redemption, should neither worry over the end nor neglect our Christian duties. Continue to be faithful.

Pastoral Reflection

Perhaps this is the time of year when faithful evangelical (gospel-based) preachers should take seriously the cultural-religious context of our time and provide a word of hope and gospel to counter the Religious Fiction shelf in your local Barnes & Noble. For the sake of full disclosure, I will admit that I have not

read any of the "Left Behind" books or anything else that is shelved near them in the stores. That said, I do not think I am prepared to preach a sermon that counters their arguments. I do not believe it is fair to parishioners (who have *faithfully* read the books) to say, "I have not read them, but here's why they're wrong." If you do choose to engage them from the pulpit, read them, and read Barbara Rossing's recent *The Rapture Exposed: The Message of Hope in the Book of Revelation* (Westview, 2004) and show your people the hope that is there for them in Jesus' promise that "not a hair of your head will perish." Remind them of Jesus' call not to follow those who will come in his name and say "The time is near!" (v. 8) But do it from a position of knowledge.

Regardless of our encounter with current pop-religious culture, it seems to me that the key words of promise for us come in Jesus' words to his followers about their own persecution and arrest: "This will give you an opportunity to testify. So make up your minds not to prepare your defense in advance; for I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict" (13–15). Jesus Christ promises to be with God's people even in the darkest and scariest times of life, providing words to mute mouths and wisdom to those of us who don't have all the answers but simply believe and trust.

Jesus' prophecy of destruction, of wars, of earthquakes and famines, and of persecution for those who proclaim the name of Jesus puts all of these events in context. They are not the ultimate truth for us. The ultimate truth comes in verse 18: But not a hair of your head will perish. Penultimately bad things will happen. There is no denying it: our preaching should not attempt to deny or minimize it. But it is not a denial of pain to believe and to proclaim that it is not our ultimate destiny. Proclaim the hope and the good news that God will be with us through persecution, through wars, even through death. SM-K

The Reign of Christ
November 21, 2004

Jeremiah 23:1–6
Psalm 46
Colossians 1:11–20
Luke 23:33–43

First Reading

What kind of people is this who celebrate their king by reading together the story of his violent and humiliating death at the hands of an enemy state? What kind of people take the mocking words of his executioners "This is the King of the Jews" and turn them into words of celebration and proclamation of Christ the king of all nations? Shouldn't there be some kind of story of coronation, some proclamation read of glory and majesty and just ruling? Instead we read of humiliation and torture.

The coronation proclamations and the explanation of Christ as king come in our readings from Jeremiah and Colossians as well as in our psalm. "He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow, and shatters the spear; he burns the shields with fire. 'Be still, and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth.' The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge" (Ps 46:9–11). These words proclaim what kind of king God in Christ is for us—a king who destroys the implements of war so that we need not fear any earthly king, a king who is exalted finally among all the nations, in the whole earth. The Hebrew word *harpu*, translated here as "be still," carries the strong connotation of relax or, in the Hiphil as here,

"let go" or "abandon." As an imperative, a command from God, we are told to let go of our attempts to order the world or our lives or to abandon our ambitions and pretensions. God in Christ is the kind of king who commands us to let go of ourselves and our own egos and acknowledge Christ alone as king.

Jeremiah provides us with God's promise to raise up a ruler to shepherd the people in safety, wisdom, justice, and righteousness (vv. 4–5). Read in conjunction with the story of Jesus' crucifixion in Luke, this passage would seem to provide us with a glimpse into the hope that some in Jesus' time had had in him to be a Davidic Messiah. Only by feeling that hope can we see the horror and the disappointment of the crucifixion through their eyes. The connection between the horror of the cross and the glory of Christ as King comes to us in our Colossians reading. Paul (or pseudo-Paul) provides us with a proclamation of glory and supremacy suitable for a heavenly king in vv. 15–20. Paul makes the connection that all of this glory is possible and has been made real because of the cross in v. 20: and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

Pastoral Reflection

If your preaching context does not normally include the reading or the singing of the psalmody appointed for the day, do it today. Use Psalm 46, especially vv. 9–11, to issue an Emancipation Proclamation. Tell the people that because Christ is king they are free. In Christ, we are ultimately free from violence and war. Christ as king makes wars to cease and shatters the weapons and implements of violence and war in our world. War, terrorism, abuse, and street violence are destroyed under the lordship of Christ the king. Use v. 10 to proclaim liberation from the need (or ability) to control our own destinies. Be still, and know that I am God! Relax, let go, abandon yourself into the kingdom of Christ. Proclaim a sabbath today.

I preach in the context of an affluent suburban congregation as Associate Pastor for Youth and Family. The young people (and older people) are being taught by their society that their value is measured by how full their calendar is. How many sports do you play, how many bands are you in, how many AP classes are you taking, what did you get on your SAT? These are the questions that determine a person's worth.

Into this world come the words of Col 1:16: "In him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him." Christ the king is bigger than your to-do list. Christ the king is bigger than anything that has power or control over you. Jeremiah proclaims the coming of a just and righteous king who will deal with wisdom and will bring safety and peace. We know that ruler to be Christ. Jeremiah 23:6 says that "this is the name by which he will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.'" Righteousness is the translation of *tzadik,* which also carries the concept of legitimacy. So perhaps Jeremiah is telling us to remember that God (Christ the king for us today) is our only legitimate ruler. Just as the crowds at Jesus' trial cried out "We have no king but Caesar!" we cry today "We have no king but Christ!"

Christ has become our king through his crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. The words of mockery become our claim of faith. This crucified one is our king. Colossians tells us that God has made peace "through the blood of his cross." Neither Colossians nor any of our other readings

nails that down with much specificity. We don't get any good atonement theories from these readings. We get the simple proclamation of faith. I may not understand how it works, but I can proclaim that God has put everything under Christ's feet through the blood of his cross, and this means that I have no legitimate king but Christ.

Thanksgiving Day
November 25, 2004

Deuteronomy 26:1–11
Psalm 100
Philippians 4:4–9
John 6:25–35

First Reading

Those who were with Jesus by the sea are like people in every time and in every place: always wanting more. They had just received their fill from the loaves that Jesus had provided to feed the crowds (v. 26), and yet they asked Jesus for some sign so that they might believe in him. They wanted some bread from heaven like their ancestors had received in the wilderness. I wonder what was wrong with the bread they had just received from Jesus! If you did that, Jesus, then we'd know you were from God and we'd give you glory and praise and thanks.

We set aside one day per year to remember to give thanks, and that one day ends up being dominated by the procuring of enough food to eat more than our fill.

Our Deuteronomy reading provides the biblical background for our talk of stewardship and first-fruits giving. The people of God are called to set aside the choicest of the crop for God even before they do any other harvesting at all. Make sure you look at the conclusion of this legal declaration that did not get included in the lectionary portion: vv. 12–15. The tithe of the produce during the year goes to the Levites (those who serve in the temple), aliens, orphans, and widows, so that they may eat their fill. When we say that we are called to give our first-fruits to God, this passage tells us that we are called to give our first-fruits to those children of God who cannot provide for themselves. That is where God is to be found.

Our Philippians reading comes from the closing exhortation to the people of Philippi. Rejoice always. Do not worry about anything. By prayer and supplication let your requests be made known to God with thanksgiving. We are called to pray and to trust God to provide for our needs. But that is not all. We are called to pray with thanksgiving, even as we are in need and are making supplication to God.

The people who were with Jesus in John's Gospel are making supplication of Jesus: as in v. 34, "Sir, give us this bread always." They are making requests known to God in Jesus: Give us some bread, some bread from heaven so that we'll know that you are from God. What they seem to have forgotten, and we seem to forget, is to make requests known to God in thanksgiving. In thanksgiving for past blessings and in thanksgiving in faith knowing that God will continue to bless and provide for our needs.

Pastoral Reflection

Thanksgiving Day seems a good time to preach liturgically—preach about Eucharist. Each and every gathering of the people of God around the table is a Thanksgiving celebration, a Eucharist. Our eucharistic liturgy provides us with the opportunity to live up to the exhortation that Paul provides in Philippians. We surely make our prayers and supplications known to God as we pray for the church, for the world, and for all those in need. And we do it in the context of thanksgiving, just as Paul says is proper. Our Great Thanksgiving (Eucharistic Prayer)

provides us with the opportunity to call to mind all of God's wonderful deeds and blessings for us and to give thanks for them. We are called upon to lift up our hearts to God in thanksgiving and in praise. And we receive blessing from God's hand once again, in the forms of bread and wine.

In our eucharistic celebration we receive the fulfillment of the request that Jesus' companions made of him: Sir, give us this bread (the bread of God which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world) always. We receive the bread of life, Jesus Christ. We receive it in thanksgiving and in supplication and in confession of sin. And that is as it should be. We approach the table after having given thanks for all that God has done for us and for the world. We approach the table daring to ask for more, just as the people by the sea asked Jesus for more. And God provides. God always provides more. God provides more each time that we gather and approach the table. The call, the duty, and the joy of the people of God is to give thanks for that—every time we gather, not just on the final Thursday of November. SM-K

First Sunday in Advent November 28, 2004

Isaiah 2:1–5
Psalm 122
Romans 13:11–14
Matthew 24:36–44

First Reading

Happy New Year! Once again the church proclaims a new beginning (of a church year) by looking forward to the ultimate new beginning too often seen as "The End": the coming of the Son of Man. A first reading of our texts for today from Matthew and Romans reminds us that, as we anticipate the coming of the Son, we ought to stay awake and turn to light.

Jesus tells his followers, "Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming" (v. 42). The past several weeks have given us many perspectives on how the faithful people of God are to respond to any anticipation of the end-times, of the coming of the Son of Man. As we begin the new year and the Matthean Jesus provides words of counsel to disciples, we hear that we are above all else to "keep awake." We are told that we cannot possibly know or predict the timing: only the Father knows. Not even the angels of heaven, not even the Son, know. How, then, could we possibly know? Jesus tells his disciples that they could not know the time, therefore they need to keep awake because it could come at any time.

The symbolism of awareness and being awake as opposed to being asleep connects with symbolism of day/night and light/darkness in our Romans reading. On the First Sunday of Advent, as the days in North America are growing shorter and darkness is gathering even as the church prepares to welcome the Light into the world, these

contrasts are powerful ones for us indeed. Paul calls on the people of light to live as is proper for the daytime. Paul provides a list of sin, activities that are more appropriate to the dark and nighttime, and calls on the church to give those things up and "make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires."

In doing so, Paul proclaims "the flesh" to be negative, dark, and appropriate to the night, building on and reinforcing his belief, expressed elsewhere, that Christians are to forsake the flesh and focus only on the spiritual. This distinction and devaluation of the flesh is a concept that may be unhelpful in our time and may need some interpretation for our congregations. Hold this Pauline injunction in the context of the God who created us *nephesh*—body and soul together—and called it "very good."

Pastoral Reflection

The First Sunday of Advent seems to me to be a good time to preach about the lectionary, to preach the church year. You might choose to remind your congregation that this Sunday in November is the beginning of the church year. As Christians we live in, but are not of, the world; we, therefore, live according to two different time systems. We Christians begin our year of worship by looking forward to a new beginning, a time when the Son of Man will return.

In the readings from both Matthew and Romans we hear a great deal about staying awake and the call to live in ways that are appropriate to the light. It is possible to issue this call and proclaim this message without degrading the flesh and setting up an unhelpful opposition between things of the flesh and things of the spirit. Or perhaps it would be good or helpful to bring that up, to preach against Paul's "make no provision for the flesh" while maintaining the call to live lives that are appropriate to the light and appropriate to those who keep awake.

Most helpful, it seems to me, is Paul's proclamation that "the night is far gone; the day is near" (v. 12). As the days grow shorter and the darkness grows longer in our world, we are called to place our hope in the truth that God's light is entering the world and growing brighter. Through this season of Advent, the light will continue to grow, just as the number of candles on our Advent wreathes grows, until the Light of the World comes into our world. And so we use the season of Advent to prepare for—and to encourage our congregations to prepare for—marking the entrance in the past into our world of the Light of Lights and Prince of Peace as we continue to await with eager anticipation the Son of Man's entrance finally at the time of God's choosing. SM-K

Responses
are welcome!

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