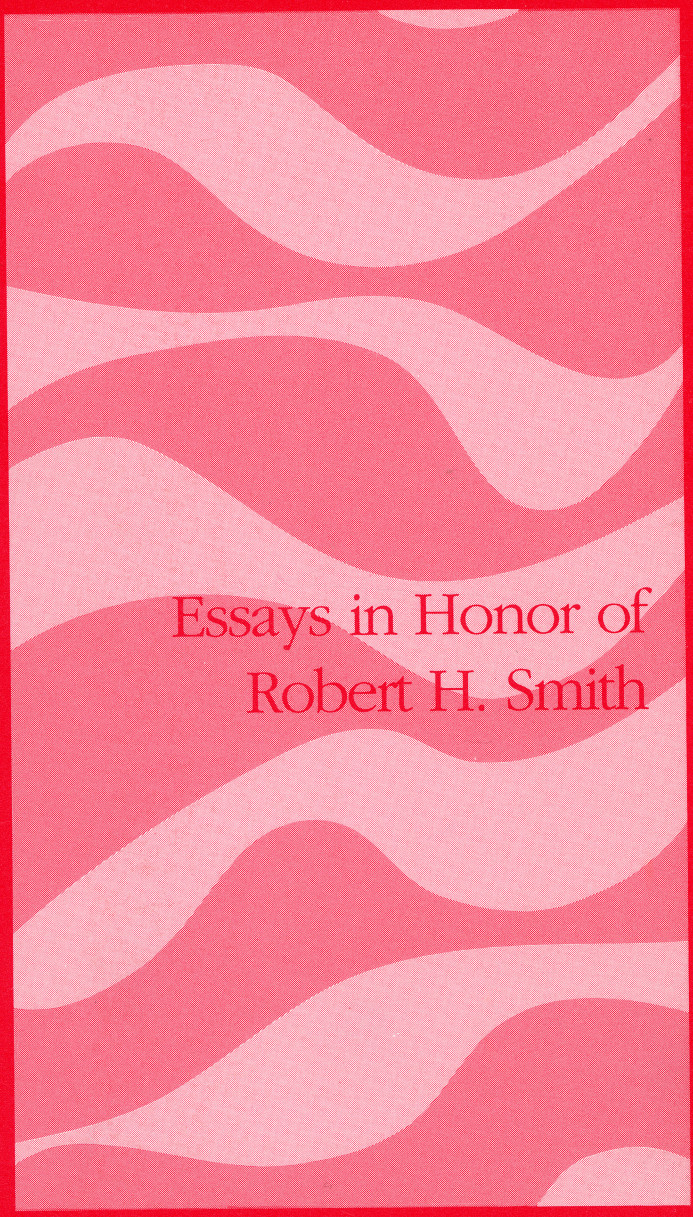
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Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary
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Editor: **Ralph W. Klein**
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago
rklein@lstc.edu
Associate Editor: **Norma Cook Everist**
Wartburg Theological Seminary
Assistant Editor: **Peggy B. Eldredge**
pbe@lstc.edu
Editor of Preaching Helps: **Craig A. Satterlee**
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago
csatterl@lstc.edu
Editors of Book Reviews:
Edgar Krentz
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (773/256-0752)
ekrentz@lstc.edu
Connie Kleingartner
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (773/256-0747)
ckleinga@lstc.edu
Craig L. Nessan
Wartburg Theological Seminary (319/589-0212)
clnessan@aol.com
Circulation office: 773/256-0751
currents@lstc.edu

Editorial Board: **Paul G. Bieber, Mary R. Bischoff, Jan Wiersma Halverson, Connie Kleingartner, Randall R. Lee, Richard L. Ramirez, Susan Rippert, Barbara Rossing, Vicki Watkins, Fritz Wehrenberg, Vítor Westhelle.**

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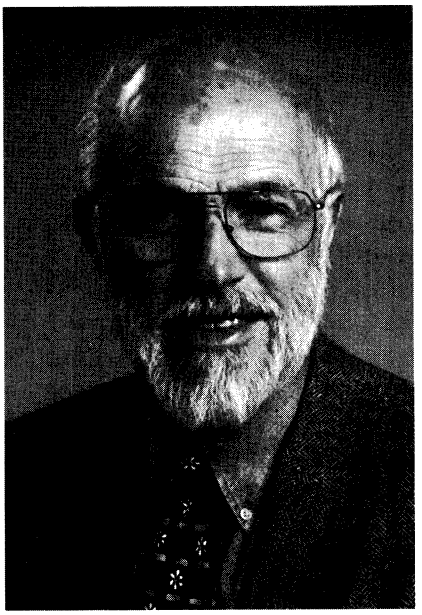
Essays in Honor of Robert H. Smith

A number of nouns come to mind when I think of my long-time dear friend and colleague Bob Smith: grace, style, class, carpenter, preacher, wordsmith, fidelity, insight, art, warmth, humor, exegete, love, leader. Wherever God's call has led him—to parish ministry, seminary teaching, academic leadership, writing, editing, marriage—Bob has served and continues to serve with high distinction. As an exegete Bob has a unique gift of getting to the heart of the matter, in a fresh way, with fresh questions, and with theologically penetrating answers. Both church and academy have profited immeasurably from his presence among us.

So it was no surprise when the people I invited to write for this special issue responded positively and with enthusiasm, and the firstfruits of that harvest are contained in this issue. And they replied not only in quality, but also in great quantity. Hence a second Smith issue of *Currents* will appear in February, 2004, with the names and titles of those essays listed at the conclusion of this editorial.

John H. Elliott offers a commentary on the hymn of praise from the *LBW*'s eucharistic rite, "Worthy is Christ, the Lamb who was slain." This hymn is taken from the book of Revelation, a book that has often bewildered Lutherans. In a fresh, in-depth summary of the meaning of Revelation (with many allusions to our time), Elliott points out that the opening letters to the seven churches are combinations of praise and censure, calls for repentance and non-compromise, and they lead on to the second part of Revelation in 4:1, with its account of what will take place in the future, based on the Seer's heavenly journey. The Seer identifies the ultimate agents in the present struggle and predicts its final outcome. The churches appear to be under pressure to relax their exclusive allegiance to God and conform to the ways of their Gentile neighbors. Rome had a stranglehold on the Mediterranean world at the end of the first century C.E. and expected praise and honor in public from its obsequious clients. In this context Revelation is an urgent call to remain steadfast, to repent of complacency and compromise, and to have confidence and hope. It anticipates the ultimate victory of God and the Lamb over Satan/the primordial Dragon of chaos, on the one hand, and Rome and its allies on

the other. Scattered throughout Revelation are hymns celebrating God and the Lamb's victory, now deftly reworded in *LBW*. Victory in Revelation is celebrated with a feast, now echoed in our eucharistic meal. In Revelation and *LBW* Jesus morphs from the one slain to the one reigning. The conclusion compares the message and context of Revelation with the imperial context in which we live.



Dana Davis Photography, Oakland, CA

Robert H. Smith

Everett R. Kalin, one of Robert Smith's oldest friends, discusses Romans 1:18–32, especially vv. 26–27, a central passage in the current discussion of homosexuality. He asks why Paul wrote these words and what role they play in the context of this chapter and of the book of Romans. The sinners accused in this passage are solely Gentiles, and they are accused of failing to acknowledge the God they knew by observing God's work in creation. The Wisdom of Solomon expresses a similar thought but then goes on to say how differently God treated the Gentiles from the Jews, how God showed kindness and mercy to God's own ancient people. Paul, on the other hand, follows his condemnation of the Gentiles by stating that we Jews are just like those Gentiles as far as sin is concerned. The pessimistic picture of humanity in Romans 1–3 is followed by the utterly glorious news in 3:21 to 11:36 that Jew and Gentile are united under God's righteousness conferred through the atonement effected through Christ. As Christians struggle with how to deal with Rom 1:26–27 they need to remember that a principal reason Paul wrote Romans was to encourage members of various Christian congregations in Rome, divided over issues they saw as vital to faith and life and worship, to welcome one another despite, and even before resolving, these differences.

Linda Maloney reflects on Smith's *Easter Gospels*, published twenty years ago, and particularly on his unique interpretation of the ending to Mark: The women ran straight to witness to the disciples without speaking to anyone *on the way*. This plausible proposal has not been widely accepted, and the author notes a variety of other understandings of Mark

16:8. Dewey, for example, concludes that the women's failure to speak, while inappropriate, may indicate that failure need not be the end of discipleship. Maloney notes important structural clues in Mark that point to the evangelist's intention in his final scene. At both Transfiguration and Resurrection the humans involved are both terrified and struck speechless. Archbishop Williams has observed that a descent into silence is the necessary condition of emergence into effective speech. The women's silence at the end of Mark is the necessary precondition for proclamation. In a sense, the reader is the lost ending of Mark. We have to discover for ourselves what difference is made by this life, this death, this resurrection. Until the ambiguity emerges as mystery we must remain silent.

Mark Allan Powell asserts that "binding" and "loosing" are in Matthew a constitutive aspect of the church's mission on Earth. These terms refer to determining the application of scriptural commandments for contemporary situations, not to the forgiving or retaining of sins. The community has the authority to identify which behaviors constitute sin or to discern the intent of the law with regard to particular circumstances. The article reviews a number of cases where scriptural commandments in Matthew are either bound or loosed. So we face a dilemma: the Scriptures must be properly bound or loosed if God's will is to be discerned, but the Scriptures are often bound when they should be loosed, and loosed when they should be bound, with the result that God's will is not discerned. In Matthew 16:13–20 the church's authority to bind and loose is grounded in its acclamation of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the Living God. In Matthew 18:15–20, the church's ministry of binding and loosing determines who is subject to church discipline. The article considers then whether the scriptural dictums against homosexuality should be bound or loosed, and then under what circumstances.

Herman C. Waetjen looks at the double prepositional phrase in Rom 1:17 that is conventionally translated as "through faith for faith" or something similar. The first phrase is typically used by Paul of the faith of Abraham (cf. also Hab 2:4) and of the superiority of this faith to the Law. According to Gal 3:16, however, Abraham is the original testamentary heir, and Christ, as the single descendant of Abraham, is the sole agent of the distribution of the covenant's benefits. Through the arbitration of Moses, God and Israel reached an agreement to add a codicil (the Law) to the testament that God established in trust with Abraham and his descendant the Christ. The testament/covenant was based on *pistis*, the trust fund

that God established with Abraham. All who trust God, as Abraham and Sarah did, are justified by faith. The codicil of the Law was added to the testament in order to awaken human consciousness to the reality of sin. Trusting God and living "out of faith," like Abraham and Sarah, may result in justification by faith. But being justified does not eliminate the alienation that arises when the mirror of the Law discloses the reality of sin. There must follow a life that is committed to living *eis pistin,* a life dedicated to actualizing the justice of God in and by the trust of Jesus Christ.

In the last lines of *Easter Gospels,* Robert Smith reveals his method of doing exegesis, his faith, his humanity and humility, with style:

This study has proceeded on the assumption that each evangelist was first of all a teacher or preacher rather than a historian, that his literary deposit has an integrity of its own, and that it is still supremely worth while tuning in to the message each composed for his community of believers or for his uncommitted but curious neighbors. Our Easter Gospels are certainly not the only way to proclaim the resurrection, but these documents have through most of their long life rightly enjoyed a privileged status among us. Each gospel is a remarkable application of the tradition about Jesus to a fresh situation and audience. By attending to the Gospels we hear how ancient masters made use of the tradition of the resurrection of Jesus and how they put him to work in the context of their culture and their church. They have yet many things to teach us.

I hope and pray that Robert Smith also has yet many things to teach us.

Ralph W. Klein, Editor

The following articles honoring Robert Smith will appear in our February, 2004, issue:

Roy A. Harrisville, "Encounter with Grünewald."
Ralph W. Klein, "The Last Words of David."
Edgar Krentz, "Missionary Matthew: Matthew 28:16–20 as Summary of the Gospel."
David W. Kuck, "Preaching on Acts for Mission Formation."
Douglas E. Oakman, "The Promise of Lutheran Biblical Studies."
Andrew M. Weyermann,† "The Ten Commandments for Preachers."

"Worthy is Christ": A Modern Hymn and Its Apocalyptic Pedigree

John H. Elliott
Professor Emeritus
University of San Francisco

In 1978, a new *Lutheran Book of Worship* was published, containing a new and in truth surprising innovation to the eucharistic liturgy of North American Lutherans. As an alternative to the Gloria Patri ("Glory be to the Father and to the Son . . ."), a hymn of praise that formed part of the entrance rite with which the liturgy traditionally began, a hymn was offered that was quite startling in its concept and wording: "This is the feast of victory for our God. Alleluia. Worthy is Christ, the Lamb who was slain, whose blood set us free to be people of God. Power, riches, wisdom, and strength, honor and blessing and glory are his. This is the feast of victory for our God. Alleluia. Sing with all the people of God and join in the hymn of all creation: Blessing and honor and glory and might be to God and the Lamb forever. Amen. This is the feast of victory for our God, for the Lamb who was slain has begun his reign. Alleluia" (*LBW*, 81–82).

Alleluias frame the hymn at beginning and close, thus making it particularly appropriate for use in the Easter season when the Alleluias return to the liturgy, accompanying and greeting the announcement that "Christ has risen!"

Not only was this a spanking new hymn rather than an English translation of some previous text of earlier time. It also was fresh in its language and conceptuality, virtually all of which was taken from lines and phrases of the New Testament book of Revelation, alias the Apocalypse of John. That Lutherans should be singing stuff inspired by the book of Revelation is remarkable given the differences between the staid, middle-of-the-road sensibilities of Lutherans (consult Garrison Keillor's "Prairie Home Companion" for details) and the wild and wooly visions and auditions of John the Seer.

So, to honor my irony-loving friend Bob, I invite readers to linger a bit and relish this delicious piece of Lutheran liturgical irony. Not that Bob was ever a liturgy whiz or a "chancel prancer," as they were called in his day. But I suspect that his funny bone must have been tweaked more than once as he sang this new hymn and contemplated its biblical source. For here is a hymn recently incorporated into the regular liturgy of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, but a text based on passages in a biblical book that Lutherans have tended to avoid like the Bubonic Plague or the writings of Karl Marx. Bob, as a great exception to conventional Lutheran exegetical practice, has taught and commented[1] on this politically most "extremist" of NT writings, though himself hardly a political extremist. I myself have

taught a course on "The Apocalypse of John Then and Now" each year since the early 1980s. This was not only to assure that students at the University of San Francisco were introduced to the *entire* New Testament including this writing (in contrast to most Lutheran seminaries where Apocalyptic amnesia seems to reign), but also because I too have found this text endlessly challenging and fascinating. Because we both have been singing "Worthy is Christ" since the advent of the *LBW* in 1978, it seems to me that an appreciative look at this hymn and its biblical origins would be an appropriate way to honor Bob, the churchman and the exegete. In the midst of writing this essay I learned of the untimely death of our honoree's president at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, Timothy Lull, on May 20, 2003. So while writing in tribute to Bob, I join him in remembering Tim and offering thanks to God for this good friend, engaging interpreter of Luther, and faithful servant of the church.

A surprising Lutheran creation

Lutherans in general have never warmed up to the Apocalypse of John. Placed last in the New Testament canon, it also comes in last among Lutheran canonical favorites. Perhaps this should not surprise. Luther himself admitted to not knowing what to make of this perplexing and alien writing. When facing the Apocalypse, Luther included it among his unnumbered NT documents, abandoned his normal historical-critical approach, and resorted to allegorizing the text in a blast against the papacy and the Muslims. Most of his followers tacitly seem to share his quandary. Its bizarre imagery, its uncompromising "us-versus-them" mentality, its supposedly vengeful spirit, its clutter with gore, blood and guts, its wallowing in war, destruction, and death, its cannibalism, for goodness sake!—none of this is *appetitlich* or *salonfähig* for nice, go-with-the program, respectable, middle-class Lutherans. No radicalism for us progeny of the good professor of Wittenberg. No extremism in our tent. We're the successors of Junker Jörg (Martin incognito), client of princes, not followers of Thomas Münzer, rouser of rabbles. We ensconce ourselves safely, as did blessed Martin, between the rigid authoritarian legalist Thomists on one extreme and the frenzied Anabaptist and feather-covered *Enthusiasten* on the other. For the most part we leave the text of Revelation to the "fundies" and millennarians and just hope that our parishioners are not taking too seriously the book itself or the bestsellers based on it. So it is nothing short of amazing that a hymn inspired by this bizarre writing should have made its way into a safe and comfortable hymnal, the *Lutheran Book of Worship*. Even more amazing is that this hymn is actually used and not ignored and even adopted in the hymnals and liturgies of other ecclesial communions.

Composed fresh for Lutheran worship by the Lutheran author John W. Arthur (1922–1980), member of the Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship and of its Liturgical Text Committee (1967–78), the hymn is a pastiche or mosaic of lines, phrases, or words drawn from various passages of the Apocalypse of John. In the entrance rite of all three settings of the Eucharist as set forth in the *Lutheran Book of Worship,* this text is provided as an alternative hymn of praise to the venerable Gloria in Excelsis,

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[1] Robert H. Smith, *Apocalypse: A Commentary on Revelation in Words and Images*. Illustrations by Albrecht Dürer. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2000.

which traditionally has opened the liturgy. The hymn, notes Philip H. Pfatteicher in his splendid *Commentary on the Lutheran Book of Worship,* was published initially by Pr. Arthur in *Contemporary Worship 2: The Holy Communion* (1970) and drew on "much the same material as the canticle *Dignus est Agnus* (Rev 5:12, 13; 15:3-4; 19:5,6), which was included in the *Common Service Book* (1919) and *The Lutheran Hymnal* (1941)."[2]

Pfatteicher's comment on the hymn itself (pp. 124–25) traces its wording to several passages of Revelation and notes how the antiphon relates the hymn to the Eucharistic banquet of which it is a part. The references to the Revelation of John are in fact even more extensive than Pfatteicher's brief observations indicate and echo several important motifs or themes of the Revelation that merit closer attention. Before examining this language of the hymn term for term, it will be useful to recall the gist of the writing inspiring this hymn, namely the Revelation of John, its literary structure and content, its historical situation, its rhetorical strategy, and its evangelical message.

The Revelation of John in brief

The Apocalypse/Revelation of John is one of several similar literary compositions that were produced in Israelite and Christian circles two centuries prior to the change of the era and two centuries thereafter. In the 300s B.C.E. Israel's political situation began to undergo drastic "degradation" (to use modern Pentagon lingo) when Philip and Alexander of Macedon began their military conquest of Greece, the Mediterranean, and much of the territory eastward. This military expansion was accompanied by a forceful imposition of Greek language and culture upon all of the subjected peoples, including the House of Israel. Conditions worsened to the point where military successors to Alexander began to raid the Jerusalem Temple and its treasury to support their military campaigns, to strip Israel of its autonomy, and to forbid circumcision and the practice of its worship.[3]

In response to this economic, social, and cultural oppression on the part of this Greek/Macedonian "military-political complex," while many Israelites (primarily the landed elites) collaborated with the Hellenization juggernaut, others (led by the Maccabees) protested and resisted. The struggle between occupying outsiders and subjected insiders continued, however, even when the Romans unseated the Greeks as top dogs of the Mediterranean world in the first century B.C.E. Military occupation and oppression brought about the collapse of previous institutions, confusion, and uncertainty, along with compromise and cooptation on the part of the subjected peoples.

To fuel the resistance, a new genre of writing emerged that offered clarification of the depressing situation and an unvarnished truth that revealed the lies, disinformation, and evil machinations of the oppressors. Rooted in the old prophetic tradition, its claim to absolute truth and to being a thoroughly accurate assessment of Israel's past, present, and future was based on its coming directly from God. Those recording and passing on this information had, they claimed, received it directly from God as "revelation" (*apokalypsis* in Greek),

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[2] Philip H. Pfatteicher, *Commentary on the Lutheran Book of Worship: Lutheran Liturgy in Its Ecumenical Context* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1990), 124.

[3] These events were recorded in 1–2 Maccabees and encrypted symbolically in the book of Daniel.

in contrast to conventional sources of information. Privileged with ascents into heaven and experiences of visions, auditions, and dreams, these communicators (generally remaining anonymous) transmitted in writing what they heard directly from God's mouth and witnessed in their sojourn in the heavenlies. This included what was gleaned from this other, yet equally informative, part of God's world, the sky, with its stars, planets, and constellations—all believed by the ancients to be living entities rich in data for those who could read the signs.[4]

In situations where conflict blurred vision and froze hearts, where conventional sources of enlightenment had failed, where confusion and uncertainty were rampant, where corruption was pervasive and deception widespread, only revelation from God could pierce the darkness, provide the truth, and evoke trust. This information from God to privileged humans was mediated through dreams, visions, and auditions while the seer was in a trance (or as we say today, an altered state of consciousness),[5] and when he/she had ascended into the heavens and learned there in the celestial sphere of the universe all the things that the sun, moon, planets, stars and constellations revealed about the terrestrial sphere below and the state of humanity, its past, present, and future.

Since this was resistance literature produced in times of war and conflict, authors took the protective measure of encrypting their message in a language and complex of images and symbols familiar only to fellow "insiders." For outsiders and oppressors who lacked "ears to hear," everything remained a mystery.

The Revelation of John was one of these many "apocalypses," or records of revelation, that circulated in Israelite enclaves and then later among followers of Jesus the Messiah in the first two centuries C.E. Written in the last decade of the first century C.E. and addressed to suffering followers of Jesus in the Roman province of Asia, it too was a response to harassment and conflict. This situation was causing confusion, fear, suffering, and death among the Jesus followers and also prompting cooperation and compromise with the oppressors—"going along in order to get along," as a Lutheran U.S. attorney general once put it.

The twofold structure of Revelation is announced in one of the concluding verses of the introduction (1:1–20). John the Seer is commanded, "Now write what you see, "What is and what is to take place hereafter" (1:19; cf. 22:6). This points to a basic two-part structure of the writing (2:1–22:5) that is framed by an Opening (1:1–19) and a Close (22:6-20). The first part (2:1–3:22) consists of a series of similarly constructed letters to seven churches, describing current conditions and challenges facing the Jesus Movement in Asia. These letters were composed by John the visionary on the basis of information revealed to him in an altered state of consciousness ("in the Spirit," 1:10) on the island of Patmos one Lord's day (1:9–10). They contain an account of "what is" (1:19a) in the here and now of the Seer and his addressees from his

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[4] On this genre of writing and its appeal to sources of celestial information see the highly informative study of Bruce J. Malina, *On the Genre and Message of Revelation: Star Visions and Sky Journeys* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995). See also his *Star Visions and Sky Journeys: A Reader's Guide to the Book of Revelation* (Hendrickson, 1995).

[5] As explained by John J. Pilch, "Visions and Revelation and Alternate Consciousness: A Perspective from Cultural Anthropology," *Listening* 28 (1993): 231–44.

present terrestrial location. Addressed to seven churches of seven cities of Asia, the letters are combinations of praise and censure, calls for repentance and noncompromise, reminders of the Lord's imminent coming, warnings to "listen up" with ears primed for hearing and heeding, and assurances of victory to those who remain faithful to God and the Lamb in the face of present suffering.

At 4:1 the scene shifts from earth to heaven and opens the writing's second half (4:1–22:5). A voice from heaven declares, "Come up here and I will show you what must take place hereafter" (4:1), words repeating those of 1:19b. Having written about "what is" in 2:1–3:22, the Seer now will witness from a celestial, divine perspective the consequences of the present events that are soon to take place. Once again "in the Spirit" (4:2; cf. 1:10), our Seer, the sky-traveler and astral prophet,[6] now ascends to the sky and through a series of visions and auditions is granted a comprehensive perspective on the present earthly scene unavailable to ordinary terrestrials. His location high above the earth provides him a far more encompassing perspective so that he can now see the same present reality described in the seven letters in the light of both the past and the immediate future. At the heavenly "throne of God"[7] his vantage point is that of the Creator and Controller of time and space, the "Alpha and Omega," "the First and the Last." The current situation is in view once again, but set within an encompassing historical and cosmic framework embracing both earth and heaven and extending from primordial past to imminent future. Within this all-encompassing framework, the hidden meaning and imminent consequences of the present are made known to John the Seer. Both halves of Revelation focus on the same reality and are inseparably related. Both concern the conditions and challenges to followers of Jesus the Messiah in the seven churches of Asia. Identical language, motifs, themes, and accents pervade and unite both halves. The second far longer part presents information as the Creator makes it known from the observation of sun and moon, planets and stars, the constellations, and the actions of the Zodiacal "four living creatures and the rest of the celestial entourage.[8] This description of "what is to take place hereafter" is not a prognostication of events in any distant future but a declaration of what is right around the corner, the certain consequences of present conduct. The two parts of the writing reflect on the same events but from different points of view. The letters describe the scene from a here-and-now terrestrial perspective—events taking place in actual cities of the Roman province of Asia, the province most fully under Roman control. The seer's ascent into heaven provides him with a heavenly perspective on reality, "direct," as it were, "from God's throne room and command center" (chaps. 4–5). Here, "embedded" with the constellations, planets, and stars, he gets "frontline information" of a truly cosmic scope—information about the ultimate agents in the present struggle, the meaning of the struggle in which they are engaged,

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[6] These are more appropriate cultural-contextual designations than the modern term "apocalypticist," as Malina points out.

[7] Malina sees this throne linked to the constellation known to the ancients as *Ara* = "throne." In his study *Genre and Message of Revelation,* pp. 47–65 and passim, he provides the astronomical details on this and the several other constellations mentioned in Revelation as sources of special revelation.

[8] As explained by Malina in *Genre and Message of Revelation* and *Star Visions and Sky Journeys*, though with a different interpretation than that presented here.

the ultimate agents involved, and the final outcome of this struggle. From this heavenly vantage point and in the Spirit he sees through the deceptions and confusions that distort the present scene, and he learns the actual truth about what is and what is soon to take place.

The situation and the dilemma of the Asian churches

The seven letters portray a situation rife with conflict, confusion, compromise, affliction, "tribulation" (2:9, 10, 22; see also 1:9 and 7:14), and suffering (2:10) to the point of the shedding of innocent blood (2:13; cf. also 6:9–11; 7:13–14; 11:7; 12:10–11; 16:6; 17:6; 18:24; 19:2). Lying, deception, slander, and disinformation campaigns are the order of the day (2:2, 9; 3:9).[9] Idolatry and immorality (= compromises with the powers that be) are occurring in some of the churches (2:14–15, 20–22) along with complacency (3:2, 15–16) and empty, delusional boasting (3:17). Other churches, or at least some of the members, have resisted assimilation and remained faithful to God and Christ (2:6, 13, 24; 3:4, 8, 10). The letters abound with references to "synagogues of Satan" (2:9; 3:9), the "throne of Satan" (2:13), the "deep things of Satan" (2:24); false apostles (2:2), false prophets (2:20); masquerading (2:2; 3:2, 9); mysterious names (2:17; 3:12), stars (2:1, 28); sword (2:12; cf. 1:16); eating together (3:20); God's throne (3:21); an "hour of trial coming upon the whole world" (3:10); and conquering and reigning (2:7, 11, 17, 26–28; 3:5, 12, 21). The churches appear to be under pressure to relax their exclusive allegiance to God and conform to the ways of their Gentile neighbors, which John labels "adultery" (= climbing into bed with the highest bidder). This includes joining in public cultic activities (sharing in temple sacrifices and meals) and doing obeisance to the powers-that-be, which John labels "idolatry." John does not identify this enemy by its actual name but links it with Satan and the Devil. In the second half of Revelation, however, it becomes clear for "anyone who has ears to hear" (2:7; 13:9) that this enemy is Rome and its local Asian allies. So, in anticipation of a look at these latter chapters of Revelation, a few remarks on Rome's imperial control of the Mediterranean world are in order.

By the time of John's writing (end of the first century C.E.), Rome was in sole control of the Mediterranean world. Like dominant powers of every age, it was forcing its allies in all of its twenty-five provinces to do its bidding "or else." Support and profitable trade agreements were available to "cooperative" provinces. Preemptive strikes and annihilation, on the other hand, were in store for any who refused to acknowledge the ultimate power of Rome and its legions. Confusion and deception were manufactured by Rome to cloak its takeover of power in the Mediterranean region, its bloody suppression of formerly independent states, and its totalitarian control of production, commerce, and trade around what it called "mare nostrum," "*our* sea." In a series of military coups, commanders-in-chief of the armed forces (*imperatores*) had recently taken over the government of Rome and transformed the state from a republic into an empire (from *imperium*, "military rule"). Masking this power grab and bloodbath, these emperors claimed to be establishers of a "pax romana" (in reality one of the bloodiest periods in human history). In a brilliant propaganda

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[9] On this topic see John J. Pilch, "Lying and Deceit in the Letters to the Seven Churches: Perspectives from Cultural Anthropology," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 22 (1992): 126–35.



campaign, these blood-drenched military commanders also claimed to be benevolent "fathers" (*pateres*) of a now subjugated and subservient pan-Mediterranean "fatherland" (*patriae*). This military coup replacing a Roman republican form of government began with Octavian (a.k.a. Augustus = "revered one") in 31 B.C.E. and continued uninterrupted until the collapse of Roman power in the 400s C.E. Of course, many emperors claimed to be conservatives wanting to return to a republican form of government. But an unending chain of "crises," they regretted, required retention of the "national state of emergency" indefinitely (which, of course, was never lifted). This in turn required retention and expansion of the legions—as protection, of course, against enemies and "terrorists" internal and external. With the largest standing army in history—25 or more legions of 250,000 men under arms at all times—Rome dominated the Mediterranean region and beyond, from Spain to Parthia and from Scotland to Africa, for nearly half a millennium.

The province of Asia, a jewel in Rome's provincial crown, was particularly crucial to Rome's dominance of the entire territory of Asia Minor (roughly modern-day Turkey) and points to the east. Asia Minor was rich in natural resources, and Asia's cities and markets and centers of commerce and trade were vital to Rome's economic as well as political control of its eastern territories. Rome was making it difficult for the provincials not to cooperate. Loss of Rome's favor, let alone getting on Rome's bad side for failure to go along with the program, would have disastrous consequences. So the easiest course for maintaining economic viability and political survival was to praise, honor, and court Rome's favor in public, erect those shrines to Roma and its current imperator, and to do Rome's bidding as obsequious clients. The Seer alludes to Rome's control of Asia throughout his writing; in his letters he hints at how the provincials, including many of the followers of Jesus, were staking out the middle road of compromise and selling out to Rome (= "idolatry, adultery, immorality").

The Jesus movement, as John portrays it, is still a part of the House of Israel. The followers are nowhere called "Christians." Its assemblies are "synagogues" (2:9; 3:9), its worship is Israelite in language and tone, its faith is in the God of Israel as articulated in Israel's sacred scriptures; its spokespersons are prophets (10:7; 11:10, 18; 16:6; 18:24; 22:6. 9). Its sense of itself, its history and hope, is still inspired and shaped by Israelite tradition. Without once explicitly citing Israel's scriptures, it contains more allusions thereto than any other New Testament writing. Its "holy city" is still Jerusalem, though it now lies in ruin and rubble with blood in the streets still witness to its devastation by Rome (11:1–10). It is a part of Israel, however, that is no longer concerned with the Temple in the holy city, because it is convinced that Jesus of Nazareth is God's crucified Messiah and

that it is he who mediates God's power and presence (21:22–22:5). In sociological terms, the movement has now become a sect of Israel: Israelite in its roots, thought, theology, and practice yet divergent from other Israelite groups in terms of its adherence to a crucified Galilean as Messiah of YHWH and its devotion to him, the Lion of Judah, the Passover lamb and cosmic Lamb, as messianic agent of God's redemption.[10]

In Asia, the sect, along with the native populations of the seven cities, was under increased pressure from the boot of Rome. The punishment for resisting Rome had been made graphically clear by Rome's shock-and-awe wasting of Judaea, its holy city and its Temple in the war of 66–73 C.E. Acknowledgment of Rome's power and the claim of its emperors to be *dominus et deus* ("lord and god"), would compromise the sect's exclusive devotion to God and the Messiah and endanger the very cohesion and viability of the movement. While some members of the messianic sect did whatever it took to survive and succeed in these uncertain times, others had begun to resist and had paid with imprisonment (2:10) and their very lives (2:13; 6:9–11 etc.), like the followers slaughtered by Nero in Rome back in 64 C.E. as purported arsonists responsible for the fire that destroyed four fifths of the city.

John's cryptic assessment and message

While each of the seven letters (2:1–3:22) is geared for a specific audience and locality, all share a common structure, an identical analysis of the economic-social-political situation, and a similar message. This message is unfolded in full in 4:1–22:5. It is an ambiguous message in ambiguous form for an ambiguous time, full of parody and paradox, with a lamb vanquishing a dragon and victims becoming victors. It is a message not for predicting the time but for redeeming the time. Its intent is a clarification of muted grey areas into blacks and whites, evil and good, the polluted and the pure, Satan vs. God and the Lamb, a present unjust age and an age of justice soon to come. It is a warning concerning doom, destruction, and deliverance. It is an urgent call to remain steadfast despite suffering, to repent of complacency and compromise, to move from lukewarmness and the middle of the road to heated commitment, and from disillusionment and despair to confidence and hope.

In these letters John recounts elements of this struggle: the vacillation between resistance and compromise, vigilance and complacency; the innocent suffering and the bloody tribulation. In chaps. 13–20, the Seer provides more detail on this scene and assesses it in the harshest of terms. In cryptic terminology and imagery designed to be understood only by insider believers with ears attuned for hearing,[11] and in typical prophetic fashion, John denounces Rome and its slaughter of those resisting its totalitarian pretensions. The Seer depicts Rome as a watery "beast from the sea" (13:1–10),[12] who, with authority given it by the dragon (13:4), alias Satan/the Devil (12:9; 20:2; cf. 16:13), demands of its sub-

[10] The features that qualify the Jesus movement as a sect, characterize its precarious social situation, and typify its sectarian perspective on and response to the world are set forth in John H. Elliott, "The Jewish Messianic Movement: From faction to sect," in *Modelling Early Christianity: Social-scientific Studies of the New Testament in its Context*, ed. Philip F. Esler (London: Routledge, 1995), 75–95.

[11] "Let the one who has ears to hear, hear!" (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; 13:9).

[12] From the perspective of Asia, Rome came from across the sea and claims to own the sea as *mare nostrum* ("our sea").

jects exclusive allegiance and "worship"[13] and who would control all commerce and trade by requiring its clients to bear its "mark" or "name" or "number" (666) (13:16–18; 14:9, 11; 15:2; 16:2; 19:20).

In collusion with Rome and serving as its "prophet" of propaganda (16:3; 19:20) is the aristocracy of Asia, the "beast from the land" (13:11). It looks like a lowly lamb but speaks like a dragon (13:11), so it too, like the beast from the sea, is, aligned with the dragon =Satan=Devil. It exercises the authority of beast #1 (13:12), urges its worship (13:12, 15), and causes those who refuse to be slain (13:15). As Rome's clients and beneficiaries of its patronage, these local rulers (*decuriones*) encourage and force their subjects to cooperate with Rome, acknowledge Rome's supremacy (= "worship"), and bear Rome's name or mark, the government seal of approval. While beast #1/Rome was intimidating Asia with its legionary weapons of mass destruction, local Asia puppets were "working great signs," "deceiving" the locals into making and worshiping an "image" of the beast/Rome (13:13–18), and deluding the populace with their weapons of mass distortion. As Rome's spin doctors and flacks, these local rulers, says John, have crawled into bed with a "whore," a "harlot," as John calls the beast from the sea (17:1–19:8). Their international trade agreements (compare the infamous NAFTA agreements), he insists, constitute adultery and idolatry (18:3, 9; cf. 2:14, 20–22) with a "great harlot" (17:1), who is "great Babylon," the "great city" (16:19) as evil as the Babylon that destroyed the people of Judah five hundred years earlier. This present Babylon sits enthroned on seven hills, i.e., Rome (17:1–18:24), and has been the residence of a string of seven heads/emperors (17:7–14) whose reign is limited. This location on seven hills, along with John's ascribing to Babylon features identical with those of the beast from the sea,[14] reveal to all insiders who have ears to hear the identity of Babylon and the beast from the sea as Rome. By ascribing to Rome (alias the beast from the sea) the same features as those of the dragon and by indicating that the beast acts with the authority of the dragon, John demonizes Rome and its Asian clients as agents of Satan/Devil/dragon and enemies of God and the Lamb.[15] Like the dragon of the old creation story dominating the waters of chaos,[16] Satan presently rules a chaotic scene, but its days are numbered by Almighty God and the angelic "sky servants." These forces of good and evil, John learns, are at war with one another in arenas both celestial and terrestrial.[17] The war in heaven between the dragon and Michael will overflow in its violent repercussions onto earth, which also will be wracked with war, violence, pestilence, famine, destruction, and death (as portrayed in 6:1–11:19 and 16:2–19:21). Ultimately, God, Michael, and the Lamb, the "holy trinity," will obliterate the forces of evil, the "unholy trinity" (dragon, beast from the sea, and beast from the

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[13] Better understood as "submissive obedience" (13:4, 8, 12, 15; 14:9, 11; 16:2; 19:20).

[14] For example, the scarlet attire; the seven heads and ten horns; the association with Satan, the blasphemy; the war on the holy ones.

[15] The place denounced by John as "Satan's throne" (the city of Pergamum, a seat of Roman power in Asia) and the groups decried as "synagogues of Satan" or engaged in "the deep things of Satan" (2:24) were, by John's account, especially dangerous locations of Satan's presence and power.

[16] See Ps 74:14; Isa 27:1; 2 Esd 6:52; 2 Bar 29:3–8; cf. also Job 41:1; Ps 104:26.

[17] See 6:1–17; 9:1–21; 11:2, 16–18; 12:7–17; 13:7, 15; 16:1–21; 17:14; 19:11–21; 20:7–10.

land), and will gain the victory.[18] Babylon/Rome, that scene of sorcery, deception, and bloodshed, will be reduced to a wasteland and den of demons (18:2–3; cf. 9:20–21).[19]

Like the dragon of primordial time, Satan and allies will ultimately be destroyed in a new creative act of the Creator. After the victory and its celebration (19:1–20:15), the Almighty and the cosmic Lamb will bring about a new heaven, a new earth, and a new holy city of Jerusalem where the primordial peace and bliss of Eden will prevail, God will be present, and life will be available in abundance (21:1–22:5). Those followers of Jesus who remain faithful despite conflict, suffering, and death will share in the victory; they will be liberated from the power of the axis of evil; and they will reign with Christ (2:7, 11, 17, 26, 28; 3:5, 12, 21.

In the meantime, followers of Jesus Christ, the slain Lamb, insists John (2:1–3:22), must remain faithfully committed to God and Christ alone. Their situation at the moment is indeed precarious. His sober message to the churches is one balancing commendation (2:2–3, 6, 9, 13, 19; 3:2, 8–9, 15) with censure (2:4, 9, 14–15, 20; 3:1–2, 19; 3:2, 9, 15–17), insisting on repentance (2:5a, 16, 21–22; 3:3, 19) in view of the coming of God, Jesus and judgment (1:4, 7–8; 2:5, 16; 3:3, 10–11, 13; 4:8; 5:7; 16:15; 22:7, 12, 17, 20), calling for ears attentive to what the Spirit of God is saying (2:7a, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; cf. 13:9), and promising victory and salvation to all who remain faithful to God and the Christ.[20] The churches must repent of or refuse any compromising or cooperating with the enemy. They must see through and expose the lying and deception produced by the imperial and Satanic ministries of disinformation. They must testify boldly to the truth made known by God through Christ to the elect and the holy. And they must remain steadfast in allegiance to God and the Lamb so that they may share with Christ in God's victory over evil, both terrestrial and celestial.

From the Revelation to "Worthy Is Christ"

Many hymns punctuate the narrative[21] like bursts of song and "Amens" in rousing African-American Baptist hours of worship. As a contrast to the worship of the beast and its totalitarian claims (chaps. 13–19), they express the exclusive worship of Israel's God as sole Almighty Creator and Lord of the universe. They laud God's power and honor and that of the One at his right hand, Jesus Christ, the Lamb who was slain. They anticipate God's combat with Satan and the ultimate victory of God and the Lamb over Satan/the Devil/the primordial dragon of chaos and its human agents (Rome and its Asia allies). And they celebrate the paradoxical manner by which God exerts power, establishes his rule, and liberates those enslaved by the axis of evil: liberation and ransom through the shedding of blood of an innocent lamb, the seemingly harmless lamb overcoming the seemingly deadly dragon, the victim becoming the victor (both the Lamb and his

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[18] See 11:15–18; 12:7–17; 14:1–16:21; 17:14; 18:1–24; 19:1–20:15.

[19] The denunciation of Rome as a site of sorcery and the rhetorical aim of this accusation is discussed in John H. Elliott, "Sorcery and Magic in the Revelation of John," *Listening: Journal of Religion and Culture* 28/3 (1993): 261–76. This issue contains several essays illuminating the situation and strategy of Revelation.

[20] See 2:7b, 11, 17, 26–28; 3:5, 12, 21; 7:10–17; 11:15–18; 14:1–7, 13; 19:1–20:15; 21:1–22:5.

[21] See 1:5–6; 4:11; 5:9–10; 7:10–12; 7:15–17; 11:17–18; 15:3–4;19:1–4, 6–8.

followers), followers washing their clothes pure by drenching them in blood (the blood of the Lamb), going from slain to reign, etc. They thus serve in the Revelation as special expressions of the writing's good news and condensations of its evangelical message. For the centuries to follow, these hymnic expressions of worship and bursts of acclamation and honor provide appropriate models for the church's worship and praise.

The *LBW*'s hymn "Worthy is Christ" resembles two hymns of Revelation in particular and echoes many of the motifs and themes of the writing in general. Chapters 4–5 of Revelation contain two parallel hymns announcing the worthiness of celestial personages. The celestial scene is the heavenly throne of God, the setting of the vision (4:2–5:14) that opens the second half of Revelation. Seated on this throne (4:2) is "the Lord God Almighty" (4:8). Around this throne are gathered four living creatures and the twenty-four elders.[22]

The first hymn, rendered by the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders prostrated before the throne in obeisance (4:2–10), declares the worthiness of God as Creator of the universe (4:11): "Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power; for you did create all things and by your will they existed and were created."[23]

This declaration that God is "worthy" (*axios*) to receive glory and honor and power for bringing the universe into being is followed by a second hymn rendered by the same heavenly chorus. The second hymn is addressed to the Lamb standing beside the throne on which God is seated. In the hand of the One seated upon the throne, as John saw it, was a scroll sealed with seven seals (5:1). In the entire universe there was no one worthy to open this scroll save one: "the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David" (5:5), alias "the Lamb" (5:6), who took the scroll (5:7) and subsequently opened it (6:1–8:1). Doing obeisance to this Lamb (5:8), the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders sing a hymn declaring the worthiness of the Lamb: "Worthy (*axios*) are you to take the scroll and to open its seals; for you were slain and by your blood you ransomed people for God: from every tribe and tongue and people and state, and have made them a kingdom and priests to our God and they shall reign on earth" (5:9–10).

Myriad angels then join in the acclamation of the Lamb singing "Worthy (*axion*) is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" (5:12)

Finally, all of the creatures of the cosmos then join in honoring both God and the Lamb with the doxology, "To him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever" (5:13).[24]

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[22] In ancient Mediterranean astronomical/astrological celestial lore, as already noted, the sun, moon, stars, planets, and constellations were considered living entities whose locations and actions influenced human affairs as much as did events on earth. An informative description of the constellations and stars with which the Throne (the constellation *Ara*, Greek for "throne"), the four living creatures (from among the twelve living creatures" = the twelve constellations of the *zodiac*,Greek for "living creatures," through which the sun passed in its annual course), the twenty-four elders (= decans), and the Lamb (= *Aries*, the "ram," the creature of the Zodiac ushering in the new year/age, with its head turned backward toward the preceding constellation Taurus) is provided by Malina (1995: 66–75).

[23] Other hymns to God alone appear at 4:8; 7:12; 11:17–18; 15:3; 19:1–4, 5, 6–8.

[24] This coupling of God and the Lamb recurs throughout Revelation: see "our Lord and his Christ" (11:15; 12:10); "God and

Both God and God's agent of redemption, Christ the Lamb, are declared worthy of honor, but for different reasons. *Almighty God* is worthy to receive glory and honor and power because of his *creative* activity (4:11cd). This creating and recreating power of God is stressed elsewhere in Revelation[25] for at least three conceivable reasons. First, it affirms God as the Inaugurator of time and space and thus as Author of history and Controller of the cosmos. All that occurs in earth and heaven or in past, present, and future is under the Creator's rule. Second, it establishes God's authority to assess and judge humankind, his creatures. Third, it underlines the superiority of the God of Israel and his agents over Satan/the Devil and allies, including Rome, oppressor of God's people. In any combat of these forces, the Lord God Almighty, the Alpha and Omega, will prevail.

The hymn of 5:9–10 is addressed to the Lamb and answers the query posed in 5:2, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?" Of all creatures terrestrial and celestial, only the Lamb was worthy, and this was because of what the Lamb had accomplished: it had been slain and through its blood had ransomed for God persons from all peoples and had made them "a kingdom and priests to our God." This statement echoes words acclaiming Jesus Christ at the outset of the writing: "Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and ruler of the kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father,[26] to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen" (1:5–6).

The Lamb's opening of each of the seals is recounted in 6:1–8:5 and describes the events this unsealing sets into motion. The following section, 8:6–11:19, narrates a parallel series of events ushered in with the blasts of the seven trumpets, a reprise of which occurs in the pouring of the seven bowls of God's wrath (16:1–21).

The initial line of the hymn "Worthy is *Christ*, the *Lamb* who was slain" makes explicit an identification left implicit in Revelation: the Lamb is Jesus Christ, crucified and resurrected. "The Lamb" is the chief alias for Jesus Christ in Revelation just as "the dragon" is the chief image of Satan/Devil, and the "beast from the sea" a.k.a. "the whore/harlot" a.k.a. "Babylon" is the chief image for Rome. The image of the lamb is prominent in two independent cultural traditions, Israelite and Greco-Roman. Traces of both are evident in the manner in which the Lamb is portrayed by John.

Christ" (20:6); "To him/God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb" (5:13; 6:16; 7:10; 22:1); "commandments of God and faith of Jesus" (14:12); "God and the Lamb (14:4); "the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb" (21:22; cf. 21:23).

[25] See 14:7; 21:1–22:5 and the identification of God as *pantokrator* (1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7; 14; 19:6; 15; 21:22).

[26] The formulations (see also 20:6) are John's adaptation of the Exodus covenant formula of Exod 19:6. On this Exodus formula and the history of its use see John H. Elliott, *The Elect and The Holy: An Exegetical Examination of 1 Peter 2:4–10 and the Phrase Basileion Hierateuma* (Supplements to Novum Testamentum Vol. XII. Graduate Study VII of the Concordia Seminary School for Graduate Studies [Leiden: Brill, 1966]), 50–128; on Revelation, 107–20. This study then investigates its use in 1 Pet 2:4–10 and the irrelevance of this passage to Luther's doctrine of the "priesthood of all believers." The work of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Priester für Gott; Studien zum Herrschafts- und Priestermotiv in der Apokalypse* (Neutestamentliche Abhandlungen, n.f. 7 [Münster: Aschendorff, 1972]), focuses on its use in Revelation.

The most important lamb in Israelite tradition was the lamb by whose blood the Hebrews were spared from the death meted out to the oppressive Egyptians (Exod 12; Deut 16:1–8; Num 9:1–14). In the annual Passover festival by which Israel commemorated the great salvation event of its history, its liberation from slavery in Egypt, the unblemished lamb and its blood played a central role. Followers of the resurrected Christ depicted him as an analogous Passover lamb—"Christ our paschal lamb has been sacrificed," declared Paul (1 Cor 5:7) —and regarded his shed blood and death as another occasion of the redemption and liberation of God's people. This motif recurs throughout Revelation[27] and is deftly captured in the language of the *LBW* hymn: "Christ, the Lamb who was slain, whose blood set us free to be people of God."

Greco-Roman astronomical/astrological tradition also gave prominence to a lamb or ram; namely, to the constellation *Aries* (lamb/ram), which, explains Malina, "was always pictured in the most ancient representations of the sky with head turned so as to be facing directly over its back to Taurus" [the constellation of the Zodiac preceding that of Aries].[28] John, in turn, "perceives Aries as having a broken neck twisted backward, yet standing, and thus as "slaughtered" and yet now living.[29] Aries' role in the scheme of things was to usher in the new year or era. It was when the sun passed through the "house" or constellation of Aries that the new year began. Aries, the cosmic lamb/ram, thus was seen to control time and space and human fortune. When associated with this cosmic Lamb, the crucified and resurrected Christ was seen as part of the royal retinue surrounding God's throne, with preeminent power over time and space and human lives.[30]

The Seer places greater emphasis on this identity of Christ as Lamb than any other NT writing. This double association of Christ as Lamb with both Israelite and Greco-Roman tradition is typical of John's combination of diverse traditions and of his interweaving of scriptural with astronomical/astrological lore throughout the narrative. It enables John to grab the attention of hearers/readers with differing cultural roots while at the same time remaining cryptically ambiguous. In the case of Christ as Lamb, it allows John to interpret Jesus' death as a means of redemption and liberation from the forces of evil while also acclaiming the resurrected Christ as cosmic ruler and inaugurator of a new age.

It is also thus appropriate that the Lamb, having ransomed people for God from everywhere (5:9) and having made them "a kingdom and priests to our God who shall reign on earth" (5:10), should be celebrated as "worthy" of honor and praise, as the hymns of 5:12 and 5:13 declare. It is the hymn of the angels (5:12) that provides the words of the *LBW* hymn: "power, riches, wisdom and strength, honor and blessing and glory are his."[31] His is the power and strength that outstrips that of Satan and his Roman and Asian allies; it is "the power received from his Father" (2:27). His is the wealth beyond that for which Babylon, kings of the earth, merchants, and seafarers

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[27] For the many references to the blood and death of Jesus Christ/the Lamb see 1:5, 7, 18; 2:8; 5:6, 9, 12; 7:14; 11:8; 12:11; 13:8; 19:13.

[28] Malina, *Genre and Message of Revelation*, 53

[29] Malina, *Genre and Message of Revelation*, 53.

[30] The artistic depiction of Christ as lamb with head twisted backward provides graphic evidence of this association of Christ with Aries, the cosmic lamb/ram.

[31] Another hymn of the angels (7:12) is similar in content but is addressed to God.

prostitute themselves but lose in the end (18:24); the riches that the Laodicean church claims to have but does not possess (3:17); the wealth that belongs to the church of Smyrna, though she appears poor (2:9). His is the wisdom that "knows" the "mystery of the seven stars" and works of the churches (1:20; 2:2, 9, 13, 19; 3:2, 8–9, 15), that comprehends the number and identity of the beast from the sea (13:18) and the meaning of the beast's seven heads and ten horns (17:9). His is the honor and blessing and glory that are manifested in his overcoming of the forces of evil, aiding his suffering followers, restoring justice, vindicating the righteous, and joining with God in the inauguration of a new heaven and earth with healing for all peoples.

The second stanza of the *LBW* hymn is virtually identical to its source, the hymn of Rev 5:13. Both involve an expanding of the scope of the chorus to include all creatures from all points of the cosmos. Both combine God and the Lamb as joint objects of doxological honor and praise. Rev 5:13 reads: "And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea and all therein, saying, 'To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might for ever and ever! Amen.'" The second stanza of the *LBW* hymn reads similarly: "Sing with all the people of God and join in the hymn of all creation: Blessing, honor, glory, and might be to God and the Lamb forever. Amen."

Doxologies were an integral part of Israelite worship and that of the early church, appearing frequently in psalms and hymns.[32] Their function was to publicly declare the virtues of God, especially those that ranked him above all other deities. In a culture so concerned with honor and shame, those pivotal values of ancient Mediterranean societies,[33] honor was especially due God as ultimate Benefactor, Deliverer, and Source of life and countless blessings. Seen as God's Messiah and agent of redemption, Christ the Lamb was included in this honor and glorification.

The Seer places greater emphasis on the identity of Christ as Lamb than any other NT writing.

The final line of the *LBW* hymn expresses several further themes of Revelation and is the formulation from which the antiphon is formed: "This is the feast of victory for our God, for the Lamb who was slain has begun his reign."

In a composition so focused on conflict, combat, and war, the theme of victory has a natural place. According to the Seer, the victory that Christ promised in his letters to followers who remain faithful (2:7,

[32] The basic study of NT doxologies and hymns in general is that of Reinhard Deichgräber, *Gotteshymnus und Christushymnus in der frühen Christenheit. Untersuchungen zu Form, Sprache und Stil der frühchristlichen Hymnen* (SUNT 5. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967); on the hymnic material of Revelation see pp. 44–59.

[33] On honor and shame see Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology*, 3d ed., revised and expanded (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 27–57; and *Biblical Social Values and Their Meaning: A Handbook*, ed. John J. Pilch and Bruce J. Malina (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 106–15 and passim.

11, 17, 26, 28; 3:5, 12, 21) will in fact be realized when God and the Lamb soon overcome Satan and his allies (11:15–18; 12:7–20:15). This good news of victory and commencement of reign is hailed in the hymns and in those several heavenly assertions that all who suffered as followers of the Lamb will also share in his victory and reign (1:5; 5:10; 7:11:15–18; 14:3–5, 13; 19:1–2; 20:4–6; 21:7; 22:1–5).

Victory is celebrated with a feast, says the *LBW* hymn following its source, Revelation 19, which speaks of a "marriage supper of the Lamb" (celebrating the marriage of the Lamb and his bride, that is, of Christ and the company of the holy (19:7–10). This rather familiar and positive image of union and joy is paralleled in Revelation, however, with a rather ghoulish feast: a "great supper of God" at which the birds of mid-heaven devour the population of the vanquished Babylon (19:17–18). At this meal the buzzards and vultures will "consume the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and their riders, the flesh of all persons, slave and free, both small and great" that have been slain by the sword of Christ, the warrior on the white horse, the one called "Faithful and True," who judges and makes war, whose robe is drenched in blood and who is called The Word of God" (19:11–13).

This motif of "feast of victory," appropriate as an image for the Seer's message, is also a motif that relates the entire hymn, "Worthy is the Lamb," to the eucharistic feast and liturgy of which the hymn is an important part. The "feast" of which the *LBW* hymn speaks is not likely the banquet of bodies and consumption of corpses of which John speaks in 19:17–21. It is rather the marriage banquet celebrating the union of Christ, the victorious victim, with the company of the righteous (19:6–9; 21:1–22:5)—an apt symbol for the communion taking place today in the eucharistic feast. With its derivation from Revelation, this reference to "feast of victory" is a poignant reminder of several aspects of eucharistic celebration: eucharists are, as the term itself indicates, "thanksgivings," joyous expressions of gratitude for God's presence in human lives and the universe. As "feasts," "banquets," celebratory meals, they are communal affairs of people affirming their unity with God, Christ, and one another through sharing in a meal, consuming food, and "becoming what they eat." This reference to "feast" thus recalls that a chief, core symbol of Christian identity is the meal, a communal act of sharing food, sustaining life, and forging communion. As a feast of *victory*, the eucharist acknowledges the struggle of the "human condition" but also God's dominance over the evil that daily threatens our survival.

This concluding line of the hymn also reflects a feature so characteristic of John's writing and also so dear to Luther's heart ("*dennoch*," "*trotzdem*") and authentic Lutheran sensibility: irony, parody, and the paradoxical nature of the gospel. The *LBW* formulation is even a rhyming irony: "for the Lamb who was slain has begun his reign." These ten words summarize in brilliant fashion one of the major structural themes of Revelation: its tracing of the role of Jesus Christ in the history of salvation—from his crucifixion, resurrection, and enthronement with God (1:5–5:14) to his campaign with God against the forces of evil (6:1–18:24), to their victory and inauguration of a new age of life in its fullness (19:1–22:5). Jesus Christ has morphed from "slain" to "reign." He died but is alive forevermore (1:18; 2:8). Ironically, the lowly Lamb has overcome the dreadful dragon. In lamb's skin was really the mighty "Lion of Judah" incognito. Against Lion/Lamb the bullying and blasphemous

beasts from sea and land could not prevail. That beast from the land looked like the lamb but spoke like the dragon and by the Lamb was overcome. The Lion of Judah conquers—not as invincible king of the jungle but as slaughtered lamb. Paradoxically, the victim has become the victor, and the victimizers will become the vanquished. The church at Smyrna appears poor but in Christ's calculus is actually rich. The church at Sardis appears alive but is actually dead. The church at Laodicea claims to be rich but is actually poor; boasting of self-sufficiency, it is condemned as warm spit. Clean, holy garments are those drenched in blood. "Destroyers of the earth" will themselves be destroyed (11:18). Those who "have shed blood" will be forced to "drink blood" (16:4). The unclean denizens of Babylon (18:1–24) will be devoured by the unclean vultures of mid-heaven (19:17–18). The question, "who is like the beast?" (13:4) parodies the name of God's warrior, Michael, meaning "who is like God?" (12:7). Those currently ruled by the beast will, ultimately, rule with the Lamb. Power is manifested in powerlessness. Salvation emerges from suffering. To live, one must first be willing to die. It's a familiar melody, running through the church's gospel and Israel's story like an old refrain: God writes straight with crooked lines. The first shall be last and the last first. The humble will be exalted and the exalted humbled. The meek shall inherit the earth.

Conclusion

How appropriate to open the eucharistic celebration with this hymn so greatly indebted to the language and spirit of Revelation! When seen as a reflection of its canonical parent, this is a song of courage and defiance, good news and hope. It is not likely that all who sing this *LBW* hymn song today do so with the message of Revelation in mind and heart. "Liturgizing" parts of the Scriptures, especially the prophetic sections, not only enshrines these potent passages; it also domesticates and defangs them of their power. But this is the context of the song nonetheless. If you, gentle reader, choose to sing it with Revelation as its matrix, beware the consequences, and prepare for the slings and arrows! Whoever has ears to hear, listen up!

That beast from the land looked like the lamb but spoke like the dragon and by the Lamb was overcome.

In these days of 2003, a present hour of confusion and conflict, corruption and compromise, it is tempting to observe some similarities between the narrative of John and the story of the U.S. of A. and its solemn religious assemblies. Even for entrenched historical critics like us, Robert, who respect the broad historical, social, and cultural gulf separating past and present, it is hard to resist seeing Washington as a modern-day Babylon and its play at empire, its omnipresent legions, its stars-and-stripes image on everything and everyone, and its efforts at economic hegemony as redolent of Rome's program in the days of yore. It is difficult not to spot parallels

—when the White House is looking as bloodily crimson as the beast from the sea and the body bags from Iraq keep piling up;

—when false prophets blast a steady stream

of lies, disinformation, and weapons of mass distraction at a befuddled and deluded public desperate for the truth;
—when calculated untruths are passed off as verified (and hence reliable) "intelligence";
—when things are not as they seem and deception masquerades as truth and the synagogues of Christ, by blessing the bombs, make common cause with the beast and earn the epithet synagogues of Satan;
—when Uncle Sam's allies turn out to be kings and merchants feeding at the U.S. trough and peddling their bodies and booties to the rulers of the Babylon at 1600;
—when the dynasty of the Bush house is looking more and more like the seven heads of Rome and its Julio-Claudian line;
—when a Bush was, then was not, then was once more;
—when an appointee of the land's highest court spouts the Bible and mongers war in the name of the Prince of Peace;
—when daughters and sons of peace are mowed down by bulldozers and blown apart by suicide bombers and gun-packing members of the NRA, with their martyred bodies mounting beneath the altar;
—when peace and justice seem like distant dreams and a new heaven and earth beckon.

Surveying all of this makes it difficult for believers in the enduring power of the Word of God to resist making immediate connections. Yet resist we must. For John was not predicting George Jr. or Ariel or Saddam, but he was demonizing the beasts of his own day—Rome and its clients. The sense and power of John's message is shaped by first-century conditions of Roman Asia, the prophetic tradition in which he stands, and his own faith, experience, and imagination. Revelation is not a forecast or a blueprint of the present. And yet it is also sure that John's take on reality had no limited shelf life or expiration date. His inspired perspective has animated prophets and artists and dreamers down through the centuries. It has filled the streets and the prisons with latter-day Pauls and Johns and Berrigans and Rachel Corries and has set the standard for conscientious objection across the globe. The Lutheran hymn it has inspired is one that many might wish to sing today into the teeth of Rome's successor, the Washington pretender to world empire; the government who, like Rome of old, claims the sea—in fact all seas and all lands it desires—to be its for the taking through whatever preemptive strikes it chooses; the political-military complex, like that of Rome, that controls (or aims at controlling) all commerce and trade, all buying and selling, and forces its subjects to bear on their caps the sign of the owner/beast: the swoosh, the GE logo, the H of Halliburton, the E of Enron, the stars and stripes.

However one decides the comparison issue, there is always comfort to be taken in the sentiments of "Worthy is Christ" itself and its canonical parent. Though blood is shed, victory is certain. Though the innocent are slain, the faithful will reign. Though the rich get richer, the poor will prevail. Though power is directed toward evil ends, the divine power of good conquers all. Jesus the crucified Christ is the paradoxical means by which God writes straight with crooked lines. Out of death, God brings new life; out of chaos, order; out of darkness, light; out of despair, hope. "Das," as the good Doktor once put it, "ist gewisslich wahr."

Romans 1:26–27 and Homosexuality

Everett R. Kalin
Christ Seminary–Seminex Professor Emeritus of New Testament
Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary
Berkeley, California
ekalin@plts.edu

Lex semper accusat (the law is always accusing)—but whom is it accusing, and about what?

Although I do not know who the other authors in this tribute to Robert Smith are, I am sure that none of them has so many and such "ancient" points of intersection with the honoree as I have. While some of the contributors have surely shared with Robert an M.Div. from Concordia Seminary in St. Louis and positions on the faculty there and at Christ Seminary–Seminex, and others have shared with him teaching at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary in Berkeley or the Graduate Theological Union, none has all of Robert's and my early connections. Both of us were from the East, were students and teachers at Concordia Collegiate Institute in Bronxville, New York, and pastors in the Atlantic District of the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod. Most unlikely to be matched: each of served as waterfront director at Camp Chickagami in the Poconos.

But it is in the years in which we have taught together in St. Louis and Berkeley that I have come to see Robert's outstanding gifts as a teacher beloved by students, as a colleague, an author, and a lecturer. He is always offering insights and perspectives that are solidly grounded in careful research and, at the same time, always presenting them with imagination and wit.

An example of that wit: many who, with Bob, question the continuing relevance of passages in the holiness code (Leviticus 17–26) that are used to denigrate homosexuals (Lev 18:22, for instance—"You shall not lie with a male as with a women; it is an abomination") point to other statements in the holiness code that are now disregarded by almost all, such as "nor shall you put on a garment made of two different materials" (Lev 19:19). But who but Robert would note that that verse "seems to show God's clear preference for pure polyester"?

I have known few others who pursued so many diverse interests with such energy and discipline. Actually, the phrase under Robert's graduation picture at Concordia, Bronxville, sums it up quite well: "intelligent industry." Now that he is over 70 and has laid down the task of editing *Preaching Helps* in this journal, such intelligent industry has not skipped—and when he finally retires will not skip—a beat.

But back to "pure polyester." As a tribute to Robert I offer an item that I have talked about in my Paul and Romans courses at PLTS. It is offered as what it is, a transfer to paper and an elaboration, with a mini-

mum of footnotes, of oral classroom presentations about Rom 1:18–32 (including references to Rom 1:26–27, the central biblical passage in the current discussion of homosexuality). These modest thoughts, inviting reflection and response, are my attempts to discuss *the reason* Paul wrote the words in 1:26–27. It is my assumption that that has potential relevance for the use of these words today.

Why did Paul write these verses? What is their role in the argument of of Romans as a whole?

Although I have often thought about and mentioned in class the issue this article talks about, the article was written after a trip to Philadelphia to participate in the National Approval Committee of the Extraordinary Candidacy Project. The Project was begun to work with Lutheran sexual minority candidates for the pastoral ministry and other rostered ministries who, although otherwise qualified, would not be approved in the ELCA candidacy process because the ELCA included in *Vision and Expectations*, a document to which the candidates are expected to conform their lives, a statement designed to exclude them: "Ordained ministers who are homosexual in their self-understanding are expected to abstain from homosexual sexual relationships."

As just about everyone knows, Paul's words in Rom 1:26–27, "Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another," play a large role in discussions in the church today about the morality of sexual relations among gays and lesbians. (Unless otherwise noted, biblical quotations in this article are from the NRSV; gender-specific language for God has been modified.) Those who reject same-sex sexual relations as "unnatural" are convinced that Paul's words are clear and as relevant today as they were then (Paul/God said it; I believe it, that settles it). Others, of course, see the issue differently.

So how are Paul's words understood by those who approve of same-sex relationships today while also wanting to treat Paul's words with complete seriousness? Some interpreters begin by trying to determine with specificity what it was these verses were condemning, given the context of the first-century Mediterranean world. Others point out that a modern understanding of human sexuality, which can speak of a person's "sexual orientation," puts the issue in a whole new context and makes it impossible simply to quote Paul and close the discussion. Would Paul understand the words "homosexual in their self-understanding"? And how might that phrase reframe the issue of what is "natural" and "unnatural" intercourse?

In a word, one issue in a discussion of the relationship between Paul's words in Romans 1:26–27 and homosexuality today is what might be a "faithful" and "authentic" modern appropriation of ancient words, including ancient words in the Bible, given the possible differences between Paul's thought world and ours on the issue under discussion. To me this issue is of great importance. It is not, however, the issue this article addresses. I want to frame the

question about Rom 1:26–27 quite differently. Why did Paul write those verses? What is their role in the argument of Romans 1:18–32? of Rom 1:18–3:20? of Rom 1:18–11:36? of Romans as a whole?[1]

I begin with the role of Rom 1:26–27 in Rom 1:18–32. Before I quote 1:18–32 and ask you two questions about it, I need to make one observation pertinent to understanding this passage and its context. Paul, the Jew whom God called to be the apostle to the Gentiles (Rom 1:5, 13, 15:16, 18; Gal 1:16, 2:7–9), puts all of humanity into two categories, Jew and Gentile. Rom 1:16, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to *everyone* who has faith, to *the Jew* first *and* also to *the Greek*" (emphases added), shows that Paul understands "everyone" to mean not Mark and Maria and Rufus and Thomas, etc., but "the Jew and the Greek" (the latter term here equals "the Gentile"; see also Rom 2:9–10, 3:9, 29–30, etc.).

Now the questions: As you read Rom 1:18–32, I invite you to answer two questions about it before you read further in the article: (1) Who is being condemned in this passage? and (2) What is the ungodliness/wickedness/sin for which they are being condemned? Whom is the law accusing here, and about what?

1:18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth. [19]For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. [20]Ever since the creation of the world [God's] eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things [God] has made. So they are without excuse; [21]for though they knew God, they did not honor [God] as God or give thanks to [God], but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened. [22]Claiming to be wise, they became fools; [23]and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles. [24]Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the degrading of their bodies among themselves, [25]because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. [26]For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, [27]and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error. [28]And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind and to things that should not be done. [29]They were filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness, they are gossips, [30]slanderers, God-haters, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, rebellious toward parents, [31]foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. [32]They know God's decree, that those who practice such things deserve to die—yet they not only do them but even applaud others who practice them.

So, what about question 1, Who is condemned/accused here? Before I give my answer, I can tell you the answers I usually get in class. Most students say "everybody," by which they mean every individual, all human beings up to that time (Paul's use of "everybody" in 1:16 to equal

[1] I presented my understanding of a principal reason for the writing of Romans—to encourage members of various Christian congregations in Rome, divided over issues they see as vital to faith and life and worship, to welcome one another despite, and even before resolving, these differences (see Rom 14:1 to 15:13, and especially 15:7), so that, united, they might welcome Paul and speed him on to the end of the earth, to Spain (see Rom 15:14-33)—in "Rereading Romans: Ethnic Issues (or, 'How can I find a gracious community?')," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 25 (December 1998): 461–72. The same issue of *Currents* also has an article by David Balch titled "Romans 1:24–27, Science, and Homosexuality," 433–40).

Jew and Gentile not yet having sunk in). By extension, of course, since the law keeps on accusing, those who say Rom 1:18–32 accuses everybody mean every person up to this very moment, including you and me. The other answer I sometimes get is "the Jews."

Neither answer is in my view correct. I am convinced that Paul in these verses is condemning only and exclusively Gentiles. The evidence for this can be shown in detail only by moving to the second question: Of what are they accused?

They are accused of suppressing the truth (v. 18), of not seeing fit to acknowledge God (v. 28), and, even though they knew God, of not honoring God as God or giving thanks to God (v. 21). And their suppression of the truth, their foolishness, culminated in what for Jews (including Paul) was *the primal sin of Gentiles, idolatry*: "they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles" (v. 23).

Some have said that the charge of idolatry here does not exclude Jews—consider the golden calf in Exodus 32. But the grounding in verses 19 and 20 for the assertion that the idolaters under discussion were without excuse, that they knew God *through the things God has made,* clearly shows that Gentiles are in view. Paul would not have said that about Jews, including those at Sinai, who knew God as the one who had called them out of Egypt to be God's own people, who knew themselves to be heirs of the promises to their ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Here, then, are the answers to both questions about Rom 1:18–32, Who are the sinners and What is their sin? The sinners against whom God's wrath is directed in this passage are solely Gentiles, and they are accused of one fundamental sin: failing to acknowledge the God they knew (should have known) by observing God's work in creation, instead making and worshiping idols.

But what about the sexual behavior castigated in vv. 26 and 27 and the items listed in the stream-of-consciousness vice list in vv. 29–31? Are not these the sins that have evoked God's wrath? No, actually, they are not. Instead, they are the things to which God has "given the Gentiles up" (vv. 24, 26, 28), *because* they exchanged the truth of God for a lie. Notice the context for Paul's reference to the "degrading passions" he describes in vv. 26–27: "they exchanged the glory of God for images (v. 23) . . . *Therefore God gave them up* in the lusts of their hearts *to impurity* (v. 24) . . . *because* they exchanged the truth about God for a lie (v. 25). . . . *For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions."* What is to explain the catalog of vices in vv. 29–31? This: "And *since* they did not see fit to acknowledge God, *God gave them up to a debased mind and to things that should not be done"* (v. 28).[2] Or, as Ernst Käsemann puts it, "Moral perversion is the result of God's wrath, not the reason for it."[3]

To underscore my understanding of what Paul is saying in Rom 1:18–32, I turn to striking parallels in the Wisdom of Solomon. Some of the key themes and specific turns of phrase in Wisdom 13–14 are so close to what Paul says in Rom 1:18–32 that we might even imagine him having that text before him (mentally if not physically) as he wrote. Many commentaries assume the use of Wisdom by Paul in Rom

[2] Throughout these quotations the emphases have been added by me.

[3] Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans,* trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 41.

1:18–32. I am inclined to think that these commentaries are correct, but my argument does not depend on that; they could be texts making parallel use of a common tradition.[4] What the point I am trying to make does depend on is how close Rom 1:18–32 is to thoughts and words in Wisdom 13 and 14. Here are a few examples of their similarity:

1. In their foolishness the Gentiles failed to find God in created things, and for this they have no excuse:

Wis 13:1, 5, 8–9: [1]For all people who were ignorant of God were foolish by nature; and they were unable from the good things that are seen to know the one who exists. . . . [5]For from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator. . . . [8]Yet again, not even they are to be excused; [9]for if they had the power to know so much that they could investigate the world, how did they fail to find sooner the Lord of these things? (Cf. Rom 1:22, 19–20)

2. Instead they fashioned and worshiped idols:

Wis 13:10: But miserable . . . are those who give the name "gods" to the works of human hands, gold and silver fashioned with skill, and likenesses of animals (cf. Rom 1:23).

3. This idolatry is *the cause* of their immorality, sexual and all the rest:

Wis 14:12, 23–27 [12]*For the idea of making idols was the beginning of fornication, and the invention of them was the corruption of life* . . . [23]For whether they kill children in their initiations, or celebrate secret mysteries, or hold frenzied revels with strange customs, [24]they no longer keep either their lives or their marriages pure, but they either treacherously kill one another, or grieve one another by adultery, [25]and all is a raging riot of blood and murder, theft and deceit, corruption, faithlessness, tumult, perjury, [26]confusion over what is good, forgetfulness of favors, defiling of souls, sexual perversion [in his Anchor Bible commentary, David Winston translates this phrase "interchange of sex roles"], disorder in marriages, adultery, and debauchery. [27]*For the worship of idols not to be named is the beginning and cause and end of every evil* (emphases added; cf. Rom 1:24–31).

Key themes and specific turns of phrase in Wisdom 13–14 are so close to what Paul says in Rom 1:18–32 that we might even imagine him having that text before him as he wrote.

Both in Wisdom of Solomon and in Rom 1:18–31, in remarkably similar language, *a Jewish author* is saying that in their foolishness *the Gentiles* (that is clearly

[4] The Wisdom of Solomon, part of the Bible for many Christians today, was used as scripture by many Christians in the first centuries of the church's life. The text can be found in any modern translation of the Bible that includes the apocryphal/deuterocanonical books. Although there is no direct quotation of the Wisdom of Solomon in the New Testament, the Nestle-Aland edition of the Greek New Testament lists over 100 possible allusions to it. So Paul could have known and used it. The book was probably written in Egypt, within fifty years of, and either before or after, the start of the common era. David Winston, in the Anchor Bible commentary on Wisdom, argues for a date in the reign of Caligula (37–41 C.E.). If he is correct, that would make somewhat less likely, though not impossible, Paul's use of it in the mid 50s as he wrote Romans.

who is under discussion in both texts) failed to find God in created things, for which they are without excuse. Instead they fashioned and worshiped idols, and *this idolatry is the cause of their immorality,* sexual (including homosexuality in both cases, if Winston's translation in Wis 14:26 is correct) and otherwise.

Another important thing that Wisdom and Paul have in common in the material already presented is that this is really not the main point that they want to make. All this talk about the idolatry of Gentiles and its consequences are commonplaces for them and their (Jewish) readers. And what they really want to say comes next. Wisdom 13–14 and Rom 1:18–32 are the "A" of both authors' argument, and it is in their "B" that they make the point they wanted to make all along. And it is the radical difference between the two "B's" that is a main point toward which this article has been pointing all along.

Wisdom's "B" comes at the beginning of chapters 15 and 16 and continues to the book's conclusion in 19:22. As I quote a few of the verses it will be immediately clear that a major point is how differently God has treated those idolatrous Gentiles and us Jews and how different *we* are from *them* (I have added to the NRSV translation emphases on all the words referring to the Jewish hearers/readers; that's clearly the way these words were meant to be heard):

Wisdom 15 But you, *our* God, are kind and true, patient, and ruling all things in mercy. [2]For even if *we* sin *we* are yours, knowing your power; but *we* will not sin [!], because *we* know that you acknowledge *us* as yours. [3]For to know you is complete righteousness, and to know your power is the root of immortality. [4]For neither has the evil intent of human art misled *us*. . . .

Wisdom 16 Therefore those people were deservedly punished through such creatures, and were tormented by a multitude of animals. [2]Instead of this punishment you showed kindness to *your people*, and you prepared quails to eat, a delicacy to satisfy the desire of appetite; [3]in order that those people, when they desired food, might lose the least remnant of appetite because of the odious creatures sent to them, while *your people*, after suffering want a short time, might partake of delicacies. . . .

The odious creatures sent to Israel's enemies, in contrast to the quail that fed the Israelites, are, of course, the frogs and other horrible creatures that plagued the Egyptians at the exodus. The image that shapes the rest of the book is the story of the exodus, which clearly shows how different *we* are from *them*, and how different God's treatment of *those sinful idolaters* is from the treatment accorded *us, God's own righteous people* ("For to know you is complete righteousness," 15:3).

So Wisdom's "A" is that the Gentiles failed to acknowledge God and instead fabricated and worshiped idols and that this idolatry is the cause of their unrighteous actions. The "B" is the Jews' reliance on God's favorable and gracious treatment of God's own people. The main point of Wisdom's "B" is *how different we Jews are from those Gentiles.* This way of thinking is quite understandable among the Jews in Egypt at a time in which they were a beleaguered minority in the midst of hostile Gentile neighbors.

Paul's "A" is identical to Wisdom's: that the Gentiles failed to acknowledge God and instead fabricated and worshiped idols and that this idolatry is the cause of their unrighteous actions. Before we look at Paul's "B," which begins in Rom 2:1, we note that in 1:32 he presents a transition between "A" and "B." He castigates those, whoever they may be, who, though they know God's righteous judgment, not only do what has just been castigated but even applaud those who practice such things. Although I am able to cite a parallel to the idea from the Testament of Asher 6:2,

"They both practice evil and approve of others who practice it," I do not know to whom Paul is referring.

What, then, is Paul's "B"? In 2:1 he turns to those who *dis*approve of the Gentiles' evil, in contrast to those in 1:32, who approve of it. One would think that for Paul that would be a step in the right direction; he, after all, disapproved of it too. But, on the contrary, he makes of this disapproval a *judging* of "the other," since the judge is doing the very same things. And, paradoxically, while Paul's "B" is headed in exactly the opposite direction of Wisdom's, his wording seems to operate with the language in Wisdom 15:1. Here is Rom 2:1–4, supplying the Greek words it shares with Wisdom 15:1:

2:1 Therefore you have no excuse, whoever you are, when you judge others; for in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same things. [2]You say, "We know that God's judgment on those who do such things is in accordance with truth [ἀλήθειαν]." [3]Do you imagine, whoever you are, that when you judge those who do such things and yet do them yourself, you will escape the judgment of God? [4]Or do you despise the riches of his kindness [χρηστότητος] and forbearance and patience [μακροθυμίας]? Do you not realize that God's kindness [χρηστὸν] is meant to lead you to repentance? (Cf. Wis 15:1: But you, our God, are kind and true [χρηστὸς και ἀλήθης], patient [μακρόθυμος], and ruling all things in mercy).

A Jewish reader of Rom 1:18–32 who knew the almost identical condemnation of Gentiles in Wisdom 13 and 14 (the "A") would expect it to be followed by Wisdom's "B," an appeal to God's kindness and truth, patience and mercy, on which God's own people can rely for safety and salvation. Instead Paul springs the trap, drops the other shoe, and offers a totally different "B": You too are without excuse [ἀναπολόγητος—the exact same word used of the Gentiles in Rom 1:20]!

Now Paul's condemnation of the judge who condemns others can—and does—apply to anyone ("whoever you are") whose primary approach to sin is to zero in on someone else's, while at the same time doing the "same things." But Paul's "B," judging the judge, is fully understandable only in the context of his point in 2:1–3:20, that the Jew, as well as the Gentile discussed in 1:18–32, is guilty in God's sight. The main point of Paul's "B" is that *we Jews are just like those Gentiles as far as sin is concerned.* Paul's whole point in 1:18–3:20 is that *all* are guilty, as he says in 3:9 ("for we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks [Gentiles], are under the power of sin"). And 2:1–3:20 is about the guilt of the Jew.[5]

The guilt of the Jew is for Paul a much harder sell than the guilt of the Gentiles, and this for many reasons. It is not that the Jews thought of themselves as sinless; by no means. But their covenant with a gracious God, who forgave their sin, was felt to give them a certain pride of place in the sight of God. And many Gentiles felt the same way about the Jews' special place in God's sight. That's why a good number of the Gentiles who came to believe in Jesus were, prior to that faith, partial or full participants of the life of the synagogue. And Paul's own words could be quoted to show that "sinners" goes with "Gentiles"

[5] Some interpreters of Romans claim that the focus on the guilt of the Jew starts only in 2:17, where the word Jew occurs for the first time. But I do not believe that this is correct, both because of the parallels I see to the Wisdom of Solomon, and because the argument of Rom 2:1-16 makes most sense in the context of a claim of special status before God for the Jews—whether that claim is made by a Jew or about Jews by Gentiles. Paul pursues his arguments in Romans 2 and 3 in discussion with a hypothetical dialogue partner.

more readily than it does with "Jews": "We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners" (Gal 2:15).

In short, Rom 1:18–3:20 is confirming the words in 1:18, "For the wrath of God is being revealed" (dreaded words, for "wrath" is not something one longs to associate with God) by showing the idolatry of the Gentiles (1:18–32), on account of which God gave them over to impurity, and by showing the Jew as a non-law-fulfilling judge of others (2:1–3:20). Stark and dreadful news indeed, about which two points need immediately to be made, one about 1:18–3:20, the other about 2:1–3:20.

First, about 1:18–3:20 as a whole. This utterly pessimistic picture of all humanity, Jew and Gentile united in sin, is itself only a "first shoe," an "A," the whole point of which is to lead to the "B," 3:21–11:36, the utterly glorious news that Jew and Gentile are united under God's righteousness, conferred through the atonement God effected through Jesus Christ, an atonement appropriated by faith. And this glorious news culminates in 11:32, "For God has imprisoned all in disobedience [even the Jew—cf. Gal 3:23, 'we (I and my fellow Jews) were imprisoned and guarded under the law . . .'] so that [God] may be merciful to all [including the Jew]." Rom 12:1–15:13 shows the readers that they can (and urges them to) live out that righteousness in their communities of faith and life, especially by maintaining their oneness and by welcoming one another (15:7), even across lines of disagreement and mutual misunderstanding.

Second, about 2:1–3:20. Lest there be any misunderstanding, I do not for a moment believe that Paul is characterizing the Jews as any more judgmental or self-righteous than the Gentiles. Nor does he view them as the only group that is prone to think that it has a unique "lock" on God's favor. Indeed, in the rest of Romans it is more likely the Gentiles who seem to be in danger of thinking that they alone are the favored ones.

That is especially clear in Rom 11:17–32, a section explicitly addressed to the Gentiles: "Now I am speaking to you Gentiles" (11:13). While a temporary and partial "no" of the Jews to the good news of the gospel somehow played a role in the Gentiles' "yes," the Gentiles needed to reckon with [the Jews'] "full inclusion" (11:12). And despite the cutting off of some of the olive tree's branches (the Jews) and the grafting in of a wild olive shoot (the Gentiles) in their place to share the rich root, the Gentiles were warned, "do not boast over the branches (v. 18) . . . do not become proud, but stand in awe. For if God did not spare the natural branches, perhaps [God] will not spare you" (vv. 20–21). And lest the Gentiles "claim to be wiser than they are," God reveals to them that "all Israel will be saved" (vv. 25–26). God's intension is that the Jews "too may now receive mercy . . . so that [God] may be merciful to all" [including the Jew] (vv. 31–32).

I close by indicating what I think the article as a whole might contribute to the use of Rom 1:26–27 in current discussions of homosexuality in the church.

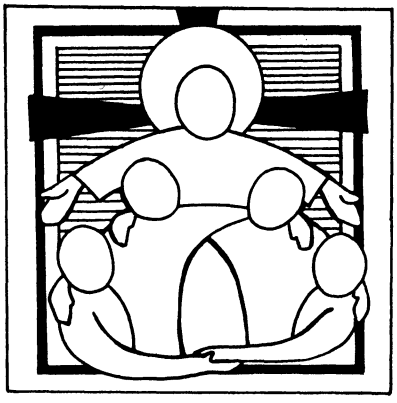
1. Contemporary discussions of homosexuality seem to take it for granted that in these verses we have Paul's firm conviction that homosexual acts are sinful. Though Paul surely understands what he describes in vv. 26–27 to be reprehensible, the context shows that these acts are not the "sins" to which he is directing our attention. These verses are part of a demonstration by Paul that the Gentiles (they are the *only* people under discussion in 1:18–32) are sinful beyond measure. *The* sin of the Gentiles that evokes God's wrath is their failure to

recognize God in the things God has created and to worship God, instead worshiping objects fashioned by their own hands. The Gentiles' impurity and degrading of their bodies (evidenced in vv. 26–27) and their debased mind and their doing of the things that ought not be done (evidenced in vv. 29–31) are the *result of* their idolatry. Paul shares this idea with the Wisdom of Solomon: "For the idea of making idols was the beginning of fornication, and the invention of them was the corruption of life" (14:1 and elsewhere). But Paul goes even further, stating that these are the things to which God has "given up [the Gentiles]"—1:24, 26, 28.

This leads me to ask of anyone who wants to be faithful to Paul's ideas in 1:26–27 what part of what he is saying must come along as part of his point. That if people commit homosexual acts this is because God, seeing their idolatry, has given them up to this behavior? That homosexuals in our congregations and seminaries are more idolatrous than other people in our congregations and seminaries?

2. There are many in the church who say that faithfulness to Paul's words in Rom 1:26–27 compels them to judge practicing homosexuals to be unfit for pastoral ministry, even those who in every other respect are qualified for and called to such ministry. While I impute to none of the "many" in the church who make this judgment the belief that they, themselves, are without sin (what Lutheran, say, would make such a claim?), with respect to 1:26–27 at least, they *distinguish themselves* from those described there, and regard themselves as *more fit* for pastoral ministry (if otherwise qualified and called).

Can those who believe that taking Paul's words in Rom 1:26–27 seriously means condemning homosexuality hear them in the context of his argument, in the world of "A's" and "B's," the world of Jew and Gentile? Rom 1:26–27 is in Paul's "A," shared by the Wisdom of Solomon: of sinful Gentile idolatry leading to perversions, including those in 1:26–27. Paul's "B," like Wisdom's, is about the only other group Paul knows, the Jews. Can those who believe that taking Paul's words in



Rom 1:26–27 seriously means condemning homosexuality say which "B" about the Jews best matches their own attitude? Is it Wisdom's "B" of how *different* the Jews are, since they are under God's covenantal protection ("But you, *our* God, are kind and true")? Or is it Paul's "B" of how *equally guilty* the Jews are ("you have no excuse")? The point of Rom 2:1–3:20 is that the "B" group, who could think of themselves, in contrast to the "A" group, as God's own, are with regard to sin *not* different. Paul's words in 1:18–32 are in that sense a trap, meant to catch those who see themselves as God's special friends. In that sense Paul's "B" in 2:1–3:20 finds an analogy not in the Wisdom of Solomon but in Amos, where accusations against various foreign peoples climax in accusations against Judah and Israel: "Thus says the Lord: For three trans-

gressions of Gaza, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment. . . . For three transgressions of Tyre . . . of Ammon . . . of Moab . . . *of Judah! . . . of Israel!* . . . (Amos 1 and 2). Once again the trap.

Though it is hard in the context of the church to find an exact analogy to Wisdom's, Paul's, and Amos's Gentile and Jew, could not the context be that some in the church think that certain others ("A") don't measure up for whatever reason and are thus outside our group ("B"), the community of God's favor? Actually, (almost) all of us in the church have that kind of attitude at times. The only thing that changes is the issue which in our minds lands certain others in the "A" group, thus not ours.

Whether or not you who have read this far think that anything I have said is pertinent to the use of Rom 1:26–27 to the current discussion of homosexuality in the church, I wish to add two points.

First, nothing I have said is meant to imply that Paul *liked* what he was discussing in 1:26–27. He surely did not. And so anyone who wants to take Paul seriously and to welcome homosexuals into the pastoral ministry will need to address the issue by, among many other things, pursuing what was mentioned near the start of the article: (1) trying to determine with specificity what it was these verses were condemning, given the context of the first-century Mediterranean world and (2) showing how a modern understanding of human sexuality, which can speak of a person's "sexual orientation," puts the issue in a whole new context and makes it impossible simply to quote Paul and close the discussion.

Second, as the discussion about this issue goes on in the church, what I proposed in note 1 as Paul's intention in Romans would be an excellent model for us—whatever our views—in our attitudes and actions toward one another: I claimed that a principal reason Paul wrote Romans was to encourage members of various Christian congregations in Rome, divided over issues they saw as vital to faith and life and worship, to welcome one another despite, and even before resolving, these differences, so that they might live in unity (cf. Rom 15:7, "Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God").

Mark and Mystery

Linda Maloney
Academic Editor, Liturgical Press
Collegeville, Minnesota
lmmaloney@csbsju.edu

In 1983 Robert H. Smith wrote a book on the Resurrection Gospels,[1] summarizing decades and even centuries of research and offering a solid basis for understanding those key texts of Christian faith. The book has withstood the ravages of time very well indeed. My present purpose is to look back at that book and its content, as regards the ending of Mark, and to reflect on its conclusions in light of some recent work in theology, and particularly mystical theology.

Easter Gospels was itself a reflective view of the biblical material, sacrificing nothing in historical-critical acuity but keeping the faith character of the Gospels always to the fore. Before examining the text of Mark's ending, Smith considered the context in which and to which the Gospel was written—the situation of Christians in persecution, whether in Palestine or in Rome, or in some other place(s). He concluded that Mark's Gospel is "a fresh and profound interpretation of the Christian tradition, emphasizing the parallels between [first-century Christians'] own experience and that of Jesus. In his portrait of Jesus, Mark emphasizes both Jesus' sonship and his forsakenness."[2] It is that dual focus in Mark that has so profoundly interested most readers, and this is a point to which I will return.

The notoriously contested "original ending" of Mark is here defended not merely as authentic but as "a dramatic and kerygmatic asset." Smith finds that the Gospel concludes both "hopefully and mysteriously."[3] The women's silence at the end has dramatic effect, but it also points beyond itself: Smith interprets it as meaning that the women ran straight to witness to the disciples without speaking to anyone *on the way,* just as the healed man in 1:44 is instructed to "say nothing to anyone" before showing himself to the priest—at which time he would most certainly have spoken. So here, the women will neglect even the social obligation to greet those they encounter on the way, intent on their sole purpose: to carry out the angelic command to go and tell the disciples of Jesus' resurrection and his promised meeting with them in Galilee.

One cannot exactly say that this solution, though plausible and well grounded, has been accepted by subsequent scholars. The nature of Mark's ending remains controverted, and a good many writers are content simply to leave it open—maybe this, maybe that; take your pick. The early church solution—adding bits to make the story come out "right"—has not lost its popularity; thus Ben Witherington writes in a commentary for preaching that "even if Mark 16:8 is the original final verse of this

[1] Robert H. Smith, *Easter Gospels: The Resurrection of Jesus According to the Four Evangelists* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1983).
[2] Smith, *Easter Gospels,* 22.
[3] Smith, *Easter Gospels,* 29.

Gospel (which I doubt), it can be understood as follows. . . ."[4] He continues with a version of the thesis of temporary silence, namely that "[d]uring the period of time that terror and fear engulfed them, they fled, and while they were afraid, they said nothing to anyone. This does not preclude their having spoken to someone eventually, nor does it preclude their having seen Jesus after visiting the empty tomb. . . ."[5]

Others are less sanguine about the happy issue of this episode. Joanna Dewey, for example, reads Mark with a feminist focus that reveals the major role of women disciples and women characters in the story, but she finds that the ending, as narrated, still portrays the women disciples as having failed, just as their male counterparts did. "They flee in astonishment and amazement. Their fear is an appropriate response to the power of God experienced in the empty grave and the encounter with the man in white. But saying nothing is not appropriate."[6] This, she finds, is in keeping with Markan irony, and she concludes that the "happy end" in this case is the news that "failure need not be the end of discipleship. . . . The audience is reassured that they may fail, turn again, and continue following Jesus. Mark's message may even be that human failure is the beginning of true discipleship. . . ."[7] This counters the position of some earlier churchmen that Mark introduces the women as witnesses precisely in order to underscore the failure of the men, and even that the role of apostleship is temporarily stripped from the men and given to the women.[8]

Clearly, the unease persists. Smith's solution is in some ways satisfying, yet it does not entirely hold. Smith himself writes eloquently, throughout his essay in *Easter Gospels,* of the paradoxical elements in this Gospel, of the sense of a brooding cloud and the question whether this is indeed "the good news of Jesus Christ."[9] Let me now, in response, say a few words on the structural clues to Mark's intention in relation to the character of the events he attempts to describe and about the theological response that may be appropriate to his intent.

It is a notorious and accepted fact that Mark writes in "sandwiches." He habitually begins a story, breaks off to tell of another incident, then returns to conclude the first story. The sandwiching of the raising of Jairus's daughter with the healing of the woman with a hemorrhage in chapter 5 is the parade example. Some even suggest that the entire Gospel is such an intercalation—that "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" must be read as the opening of a giant *Klammer* that closes only with the angel's words at the tomb, or even with the women's silence, since readers are thrown back to that beginning to understand with new eyes, and to enact, the meaning contained between the two.

Rhetorically speaking, one powerful effect of this technique is to achieve an impression of simultaneity. Two events

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[4] Ben Witherington III, "The Season of Easter," in *New Proclamation Year B, 2003: Easter through Pentecost* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 8.

[5] Witherington, "The Season of Easter," 8. See also Witherington's *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000).

[6] Joanna Dewey, "The Gospel of Mark," in *Searching the Scriptures. Volume 2: A Feminist Commentary,* ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (New York: Crossroad, 1994), 506.

[7] Dewey, "The Gospel of Mark," 507.

[8] See Joachim Gnilka, *Das Evangelium Nach Markus (Mk 8,27–16,20).* EKK II/2 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1979): 347, with reference to Theophylact and Calvin.

[9] Smith, *Easter Gospels,* 17.

are happening at the same time; we switch from one to the other and back again, holding both in motion, in tension. While the hemorrhaging woman is being healed, the little girl is dying, and the rest of the action is transformed by the tension between the two needs. Something similar may be occurring in the Easter pericope. There are, in fact, two action scenes here, one within the other: in the "outer" story (16:1–4, 8b–d), the women approach the tomb, concerned about how to roll away the stone. The size of the stone is emphasized. When the women see that it has been rolled away, despite its size, they are seized with terror; they flee in silence, unable to account for what they have seen. In the middle of this story is a second (16:5–8a): the women, finding the tomb open, enter and are greeted by the heavenly messenger who instructs them that Jesus is risen and gives them the commission: "Go, tell."

To understand that these are discrete elements, not necessarily part of the same narrative, we need only look at the way they have been rearranged or eliminated by the other evangelists. Matthew begins in much the same way, but the women's concern about the stone is not stated, and in fact the need for it is eliminated, because the removal is dramatized, apparently before the women's gaze. Although the angel (now outside the tomb) invites them to "come, see the place where he lay" (Matt 28:6), they are not said to enter the tomb at all. They run away with "fear and great joy" (28:8) to tell the disciples; on the way they encounter the risen Jesus. Luke's women are first perplexed by the emptiness of the tomb, then terrified by the heavenly messengers, but they are calmed by being adjured to "remember," and they proceed without apparent haste (and without an appearance of the Risen Lord) to relate what they have seen to the other disciples



(who do not believe them).

The element of fear or amazement is a constant, but it seems more overpowering in Mark than in Matthew or Luke. It is surely a measure of our distance, not only from that social world, not only from that world of imagery, but indeed from much sensitivity to the nonfactual that we find this fear at best puzzling, at worst inexplicable. Is this not, after all, good news, that Jesus has been raised, vindicated, seated at the right hand of God? Why does Smith write of this moment of confrontation with that reality: "Terrible depths underlie it and an aura of mystery surrounds it"?[10]

There is a parallel between Mark 16:8 and the Transfiguration scene in 9:5–6. In both cases, when confronted with a manifestation of the divine—and one that points to a brutal interruption in the "normal course of events"—the humans involved are both terrified and struck speechless. After the earlier scene Peter, James, and John are instructed not to tell; here the women are (in the internal scene) instructed to "go, tell." But in both cases speech is effectively impeded by fear.

[10] Smith, *Easter Gospels,* 41.

What do you say when the end of the world is announced? What would *you* say?

What these disciples are looking at in both those scenes, so it must seem to them, is the end of all things, the "eschatological future" in theological terms. In the Transfiguration scene the disciples see Jesus conversing with Elijah, whose return heralds the end. In the tomb scene the women disciples are told that Jesus has been raised. The resurrection of the dead, as has so often been pointed out, was not an entirely unfamiliar concept for first-century Jews, but it was always associated with the end of the ages. If Jesus has been raised, then it must mean that the end has come. What do you say when the end of the world is announced? What would *you* say? (I try to imagine the ubiquitous reporter sticking a microphone in my face and asking "How do you feel about that?")

In our own age we have lost hold on the eschatological, in spite of the wild popularity of the *Left Behind* series and the like. The element of discontinuity, real, ontological discontinuity, seems beyond our perception—well, it would be, but we seem lacking even the ability to gasp at the *possibility* of such a discontinuity. It is, I think, this banalization of our hope that turned Jacques Pohier against the doctrine of resurrection. In his poignant book *Quand je dis Dieu* and its even more searing sequel, *Dieu fractures (God—in Fragments)*,[11] he pointed out that we use resurrection as a convenient excuse for degrading and devaluing the real lives we live here and now, promising "pie in the sky when you die," as the Wobblies sang. This would be impossible if we approached it as the kind of meta-event that does, in fact, bring an end to all things as we have heretofore conceived them—but would we then be reduced to silence?

There is, then, a perfectly plausible way of accounting, in psychological terms, for the women's terrified silence. What words shall we use to speak the unspeakable? At the same time, the command to "go, tell" appears to demand a different response to the same reality. The interlocked scenes seem to make simultaneous but conflicting demands, or they may represent alternatives that are not simultaneous but sequential: now this, later that. Both Smith and Witherington have adopted versions of the sequential interpretation: first silence, then speech. This conundrum is part of the tantalizing ambiguity of Mark that we need to ponder, and to which we may find different answers at different times in our own lives.

Theologically, mystically speaking this may be the polarity of the apophatic and the kataphatic. I speak here of polarity, but I would want to deny polarization, the radical disassociation of the two poles. Here I am indebted to Archbishop Rowan Williams, who in his essay "Against Anxiety, Beyond Triumphalism,"[12] challenges "the dichotomy between 'negative' and 'positive' in spirituality." In an analysis of

[11] Jacques Pohier, *Quand je dis Dieu* (Paris: Seuil, 1977); idem, *Dieu fractures* (Paris: Seuil, 1985) [English: *God—In Fragments*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Crossroad, 1985)].

[12] Rowan Williams, "Against Anxiety, Beyond Triumphalism," in idem., *A Ray of*

Meister Eckhart and John of the Cross, and in a challenge to what he sees as the over-optimistic views of "creation spirituality," Williams affirms that a stripping and questioning, a descent into silence, is the necessary condition of an emergence into effective speech, into mission.[13] In terms of Mark's final chapter, we may say that the women's silence is the necessary precondition for speech, for proclamation.

Rowan Williams has also written about the ending of Mark in his 2000 Lenten lectures, published as *Christ on Trial: How the Gospel Unsettles our Judgment.*[14] He reflects that Mark leaves us with the women's terrified silence, leaves us to make what we will of it: "Once again, he invites us to consider what difference the resurrection makes. Is it a reversal of tragedy? A happy ending? A promise of revenge against the sinful judges who brought Jesus to his death? It is none of these. The resurrection comes across as radically unexpected, almost disconnected with what has gone before. . . . As has sometimes been said, the *reader* is the 'lost ending' of Mark. We have to discover for ourselves what difference is made by this life, this death and this disorienting mystery after the crucifixion."[15] That discovery requires patience, the willingness to allow Mark to say and not say what he will (or will not). It requires that we be patient with ambiguity, until the time when it reveals itself as mystery. Until then is silence.

Darkness (Cambridge and Boston, Mass.: Cowley, 1995), 233–44. This essay was originally delivered as a lecture at Berkeley Divinity School, Yale University, in 1991.

[13] Rowan Williams, "Against Anxiety, Beyond Triumphalism," 240–41.

[14] Williams, *Christ on Trial: How the Gospel Unsettles our Judgment* (London: HarperCollins, 2000; new ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002).

[15] Williams, *Christ on Trial,* 16–17.

Binding and Loosing: A Paradigm for Ethical Discernment from the Gospel of Matthew

Mark Allan Powell
Trinity Lutheran Seminary

Twice in Matthew's Gospel the words "bind" (δήσῃς) and "loose" (λύσῃς) occur in what is apparently a formula that the readers are expected to recognize:

- (Jesus says to Peter), "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (Matt 16:19).
- (Jesus says to the twelve), "Truly, I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (Matt 18:18).

Notably, the immediate literary contexts for these two passages include the only two texts in Matthew (or anywhere in the New Testament) where Jesus explicitly refers to "the church" (16:18; 18:17). Thus, we may observe that Matthew closely connects the business of binding and loosing with the mission of the church that is built by Jesus (16:18) and sustained by his continuing presence (18:20). It would not be an overstatement to say that Matthew considers binding and loosing to be a constitutive aspect of the church's mission on earth.

Meaning of the terms

A majority of scholars now recognize that the terms "to bind" and "to loose" are best understood with reference to a practice of determining the application of scriptural commandments for contemporary situations.[1] The words are used in this regard by Josephus and in targumic materials. Jewish rabbis "bound" the law when they determined that a commandment was applicable to a particular situation, and they "loosed" the law when they determined that a word of scripture (while eternally valid) was not applicable under certain specific circumstances.

Other interpretations of the terms have been offered.[2] A few scholars have related them to exorcism (binding and loosing of demons—but why would the church ever want to loose a demon?). More often, interpreters throughout church history (including Luther) have thought that the terms referred to the church's authority to forgive or retain sins. The scriptural basis for the church having such authority is secure but is better derived from John 20:23. Modern scholarship has cautioned against reading

[1] This accords with the definitions offered in *ABD* 1.743–45 and BDAG 222.

[2] Dennis C. Duling, "Binding and Loosing: Matthew 16:19; Matthew 18:18; John 20:23," *Foundations and Facets Forum* 3, 4 (1987): 3–31.

the Matthean texts in light of the Johannine concept. It seems unlikely that the first evangelist would have favored the notion that the church might withhold forgiveness of sins; he seems to guard against such an interpretation of 18:15–20 via the addendum of 18:21–35 (cf. also 18:10–14).

For Matthew, the issue is the *identification* of sin. Final authority rests with the community to identify which behaviors constitute sin and which therefore require repentance. As in John, the person who does not heed the church's authority may be excluded from God's eschatological community, but for Matthew the problem is ethical discernment (and lack of respect for the church's role in this) rather than mere obstinacy. This is consistent with Matthew's understanding of the Great Commission as being to teach baptized people to obey the commandments of Jesus (28:20). To fulfill such a commission the church must be able to discern what obedience to those commandments entails, and the baptized persons who are to be made disciples must accept the church's teaching on such matters.

Matthew's Gospel is commonly understood as reflecting a close connection to the world of Second Temple and post-Temple Judaism.[3] Within that milieu, debates over the applicability of the law to specific situations were common; they appear already in famous arguments between the first-century schools of Hillel and Shammai and continue to be a defining part of the discussions that would ultimately be codified as the Mishnah. For example, the question was raised whether one might be guilty of stealing if one finds something and keeps it without searching for the rightful owner. When is such a search required, and how extensive must it be? The Talmud states, "If a fledgling bird is found within fifty cubits of a dovecote, it belongs to the owner of the dovecote. If it is found outside the limits of fifty cubits, it belongs to the person who finds it" (*Bava Batra* 23b).[4]

To use Matthew's terminology, the decision was that the law ("Do not steal") was *bound* when the bird was found in proximity to its likely owner; one who keeps the bird under such conditions has transgressed the law and is guilty of sin. But the law is *loosed* when the bird is found at a distance from any likely owner; the law against stealing does not forbid keeping the bird in that instance. Matthew's Gospel displays an awareness of such legal discussions when it refers to "the tradition of the elders" (15:2) and when it engages such questions as "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife *for any cause*?" (19:3). Matthew's community seems to have been struggling with issues similar to those that exercised the rabbis.

It is important to note that for the rabbis (and for Matthew) loosing the law never meant dismissing scripture or countering its authority. The law was never wrong when it was rightly interpreted. The issue, rather, was discernment of the law's intent and of the sphere of its application. Thus, in the above example, the rabbis did not decide that in some instances it is all right to steal; rather, they sought to define *stealing* in a way that would determine just what behavior was prohibited. The logic of rabbinic argument does not always hold up

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[3] W. D. Davies, *The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964); Anthony J. Saldarini, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

[4] The citation continues with a humorous note: "Rabbi Jeremiah asked: If one foot of the fledgling bird is within the limit of fifty cubits, and one foot is outside it, what is the law? It was for this question that Rabbi Jeremiah was thrown out of the House of Study."



to modern critical scrutiny (especially from Gentiles), and, at times, decisions to loose the law may appear to us as simple dismissals of scripture; still, they were apparently never intended as such.

Likewise, in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus may seem dismissive of scripture when he says, "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,' but I say to you . . ." (5:38). Most likely, however, Matthew intended to present Jesus' radical reinterpretations of the law as bringing out its true intent and defining its sphere of applicability, in a manner analogous to what was done by other rabbis. Certainly, Matthew does not intend to pit Jesus against Torah but strives to present Jesus as the one who indicates how Torah is to be fulfilled.[5] Jesus says, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (5:17–19). The word that the NRSV translates "break" in this passage is exactly the same word that is rendered "loose" in 16:19 and 18:18 above. If the latter two verses were absent from this Gospel, we might assume that Jesus is here rejecting the rabbinic practice of "loosing" the law altogether. But in 5:17–19 "loosing" the commandments is contrasted not with binding them but with doing (ποιήσῃ) them and teaching (διδάξῃ) them. Clearly, then, Matthew condemns the practice of loosing the law when this means abolishing the scriptures rather than fulfilling them through obedience and teaching. But 16:19 and 18:18 present him as commending the practice of (sometimes) loosing the law in some other undefined sense; most likely, the latter sense is the same as that employed by rabbis—discerning the intent of the law with regard to particular circumstances. Sometimes, Matthew's Jesus allows, the church will be expected to determine that the law, while eternally valid, does not apply to specific circumstances.

We may also note peripherally that the mere existence of the text cited above (5:17–19) is a fairly strong indication that some people were saying that Jesus (or the Matthean community speaking in his name) *was* abolishing the law. There would be little sense in issuing the disclaimer otherwise. Apparently, then, Matthew's community and possibly Jesus himself were sometimes regarded by their peers as people who "loosed the law" in ways that were dismissive of its intent and authority, though (like other rabbis) they would have maintained that this was not actually the case.

[5] Klyne Snodgrass, "Matthew and the Law," in *Treasures New and Old: Contributions to Matthean Studies*, ed. D. R. Bauer and M. A. Powell (Atlanta: Scholars), 99–128.

We should also note that, if Matthew's Gospel contains warnings about the potential abuse of "loosing" the law, it likewise warns against abuses involved in *not* doing so. One of Jesus' primary accusations against the scribes and Pharisees is that they "bind (δήσῃς) heavy burdens that are difficult to bear" on the shoulders of those who listen to their teaching (23:4).

Examples of binding and loosing in Matthew's Gospel

Many passages in Matthew can be read as expressive of a concern for the church's responsibility in binding and loosing the law. The Gospel offers both good and bad examples with regard to how this ought to be done. Jesus consistently exemplifies the right way to bind and loose the scriptures, while the scribes and Pharisees consistently exemplify the wrong way to do so.[6]

In 5:21–23, Jesus binds the law prohibiting murder as applicable to anger and insults, and in 5:27–28 he similarly binds the law prohibiting adultery as applicable to lust. The apparent rationale for these decisions is that the "heart" is the locus of human sin and thus intentions of the heart are judged by the same standard as actions.

In 5:31–32, Jesus binds the prohibition against adultery as applicable to divorce and remarriage, and does so with explicit repudiation of scriptural allowance for the latter. This is taken up later (19:3–9), where he explains that such allowance was merely a concession granted in recognition of "hardness of hearts" and that it never expressed the actual intent of God. (We note in passing that the notion that some biblical prescriptions and proscriptions are concessions to the human condition that do not represent the intent of God is a fairly radical hermeneutical innovation). But Jesus also looses his own prohibition of divorce and remarriage for those instances involving *porneia* (i.e., when the spouse has been unfaithful or, possibly, when the marriage itself was illegal; the exact situation governed by this exception clause is debated). In 5:33–37, Jesus binds the prohibition against swearing false oaths (Lev 19:12) as applicable to *all* oaths (without explanation, but possibly because human frailty or unseen circumstances can make even an oath that was intended in good faith into a false one).

In 5:43–48, Jesus effectively binds the commandment to "love your neighbor" as applicable also to enemies (or, we might say, he rejects a loosing of the love commandment by which some have indicated that "enemies" are distinct from neighbors and so not covered by the prescription). He does so with an appeal to the nature of God who bestows blessings upon the good and the bad alike.

In 12:1–9, Jesus looses the prohibition against performing work on the sabbath with regard to plucking grain to satisfy one's hunger. He further opines that the Pharisees' attempt to bind the law in such an instance causes them to "condemn the guiltless" (12:7).[7]

In 12:9–14, Jesus looses the prohibition against performing work on the sab-

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[6] So polemical a presentation obviously reflects the strained relations between church and synagogue. The bias of Matthew's construal is a matter of record and need not concern us here. Even those who question the historical accuracy of his attributions recognize that the reports of legal disputes reveal this evangelist's own ideas regarding what constitutes proper and improper ways of binding and loosing the law.

[7] Similar discussions are found in (later) Jewish literature. Plucking grain on the sabbath is forbidden without qualification (as equal to harvesting) in *y.Sabb.* 7.9b.67, but *b. Sabb.* 128a says, "One may pinch with the hand and eat but not with a tool."

bath with regard to works of healing and then declares, "It is lawful to do good on the sabbath." The latter pronouncement would potentially allow sabbath prohibitions to be loosed in a great many other instances as well (whenever the otherwise prohibited activity can be construed as "doing good"). In 15:1–2, 10–20, Jesus looses some law (we're not sure which one) with regard to ritual hand-washings. By so doing, he rejects a binding of the law that was found in the tradition of the elders. Apparently, that tradition interpreted some purity regulation in the law as necessitating such hand-washings.[8] Jesus rejects that interpretation and looses the law on the broad observation that "what goes into the mouth does not defile a person."

In 15:3–9, Jesus binds the commandment "Honor your father and your mother" as applicable to caring for one's parents in old age. He strongly rejects the scribes and the Pharisees' attempt to loose the law for those instances in which one might say, "Whatever support you would have had from me is given to God." He denounces this attempt at loosing the law as "making void the word of God for the sake of human tradition" and declares that those who favor such an interpretation teach "human precepts as doctrines."

There are many other instances in which disputes over binding and loosing the law seem to stand in the background. For example, no Mosaic law is mentioned explicitly in 22:15–22, but the question of paying taxes to Caesar turns on an interpretation of the biblical prohibition against idolatry: one might bind that prohibition to forbid offering tribute to a man who claims to be a god; Jesus appears to loose it on the ground that a person who does not recognize Caesar's divinity may regard the "payment" as a meaningless act. Jesus' encounter with the Canaanite woman in 15:21–28 is intriguing in that she appears to loose a commandment that Jesus himself had given earlier ("Go nowhere among the Gentiles but only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel," 10:5–6). She does not repudiate or invalidate his command but stipulates an exception, which he allows.

Some observations from the Matthean examples

Emerging from this survey of Matthean texts are the potentially contradictory notions that (a) the scriptures must be properly bound and loosed if God's will is to be discerned and obeyed, but that (b) the scriptures are often bound when they should be loosed, and loosed when they should be bound, with the result that God's will is *not* discerned or obeyed.

We may note that Jesus binds laws more frequently than he looses them. Yet this observation must be balanced by the fact that he claims—almost programmatically—to offer an "easy yoke" and a "light burden" to those who follow him (11:30; cf. 23:4). Further, although the instances in which he looses the law are relatively few, his justifications for doing so (e.g., "it is lawful to do good on the sabbath"; "what goes into the mouth does not defile a person") set sweeping precedents with potentially radical implications for ways in which laws could be loosed in many other instances (as they obviously were in the developing Christian church).

Matthew's readers are urged to avoid two pitfalls:

- if the church is cavalier about loos-

[8] Jacob Neusner's theory is that the Pharisees (especially after 70) sought to apply laws for the purity of priests serving in the temple to the people of Israel in general. See *Das pharisäische und talmudische Judentum* (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1984), 24–25, 62.

ing the law when it shouldn't, it will "make void the word of God for the sake of human tradition" (15:6), but

• if the church neglects to loose the law when it should do so, it will sometimes end up "condemning the guiltless" (12:7).

To help readers find the narrow way that lies between these pitfalls, Matthew's Gospel not only offers the good and bad examples cited above but also presents Jesus as articulating a number of principles that might guide the church in its deliberation. Two points especially stand out:

1. Acceptable binding and loosing is founded in a hermeneutic that interprets scripture in light of scripture and, specifically, recognizes the priority of certain scriptural mandates. These include the Golden Rule (7:12), a recognition of the divine preference for mercy over sacrifice (9:13; 12:7), a prioritization of love for God and neighbor (22:34–40), and identification of the "weightier matters of the law" as justice, mercy, and faithfulness (23:23). All of these principles derive in some sense from scripture itself, and in every instance in which Jesus binds or looses laws (or criticizes the binding and loosing of laws performed by others) his decision is consistent with this hermeneutic. For example, when Jesus looses the sabbath prohibition for those who pick grain to satisfy their hunger, he does so with an appeal to the scriptural prioritization of mercy over sacrifice (12:7).

2. The authority to bind and loose is securely located in Matthean Christology and in this Gospel's christological understanding of eschatology and salvation history. Jesus possesses this authority because he is a unique manifestation of God's presence (1:23; 11:27). Thus, even apart from the appeal to mercy, his loosing of the sabbath law is justified because "The Son of Man is Lord of the sabbath" (12:8). The ultimate question for Matthew is not simply "on what basis is the law to be bound or loosed" but "who has the authority to do this." God has given the authority to Jesus (and not to the scribes and Pharisees, cf. 7:29), and Jesus in turn gives it to the church.

The two key texts

In Matthew 16:13–20, the primary concern is not with *how* the church will exercise its authority to bind and to loose but with the establishment of this authority and its effects. Just as Jesus' authority to bind and loose is attributed in Matthew to his christological identity, so the church's authority is grounded here in its acclamation of Jesus as "the Christ, the Son of the living God." We notice too that the authority to bind and loose is described metaphorically as utilizing the keys to the kingdom of heaven. By interpreting God's will rightly, the church opens the door for God's will to be done and, hence, for God's rule to become a lived reality. Likewise, this authoritative discernment of God's will facilitates the overcoming of the gates of Hades, such that the power of death and the devil may be undone.

Matt 18:15–20 presents the church's ministry of binding and loosing as necessary for the determination of who is to be subject to church discipline. As such, we are given a glimpse of how the process might actually work within the post-Easter community. Notably, it is no longer to be exercised by one gifted leader (e.g., Peter) but is now to be exercised by the community as a whole. Again, the authority to bind and loose is grounded in Matthew's christological claims—the church possesses such authority not because Christians have shown themselves to be wiser or more faithful than Pharisees but because Christ dwells in their midst (18:20; cf. 28:20). We

notice also that the church does not attempt to bind and loose laws for the world at large but only for its own community: the ministry is exercised with regard to a "sibling" (i.e., a member of the church) who is believed to be sinning. Thus, Matthew expects the church to exhibit a peculiarly Christian ethic that may or may not concur with the expectations of its social environment.

Specifically, 18:15–20 offers a perspective on how binding and loosing might function in a conflict situation, where there is disagreement. The sinful sibling in this passage is not to be understood as one who stubbornly persists in what he or she acknowledges to be sinful behavior (Matthew's definition of "brother" and "sister" in 12:50 makes that unlikely). Rather, the text envisions a situation in which a number of church members confront a member of the community concerning behavior that they believe to be sinful but which he or she apparently does not believe to be sinful. Ultimately, the church as a whole is called upon to make a determination. Basically, they must either bind the law by deciding (with the accusers) that some scriptural injunction does apply to the person's behavior or loose the law by deciding (with the accused) that cited scripture does not apply to this person's behavior.

An example of such a situation (albeit an issue never mentioned in Matthew) would be the dispute elsewhere in the New Testament regarding food offered to idols (e.g., 1 Corinthians 8). According to the program presented in Matt 18:15–20, we may imagine that one member of the community might think that another is sinning if the latter individual is consuming such food. The proper procedure, then, is: (a) confront the person privately; (b) consult with two or three others; (c) bring the matter to the community as a whole for resolution. The community would then ask, "Is the scriptural prohibition against idolatry applicable to eating food that was once dedicated to idols?" Conceivably, the church might bind or loose the law, but in either case, Matthew's Gospel claims that the community speaks with divine authority: "whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

Implications for Christian practice

Although this discussion of binding and loosing strikes some as new and potentially controversial, it has in some sense been the practice of the church throughout the centuries. Churches do not usually have assemblies where they vote specifically on whether a particular scripture text is applicable to a certain type of situation, but discussions regarding such applicability have been in the background for many formal and informal decisions. Certain church bodies have bound the commandment against murder ("You shall not kill") as applicable to situations it was not originally intended to address (abortion, capital punishment, warfare). The virtually unanimous opposition to slavery in global Christianity today also represents a binding of scripture, a recognition that the overall witness of scripture should be interpreted as denouncing behavior that was permitted in biblical times.

Christian churches have also loosed commandments, narrowing their range of application without dismissing their original intent. Indeed, the first commandment God ever gave to humans was "Be fruitful and multiply," and at the time it was given it expressed the will of God for every human being on the planet. But few Christians today and no major church body would read this text as meaning that God wants all

people to reproduce without limit. Jesus' prohibition against saving money for the future (Matt 6:19, "Do not store up treasure on earth") has also been loosed with regard to many modern applications: Christians are permitted to save money for retirement or to pay for their children's education.

The church today may consider whether the Matthean understanding of binding and loosing can continue to inform its ethical deliberation with regard to current issues. To take an obvious example, contemporary questions regarding acceptance of homosexual behavior may be considered in this light. Should the biblical prohibitions of same-sex sexual relations be bound or loosed with regard to specific contemporary situations? What if, for example, the couple can be determined to be exclusively and irreparably homosexual in orientation, and what if they are willing to commit themselves to living in a monogamous relationship that is accountable to the church? Could the prohibitions be deemed inapplicable to that situation? Matthew's paradigm for ethical discernment would seem to suggest at least three points for our deliberation.

First, application of this paradigm assumes that the question is whether there might be exceptions to a normative policy. A church following the Matthean paradigm might maintain that while it is normally an abomination for a man to engage in sexual relations with another man, there could be circumstances under which such behavior could be accepted or affirmed. The obligation on those who would argue for such exceptions would be to show why the biblical prohibitions did not apply in the specified instances. This would be a different matter than arguing that the biblical perspective on human sexuality is so limited that it needs to be amended on the basis of modern knowledge.

The authority to bind and to loose is granted by Christ *to the church as a whole.*

Second, Matthew's Gospel suggests that the church does in fact have the authority to make such determinations. Persons who say that the church would violate scripture by allowing for exceptions to a normative policy against homosexual relations ignore the fact that scripture itself gives the church authority to do precisely that. For the church to loose the biblical prohibitions against same-sex activity under specified circumstances would not constitute a rejection of biblical authority but, rather, an exercise of ecclesiastical authority granted in the Bible by Jesus himself. Recognizing this does not, of course, prejudge what the church ought to do.

Finally, the authority to bind and to loose is granted by Christ *to the church as a whole.* Whatever that might mean in our modern context (local congregation? national church assembly?), such authority is not granted to the individual. The point of Matt 18:15–18 seems to be that the church as a community can and should sometimes offer individual Christians guidance on questions of what behavior is pleasing to God. The expectation, furthermore, seems to be that when the church does this, the individual Christian will heed that teaching and strive to live in a way that the church as a whole believes to be in keeping with God's will.

The Trust of Abraham and the Trust of Jesus Christ: Romans 1:17

Herman C. Waetjen
Robert S. Dollar Emeritus Professor of New Testament
San Francisco Theological Seminary, Graduate Theological Union

Both the end of the Preamble of Paul's Letter to the Romans (1:16) and the following transition (1:17) into his analysis of the human condition are introduced by the adverbial conjunction "for" (γάρ). Paul wants to explain why he is apostolically under obligation to "Greeks and barbarians, to wise and foolish." As an apostle he is free, as he had claimed in 1 Cor 9:1; and yet necessity is laid upon him not only to evangelize without charge (9:16–18) but also to fulfill his apostolic commitment to the Gentiles. On the one hand, he is not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God that is teleologically oriented "unto" or "towards salvation" (εἰς σωτηρίαν). On the other hand, he is not ashamed of the gospel because it discloses the reality of "the justice of God." As a Jew and as a former "Pharisee of the Pharisees," he has been engaged in pursuing God's righteousness. That pursuit has finally been fulfilled in his submission to the gospel of Jesus Christ, for, as he acknowledges, "in it the justice of God is revealed." Even as the gospel is God's power "to everyone who believes," the gospel is also the disclosure of God's justice ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν.[1]

How is this double prepositional phrase to be translated? A literal rendition, "out of faith into faith" is no more intelligible than the translations that are offered by the versions that are in print today.

King James: "For therein is the righteousness of God revealed *from faith to faith*; as it is written, 'The just shall live by faith.'"

RSV: "For in it the righteousness of God is revealed *through faith for faith*; as it is written, 'He who through faith is righteous shall live.'"[2]

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[1] For the recent debate on Rom 1:17, see Douglas A. Campbell, "Romans 1:17—*A Crux Interpretum* for the Πίστις Χριστοῦ Debate," *JBL* 113/2 (1994) 265–85; Brian Dodd, "Romans 1:17—A *Crux Interpretum* for the Πίστις Χριστοῦ Debate?" *JBL* 114/3 (1995) 470–73. Many of the following works are focused on the problem of πίστις Χριστοῦ, primarily in Galatians, but in one way or another they relate to or have a bearing on Rom 1:17: A. J. Hultgren, "The *Pistis Christou* Formulation in Paul," *NT* 22 (1980): 248–63; L. T. Johnson, "Rom 3:21–26 and the Faith of Jesus," *CBQ* 44 (1982): 77–90; Richard B. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ: The Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1–4:11* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), originally published in 1983 by The Society of Biblical Literature; S. K. Williams, "Again, *Pistis Christou*," *CBQ* 49 (1987): 431–37; Morna D. Hooker, "ΠΙΣΤΙΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ," *NTS* 35/3 (1989): 321–42; James D. G. Dunn, "Once More, ΠΙΣΤΙΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ," *SBL 1991 Seminar Papers*, ed. Eugene H. Lovering Jr. (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), 730–44.

[2] "Through faith for faith" is the translation that Anders Nygren offers in

NRSV: "For in it the righteousness of God is revealed *through faith for faith*; as it is written, 'The one who is righteous will live by faith.'"

NIV: "For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is *by faith from first to last*, just as it is written, 'The righteous will live by faith.'"

NEB: "Because here is revealed God's way of righting wrong, a way that starts *from faith and ends in faith*, as Scripture says, 'he shall gain life who is justified through faith.'"

Good News: "For the gospel reveals how God puts people right with himself: it is *through faith from beginning to end.* As the Scripture says, 'The person who is put right with God through faith shall live.'"

Goodspeed: "In it God's way of uprightness is disclosed *through faith for faith*, just as Scripture says, 'The upright will have life because of his faith.'"

Luther: "Denn Gottes Gerechtigheit wird darin offenhart *aus Glauben zu Glauben*, wie denn geschrieben steht, 'Der Gerechte wird aus Glauben leben.'"

Protestant, and Catholic Union Translation: "Denn in Evangelium wird die Gerechtigkeit Gottes offenhart *aus Glauben zum Glauben*, wie es in der Schrift heisst, 'Der aus Glauben Gerechte wird leben.'"

Why does the Apostle employ a double prepositional phrase, when the first of the two, ἐκ πίστεως, corresponds to the prepositional phrase of the quotation of Hab 2:4, ἐκ πίστεως, from which it may have been derived? It would seem that that congruity would be adequate. Indeed, Paul employs the phrase at least eight times in Romans and six times in Galatians, but the second prepositional phrase, εἰς πίστιν, occurs nowhere else in his writings.[3]

A few of these instances of ἐκ πίστεως suffice to disclose something of the sense and significance they have for the apostle. According to Rom 3:30, it is "*out of faith* (ἐκ πίστεως) that circumcision will be justified." The promise to Abraham and his seed was made on the basis of ἐκ πίστεως (4:16) so that [the promise might be] according to grace not only to those descendants to whom the law was given but also to those who, like Abraham, live *out of faith* (ἐκ πίστεως). Indeed, Abraham, empowered by faith, believed (ἐπίστευσεν) in hope against hope (παρ' ἐλπίδα ἐπ' ἐλπίδι) and "it was reckoned to him unto justice" (εἰς δικαιοσύνην). "Now this was written not only on account of him, that is, 'it was reckoned to him,' but also on account of us to whom it is going to be reckoned, to those who believe on the one who resurrected Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up because of our

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Commentary on Romans, trans. Carl C. Rasmussen (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1949), 78, and it is interpreted as: "Faith is both the beginning and the culmination."

[3] After examining various interpretations of these phrases, D. A. Campbell, "Romans 1:17," renders ἐκ πίστεως as "the faithfulness of Christ" and as an interpretation of εἰς πίστιν proposes, "with the goal of faith/fullness (in the Christian)." But by focusing his investigation on πίστις Χριστοῦ he is misled into a set of christological interpretations. Brian Dodd, "Romans 1:17," in his critique of Campbell makes the same mistake. Luke Timothy Johnson, *Reading Romans: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2001), 29, is attracted to Campbell's interpretation, but he prefers the possibility of the dynamic of gift and response: "God's faithfulness to humans" and "their obedient acceptance of that gift."

offenses and was resurrected because of our acquittal."[4] In the very next verse (5:1) Paul proceeds to draw the consequences, "Therefore, being justified ἐκ πίστεως, we have peace towards God through our Lord Jesus Christ."[5] Accordingly, the phrase ἐκ πίστεως is especially linked to Abraham, the grand patriarch of Israel, and it indicates the basis of his relationship to God and attendantly his justification by God.

Paul employs the same phrase, ἐκ πίστεως, in his Letter to the Galatians in order to establish the priority of faith over the giving of the Law: "Even as Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him unto justice. Consequently you know that the offspring of Abraham are those [who live] *out of faith* (ἐκ πίστεως)." As in Romans 4, Paul proceeds to draw the Gentiles into this heritage of faith: "Now the Scriptures foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles *out of faith* (ἐκ πίστεως) proclaimed good news to Abraham in advance that 'all the nations will be blessed in you; so that those ἐκ πίστεως are blessed with the faith of Abraham." A few verses later, in 3:11, he declares "that it is clear that in or by the Law no one is justified before God, because the righteous one will live ἐκ πίστεως." Hab 2:4 is quoted here as also in Rom 1:17.[6]

Why then is it necessary in Rom 1:17 to attach the prepositional phrase εἰς πίστιν to ἐκ πίστεως, the phrase that may have been drawn out of Hab 2:4? What is its rationale?[7] Earlier scholarly efforts to resolve the problems of Rom 1:17 ignored the purpose and significance of εἰς πίστιν. To determine the relationship between the two prepositional phrases it is necessary to examine Paul's complex discussion of πίστις Χριστοῦ in Gal 2:15–3:29 and particularly his attendant application of an analogy that he appears to have drawn out of Roman jurisprudence.[8] It is the juridical

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[4] These are paraphrases of Romans 4:18–25.

[5] See below for the grammatical elucidation of this text.

[6] Contrary to D. A. Campbell, "Romans 1:17," there is not the slightest implication here that ἐκ πίστεως in Hab 2:4 or Rom 1:17 has a christological significance.

[7] For C. H. Dodd, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (New York: Harper, 1932), 13–14, the meaning of the double prepositional phrase "is not very clear. The probability is that we have no more than a rhetorical device to give emphasis to the idea of faith." Otto Michel, *Der Brief an die Römer* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1955) identifies the phrase as a "Kampfruf," a battle cry that emphasizes the concept of faith, but moves on quickly to the quotation of Hab 2:4. Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. and ed. G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 31, tends to dismiss its importance, claiming simply that the clause "is related only loosely to the preceding statement." Its purpose is to indicate that the revelation of God's righteousness "takes place always only in the sphere of faith." James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8. Word Biblical Commentary* vol. 38 (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 44, seems to conclude that ἐκ πίστεως refers to God's faithfulness and εἰς πίστιν to "man's faith." Peter Stuhlmacher, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Commentary*, trans. Scott J. Hafemann (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1994), 29, concentrates on "God's righteousness" and, without commenting specifically on this clause, states, "God's righteousness is experienced as salvation simply and solely by faith."

[8] Πίστις Χριστοῦ is the focus of M. D. Hooker's essay, "ΠΙΣΤΙΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ," and, after examining many of the occurrences of this phrase in Paul's writings, but without including an analysis of Paul's use of *fidei commissum* in Gal 3:15, she concludes on pp. 336–37 that the genitive construction of πίστις Χριστοῦ should be identified as a subjective genitive and therefore interpreted as "the faith of Christ" with the implication that it also refers "to the faith of the believer."

principle of *fidei commissum*, an undertaking by trust adopted from ancient Greek law; and, because of its pervasive appropriation throughout the Mediterranean world, it would be intelligible not only to the Christians at Rome but also to Christians in the Roman province of Galatia.[9]

Paul introduces this analogy in Gal 3:15 by informing his addressees that he is going to speak κατὰ ἄνθρωπον; he is going to give an example from everyday life: "No one annuls or adds a codicil to a testament (διαθήκην) ratified by a human being."[10] This is not the testament (διαθήκη) of the old covenant that was "chiseled in letters on stone tablets," nor is it to be identified with the new covenant "of greater glory" (2 Cor 3:7–11). This is the διαθήκη that is "430 years older than the Mosaic law."[11] It is the testament that was drawn up between God and Abraham, and, as Gal 3:18 indicates, it has to do with "inheritance." Διαθήκη, as Raphael Taubenschlag states in his analysis of the Roman law of inheritance, is "the most frequently used technical term to designate the last will and testament."[12]

It was Greer M. Taylor who recognized the juridical determination of διαθήκη in Gal 3:15 and related it to the distinctive function of πίστις (faith) in both Galatians and Romans on the basis of the Roman legal institution of *fidei commissum*.[13] The *fidei commissum* is a body of law that establishes the provisions for the disposition of inheritance. "It is a device for the distribution of benefits—which include δικαιοσύνη but, also, other benefits which the law does not even claim to offer."[14] Abraham and Christ are the successive testamentary heirs who receive the inheritance in πίστις. As Paul says in Gal 3:16,

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[9] On the basis of Greer M. Taylor's example of the will of C. Longinus Castor, which is limited to Rome, R. B. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ,* pp. 188–89, denies its institutionalization beyond Rome. But this does not appear to be true. On pp. 70 and 73 Taylor refers to the use of *fidei* commissum in Egypt. He includes the *Institutes* of Gaius, the tenure of property in a fiduciary capacity in the Septuagint, and *Der Gnomon des Idios Logos*, the papyrus collection of imperial enactments. See Raphael Taubenschlag, *The Law of Greco-Roman Egypt in the Light of the Papyri 332 B.C.–640 A.D.* (Warsaw: Panstwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1955) 190ff., esp. p. 203 n. 10. Also J. H. Moulton and G. Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek* Testament (London: Hodder & Hodder, 1957); πίστις is also used in the papyri in the juridical sense of "guarantee, pledge, bond."

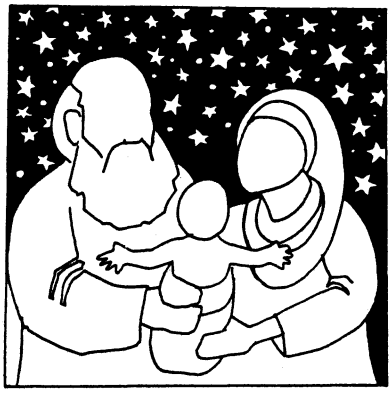
[10] Somehow Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ,* ignores the example from real life that Paul introduces in Gal 3:15. On p. 187 he acknowledges that the first reference of διαθήκη occurs in Gal 3:15, but he makes no effort to link it to Paul's introduction of the διαθήκη analogy. What is that illustration from everyday life? The analogy of *fidei commissum* not only determines the development of Paul's thought in Gal 3:16–29 but throughout the entire section, 2:15–4:31, that is, from the beginning of the "Proposition" of 2:15–21 through his development of the four arguments that follow in 3:1–4:31.

[11] Taylor, "The Function of ΠΙΣΤΙΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ," p. 63 n. 8.

[12] Taubenschlag, *The Law of Greco-Roman Egypt*, 190.

[13] As Hays acknowledges in *The Faith of Jesus Christ*, 185, Taylor's hypothesis "has been greeted among Pauline scholars with benign neglect . . ." In his critique of Taylor's work, Hays dismisses Taylor's interpretation for various reasons, but perhaps mostly because, as he claims on p. 187, "*precisely at the point where Paul develops the analogy of the διαθήκη* (3:15–18) *πίστις drops out of the discussion*" (emphasis his). But there is no need to include πίστις until 3:22ff., because the matter of adding a codicil to the inviolable testament must first be resolved.

[14] Taylor, "The Function of ΠΙΣΤΙΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ," 63.



"The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed, who is Christ." By drawing upon a close reading of the Septuagint text of Gen 12:2, "τῷ σπέρματί σου, he is able to apply the *fidei commissum* to Abraham and a single lineal descendant, Jesus Christ. For, as he continues, "It does not say, 'and to seeds,' as of many, but as of one;" and, after repeating the text of Gen 12:2, he identifies that one seed as the "Christ."[15] "These two persons," as Taylor asserts, "have exclusive legal title to, and exclusive power to transmit the benefits [of the testament]. And the benefits come as a free gift—without being earned—to beneficiaries of all nations, Jew and Gentile alike, all on the same terms."[16] Although Abraham is the original testamentary heir, Christ as the single descendant is the sole agent of the distribution of its benefits.

God is the maker of this διαθήκη, and it was made and received in πίστις; that is, it was made and received in "faith." Here, however, as already implied, the word "faith" is an inappropriate translation. For πίστις, in this context of Gal 2:15–3:29 and Paul's employment of *fidei commissum*, belongs to the language of jurisprudence and therefore is more aptly rendered into English as "trust."[17] Indeed, throughout its use in Gal 2:15–3:29, πίστις belongs to the διαθήκη, the testament that God established with Abraham and his descendent Christ. Πίστις, however, is the trust that was given and received under the testament; it is that trust or trust fund that would confer the promised inheritance when its beneficiaries would come of age, as Gal 3:25 and 4:1–6 indicate.[18]

The juridical principle of the *fidei commissum* that Paul has enunciated in Gal 3:15 makes the testament inviolable: "No one annuls or adds a codicil to a testament (διαθήκη) ratified by a human being." The precedence of that testament, however, is challenged by the Sinai covenant and its attendant giving of the Law. "For if the inheritance is "out of law" (ἐκ νόμου), it is no longer "out of promise" (ἐξ ἐπαγγελίας). Consequently it is necessary for Paul to return to the inviolability of that διαθήκη that was given and received in "trust," and he adds in v. 17, "The law having happened after 430 years does not make void the διαθήκη previously ratified by God so that the promise is abolished."

That, then, brings the teleology of the Law into sharper focus! "Why then the Law?" In spite of its originally intended purpose to serve Israel as social legislation, Paul attributes to it the function that he

[15] Hays claims that "Gal. 3:16 and 3:19 show that Paul understood certain promises to the seed of Abraham as messianic prophecies" (*The Faith of Jesus Christ*, 183). Perhaps! But it is also possible that Paul's analogy of *fidei commissum* has determined his interpretation of Gen 12:2.

[16] Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ*, 183.

[17] "Trust" is the appropriate translation of πίστις, as Taylor rightly contends in "The Function of ΠΙΣΤΙΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ," 68.

[18] Taylor, "The Function of ΠΙΣΤΙΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ," 64.

might have derived from the entire Old Testament account of Israel's history, the function of the Law as a mirror. "It was added on for the sake of transgression." He expresses the same perspective at the conclusion of his analysis of the human condition in Rom 3:20, "By the Law is the recognition of sin." Before Abraham's seed should come, it was necessary to expose the human condition of sin (ἁμαρτία) and the acts of transgressions and offenses that it engenders. Only after that disclosure could Abraham's seed fulfill the terms and conditions of that original testament (διαθήκη).[19]

If that original διαθήκη was inviolable so that it could neither be annulled nor a codicil added to it, how, then, could the Law have been joined to it? Paul offers a stunning reply to this critical question: "[It was] ordered through angels by the hand of a mediator." Ignoring the biblical witness to the divine origin of the Law, he claims that the Law was ordained by angels, through the mediation of a negotiator.[20] But as he is quick to acknowledge in v. 20, "A negotiator is not of one, but God is one."[21] By these rather enigmatic words, Paul infers that arbitration always involves two parties. God was one of them! The other party is not named, but undoubtedly it must be Israel. The mediator also remains unidentified, but it could only be Moses. Through the arbitration of Moses, God and Israel reached an agreement to add a codicil to the testament that God established in trust with Abraham and his single lineal descendant, the Christ. As a codicil it does not annul the testament or cancel the promises. Indeed it could not, because as Paul maintains, "If the Law [that] was given was able to make alive, in truth justice would come "out of the Law" (ἐκ νόμου)."

The Scriptures make it very clear, however, that "all things were confined together under sin (ἁμαρτία)." The teleological objective of the διαθήκη, therefore, was the arrival of the second testamentary heir, Jesus Christ. He, then, would serve as the divinely appointed agent to distribute the benefits of this trust, "so that the promise out of the trust of Jesus Christ (ἐκ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ) be given to those who believe." The διαθήκη was based on πίστις, the trust fund that God established with Abraham. But because its benefits were made available after the second testamentary heir, Jesus Christ, had fulfilled the conditions of the διαθήκη, Paul can designate this trust fund "the trust of Jesus Christ," as he does in Gal 2:16; 3:22, 26 (and also in Rom 3:22).[22] In Gal

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[19] Taubenschlag,"The Law of Greco-Roman Egypt," 218.

[20] Ben Witherington III, *Grace in Galatia: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 257, maintains that, because the preposition διά (through) in 3:19 expresses "intermediate agency," the Law was ordained by God but came to Moses through angels. That may be correct. But Witherington, therefore, is unable to identify God as one of the two parties negotiating with Israel, with Moses serving as arbitrator, to determine whether the codicil of the Law should be added to the διαθήκη. In his judgment, Paul is stressing the oneness of God in 3:20. Charles B. Cousar, *Galatians: Interpretation* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 77–83, ignores vv. 19–20.

[21] Unfortunately, Taylor does not draw upon Gal 3:19b–20; it would strengthen the case he is attempting to establish. Curiously, Hays also makes no reference to either v. 19b or 20 in *The Faith of Jesus Christ*, yet they are crucial for the development of Paul's analogy.

[22] The Greek text of Gal 3:26 is problematic because of a manuscript variant that places the preposition ἐν (in) before "Christ Jesus" and therefore requires the use of the dative case, Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ. Although it may possibly be regarded as the more difficult

3:23, 25, he also refers to it simply as "the trust."[23] "When the trust came, we are no longer under a παιδαγωγόν" (very likely the slave who made certain that the child got to school but whose duty was completed when he turned the child over to the teacher). Consequently, if the Law as a παιδαγωγός has fulfilled its function by making human beings conscious of sin, it prepared them for the "trust of Jesus Christ." "Christ," therefore, as Paul declares in Rom 10:4, "is the termination and goal of the Law unto justice (δικαιοσύνην) to everyone who believes."

If the Law accomplishes its objective as a truant officer, how has Jesus Christ fulfilled the obligations of the διαθήκη? There are only hints in this section of Gal 2:15–3:29. In 2:20 Paul, speaking in the first person singular, acknowledges "[The life] that I now live in the flesh, I live in the trust of the Son of God who loved me and handed himself over on my behalf." Through his death by crucifixion Jesus terminated the old moral order for all of humanity. The same eschatological perspective is expressed in 2 Cor 5:14, "one died on behalf of all, consequently all died." More, however, is expressed in Rom 5:1–11, a passage that concentrates on the reality of Good Friday: "God confirmed his love unto us, for while we were still sinners Christ died on our behalf. Being justified now by his blood, how much more shall we be saved through him from the wrath. If being enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his son, how much more, being reconciled, shall we be saved by his life" (5:8–10).

Reconciliation or "peace with God" is the first of many benefits that are dispensed through the death of Jesus Christ. But there are also benefits that are transmitted through his resurrection from the dead, according to 5:12–21: "For if by the offense of one death ruled through the one, how much more those receiving the abundance of grace and the legacy of justice (δικαιοσύνη) will rule in life through the one Jesus Christ" (5:17). Grace, justice, ruling in life, and therefore recovering the glory, honor, and sovereignty that the Creator willed for all human beings, according to Gen 1:26–30 and Ps 8:5–6, are among the benefits that are conveyed through the trust of Jesus Christ.[24]

The precondition of being a beneficiary of that trust requires participation in the family of God that Jesus has constituted by his death and resurrection. According to Gal 3:26, "For you all are daughters and sons of God through the trust of Christ Jesus, for as many of you as were baptized into Christ, you have put on Christ [as a robe or garment that bears witness to the coming of age]." The eschatological death experience of baptism terminates partici-

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reading, it does not correspond to the Pauline use of the genitive construction of πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ that dominates Gal 2:15–3:29. The preposition ἐν must be deleted and the dative Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ replaced by the genitive Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

[23] George Howard, *Paul: Crisis in Galatia. A Study in Early Christian Theology* (Cambridge: University Press, 1979), 65, translates πίστις as "faith," without considering the analogy of jurisprudence that Paul introduces in 3:15, and contends that: "This 'faith' is the faith of Christ, who, by keeping the promise given to Abraham, brought salvation to non-law-abiding Gentiles and unity to mankind." Witherington, *Grace in Galatia*, 267–68, acknowledges that the use of ἡ πίστις in v. 23 is "an odd way to speak" and concludes that the phrase means "the coming of faith to be revealed." Subequently, in his interpretation of v. 25, he identifies πίστις with Christ.

[24] See Taylor, "The Function of ΠΙΣΤΙΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ," 64, for the benefits that he lists when the terms and conditions of the trust have been fulfilled.

pation in the old moral order and its dominant reality of the human infection of sin and incorporates men and women into a New Humanity in which "there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, neither male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are of Christ, consequently you are Abraham [and Sarah's] seed, heirs according to the promise."[25]

Those who are "of Christ" are separated from Abraham and Sarah by the great divide or chasm of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The latter belong to the old moral order that is dominated by the power of sin, but they were justified because they lived "out of faith" (ἐκ πίστεως). Justification by faith, as the Reformation doctrine is usually called, is a reality of the Old Testament and has no immediate connection to the trust of Jesus Christ. All who trust God, as Abraham and Sarah did, are justified by faith. But because Abraham and Sarah lived before the giving of the Law, and because "By the Law is the recognition of sin!" they had no consciousness of their infection. In the face of the stark realities of the old moral order, they lived "out of faith" and God reckoned to them righteousness (δικαιοσύνη), as Paul states in Rom 4:22 and Gal 3:6. According to Gal 3:7, therefore, "those ἐκ πίστεως are the daughters and sons of Abraham." The codicil of the Law was added to the testament that God established with Abraham and his lineal descendant in order to awaken human consciousness to the reality of sin. All those who live on this side of Sinai and the giving of the Law, therefore, are confronted with the mirror of the Law and all that it reveals. Although they, like Abraham and Sarah, can be justified by faith, they must live with the realities that are generated by their awareness of sin and the alienation, guilt, and death that result from it. They can live by faith, be declared righteous by God, and live with the courage to be. But they have not crossed the great divide into the trust of Jesus Christ.

Reconciliation or "peace with God" is the first of many benefits that are dispensed through the death of Jesus Christ.

That is the significance of ἐκ πίστεως in Rom 1:17. No more, no less! It is living out of the trust of Abraham without its completion by his descendent, the Christ.[26] The good news of Jesus Christ is what Paul implies in and by the second prepositional phrase of 1:17, εἰς πίστιν (into trust), that is, the trust of Jesus Christ. The good news is about the fulfillment of the terms and conditions of the testament that God established with Abraham and the benefits that

[25] According to Gal 4:5–6, adoption is the means by which human beings are incorporated into God's family of daughters and sons. Francis Lyall, "Roman Law in the Writings of Paul—Adoption," *JBL* 88/4 (1969): 466, concludes, "the believer is taken out of his former state, and is placed in a new relationship with God. He is made part of God's family forever, with reciprocal duties and rights."

[26] According to Karl Paul Donfried, "Justification and Last Judgment in Paul," *ZNW* 67/1/2 (1976): 99, "justification is the beginning of the Christian life." But only inasfar as a Christian, trusting with the faith of Abraham, believes "on the one who resurrected Jesus our Lord from the dead. . . ."

are universally conferred on all who participate in it. The movement of 1:17, therefore, is ἐκ πίστεως, out of the trust of Abraham, εἰς πίστιν, into the trust of Jesus Christ.[27]

The grammatical principle that is operating in Rom 5:1 accentuates this critical differentiation: Δικαιωθέντες οὖν ἐκ πίστεως εἰρήνην ἔχομεν πρὸς τὸν θεὸν διὰ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. The aorist participle, δικαιωθέντες (being justified), is relative to the main verb, ἔχομεν (we have), and expresses an action that is antecedent to that of the main verb.[28] Therefore, the act of "being justified out of faith" is prior to the reality of "having peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Reconciliation does not originate from being justified "out of faith," but as Paul subsequently states in 5:9, "Being justified now by his blood." Trusting God and living ἐκ πίστεως, like Abraham and Sarah, may result in "justification by faith." But being justified does not eliminate the alienation that arises when the mirror of the Law discloses the reality of sin and with it the resulting growing sense of exile and estrangement. If there is anything Christian about being justified by faith, it is, as Paul asserts in Rom 4:24, "believing on the one who raised Jesus from the dead." Abraham and Sarah trusted the same God, and they were declared righteous. However, beyond living ἐκ πίστεως is a life that is committed to living εἰς πίστιν, a life therefore that is dedicated to actualizing the justice of God (δικαιοσύνη τοῦ θεοῦ) in and by the trust of Jesus Christ.

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[27] Adolf Schlatter almost reaches the same conclusion: "God's righteousness is not only revealed on the basis of faith (*ek pisteōs*), but also for the purpose of faith (*eis pistin*). *Romans: The Righteousness of God*, trans. Siegfried S. Schatzmann with a foreword by Peter Stuhlmacher (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 24.

[28] See F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, translated, revised and edited by Robert W. Funk (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 174–75. Also C. F. D. Moule, *An Idiom-Book of New Testament Greek* (Cambridge: University Press, 1968), 99.

Book Reviews

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

The eight ELCA seminary presidents commissioned this book in which six professors from five of those seminaries discuss various aspects of the question of homosexuality—from a variety of disciplines, with a variety of opinions, including multicultural perspectives. Each chapter concludes with short bibliographies and questions for discussion, and the book ends with a dozen pages of open-forum dialogue among the contributors. All this is under the evenhanded editorial control of Childs, who, subsequent to the commissioning of this book, has been chosen to head up the ELCA task force on sexuality that readies the ELCA for a churchwide vote on the subject in 2005.

Most of the authors show some ambivalence on the subject, even inner conflict, though a few spend so much time on preliminaries that one feels a bit shortchanged in the end on the content of the debate. But on the whole this book deals openly and honestly with the subject and will bring much more light than heat to the discussion. I wish it a very wide audience.

On a few issues I would have wished for more precise statements or for fuller statements:

- Celibacy and refraining from sexual activity are not the same thing. Celibacy is a decision to eschew sexual activity for religious and vocational reasons. It is a gift, bestowed on relatively few people, and certainly not something to be mandated. What is often called celibacy in this book I would call chastity.
- The sixth commandment, strictly understood, prohibits a man from sleeping with the wife of another man. It does not in itself reject sexual relations apart from marriage, though such an ethic can be supported from inferences from Scripture and long tradition.
- "In the biblical writings," we are told, "sexual activity between same-sex partners is consistently regarded as both unnatural and sinful every time it is mentioned." The author mentions seven passages. Two of them deal with homosexual rape; two more in the New Testament use such obscure terms that no one is really sure what is being prohibited; two in the Old Testament Holiness Code clearly prohibit it, but they also prohibit wearing clothes made out of two different fibers and couples sleeping together during a woman's menstrual period. On the one remaining passage, Romans 1:18–32, we face three serious questions: Would Paul's knowledge of the phenomenon of sexual orientation have made any difference? Did Paul consider homosexuals overly passionate? What is the basis for his view of nature? Statements about "the overwhelmingly negative portrayal of homosexual activity in the Bible" and "the unanimous judgment of Scripture" are at best misleading in my opinion.
- One author fears that changing our position on this question would alienate us from the very church bodies with which we have sought closer accord. Is that really true of the church bodies with which we have entered into full communion?
- Two authors issue a welcome call for attention to voices from the nondominant ethnic communities and note that there is no representative in this book from the homosexual community. Well taken. But I wish they had spelled out more fully what their respective communities have to contribute in this area and to explore what about sexual ethics is ethnic-specific and what applies to all human beings. This whole review can be read as an open invitation for any of the authors of this book to continue the discussion in *Currents.*
- The term "homosexual lifestyle" is used loosely, almost carelessly, in this book. There are homosexuals who are promiscuous, but there are also many homosexuals who live in love and lifelong fidelity with a partner of the same sex. I found both described here as "the homosexual

lifestyle." We do not speak of a heterosexual lifestyle even when faced with the shocking statistic in this book that claims that 40 percent of this nation's ninth graders have already had sexual intercourse.

- Sexual orientation is a very important contemporary issue, and the discussion about the uncertain etiology of this phenomenon could leave the impression that there is vast uncertainty about the phenomenon itself. Is it true to say that the argument that God creates some people as homosexuals or intends some people to be homosexual has no warrant in Scripture?
- One opponent of change states that the church has one purpose, to declare Holy Absolution, to speak Christ's forgiving word, and to proclaim the justification of the godless. A proponent of change roots sexual ethics for heterosexuals and homosexuals in our baptism. Somewhere in those two ships passing in the night lies the germ of understanding.

My questions to the authors are tokens of my respect and thanks. I am not the same after reading this book. The test of the ELCA in 2005 and beyond is not who will get 51 percent and who 49 percent of the vote at the churchwide assembly but on how serious Christian thinkers like these—and like us—who clearly disagree with one another can trust justification and baptism enough to keep this church together, to love one another, and to respect those of differing opinions. That is *the* missional question as well.

Ralph W. Klein

Constructing the World: A Study in Paul's Cosmological Language. By Edward Adams. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000. 320 pages. Cloth. $65.00.

This book is a revised University of Glasgow dissertation that explores the rhetorical force of Paul's cosmological language through an in-depth study of the terms "world" (*cosmos*) and "creation" (*ktisis*). Adams is interested in the "coherent relationship" between Paul's uses of these terms and the situations being addressed. His attempt to ascertain the social function of this language is guided by two pivotal questions. How does Paul's use of "world" and "creation" *reflect* the social situation he is confronting, and how is his usage meant, in turn, to *affect* that situation? Adams draws on the sociology of knowledge, critical linguistics, and sect typology to develop an approach that is oriented to the particular "response to the world" Paul attempts to evoke from the recipients of his letters. The second part of the book deals with the linguistic background of "world" and "creation" in Greek and Hellenistic philosophy and the Septuagint and other Jewish writers, but the greater part of the book is devoted to a textual analysis of these terms in 1 Corinthians and Romans, though there is a very short chapter on Galatians and 2 Corinthians.

Adams' study of Paul's cosmological language in 1 Corinthians builds on previous scholarship which analyzed the Greco-Roman social milieu of the community Paul founded there. On this view, the letter betrays Paul's concern that believers in Corinth have not sufficiently distinguished themselves from the social practices and attitudes of the surrounding society. Hence, Paul attempts to establish a clearer sense of the congregation's distinctive religious, moral, and social identity by invoking an apocalyptic dualism that sets the dominant social and value system associated with the "world" (*cosmos*) in antithesis to God's new order. Adams's exegesis does not advance our knowledge of the social setting of 1 Corinthians or the overall rhetorical strategy of the letter, though he does explicate the role of Paul's apocalyptic dualism in that strategy.

The real contribution of this study is in the contrast and comparison it makes of Paul's use of the same terms in Romans. Adams underlines the strong emphasis in Romans on God as creator and observes that Paul uses "world" and "creation" in this letter to construct a positive assessment of the world as a vehicle of revelation. Although hostile forces have overpowered the cosmos and Gentile society is out of harmony with the cosmic and natural order, it is not inherently bad. Paul's perspective here is almost antithetical to that of 1 Corinthians, which is characterized by God's apocalyptic judgment of the present evil world. Adams accounts for this shift by providing a succinct yet incisive discus-

sion of the social situation in Rome as one of conflict with outsiders. In the time between Claudius's expulsion of the Jews from Rome in 49 C.E. and the persecution of the church by Nero in 64 C.E., the church in Rome had become predominantly Gentile in its makeup, and as it developed away from Judaism it became more vulnerable to social opposition. The situation in Rome is the converse of that in Corinth, where in Paul's estimation believers did not sufficiently distinguish themselves from outsiders in their beliefs, attitudes, and conduct. In Romans Paul uses the terms "world" and "creation" to depict the world as God's good and well-ordered creation so as to counsel social integration and promote within the Roman congregations values that are held in common between Christians and outsiders (cf. Rom 12:14–13:10).

This study demonstrates how Paul's assessment of the relationship between church and society influenced not only his use of language but also his message and theological perspective. However, the focus of the monograph is narrow and the style rather technical, so this is probably a book whose primary readership will be the guild of New Testament scholars.

Ray Pickett
Lutheran Seminary Program in the Southwest

Servant Leadership for Church Renewal: Shepherds by the Living Springs. By David S. Young. Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2000. 175 pages. Paper. $12.99.

David S. Young, a pastor and professor who has taught at Eastern Baptist, Bethany, and Princeton Theological Seminaries, writes in the arena of spirituality and leadership. This book is a sequel to his previous book, *A New Heart and a New Spirit* (Judson Press, 1994).

Young writes from the front lines to educate pastors on church renewal based upon a servant-leadership model, which has as its foundation spiritual growth. Using the Servant Songs of Isaiah 40–55, Revelation (particularly chap. 7), and the Gospel of John as a scriptural basis, he argues that spiritual growth and depth are the basic building blocks for all endeavors in the church for leadership and church renewal. These are the transforming agents in a person's life that allow him or her to follow the example of Jesus as a servant of the people.

Young goes on to state that vision casting for leadership begins "from the bottom up" with the leaders "learning to kneel, to listen to God, and to be attentive to directives from God" (p. 28).

Vision is necessary for church leadership to succeed and for church renewal to have a chance, but neither is possible without strong faith in God and the ability to discern the voice of God as God directs the servant leaders of the church. Young is concerned that for pastors and other leaders of the church, their spirituality is lost in the everyday routine duties that need to happen to keep the church operating. As such, Young implores these pastors and leaders to place their personal spirituality at the top of their duty list.

Young uses the concept of "living water" to refer to the renewal of personal spirituality. Just as water renews the parched ground, so this living water renews the servant. Examples of this renewal in *Servant Leadership for Church Renewal* describe Young's success in using his method in various congregations. The examples show a pattern for church renewal that consists of listening to the situation, spiritual growth through personal prayer, listening to the people of the congregation *and* to God, and responding to the voices heard during the listening phase. This pattern is implied in the reading and is not specifically stated as a "method" for doing church renewal.

Great emphasis is placed upon praising God. Young believes that worship is a key component in church renewal. Along with offering praise to God, Young believes that it is the role of the leaders to offer "praise" to people doing work for the church. Acknowledging and praising people, including God, puts a sense of thankfulness in the hearts of the leaders along with building goodwill.

This book is very understandable and is user-friendly. It would be easy to use as an adult study. Worksheets are included that raise issues and guide the process.

Larry Kula
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

Matthew 8-20: A Commentary. By Ulrich Luz. Hermeneia—A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Bible. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002. xxxvii and 607 pages. Cloth. $69.00.

The Apostolic Tradition: A Commentary. By Paul F. Bradshaw, Maxwell E. Johnson, and L. Edward Phillips. Hermeneia—A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Bible. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002. xviii and 247 pages. Cloth. $47.00.

These are the two latest additions to this premier commentary series. The Luz commentary is volume 2 of what will be a three-volume commentary in English (four volumes in German). Reviewers hailed the original German in the German *Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar* as one of the best commentaries in print. This English version preserves the values of the German edition: critically informed, using all the methods of modern interpretation, bibliographically comprehensive, written clearly, and paying special attention to the *Nachleben* of the text (history of interpretation). Every scholar who is interested in Matthew must have this commentary. The editors note on p. xxxvii that there is a translation of volume 1, not in the Hermeneia series (published by Augsburg Publishing House in 1989). They promise an updated version in the Hermeneia series on the completion of volume 3.

The Apostolic Tradition goes beyond the scope implied in the series subtitle: "A Critical Commentary on the Bible." *The Apostolic Tradition* is a church order from the third century reflecting the usage of the church in Rome, possibly by Hippolytus. The reconstruction of the text is very difficult, since the original Greek text is lost. The three editors of the present edition have translated Latin, Coptic, Sahidic, Arabic, and Ethiopic texts on the left pages of this edition, placing translations of the three principal adaptations (the Epitome, the Canons of Hippolytus, and the *Testamentum Domini*) on facing right-hand pages. They do not reconstruct the lost Greek text on the basis of this evidence but provide an extensive commentary on each of the 43 sections of the work. Each commentary section first discusses the text, then provides detailed commentary on the text with extensive documentation from Patristic writers.

This text is of contemporary interest; section 4 contains the eucharistic prayer of the bishop, a form of which is printed in the celebrant's altar book for the *Lutheran Book of Worship*. In it the Epiklesis invokes the Holy Spirit over the assembled congregation, but not on the elements. It contains sections describing the bishop, presbyters, deacons, confessors, widows, lectors, virgins, subdeacons, healers, neophyte Christians, and artisans and craftsmen. The tripartite division of clergy is not yet clearly present. There are extensive regulations for worship, e.g., the use of oil, olives, and milk in the Lord's Supper, for the reading of the Scriptures, for the catechumenate and baptism [by far the longest section], for the distribution of the elements in the Eucharist, for the sign of the cross, and other such matters. The commentary is learned and terse, yet informative.

In short, this is an excellent resource for all those interested in the developments of liturgy and church order in the post–New Testament church; it will be of less interest to most students of the Bible. This is now the new standard English edition of this significant text, replacing those of Burton Scott Easton and Gregory Dix. Its cost will likely keep it from use as a textbook in classes on worship; perhaps the publisher would put out a softcover edition if there were sufficient demand. It deserves wide use.

Edgar Krentz

The Gospel of Matthew. By Rudolf Schnackenburg. Translated by Robert R. Barr. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2002. vii and 329 pages. Paper. $24.00.

This commentary by the well-known Roman Catholic scholar Rudolf Schnackenburg, who died in 2002, is translated from his two-volume German commentary originally published in 1985 and 1987. After a brief introduction, Schnackenburg comments in some detail on each section and smaller unit. His comments focus mainly on the sources of Matthew's mate-

rial and his redaction of those sources, which he takes to be mainly Mark, Q, and special tradition. He also makes cautious judgments about the relation of the material to the historical Jesus. He draws from this study of Matthew's composition a sense of the Gospel's meaning and purpose. Although he states that "Matthew's sole aim is the Christian proclamation of salvation," he also notes continuously how Matthew has shaped the material for his own community, especially in terms of an anti-Jewish polemic that has little root in the purposes of Jesus himself. One aspect of this commentary may make it pleasing to some but frustrating to others. This commentary dispenses with all references to other scholarly views. There are no footnotes and bibliography. Schnackenburg simply states his own views, occasionally noting alternate views but rarely giving detailed arguments. The result is an uninterrupted reading of the text by a seasoned scholar. However, the reader often has little sense of how to evaluate his exegetical opinions. As one would expect of a scholar of Schnackenburg's integrity, there is little Roman Catholic "special pleading" apparent, but I would have appreciated a little more discussion of such texts as Peter's confession. For those pastors and others who want an accessible and dependable historical commentary on Matthew, this book is to be recommended.

David W. Kuck
United Theological College
Kingston, Jamaica

Jesus' Attitude towards the Law: A Study of the Gospels. Third ed. By William R. G. Loader. Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, U.K.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2002. x and 563 pages. Paper. $50.00.

The title of this book might suggest to some readers that the writer endeavors to inform them about attitudes of the historical Jesus towards Israel's Mosaic inheritance. Professor William Loader, head of the School of Social Inquiry at Murdoch University, Perth, Western Australia, and lecturer in the Perth Theological Hall of the Uniting Church in Australia, himself cautions against such assumption with the opening sentence of his introduction: "In the present study I am concerned with Jesus' attitude towards Torah as it is presented in the gospels." His focus is on the Gospels themselves and not on retrieval of the "attitude of the historical Jesus himself." The term "Gospels" covers the canonical Gospels and a number of noncanonical documents, among them the so-called Gospel of Thomas and other sources of alleged sayings of Jesus. Included in the analysis of the four Gospels is a study of hypothetical Q and a chapter titled "Perspectives from Acts."

Mark's Gospel recognizes the importance of continuity with the Law, but discontinuity emerges when Jesus uses his authority to determine which parts are of enduring value, for his authority is rooted in the understanding that with him comes the "fulfilment of biblical hope" (p. 55). The Decalogue is a front runner but is best understood as eliciting internalized behavior. Jesus is not anti-Torah, yet not Torah observant in the usual sense. By moving outside circles which have responsibility for defining Law in society Jesus seals his own demise, but Mark makes no effort to show Jesus' death as an atoning work. Ultimately, the community of faith replaces the temple.

Q's Jesus upholds Torah in its entirety and shows him confronting Pharisaic abuse of the Law. Jesus does not play off written against oral law. His emphasis is on justice and love of God, but tithing of minor foodstuffs also finds endorsement.

Matthew clearly opts for the approach taken by Q. The God who gave the Law and the Prophets has sent the one of whom they spoke. Therefore, the authority of Jesus as Israel's divinely created Messiah and the authority of Torah cohere. The Law properly understood is the law as interpreted by Jesus and those under delegated authority. Matthew removes all of Mark's disparaging comments about the law and cult but targets Pharisaic extremism on hand washing. The dominant theological perspective is one of a God who loves and commands love. Much of Jesus' distinctive Torah interpretation therefore displays compassion for the needy, and the judgment to come will be based primarily on such works.

Also Luke opts in favor of Q's approach

and shows appreciation of ritual and cultic rules. Therefore the dominant note in Luke's account of Peter's vision in Acts 10 does not resonate in Luke's Gospel. His omission of Mark 6:45–8:26 as a bloc may, on the same grounds, be considered deliberate. Yet, even while favoring legal observance, Luke can do without circumcision for Gentiles and can report dismissal of purity conformity. Jesus is not primarily an interpreter of the Law, and Luke does not envisage Christian scribes; but Jesus does emphasize proper attitudes as the way to meet legal obligation. Ultimately, salvation in Luke means God's inclusive action, especially in reaching out to the marginalized. Piety and hope dominate the pages of Luke's Gospel. Inasmuch as Jerusalem is the place of hope, it will finally be liberated upon the restoration of the kingdom to Israel.

John offers a solution closer to Mark's approach. The only abiding function of the Law is to point to Christ, and only he, as the Son, can mediate the truth from above. Cut off from the synagogue, John's community no longer acknowledges its authority, without engaging in attack on traditional Mosaic institutions or practices. With the hour of Jesus the earthly temple is replaced by Jesus himself, and identity within Israel is established by affiliation with Jesus.

The Gospel of Thomas is "rich in allusions to Jewish practices" (p. 515), yet it disparages many of them while refraining from negative critique of the scriptures or the Law as such. Whereas John shows the value of scriptures and the Law as testimony to Christ, Thomas's community and Jesus are not dependent on them.

Loader's analyses amount to mini-commentaries of the type that can be expected when original texts are not subject to critical inquiry. Many readers will therefore appreciate the argumentative flow without interruption of detailed philological notation. In contrast to the space accorded the first two Gospels, Luke and John endure relatively short shrift, with the result that problems of continuity and discontinuity, not to speak of attitudes, in these last two Gospels are obscured by overly facile treatment.

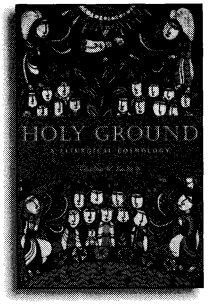
It is not to be expected that "word study" be a prime objective in a work of the kind under review, but the value of the study could have been enhanced by more attention to crucial terms. Certainly the description of Nathanael as a "true Israelite" (John 1:47) deserves further exploration through more intense probing of the word *Ioudaios*. Such inquiry is especially important since Loader's use of the terms "Judaism" and "Jew/Jewish" runs the hazard of injecting an anachronistic tone that jeopardizes scientific appraisal of attitudes arising out of claims of self-identification in John's communities. More precise definition is desirable, notably when dealing with John 4:22, "salvation is of the Judeans." This has to do with Judah's tribe. What self-identification is at work here? More clarity is also needed in connection with the use of the term "Gentile."

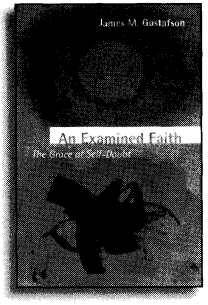
Loader's study of Luke similarly suffers from limited use of philological resources, such as grammars, lexicons, and commentaries, which deal with some of the very themes Loader explores. For example, Loader does not consider the paradox of the birth of the "son of the Highest" occasioning impurity for his mother. What is on Luke's mind here relative to Mosaic tradition? Among other items that might be mentioned, the so-called great omission of Mark 6:45–8:21 at Luke 9:18 is far more complicated than Loader suggests. As for the pronoun "their" (Luke 2:27), a reader is entitled to grammarians' contributions on the topics of concord and colloquial usage as sources for a probable solution.

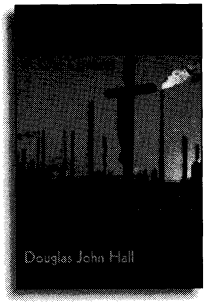
In conclusion, Loader's study may well stimulate further inquiry into the personal attitudes of the historical Jesus concerning Mosaic tradition. At the same time, the amount of redaction documented by Loader suggests that the task may be even more daunting than was ever envisaged. Ironically, the Jesus of history recedes even further under the impact of multilayered editorializing in the Gospels traditions. Yet something emerges that is beyond dispute: The Jesus of history won extraordinary allegiance as an interpreter of Mosaic tradition with concern especially for those who were marginalized by some of the keepers of Israel's vineyard.

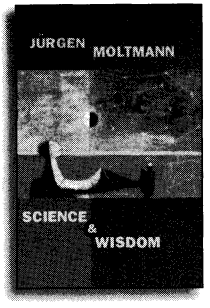
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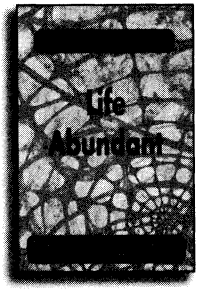
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Living and Active: Scripture in the Economy of Salvation. By Telford Work. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001. xx and 343 pages. Cloth. $35.00.

In this book Telford Work, professor of religion at evangelical Westmont College, offers a revision of his Duke dissertation, which seeks to address the many questions about the authority of Scripture by developing "a fully Trinitarian account of Scripture, establishing and exploring its divine and human character and its salvific purpose in its Church setting and beyond. It claims that the Christian Bible, as divine message, historical phenomenon, and physical object, participates in the Trinitarian economy of salvation" (p. 2). In this way Scripture is norm for the church, the basis of its mission.

For Work, the old dichotomies of fact and value, historical-critical analysis and existential or ethical import, tradition versus individual liberty, autonomy versus heteronomy, are a fictitious result of Enlightenment assumptions that now have been fragmented by postmodern critiques. They are no longer plausible. Characteristic of the Duke school, he seeks to locate the authority of scripture in the agency of the church whose origin is from the Triune God and whose ultimate goal is union with this God. Hence, ecclesiology is a form of trinitarian theology, and the Trinity enables our ability to map the cosmos within the divine plan for salvation. Thus everything within the cosmos is elevated to its triune basis and goal. The church has a place in the economy of the triune life via grace and serves as the singular way the triune life is embodied. Work's is a deeply ecumenical evangelicalism, tempered by an Orthodox and Roman Catholic appreciation of Scripture that sees Scripture as traditioned and traditioning.

Work's book is divided into three main sections: (1) The Beginning of Scripture: The God of Word, which examines Athanasius, Augustine, Barth, and von Balthasar's views of Scripture and ecclesiology, (2) The Mission of Scripture: A School for all the World, which examines the role of Scripture and its development in Israel and its authority in light of Jesus' mission, and (3) The End of Scripture: God's Word in Faithful Practice, presenting the role of scripture in community formation, humanity, the church's life, and worship.

Interestingly, he argues that controversy over Scripture's authority today is comparable to the iconoclastic controversy more than 1,000 years ago. While fundamentalists are surely "bibliolaters," mainline Protestants by contrast have usurped Scripture's divinity (p. 5). For Work, the ecclesiological, trinitarian foundation of theology alters the terrain and moves bibliology into an orthodox trinitarian perspective. Word-Christology and Spirit-Christology "portray a Christocentricity that elevates the biblical Word even as it firmly subordinates it to Father, Son, and Spirit, by locating its power in the power of the Triune God. They demand close attention to the actual course of Scripture in human history, while never forgetting that human history is a salvation history moving towards the realization of God's will" (p. 122).

At one level, the kind of theology presented here seems to be a significant advance on the tired above-mentioned dichotomous categories of the last four decades. However, this reviewer cannot help but wonder how the Trinity or the church can or should be an adequate substitute for the gospel. Wouldn't linking Scripture's authority to the authority of the gospel as sheer promise still be the best approach for a truly "evangelical" theology?

Mark C. Mattes
Grand View College
Des Moines, Iowa

The Social Setting of Jesus and the Gospels. Edited by Wolfgang Stegemann, Bruce J. Malina, and Gerd Theissen. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002. xvi and 404 pages. Paper. $24.00.

This volume contains nineteen essays read at the fourth international meeting of the Context Group, held in Tutzing, Germany, in 1999. The Context Group consists of scholars who use social-scientific methods to determine the milieu of the Jesus movement. The purpose of this particular conference was to elucidate the "historical Jesus" by methods not regularly used by other New Testament critics (p. vii). These

essays have been assembled and edited by three scholars in the forefront of the social-scientific approach. Their articles set the tone. Malina presents the methodology in his "Social-Scientific Methods in Historical Jesus Research" and summarizes the current state of research (pp. 1–26). Stegemann writes on "The Contextual Ethics of Jesus" (pp. 45–61). Among other observations, I found his discussion of neighbor love and enemy love very helpful. He eschews the sense of romantic love and argues that, understood contextually, love refers to family kinship in a social and economic sense. Hate, then, referred to the dissolution of such ties (p. 57). Theissen writes on Jesus' involvement in political life ("The Political Dimension of Jesus' Activities," pp. 225–520). He argues convincingly that various admonitions of Jesus are not to be understood simply as personal ethics. For example, "Love your enemies" comes as a plural command, not singular (pp. 233–34). Therefore the teachings of Jesus had political consequences. Jesus anticipated a kingdom of God constituted without force and coercion by a ruler who served the people with humility (pp. 229, 240–42).

The usefulness of the other essays will depend on the interests of the reader. Philip Esler gives us a perceptive article on community formation using the parable of the Good Samaritan ("Jesus and the Reduction of Intergroup Conflict," pp. 185–205). He maintains that Jewish identification with the compassion of the third person walking by, a hated Samaritan, redefined and also created neighborliness. Esler speaks of the phenomenon as cross categorization. John J. Pilch, well known for his studies in the altered states of consciousness, insists that we must understand some aspects of the Gospels in terms of cross-cultural psychology (pp. 103–15). Following the patterns of the Mediterranean culture (at the time of New Testament), he sees the spirit experiences of Jesus as valid descriptions of a Near Eastern shaman (pp. 106–8). Annette Weissenrieder examines the Lukan narrative of the woman with the issue of blood from the perspective of Greco-Roman medical practice ("The Plague of Uncleanness? The Ancient Illness Construct 'Issue of Blood' in Luke 8:43–48," pp. 207–22). She believes that the Markan account stressed uncleanness, so that Jesus appeared as a redemptive priest, while in Luke Jesus becomes a healer.

The writers in this collection stress the importance of the social-scientific but warn that this is only one of several methods to be used in Jesus research. Aware of that warning, readers of *Currents* will find in this volume many useful insights regarding Jesus.

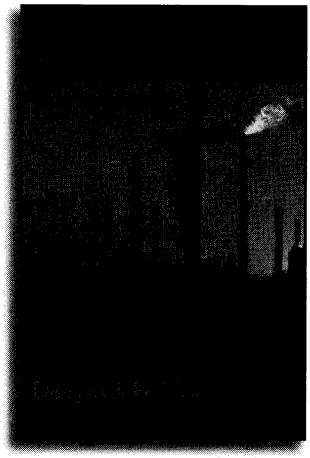
Graydon F. Snyder
Chicago, Illinois

Briefly Noted

The Old Testament apocryphal books are largely unknown among Protestants, though Luther included them in his 1534 Old Testament, as did the early editions of the King James Version. David A. deSilva's ***Introducing the Apocrypha: Message, Context, and Significance*** (Baker Academic, $29.99) is a call to recognize their value, both religious and historical. He opens by giving a good argument for paying attention to them, then writes a chapter on each work describing structure, contents, historical origins, message, sources, and later influence. Clearly written by an author who knows his material and wants his readers to be as excited as he is. Excellent bibliographic aids. Useful both for a parish library and for the pastor, it is a good book that is welcome. *Edgar Krentz*

Welcome the second edition of Wayne Meeks' ***The First Urban Christians***, a cutting-edge study of Paul's letters back in 1983. Meeks locates Paul in the social milieu of the first century. This paperback second edition (Yale, $18.95), updated with a new, brief four-page introduction and a supplementary bibliography, is a must read if you missed the original edition. Almost every page will give you a new insight into the earliest Christians and Paul's thought. I make it required reading for Paul students. *Edgar Krentz*

Douglas John Hall



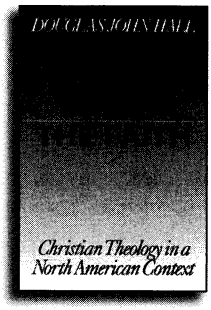
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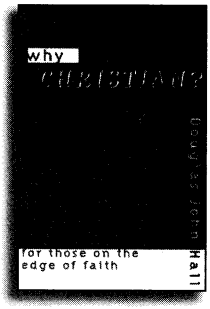


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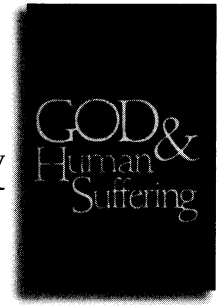
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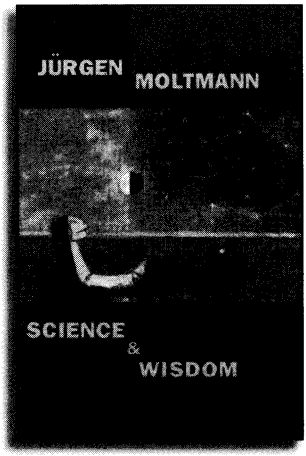
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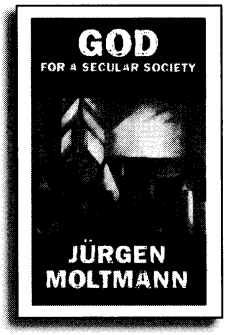
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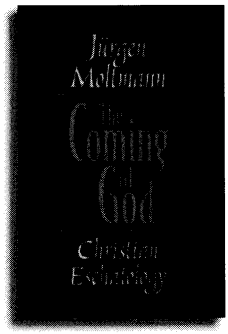
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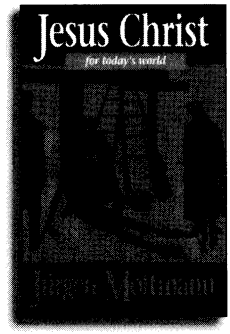


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Preaching: Common Property of the Church

One of the issues that some pastors and congregations seem to be struggling with these days is plagiarism in preaching. In the last few months, I've been called for advice when someone found something in a sermon that came from the Internet or originated with another preacher and went unacknowledged in the preaching. The bishop was notified and the pastor accused of plagiarism. I wondered what else was going on in that ministry.

While it is certainly unethical to claim as original work anything that originated with someone else, how much of preaching is truly original work? Scripture does not originate with us. Even interpreting Scripture is not original work. It happens in conversation with the writers of creeds, confessions, and commentaries. As Lutheran preachers, one of the promises we make at ordination is not to be overly original in our preaching; we promise to preach and teach in accordance with Holy Scripture and the creeds and Lutheran confessions. We make this promise because the gospel certainly does not originate with us. When it comes to preaching, the most we might claim is that, on occasion, we put things together in a truly original way. And on those Sundays when we don't, weighing down sermons with quotations and citations can clutter the proclamation of the gospel. Unlike published books and articles, the gospel preached is not the private possession of any individual. The gospel preached is the property of the gathered assembly and, in fact, the church and the world. As preachers, we all build upon one another. We all borrow from each other as we seek to fulfill our shared calling of making Christ known.

In this spirit of partnership in preaching, I am delighted to acknowledge that, though these reflections for the Epiphany Season bear my name, they are not entirely my original work. My stewardship of *Preaching Helps* got off to a slow start this spring when I set some things aside in order to participate in my dad's illness and death. When I hadn't enlisted contributors for this issue, I turned to my own exegetical notes and reflections, compiled over many years and surely borrowed from many fine preachers, pastors, scholars, and perhaps even from *Preaching Helps*. Unfortunately, somewhere along the way, I lost track of the footnotes.

I would like to footnote for a moment one group of these partners. When I began ordained ministry as an assistant pastor in Fairport, New York, I was invited to be part of a pastors' group that met monthly to study the pericopes for the next month's preaching. Everyone took the task very seriously. We prepared exegetical papers and pastoral reflections. Those more gifted than I undertook their own translation. The questions and insights that came from a colleague struggling with a text were the most rewarding part of our time together. These colleagues taught me some things that now seem so obvious: preachers approach Scripture in a particular way, preachers bring their people with them to the text, and the best gift preachers can offer one another are the questions and perspectives of those that one preacher brings to a text and another preacher leaves behind.

I have been away from that table for many years now. I'm told that, though the participants have changed, the group still gathers. Best of all, it is but one of many such groups throughout the church that gather weekly or monthly to collaborate in preparation for preaching. Sharing the common property of the church in this way speaks a truth about preaching in these Sundays after the Epiphany. During this season when Christ is made known to the nations, in part through our words, a key to preaching is to be in partnership with those who can make Christ known to us.

Perhaps the most original work I can offer is the question that concerns me as I prepare to preach during this Epiphany season. *How is Christ being made known to the nations?* Writing these reflections early in the morning of September 11, I wonder if we who claim Christ can trust enough to turn to God in moments of terror, or if we are so scared that we will spend our lives attempting to save ourselves through increased security? How does our response make Christ known? When the ELCA's draft statement on human sexuality arrived on my desk last evening, I found myself afraid that how Christ would be made known will be colored by a church so divided that it cannot overcome its differences. As we look around our world and see the supposed boundary between religion and politics continue to blur, I hope and pray that God's glory made known as Christ made a home with us on the cross is not confused with awesome military might that, to many, is taking away their place of home. As every expression of the church struggles with financial uncertainty, I wonder how Christ will be made known in the way we take next steps. Mostly, I struggle with how Christ is made known as we preach, and how Christ is made known when the way we live is laid alongside what we preach. As I reflect on our task, issues of originality seem a bit silly as I am overwhelmed with gratitude that I am not in this work alone, but can both turn to partners who make Christ known to me, and draw from and rely upon the common property of the church.

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

The Baptism of Our Lord
January 11, 2004

Isaiah 43:1–7
Psalm 29
Acts 8:14–17
Luke 3:15–17, 21–22

First Reading

The liturgical remembrance and celebration of Jesus' baptism suggests that the Gospel reading be the guiding text for this Sunday's sermon, with the readings from Isaiah and Acts offering further theological reflection on this event in the life of the Christ and the church.

The reading from Luke is divided into two parts: the teaching of John the Baptist (vv. 15–17) and the baptism of Jesus (vv. 21–22). The people are expectant; they question whether John might be the Messiah. John responds to the people's questions by describing rather than naming the Messiah. In fact, John does not even give the one he describes the title Messiah. But John makes clear that he is not the one. I can hear John saying to his adoring fans, "If you think I am powerful, wait until you see who is coming! You think I am the one who is to come, but I am not even worthy to serve the one who comes by untying his sandal!" This description becomes very vivid when we reflect upon how popular John was with the people. But John explains the difference between himself and the one to come: "While I baptize with water symbolizing repentance, this one baptizes with the very agents that bring forgiveness and repentance, the Holy Spirit and fire. And this one has the power to discern who people really are and to separate the righteous from the unjust."

Now I imagine that the people are really expectant. But rather than a powerful entrance, Luke's account of the Messiah's arrival is quiet and unassuming. We hear nothing at all about Jesus' baptism except that Jesus was baptized along with the people. But after Jesus is baptized with the people, we get three signs of God's presence as Jesus is praying. The heavens open, the Holy Spirit descends, and a voice speaks from heaven. The descent of the Spirit recalls Isaiah 42 and makes clear that Jesus is anointed for service. Rather than coming from John, the voice from heaven names Jesus the Messiah, using a combination of Ps 2:7 and Isa 42:1.

Isaiah 43:1–7 announces God's presence to exiled Israel. God's presence both embraces Israel as God's own and banishes Israel's fears. Read on this day, Isaiah names the effects of Jesus' baptism on the community. Jesus' baptism and God's announcement of Jesus as Beloved and Servant promise God's presence with the Christian community. So, rather than digging into this text's historical setting and original intent, this preacher prefers to bask in the baptismal connections: God calls us by name, claims us as God's own. When we pass through the water, God is with us. When we walk through fire, we will not be consumed. We are precious, honored, and loved. God intends to call all to Godself.

That intention is made evident in Acts 8:14–17. This short account of the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the Samaritans marks the fulfillment of one aspect of Jesus' commission to the disciples after the ascension. The disciples have been Jesus' witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and now they were on their way to the ends of the earth (cf. Acts 1:8). Jesus' baptism with the agents of forgiveness and repentance, the Holy Spirit and fire, does not end with Jesus' earthly ministry. His ministry continues as the Spirit spreads to the ends of the earth through the proclamation of the gospel by Jesus' followers.

Pastoral Reflection

I cannot preach on baptism, whether Jesus' or ours, abstractly. Ideally, the congregation would celebrate a baptism on this day or we would affirm and remember our status as the baptized. At the very least, there will be water in the font, and the proclamation of God's promise will seek to draw God's people to that water. My inclination is to weave the baptismal liturgy—words and actions—into the sermon as the way we enact the promise of baptism (see Satterlee and Ruth, *Creative Preaching on the Sacraments* [Discipleship Resources, 2001]). I find my homiletic task in the Word of the Lord to the Spirit/wind recorded in the Old Testament reading for this day: "I will say to the north, 'Give them up,' and to the south, 'Do not withhold; bring my sons from far away and my daughters from the end of the earth—everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made'" (Isa 43:6–7).

The promise that brings God's people to the water is the good news that no one other than God in the person of Jesus will meet us there. Luke sidesteps Matthew and Mark's question of why Jesus needed to be baptized. In Luke, Jesus is baptized with the people without explanation, and God smiles upon Jesus after Jesus comes out of the water and prays on the shore. After Jesus meets God's people in the water, the heavens open, the Spirit descends, and God tells Jesus that Jesus is Beloved, that God is well pleased. Jesus is anointed with God's Spirit and commissioned for ministry. Jesus is God meeting us in the water.

When Jesus meets us in the water, the water overflows with promise—forgiveness, repentance, God calling us by name, God claiming us as God's own. Like Jesus, we are named as beloved, precious, honored, and loved. God is with us always, so that we do not need to be afraid. Jesus is the fulfillment and embodiment of God's promise. For after meeting us in the water, Jesus meets us in every circumstance and season of life and even in the moment of death. From the water, Jesus meets us in the journey of life that ends in a cross and a tomb. Even there Jesus is with us; with Jesus we pass through to new life.

When Jesus meets us in the water, we overflow with promise ourselves. As God's beloved daughters and sons, we are also anointed for service. Like the people with John at the Jordan, we are filled with expectation. We question when Jesus will come. Embraced by God's promise and Jesus' presence, we trust that Jesus will. Baptized with the Holy Spirit and fire, our lives are transformed as the old is burned away and new life is breathed into us. We are the ones in whom Jesus' work of forgiveness and repentance continues. Ours is the voice that proclaims the promise of the gospel, calling all people to the water, where God in Jesus promises to meet them. CAS

The Confession of St. Peter January 18, 2004

Acts 4:8–13
Psalm 18:1–7, 17–20
1 Corinthians 10:1–5
Matthew 16:13–19

First Reading

The commemoration of Peter's confession that Jesus is "the Messiah, the Son of the living God" (Mt 16:16), which begins the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, is the context for preaching and the lens though which we read these texts. On this day we pray asking God to keep the church firm on the "rock" of Peter's confession and to empower the church to proclaim one truth and follow one Lord (cf. Prayer of the Day).

In the reading from Acts, Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, boldly confesses to the authorities what he previously confessed to Jesus. After healing a man lame from birth by calling on the name of Jesus of Nazareth, Peter and John are arrested and stand trial before the council that recently judged Jesus. Peter and John are arrested because they called upon the name of Jesus of Nazareth as the power by which the man born lame was healed. Peter proclaims the saving and healing power of the name of Jesus, whom the leaders of God's people rejected but whom God raised up. As Peter proclaims it, the crucifixion is an act of people; the resurrection is an act of God. By the power of God, Jesus, the stone rejected by the builders, is the cornerstone of faith and life (cf. Ps 118:22). On this foundation God's power extends from healing a man unable to walk to giving salvation to the whole world. This bold confession comes from companions of Jesus who are ordinary and uneducated men, which leaves the council amazed.

Read on this day, 1 Cor 10:1–5 seems to make clear that the "rock" upon which Christ builds the church is not the person of Peter but Peter's confession that Jesus is the Christ. Drawing upon the spiritual ancestors of the Exodus, Paul uses sacramental typology in which passing through the sea foreshadows baptism and eating and drinking spiritual food and drink foreshadows the Lord's Supper (see Satterlee and Ruth, *Creative Preaching on the Sacraments*) to show that the rock from which the water sprang is Christ himself.

Matthew provides an account of Peter's confession and of Jesus' response. In all three synoptic Gospels, this incident is a turning point in the story of Jesus. From this moment, Jesus' emphasis changes from the coming of the reign of God to Jesus' pending suffering and death. Matthew provides the fullest account of Peter's confession. Caesarea Philippi, named to honor Caesar and Herod's son Philip, was located in a Gentile region and the home of a pagan shrine. In asking how people are identifying him, Jesus refers to himself as "Son of Humanity," a term used in Daniel 7:13 to distinguish the reign of God, in which people are truly human, from the idolatrous reign of beastly world powers. That both Jesus and John the Baptist announce the coming of the end of the age, God's judgment, and the establishment of God's reign make the people's confusion of the two understandable. Calling Jesus either Elijah or Jeremiah is likewise understandable, since Jewish tradition expected Elijah to reappear in the last days and prepare for God's coming and Jesus sounded very much like Jeremiah's talk of a new covenant. But Peter names Jesus as God's anointed who will rule as God's agent over God's people. What Peter disclosed has not come via any human agency but directly from God. Peter's designation as "rock" does not name him the first bishop

of Rome but the first witness of Christ's resurrection.

Pastoral Reflection

I am disturbed by some of the claims made in today's texts. Peter preaches, "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:21). Paul proclaims, "Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them, and they were struck down in the wilderness" (1 Cor 10:5). I am disturbed because, in today's world, which increasingly resembles Caesarea Philippi, we are called to carefully consider the implications of the way we confess Christ as we say who the Son of Humanity is. Do we understand Peter's assertion that "there is no other name under heaven given by which we must be saved" to be assurance that nothing else is necessary or as a prescription that people need to follow in order to find their way to God?

That there is no name under heaven given by which we are saved is good news to the church during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. It assures us that, as we struggle to forge and implement ecumenical agreements, as we strive to manage and heal congregational conflict, and often act in ways that do not please God, Christian unity does not depend upon our efforts, strategies, successes and failures, though the Spirit of Christ certainly works in and through them. So often I hear sermons and prayers that seem to assume that, if only we do it right, if only we will be more inclusive, more contemporary, more liturgical, more hospitable, more Lutheran, or whatever, we can achieve and establish the reign of God. We cannot. Only Christ can. Unity, like all expressions of salvation, depends upon Christ. Christ, and not any individual, formula, program, or strategy, is the rock, the cornerstone, upon which the church is founded. Jesus not only unites with us on the cross; Jesus also unites us on the cross. Jesus brings healing. Jesus empowers us to stand up and leap in faith when on our own we cannot. Perhaps this is why we begin a week of *prayer* for Christian unity. It is not a week to commit to Christian unity, not a week to work for Christian unity. This is a week of prayer, of asking Christ to unite the church and every expression of it. So to confess Christ is to confess that we are completely dependent upon Christ.

As important as it is to remember that Christ alone brings Christian unity, it is equally important to remember that Christian unity is not an end in itself. We pray for Christian unity for the sake of the world. When Peter declares, "There is salvation in no on else" (Acts 4:12), Peter is not drawing a narrow line by which many are excluded. Peter is proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the way by which all are saved. This is what it means to confess Christ. As we stand in places named for their worldly power, as we stand amidst shrines dedicated to all sorts of belief, as we stand before the people of God and their leaders, confessing Christ does not involve calling people to believe a certain way and thereby save themselves. To confess Christ is to proclaim the good news that the one whom we rejected unites with us on the cross. The one whom we rejected unites us on the cross. Under Jesus' healing rule, we live in God's coming reign, where all will be truly human. CAS

The Conversion of St. Paul January 25, 2004

Acts 9:1–22
Psalm 67
Galatians 1:11–24
Luke 21:10–19

First Reading

Paul's conversion to Christianity is of such importance to the church that the story appears three times in Acts (9:1–22; 22:3–21; 26:9–20). Jesus appeared to Saul, an enemy of the church, and Paul submitted himself completely to Christ. This day marks the conclusion of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. We pray on this day that, as God established one church from among the nations through the preaching of Paul, we might follow Paul's example and be witnesses to the truth of Christ (cf. Prayer of the Day).

Paul's conversion is often thought to be instantaneous. Yet, Paul was prepared for this moment as Paul witnessed both the stoning of Stephen and the persistence of those whom he persecuted. Paul's vision is presented using ancient symbols. The light from heaven signifies divine revelation, and the heavenly voice recalls the supernatural word heard in rabbinic debate. Jesus' words make clear that persecuting the church is the same as persecuting the Christ. In this account Paul hears but does not see Jesus. Paul's blindness should be understood not as divine punishment but as the result of the radiance of the vision. Paul not eating or drinking may be understood either as the effect of the impact of the vision or as penitent fasting. Recalling Paul's persecution of the church, Ananias is reluctant to obey Jesus, emphasizing the greatness of Paul's conversion. The one who persecuted the church in the past is Christ's chosen instrument to bring Christ's name to the world After being restored by Ananias and spending time with the disciples in Damascus, Paul began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogue. While this account tells us much about the external signs of Paul's conversion, we learn nothing of what was going on inside Paul.

Though these verses in Galatians are the most explicit reference to Paul's conversion found in his letters, none of the external details recounted in Acts are present here. Instead, Paul provides some insight into the way he understood his conversion. Paul emphasizes that both the gospel he preaches and his call to preach it originate with God. Paul claims God's initiative in calling him. Like the prophets of the Old Testament, Paul believes that he was called before he was born (cf. Jer 1:5; Isa 49:1). While Acts suggests that Paul was converted by Christ then commissioned by the church, Paul himself makes no such distinction. Paul's call to preach came directly from Christ. Paul's call is specific; Paul is to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. In order to reinforce the divine nature of his gospel and call, Paul asserts his independence from Jerusalem and the apostles. Paul did not go to Jerusalem to learn from or to confer with the apostles. Three years after his conversion, Paul went to Jerusalem for a short time, where he merely spoke with Peter and saw James.

The reading from Luke seems to pick up the risen Christ's words to Ananias: "I myself will show [Paul] how much he must suffer for the sake of my name" (Acts 9:16). Jesus predicts the persecution of the faithful—imprisonment, being brought before rulers and governors—and promises to provide powerful testimony in the hour of trial. Jesus' prediction and promise are both fulfilled in Paul's life and ministry. Most important, Jesus promises that, though Chris-

tians be persecuted and even executed, not one hair on our head will perish. Ultimately, we cannot be destroyed because in Christ our salvation is secure.

Pastoral Reflection

After a week of praying for Christian unity, we may find ourselves a bit unsettled by the good news that the feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul brings. Paul's conversion and call suggest that Jesus has more in mind than the church getting its own house in order. We pay for unity for the sake of something greater, namely, God's mission to the world. Like death and resurrection, like our baptism, Paul's conversion and call are two sides of the same coin. Better yet, they are God's seamless and saving activity. Yes, Paul is converted by grace so that he might be united with Christ. At the same time, Paul is called by God to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. God's will and intent is that all people come to Christ, even those like Paul who would persecute the church. As Paul fulfills this calling, he will bear his own cross for Jesus' sake. But Jesus will be with Paul and give him the words to say.

Paul's conversion makes clear that people are not brought to faith in Christ merely so that their souls might be saved. The church will not be united so that it can settle in and spend its life quietly and in peace. As we are saved by grace through faith, we are at the same time called to make Christ known to the world. Though our call, like Paul's, is concrete and specific, its goal is ultimately that all people will come to Christ.

Paul's conversion invites us to consider three characteristics that all of our specific calls seem to share in common. First, I am struck by the fact that Jesus stepped outside the church in order to call someone to preach to the Gentiles. Paul strongly asserts his independence from Jerusalem and the apostles. Could Paul's conversion suggest that God is so intent on bringing all people to Christ that, if the Christian, the congregation, or any expression of the church refuses to answer this call, God in Christ will step outside the system in order to find someone who will? This possibility is both exciting and overwhelming as the church, like Paul, must close its eyes to the past in order to be touched by grace to see with new vision.

Second, the call of God does not entitle us to privilege. Instead, we will suffer for the sake of Jesus' name. Whether pastor or church pillar, new or active member, we have all at some time mistakenly asserted our right to some unspoken privilege within the congregation, if not the community. Our decisions should go unquestioned. The church should send us where we want to go. Effort and commitment should result in growth and success. For us there should be an exception. Luke's promise of persecution of the faithful is fulfilled in Paul's ministry. Although we might not be thrown into prison, at some time we will all have our call questioned, be tried for the way we conduct our ministry, and have as our only defense the belief that God called us.

Third, we can trust the God who calls us. As we seek to preach the gospel to all people, as we struggle to figure out how to do it and just what that means and find ourselves questioned, challenged, and tried, Jesus is with us. Sometimes Christ's presence comes through the healing touch of someone like Ananias. Sometimes Christ comes in an unshakable experience that forever changes our lives. Most often, I think, Christ comes from within our hearts as a wisdom overcomes us and words not our own find their way to our tongues. However Christ comes, Christ comes to save us so that, no matter what happens, not one hair on our head will ultimately be destroyed. CAS

Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany February 1, 2004

Jeremiah 1:4–10
Psalm 71:1–6
1 Corinthians 13:1–13
Luke 4:21–30

First Reading

The first reading is the call of Jeremiah or, better yet, Jeremiah's commissioning, since Jeremiah was called before he was born (v. 5). In this passage, the word of the Lord comes to Jeremiah and informs Jeremiah of his place in God's work of salvation. God puts God's words in Jeremiah's mouth and appoints Jeremiah over nations and realms. God makes clear that Jeremiah's prophetic word is "to pluck and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant" (v. 10). The God revealed in this commissioning story is not content with the status quo but seeks to bring about genuine change. Knowing people's resistance to change, the call to be a prophet, which many preachers today seem to step into so easily, is a frightening task. Wisely, Jeremiah objects to God's call on the ground that he is only a boy. But God assures Jeremiah that God is with him and will deliver him. The prophet is sustained only by the knowledge that the word the prophet brings is from the Lord, who assures the prophet not to be afraid.

The second readings for these Sundays after the Epiphany provide a semi-continuous reading of 1 Corinthians 12–15 and are not intended to connect with the other readings. 1 Corinthians 13, read at many weddings, is so familiar that the preacher might well undertake to hear it again for the first time. Long ago I discovered this helpful paraphrase: "Without love, nothing counts—Nothing. And so we are to love. How? Be patient, be kind—even to people who are clearly in the wrong. Don't envy, don't boast, don't toot your own horn—ever. Don't be arrogant, don't be rude—even to people who really deserve to be knocked down a peg or two. Don't insist on your own way. Don't be irritable. Don't be resentful. Don't rejoice in doing wrong—even a little wrong. Bear all things—*all* things. Believe all things—even when to do so is to be gullible. Hope all things. Endure all things—all things." For Paul, this is what it means to love as Christ loved us. These are the rules for life in a Christian community.

Luke portrays Jesus as a prophet so aware that God is with him that Jesus moves through threats and dangers without the slightest sign of being afraid. The lectionary divides Luke 4:16–30 so that, as we enter the synagogue at Nazareth, Jesus is finishing his sermon with the pronouncement, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (v. 21). While the congregation's initial reaction to Jesus' reading of Scripture and announcement of its fulfillment is positive, the congregation's mood changes when Jesus goes on to interpret the text. First, Jesus criticizes the crowd for their desire for signs (v. 23). Then (vv. 25–27) Jesus recalls two biblical incidents in which the prophets Elijah and Elisha performed miracles for foreigners (1 Kings 17:1, 8–24; 2 Kings 5:1–19). In this way Jesus makes clear that, more than not having a special claim on Jesus' ministry, the signs the people of Nazareth desire will be granted to those considered to be outside the people of God. Jesus declares that God's gift of healing and life is not limited to Israel but intended for all people. Jesus' announcement that God's promises are available to all people turns the crowd against him. Rather than speaking well of Jesus and being amazed by the gracious words that came from his

mouth, the congregation was so enraged that they drove Jesus out of town and attempted to throw Jesus off a cliff (cf. vv. 22, 29). When Jesus challenged the congregation with the gospel's radical inclusion, their privileged status as God's people was threatened, and they rejected Jesus.

Pastoral Reflection

Our readings make clear that, if we take God's word seriously and dare to speak it, conflict will result. Jesus comes across as one of those young preachers who just can't leave well enough alone. Jesus has the hometown crowd eating out of his hand. Everyone is speaking well of him, remarking at his gracious words. Sure, they are surprised, given Jesus' family background. But, all in all, they are impressed. But instead of smilingly accepting the accolades of his fellow Nazarenes, Jesus turns provocative. First, Jesus offends the crowd by describing what he sees as his role in salvation history—"The spirit of the Lord is upon *me* because God has anointed *me*. . . ." The crowd could overlook this as the arrogance and naivete of youth. But then Jesus insults the town he grew up in. Jesus seems to mock the whole people of Israel. Shocked and outraged, the congregation becomes a lynch mob. They drive Jesus out and try to do him in.

From his very first sermon, the shadow of rejection hangs over Jesus' ministry. It culminates in Jesus' crucifixion. Again God's people become a lynch mob, only this time they succeed in doing him in. Why? Jesus challenged tradition. Jesus failed with the pillars and power brokers of the day and succeeded with the poor and the powerless. Jesus was anointed by the Spirit for the extraordinary task of ministry. Jesus' life was a journey to God according to God's plan. Jesus made clear that God's love and promise are intended for all. As Jeremiah makes clear, the problem with being anointed by the Spirit, living according to God's plan, and proclaiming God's promise in all its fullness is that our power structures and social systems do not easily accept the Spirit's power and direction. And so opposition, hardship, and scorn become the scenery along the journey of discipleship. Conflict is a fact of faith, an appropriate response to the gospel.

So when was the last time God's word caused us conflict? When was the last time we heard something—in a sermon or a reading, in a prayer or a hymn—that so outraged us that we wanted to kill the messenger? Why is it that so many Christians today are never disturbed or upset at worship (except, of course, when the acolyte does acrobatics, the soloist strikes a sour note, the liturgy runs long, or the kids are cranky and crying)? Why is it that so many churches today say that we should tailor our messages and do everything that we can so that people *won't* get upset at worship? Why aren't we disturbed by the gospel? Why aren't we upset by God's word? Could it be that we aren't paying attention? Could it be that we're afraid of what we'll hear? Or have we heard so often that we no longer listen? Or, when it comes to God's promise extending to those traditionally considered beyond God's promise, are we ready to drive the messengers out of the church and off the cliff?

If Jesus and the gospel never cause us conflict, perhaps we've forgotten that we too were anointed by the Spirit for the extraordinary task of ministry. We too are called to understand our lives and the life of our church according to God's plan. And if we are so outraged by what we are hearing, perhaps this is a sign of both God's impatience with the status quo and the seriousness with which we take God's word. CAS

Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany February 8, 2004

Isaiah 6:1–8 (9–13)
Psalm 138
1 Corinthians 15:1–11
Luke 5:1–11

First Reading

Isaiah provides another example of commissioning. Again, the commission is specific; Isaiah's ministry is to take place in the year King Uzziah died (v. 1). The commission includes an awareness of God. And what a vision Isaiah gives us! Isaiah sees the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; the hem of God's robe filling the temple, seraphs in attendance, each with six wings. With booming voices they shake the foundations as they call, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of God's glory." And around the altar, the entire temple puffs with smoke.

While we may never see such a thing, we can be just as certain that our mission is a response to God's will. For the unconditional love of God is the will, power, and promise that works in and through us to reach out, reclaim, and return all things to God. As in all biblical commissioning stories, Isaiah is afraid and protests because he is a man of unclean lips. The speed with which the seraph touches those lips with a coal indicates the readiness of God to remove our guilt and make us ready for God's service. The Lord's question, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" (v. 8) is answered decisively in the person and ministry of Jesus.

1 Cor 15:1–11 is held to be an early credal formulation. The passage can be divided into three parts: vv. 1–2, introduction; vv. 3–7, credal recital of the gospel; vv. 8–11, Paul's own experience of the gospel Paul speaks of the credal formula in terms o *traditio*, something that one receives and i turn hands over. The essential message tha Paul received and passed on is that Chris died and rose according to the Scriptures The reality of Christ's death is underscore by the reference to burial. Christ demonstrated the reality of the resurrection an Christ's continuing presence by a series o post-resurrection appearances that were experienced and attested to by many of Jesus closest followers. The general reference t Scripture makes clear that Christ's deat and resurrection are part of God's plan revealed in Scripture. The credal formula i important for preaching because of all that i enabled Paul to do. It provided the details o the gospel that Paul preached to the Corinthians, the gospel by which those who believed were saved. Paul makes clear that all mission is grounded in and a response to the good news about Jesus. In fact, the mission of every believing community is to experience, share, articulate and pass on this good news.

Luke's account of the call of Simon Peter and the sons of Zebedee parallels Isaiah's commissioning in some striking ways. Again, the commission is specific; Jesus tells the fishers to put out into the deep water and let down their nets. The fishers have an overwhelming experience of God's abundance in terms of a catch so big that their nets begin to break and the boat begins to sink. In response to this experience, Simon Peter falls down at Jesus' knees. Where previously Simon addressed Jesus as "master," now Simon addresses Jesus as "Lord." Simon Peter recognizes God's presence in this catch of fish. Like Isaiah, Simon is afraid and confesses his sin and unworthiness. Jesus tells Peter not to be afraid and lays out a new vision for Peter's life. "From now on, you will be catching human beings"

(v. 10). The phrase literally means "you will be capturing people alive," implying that Simon will join Jesus in bringing people from death to life. Simon leaves his nets and, like Isaiah, embraces a new vocation.

Pastoral Reflection

The readings touch upon commission, vocation, and mission. Isaiah receives a vision of God's smoke-encircled, angel-adorned throne and, in response to God's voice, agrees to go. A most unusual carpenter turned teacher turned fishing guide comes along, shows Simon and the Zebedees where to find fish, and says, "Let's go." And the partners shut down their fishing business, leave life as they know it, and follow. God's people have struggled with these stories ever since. Are they intended to be the model for all disciples at all times, or are there other forms of following that could also be legitimate?

No matter how we answer the question, following Jesus means, of course, sharing in Christ's mission. And to share in Christ's mission involves trusting Jesus above everything else. So what does trusting Jesus above everything else, leaving all, and following mean for the church and the Christian of today? A Christian who wants to grow spiritually and a congregation that wishes to be more vital as a witness to the good news will have to take into account what must be left behind in order to join Jesus in bringing people from death to life. Both as individuals and as congregations, Christians today have invested so much of our being in obtaining and maintaining our property and possessions. Both as Christians and as congregations, we have become comfortable with who we are and how we do things. So often the task of mission becomes secondary to the institutional machinery that's supposed to make mission happen.

Luke invites us to put ourselves in Simon's place. The Lord calls us to cast the nets. We find ourselves dumbfounded at the command, because we've been casting our nets in various ways for so long, but so often they seem to come up empty. Like Simon who confesses his weakness of faith ("Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinner!"), we know ourselves to be faithless, lazy, exhausted, indifferent, content, frustrated, fed-up failures when it comes to Christ and mission. And yet, it is to Simon, a self-proclaimed sinner and a fisher who admits he hasn't caught a thing all night, that Jesus says, "From now on you will be catching people." And Jesus says the same to us. Jesus does not shame Simon for hesitating to follow. Jesus is not angry and condemning. Jesus is the one who brings God's unconditional love near, the one who suffers and dies so that sinners will know how much they are loved. Notice how soft, how compassionate and caring Jesus is in dealing with Simon. "Do not be afraid," Jesus says, reassuring the prostrate disciple who has failed to understand. And following that simple command come the words of the commission: "From now on you will be catching people."

Confronted by the divine commission and our (lack of) response, today's readings all remind us that the essential ingredient is an overwhelming experience of God's presence. Isaiah's vision, Paul's creed, and Simon's catch have all been passed on to us. Unfortunately, these stories often strike us as somewhat less than overwhelming. An indispensable part of any sermon on this Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany is the preacher's passing on the experiences of Christ's death and resurrection that this assembly has received. Better than individual anecdotes is the common story of the congregation's life. For nothing less than our own experience of being brought from

death to life will empower us to leave our nets, cry "Send me!", and join Jesus in this life-giving work for the sake of the world. CAS

Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany February 15, 2004

Jeremiah 17:5–10
Psalm 1
1 Corinthians 15:12–20
Luke 6:17–26

First Reading

The wisdom selection from Jeremiah offers us a classic example of binary opposition. There is either A or B, blessing or curse. Trust in mere mortals and in the strength of flesh is contrasted with trust in the Lord. More specifically, a spirit of domineering control is coupled with forsaking God. On the other hand, a spirit that places one's life and identity under the power of the source of life and goodness is coupled with trusting God. To be "cursed" is to be nothing, to go nowhere, to have no meaning, regardless of how much domineering power one possess at any given moment. To trust the Lord is to be "blessed," to have life in all circumstances. Thus, a tree in the desert is vividly contrasted with a tree by a spring. The image of the living tree with deep roots and green leaves and bearing fruit becomes even more vivid in this Epiphany season as we consider Jesus' identity. Jesus so trusted God that from the tree of the cross Jesus revealed in the face of domineering power that love, forgiveness, healing, and reconciliation are the purpose and goal of a blessed life.

In this week's reading from 1 Corinthians, which directly follows Paul's recital of the creed that all Christians affirm and hold in common, Paul shows the Corinthians that the belief that "there is no resurrection of the dead" (v. 12) can only be maintained at the cost of the heart of the gospel. The Corinthians assert that they fully experience Christ's resurrection without having experienced death; Paul contends that death is prerequisite for fully experiencing the resurrection of Christ. Paul outlines the implications of denying the resurrection of the dead: denial of Christ's resurrection (v. 13), proclamation and faith that are both "in vain" (v. 14), misinterpretation of the God as revealed in Scripture (v 15), denial of the source of redemption (v 16), and condemnation of those who have already died as not sharing in the resurrection (v. 18). Paul affirms the future dimension of Christian existence, though for Paul hope for this life is as important as hope for the life to come. Paul also affirms that we hope not only for a future but also for the new possibilities of God's future that become evident in any given moment through transformation and new life.

Whereas Matthew's beatitudes emphasize spiritual disposition, Luke's beatitudes are concerned with material inequities. Luke counters the blessings with a series of "woes." "Woe" is an expression of pain or displeasure. Thus, wealth brings the rich nothing but woe because wealth and possessions stand in the way of a person's full access to the reign of God. Lacking wealth and possessions, the poor experience the reign of God. Whether one hungers now or is full now reflects one's relationship to God. Jesus declares that this status will be reversed. Those who weep now will laugh, and those who laugh now will mourn and weep. Jesus says that how one lives now will impact one's future. Jesus makes this point clear when he contrasts those who risk being hated, rejected, excluded, and de-

famed for Jesus' sake with those who risk nothing for the sake of the gospel.

Pastoral Reflection

I'm beginning to understand why the people of Nazareth tried to toss Jesus off the cliff of their city and why the religious leaders of the day did Jesus in. "Woe!" Jesus says to all who are rich, full, laughing, and of good reputation. "Woe!" Jesus says to us. Our Gospel lesson is the beatitudes. We read Matthew's account of the beatitudes on All Saints' Day, and it comforts us and makes us feel good. But Luke's version of Jesus' beatitudes makes us squirm. For we can all identify with Matthew. All of us, at some time, have been poor in spirit or have been hungry and thirsty for righteousness. But the loopholes aren't there in Luke. Here the beatitudes are unnerving.

Blessed are the poor, Luke says. Period. Blessed are the hungry. Period. The poor that Jesus refers to are so poor that they have to beg. In Jesus' day, "poor" was the way of describing pious, though humiliated, people. And that isn't us. Even in a relative sense, few of us who bear these words today can claim with a straight face to be poor or hungry in the primary meaning of those words. This is especially true when we compare our situation with that of the tens and hundreds of millions of Christians around the world who are hearing these words today and whose physical plight we can only dimly understand. And if people don't always speak well of us, most of us have not been reviled or defamed recently (and probably not ever). What's more, not only are almost all of us far from poor and hungry, but virtually all of us are, at least relatively, rich and full.

Woe to us! says Jesus. Luke makes it plain that when it comes to being righteous, when it comes to making ourselves right with God, there is absolutely nothing for us to hang on to. Or, more accurately, there is only one thing left for us to hang on to when it comes to being right with God, and that is the unconditional love of God revealed in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Of course, this is true for everyone. But the really poor and hungry, those who have nothing else to hold on to, are "blessed" because they have a clearer vision of this gospel truth. They know that the only thing that they have to hold on to is Jesus. For to be "blessed," as Jeremiah reminds us, is to trust in the Lord.

Jesus condemns a demonic attachment to wealth, to pleasure, to comfort, and to reputation because these things obscure our vision of the cross. These things make it harder for us to see and to understand and to accept the truth that the only thing we have to hang on to is the love of God revealed in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. However, salvation is not to be found in becoming poor. Rather than in simply giving it all up, salvation is found in trusting God's promise that all human need will be met by God. And here is the good news. For Jesus, real, authentic life, the kind of life that the deepest part of our personality hungers for, is life that is nurtured in God. As Paul reminds us, our Lord is the one who has "in fact" been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are woeful unto death. If we put our trust in ourselves, if we put our trust in what we have, Jesus is right. Woe is us! CAS

The Transfiguration of Our Lord February 22, 2004

Exodus 34:29–35
Psalm 99
2 Corinthians 3:12–4:2
Luke 9:28–36 (37–43)

First Reading

The Transfiguration of our Lord marks the transition from the Sundays after the Epiphany to the season of Lent. On the mountain, the light and glory of God are revealed in Jesus, a central theme of Epiphany, but this light and glory are revealed along with disclosure of Jesus' pending departure, which he was about to accomplish in Jerusalem (Lk 9:31). The Gospel reading is Luke's account of the transfiguration; the Old Testament and Epistle readings highlight different dimensions of this event in the life of the Christ.

Moses returns from Mount Sinai with new covenant tablets. God's will for the way God's people conduct their lives is as concrete as the tablets that Moses carries. That this direction comes from God is as obvious as Moses' shining skin. While the people of Israel are frightened by Moses' appearance, Moses does not seem to be aware that his face has been transformed. Through the use of a veil, Moses does not allow the nearness of God's presence and power to become something the people overlook. In Moses' face the people come face-to-face with the nearness of their God.

Using biblical typology as his method of interpretation (see Satterlee and Ruth, *Creative Preaching on the Sacraments*), Paul treats Moses as a type of the apostles and their ministry. Like Moses' ministry, the ministry of the apostles is a revelation of God's glory. Paul argues that Moses used the veil to hide the fact that the shining skin on Moses' face faded in the time between Moses' visits with God. By contrast, the apostles are bold because their hope is in the permanence of God's glory in Christ. Paul also uses "veil" to describe the people's inability or unwillingness to see God's glory in Christ.

By referring to "these sayings" (9:28; cf. 9:18–27), Luke intends that the Transfiguration be understood in terms of Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection and the cost of discipleship. Jesus goes up a mountain. Like Moses, Jesus journeys to a place of revelation, to a place of prayer and communion with God. Jesus takes with him his inner circle of disciples, those who will witness to the Transfiguration. On the mountain Jesus prays, and his face, that which makes Jesus recognizable as Jesus, changes. Like Moses, Jesus' face shines as Jesus is in the presence of God. Jesus' clothes become dazzling white, another symbol of the presence of God. Moses and Elijah appear, and Peter, James, and John see them. The presence of Moses and Elijah points to Jesus as the Messiah. Like Jesus, they manifest the presence and brilliance of God. Moses and Elijah converse with Jesus about his pending departure (in Greek "exodus"). Jesus' death on the cross will bring freedom and liberation. Jesus' death and resurrection are grounded in Moses and Elijah, the Law and the Prophets, as part of God's plan of salvation. Peter wants to build tents and hold on to the moment. But God appears and, echoing Jesus' baptism, announces that God is well pleased. God's instruction to the disciples is to listen to Jesus. In words prior to the Transfiguration and in actions after, Jesus teaches that God's glory is to be found in Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection.

Pastoral Reflection

My temptation on this day is to run to Simon Peter. For, while the message of the Transfiguration is easy to understand, it is at the same time hard to grasp. Everything that happened on the mountain declares that God's presence and brilliance are to be found in the person of Jesus. Jesus' face changes. Jesus' clothes become dazzling white. Moses and Elijah appear. Even God shows up. Peter, James, and John see it; the world does not. But the world will see God's glory in Jesus. Jesus will reveal God's presence and glory to the world when Jesus departs from Jerusalem via a cross.

We know this. But how well do we grasp it? While the images of mountain as place of revelation, the presence of God changing one's physical appearance, and the presence of Moses and Elijah proving the identity of the Messiah may at one time have been immediately accessible, today they are not. How might the preacher communicate the Transfiguration using images that hearers not only understand but can experience?

And even when we cannot grasp the glory of the mountain, we have heard for so long that God's presence and glory are revealed on the cross. But in our daily lives, our minds are veiled. Like Peter, we resist. We prefer to stay on the mountain rather than follow Jesus to Jerusalem. We would rather be impressed and awed by the tributes to the glory of God that we might build than embrace Jesus' talk of his departure via a cross, Jesus' prediction that great suffering lies ahead, Jesus' pronouncement that the life of faith means taking up our own cross, and Jesus' promise that we must die in order to live. Yes, as disciples we often prefer a mountain of our own devising to the notion of discipleship that Jesus has in mind.

But rather than scold Simon Peter and us, it occurs to me that, regardless of whether Moses really used the veil to hide the fading of his facial glow, Paul is correct. Even if we somehow succeed at staying on the mountain, the glory we experienced there all too quickly fades and feels far away. Even as we recall those moments, we cannot reenter them. Other moments rush in and take their place. The glory of ordination quickly becomes the reality of parish ministry. The joy of the wedding is replaced by the hard work of marriage. All too quickly growing up becomes growing old as we find ourselves closer to death than we are to birth. This truth is equally valid for congregational life and a nation's place in history. All glory fades.

All glory fades except the glory of the cross. It occurs to me this Transfiguration Sunday that the good news really is to be found in listening to Jesus. The choice that confronts us is not stay on the mountain or follow Jesus to the cross. Even if we do not choose to follow Jesus, the glory of the mountain soon fades, life resumes, and we find ourselves in pain and suffering, rejection and death. The choice we have is between following Jesus to Jerusalem and ending up there some other way. When we follow Jesus to Jerusalem, we go trusting that God will meet us there and that God's presence and glory will be revealed to us in Christ. Death will give way to life as we, like Moses and Jesus, find ourselves transfigured, sometimes in ways obvious to others but of which we may be unaware. CAS

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