April 2003 Volume 30 Number 2



CURRENTS
in Theology and Mission

Currents

in Theology and Mission

Published by
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

in cooperation with
Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary
Wartburg Theological Seminary

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**
peldredg@lstc.edu
Editor of Preaching Helps: **Robert H. Smith**
Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary
rsmith@plts.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.**

CURRENTS IN THEOLOGY AND MISSION (ISSN: 0098-2113) is published bimonthly (every other month), February, April, June, August, October, December. Annual subscription rate: $15.00 in the U.S.A., $20.00 elsewhere. Two-year rate: $29.00 in the U.S.A., $39.00 elsewhere. Three-year rate: $42.00 in the U.S.A., $57.00 elsewhere. Published by Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, a non-profit organization, 1100 East 55th Street, Chicago, Illinois 60615, to which all business correspondence is to be addressed. Printed in U.S.A.

CURRENTS is indexed in *ATLA Religion Database, Elenchus, IZBW, NTA, OTA, Religion Index I* (formerly *IRPL*), *Religious and Theological Abstracts*, and *Theologische Literaturzeitung*.

MICROFORM AVAILABILITY: 16mm microfilm, 35mm microfilm, 105mm microfiche, and article copies are available through University Microfilms Inc., 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106.

Contents

Father of the Year Award? 82
Ralph W. Klein

Schleiermacher's Social Witness 85
James M. Brandt

Augustine and Luther for and against Contemporary "Spirituality" 96
Paul Rorem

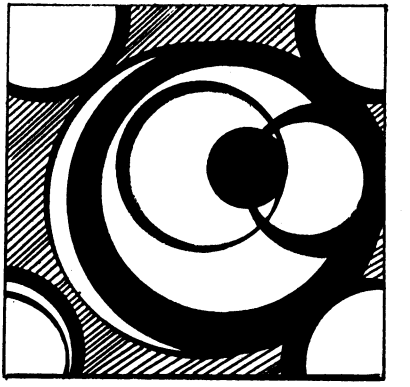
Christ Crucified: Lutheran Missiological Themes for a Post-Christian Century 105
Mark Thomsen

Reformation in the Global Context: The Disturbing Spaciousness of Jesus Christ 119
Kosuke Koyama

Local Lutheran Boy Finally Makes Good, Sixty Years Late 130
David Zersen

Book Reviews 140

Drawings by Mark Kloess



Preaching Helps 145

Moving Right Along
Robert H. Smith

The Holy Trinity—Eighth Sunday after Pentecost, Series B
Contributor: James Bartos

Father of the Year Award?

I talked with a pastor recently whose son is contemplating studying for the ministry. Though the son is only a senior in high school, he is already—and appropriately—on the seminary's mailing list of prospective students. But what lingers in my memory from this conversation is the deal the pastor has cooked up. Every summer he invites his son to read a weighty and challenging theological book—and pays him for it! After all, the pastor remarked sagely, I pay him for carrying out the garbage. Why shouldn't I pay him to do something constructive?

Having served many years in the office of father—and now grandfather—I have heard of much worse ideas. In fact, I have published smaller ideas. Maybe the children of light are finally catching up in our generation with the children of this world. Since I give all my awards anonymously, I invite and welcome other nominations for "parent of the year."

James M. Brandt highlights the social witness of the famed 19th-century theologian and pastor Friedrich Schleiermacher. Schleiermacher rejected the death penalty, violent revolution, wars of aggression, forceful colonization, divorce, slavery, dehumanization of workers, competitiveness in society, and gambling. Schleiermacher's mature theology gives significant place to the active, ethical expression of the faith; his greatest impact on his contemporaries, politically and in other arenas, was from the pulpit. (In addition to his professorial duties, he was the senior pastor of a 12,000-member congregation. Of course, faculty committees had not yet been invented. . . . But I digress.) He inspired the church and the people to political activism in the causes of the liberation of Prussia and then its reform. Ironically, the activism eventually adopted by the church moved in a much more conservative direction than Schleiermacher advocated. Faithfulness does not assure effectiveness.

Paul Rorem writes about contemporary discussions of spirituality against the backdrop of Augustine's own views on the subject in his *Confessions*. The problem with much spirituality is that it often starts with our own "spiritualness" rather than with God. The core issue is on who God is and what God does. Augustine's ministry depended on God's faithfulness, not his own. A recent academic emphasis on "negative theology" is being used to destabilize all talk of God so that spirituality becomes a matter of private preference based on "irrefutable religious experience." But Luther argued that because God's

transcendence is beyond us, we must look to God as revealed in Christ and as revealed on the cross. The essential emphasis is not on what we do or know or offer but on what God has done and offers us. What does this mean for pastoral practice? Should we call communion the Lord's Supper or Eucharist? Should we say the "words of institution" or the Eucharistic Prayer? Should we continue offertory processions or have processions after the Lord's Supper out the door into the world?

Mark Thomsen asserts that a theology molded by the 16th-century context has the potential for constructing a dynamic foundation for a contemporary vision of the mission of God. Mission outreach should focus on lay persons as they engage the world of home, work, and society in the name of Jesus. God is not only transcendent creator but is present "in, with, and under" creation. Only a church with the capacity for cultural change and adaptability has the potential for being an instrument of the mission of God. An authentic theology of the cross affirms that life and the transformation of life, not suffering and death, are the ultimate purposes of God. A theology of the cross for the 21st century will use the theme of dying and rising to speak of dying to personal, ethnic, and nationalistic dreams in order to participate in a mission rooted in God's vision of a new creation. Our love must be moved by the pain of the other and enter into the suffering of the other for the transformation of life. In the struggle against evil, God limits Godself to the power of non-coercive, persevering love. In relating to people of other faiths the church will denounce every manifestation of imperialistic Christendom and will be instead a serving and reconciling community. Limiting salvation to those who encounter the Jesus of the Gospels is placing Jesus in a very tiny theological package addressed to a small fraction of the human family within a small corner of the universe. We Christians may expect to be blessed by people within every other religious family.

Kosuke Koyama also wrestles with a definition of mission for our century. He affirms that the church exists for the sake of the world, not the world for the church. In the welfare of the world the church will find its welfare. Any claim to exclusivity or religious triumphalism will eventually run aground on the expansive vision of the biblical God. The apostolic message is that healing space was created through the Christ on the cross as God's response to human violence. Wherever there is violence, there is a false god. It is the church's task to imitate this extraordinary divine model of the self-sacrificing cross for the welfare of the world. There is no individualism in a global context; we live only in the context of the human family and human unity. We are called to participate in the creation of eucharistic *shalom* space for all people.

David Zersen tells the story of Mato Kosyk (1853–1940), a Sorbian (Slavic) immigrant to the United States, who is now regarded in his homeland as its greatest poet. Sorbs in this country usually called themselves Wends, but that term has acquired a pejorative ring in Europe today. The development of Sorbian identity and self-consciousness greatly influenced young Kosyk. Sorbian language has been forbidden in many centuries, most recently in Nazi Germany, where one could not write or sing in Sorbian. Before Kosyk came to this country he had edited more than two hundred Sorbian hymns for their hymnal and had written many poems. He studied at the German Lutheran Theological Seminary in Chicago Lawn, operated by the General Synod. After this seminary merged with what was eventually to be called Central Seminary in Nebraska, its legacy became part of LSTC in 1967. Kosyk served as pastor at a number of very small Lutheran congregations until he retired to a farm he owned in Oklahoma in 1913. Married in 1890, Kosyk had one son who drowned at an early age. He married again, at 85, two years before his death. He wrote poetry during three periods in the United States, often filled with longing for his native Lusatia and a desire to go home there, and also to heaven. His five volumes of poetry have not been translated into English. Unfortunately, during his lifetime, the diversity and idiosyncrasy he represents were suppressed, not prized. Concordia University at Austin has issued a call for papers to be presented at a symposium on September 19, 2003, on "Mato Kosyk and the Slavic Writer in the New World. (For a brochure write to dzersen@aol.com.)

Somewhere along the line, I hope the young professional reader of theology mentioned in the first paragraph above will become a true amateur, reading purely for the love of theology and for the love of the God unfolded in that theology. By that time his father will probably be a grandfather and can start recruiting the next generation and competing for my grandfather-of-the-year award. Unless, of course, I have already retired that trophy by then.

Ralph W. Klein, Editor

Schleiermacher's Social Witness[1]

James M. Brandt
Saint Paul School of Theology
Kansas City, Missouri
jbrandt@spst.edu

The funeral procession for pastor and theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher included a line of mourners on foot, stretching over a mile in length. Behind these mourners on a cold February day in 1834 came some 100 horse-drawn coaches; in the first of these rode Friedrich Wilhelm III (1770–1840), King of Prussia, along with his son, the crown prince, six years later to be Friedrich Wilhelm IV (1795–1861).[2] And lining the streets were additional masses of people, conservatively estimated at 20,000 to 30,000. Clearly, some organization had gone into this event, but according to contemporary witnesses, it was even more—a spontaneous expression on the part of the people of Berlin, meant to honor the one who had died.[3]

Small only in his physical stature, Schleiermacher had been a pastor, a theology professor, and a leader in the cause of social-political reform. He was loved by the people of Berlin. The presence of the king in the funeral procession raises interesting questions. Schleiermacher had been a leader in the movement to secure freedom for Prussia when the country had been conquered by Napoleon some twenty years earlier. In this he was a supporter of the king. But Schleiermacher also had been a thorn in the king's side for most of his life—a leader in the reform movement that had flourished from 1807–19 that had opposed and criticized many of the king's policies. Does the king's presence in the funeral procession signify his respect for Schleiermacher as a Prussian patriot? Does it signify the fact that he had outlasted the theologian and triumphed over the reform movement?

Critics of Schleiermacher's theology would likely see the king's presence as symbolic of an unholy union between theology and culture. Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, and other leaders of last century's "neo-orthodoxy" see Schleiermacher as the headwater of a stream of culture-Protestantism, the progenitor of a theological movement that ended up accommodating itself to the culture around it and having no critical leverage against it. Viewed in light of the crises caused by the World Wars of the first half of the twentieth century, neo-orthodoxy casts Schleiermacher into the place of theological weeping and gnashing

---

[1] This essay includes material from James M. Brandt, *All Things New: Reform of Church and Society in Schleiermacher's Christian Ethics* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001).

[2] "Translator's Introduction" in *The Life of Schleiermacher, As Unfolded in His Autobiography and Letters*, trans. Frederica Rowan (London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1859), ix–x.

[3] Martin Redeker, *Schleiermacher: Life and Thought*, trans. John Wallhauser (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973), 213.

of teeth. He is charged with giving up a distinctively Christian identity and selling its birthright for a mess of pottage. He is seen as the beginning of a movement that culminated in Barth's liberal teachers acquiescing to or even supporting the Kaiser's war machine.

H. Richard Niebuhr's assessment is quite similar to neo-orthodoxy's. He places Schleiermacher in the "Christ of culture" category—the least favored of his five types of the Christ-culture relation. I have argued that Niebuhr's assessment is a mistake. In fact, Schleiermacher has much affinity with the Christ-transforming culture type in terms of the particular stands he takes on issues of social ethics as well as the overall orientation of his system.[4] Under the rubric of what Schleiermacher calls restorative action, a prophetic critique is at work in Schleiermacher's thought that rejects the death penalty, violent revolution, wars of aggression, and forceful colonization as immoral because of the violence and coercion inherent in such actions. He also rejects divorce, slavery, and dehumanization of workers, dueling (a serious problem at the time), competitiveness in society, and gambling as immoral and unChristian. Under the rubric of what Schleiermacher calls "broadening action," a transvaluation of cultural goods finds expression. Here Schleiermacher reflects particularly on the State. He critiques the State's "selfish nationalism," calling the self-interest of the State the most powerful force that can oppose Christianity. He argues that Christian faith relativizes the value of the State and all cultural goods. Where the citizen sees the furtherance of the State as the highest good, the Christian sees the Reign of God, here defined as the "absolute community of all with all," as the highest good and views the State only as a lesser good which must be subordinated to the kingdom of God and brought into its service. In terms of what Schleiermacher calls "representational activity," the call is for Christians to participate in all cultural communities and therein to express the Christian principle of love for the brothers and sisters, the mutuality and equality of all persons in Christ.

At the theoretical level, there is much correspondence with the Christ-transforming culture type. This essay focuses on Schleiermacher's activity in the social and political realm. What did he do, and what kinds of consequences did his actions have for the Prussia of his day and for subsequent Prussian and German history? What was his social witness, and what effects can we discern?

Social context and activity

The Christian identity of Prussia, and of Brandenburg and Brandenburg-Prussia before it, was unusual. In 1613 John Sigismund, the Elector of Brandenburg, had announced his adherence to Reformed Christianity, but he had not required that his subjects follow him into the Reformed fold. Lutheranism remained the dominant confession of the people of Prussia, and the unusual result was a Reformed ruler with a majority of Lutheran subjects. This situation remained until the church of the Prussian Union joined the Reformed and Lutheran confessions in one church in 1817. As a Reformed pastor, Schleiermacher, like his father and grandfathers before him, was part of a "royal minority" in Prussia.

Friedrich II (the "Great," 1712–1786) casts a shadow over all of subsequent Prussian and German history. Although he shared with his father (Friedrich Wilhelm I, 1688–1740) the goal of economic and military development of Prussia, he was in

---

[4] See Brandt, *All Things New*, 109–34.

other ways very different. Friedrich was deeply immersed in the Enlightenment and a lover of all things French. He admired and befriended Voltaire; for three years the French *philosophe* lived with Friedrich in Potsdam and Berlin. He rejected confessional Christianity and allowed religious toleration in his kingdom. Believing that humanity could elevate itself through reason, Friedrich eased censorship and eliminated torture in his regime; immediately on his accession to the throne, he reinstated the rationalist Christian von Wolff (1679–1754) at Halle, and he later built an opera house in Berlin for the production of French opera. Friedrich accepted Rousseau's "social contract" theory of the state and believed that the ruler was to serve the people by promoting their security and happiness.

On the other hand, Friedrich believed that, in a ruthless world of struggle and strife, to fulfil his mandate to the people he needed to exercise power unchecked by anything save his own reason. This he did. Friedrich was an autocratic ruler; he gave his ministers and generals no real responsibility. He ruled by fear, though not the fear of physical brutality his father had employed. On the basis of his brilliance and daring, Friedrich became a great military strategist; Napoleon looked back in awe at his prowess. Friedrich won military victories against superior forces. He greatly expanded Prussian territorial claims, adding Silesia through the Seven Years War of 1756–63 and West Prussia by means of the partition of Poland he brokered among Prussia, Austria, and Russia in 1772. Friedrich was a person of genius and contradiction—at once a rationalist committed to toleration, openness, and the pursuit of happiness and a militaristic power broker who prospered while crushing others under foot.

In terms of social class, eighteenth-century Prussia remained a feudal society. Prussian power was developed on the backs of the peasants. They remained bound to feudal lords with little opportunity to better themselves. Peasants paid 40 percent of their income in tax and were obligated to mandatory military service. Friedrich II intended some positive changes for the peasants but accomplished little. He wanted to limit peasant forced labor to three or four days per week but was unable to impose this on the Junker nobility. He didn't even accomplish this for his own peasants, though they did receive land as hereditary holdings. Friedrich's most positive accomplishment regarding the peasantry was the draining of swamps where he then settled free peasants. But overall the peasant lot remained virtual slavery in eighteenth-century Prussia. The class that benefited from the rationalization of state government and economic prosperity was the Burghers. Involved in production and commerce, they became economically secure, a few even wealthy. University-educated and recruited into the state bureaucracy, their status was raised near that of other professionals—clergy, lawyers, teachers.

Schleiermacher was born during the reign of Friedrich II and, like many boys of his generation, was named after the king. Schleiermacher lived to see the reign of two more Prussian kings—Friedrich Wilhelm II (1744–1797), who ruled 1786–1797, and his son, Friedrich Wilhelm III (1770–1840), who ruled 1797 to 1840. This period of history was a tumultuous time. It saw the "fall" of Prussia from its powerful ascendancy under Friedrich II to the low ebb of its defeat by Napoleon in 1806. Eventually Prussia threw off the yoke of the oppressor, gaining its freedom in the "War of Liberation" (1812–14). The Reform period, 1807–19, was ushered in by Napoleon's conquest; this was a period of great hope and movement away from

feudalism and bureaucratic absolutism. The year 1819 marks the end of the Reform movement, a turning that saw the king and his bureaucracy triumphant again. And it paved the way for the conservative "German-Christian" dominance under Friedrich Wilhelm IV (ruled 1840–1861).

Friedrich Wilhelm III ruled Prussia for the final 37 of Schleiermacher's 66 years. In contrast to his father's sexual libertinism, he was happily married to Queen Louisa; this set a different moral tone in the land. But like his father, he was an inept, nervous politician, relying heavily on his personal secretaries for political counsel and excluding his ministers of state from influence. This isolated the king politically, and without a good working relationship with his ministers he lost the insight and support they could have given him.

After some defeats Prussia stayed out of the early years of the Napoleonic Wars. In 1805 Friedrich Wilhelm III made a treaty with Napoleon, but, unhappy with its treatment by France, Prussia resisted, hostile negotiations proceeded, and in October 1806 Friedrich Wilhelm declared war on France. War ensued immediately, and Prussia was utterly defeated: Napoleon routed the unprepared Prussian army at the battle of Jena (October 14, 1806), captured Berlin (forcing the royal court to flee to Koenigsberg), and concluded a peace treaty at Tilsit in 1807 that made Prussia subject to the French. With the King's power marginalized, the period of reform begins in 1807.

German intellectuals of Schleiermacher's day, like generations before them, focused on religious and philosophical issues. In contrast to their French and English counterparts, for whom political action and reflection were central, the thinkers of the German Enlightenment maintained their distinctive focus. This may be due in part to the fertility of German soil for religion—the strong tradition of German mysticism, the Reformation, and Pietism being noteworthy examples. Even more was it due to the tight control that German princes exercised over intellectuals. Having little opportunity to wield influence in the political arena, they continued to plow in the fields of religion and philosophy.[5]

Schleiermacher witnessed the humiliation of his country at first hand as the Prussians were defeated in Halle. Schleiermacher's house was plundered, and he was forced to quarter French officers even after he had taken in friends left homeless by the occupation. The University was dissolved, and the church where Schleiermacher preached was used by the French to store grain. Still Schleiermacher vowed to stay on, and he located another pulpit from which he could preach until 1807, surviving on "salt and potatoes."

Schleiermacher repudiated Napoleon as an aggressor and a dictator and, when Halle was severed from Prussia in 1807 (handed over to Westphalia), he returned to Berlin. There he found some opportunities to teach. But, more important, he returned to the capital with a new political consciousness and a commitment to the reform of the Prussian educational and political system and to liberation from the oppressor's domination. This new political consciousness with its call for moral activity in the world also made a mark on his theology. Whereas his youthwork, the *Speeches on Religion*, had emphasized the passive element in religion, the soul dissolved in a union with the universe, his later theology gives significant place to the active, ethical expression of the faith: in addition to being person-forming, faith is now seen to be

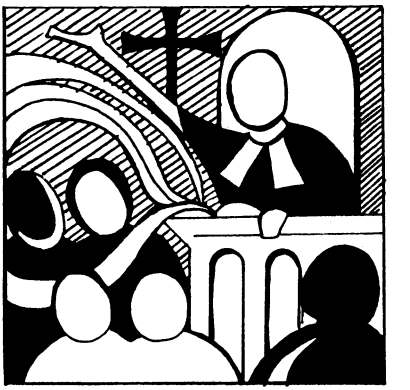
---

[5] Hajo Holborn, *A History of Modern Germany*, 3 vols. (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1959–69), vol. 2 (1648–1840), 308.

community-forming, nation-forming, (human) race-forming, and even world-forming. This gives a decisive shape to Schleiermacher's philosophical and theological program and is especially evident in his *Philosophical Ethics* and *Christian Ethics*.

In 1807 Schleiermacher made a secret trip to eastern Prussia at the behest of leaders in Berlin agitating for an uprising against Napoleon. On this trip, Schleiermacher carried messages to exiled government officials and had an audience with Queen Louisa and Princess Wilhelmina. Then in 1808 he was appointed to a post in the Department of the Interior, which was working to restructure the educational system and make it available to more than the children of the nobility. He held this position until 1814, and it was from here that Schleiermacher contributed to the formation of the new University of Berlin. The years 1813–14 were filled with hope for the reformers: Napoleon was in retreat; Prussia had joined the attack on the French; and Friedrich Wilhelm had promised a constitution which was to mean a significant reordering of Prussian politics. In these same years, Schleiermacher worked as editor of the *Preussische Zeitung*, a reform-minded newspaper that was regularly critical of the government, particularly of any compromise with Napoleon.

Schleiermacher's criticism of the government was such that the Royal Cabinet ordered his resignation as editor and his exile from Prussia. The order was never carried out. In the reactionary period following 1819 Schleiermacher was again embroiled with the government; he came near to losing his positions in 1819 and again in 1823. Neither threat came to fruition, but the latter controversy led to a complete severing of Schleiermacher's relation with the King. Although Schleiermacher was not a politician by vocation, he was an active participant in the political arena—always on the side of reform and often at odds with conservative and reactionary political forces.



Schleiermacher's greatest impact on his contemporaries, politically and in other arenas, was arguably from the pulpit. He preached weekly from 1790 until his death in 1834 and had "a charismatic ability to sway a whole congregation through fervent delivery and profound wrestling with many of the most vital religious questions troubling people of the day."[6] Perhaps the most moving and significant sermons were preached in Berlin during the quest for liberation from Napoleon. The sermon sending student volunteers off to join the army communicated a profound sense of God's action in history: the fall of Prussia is the judgment of God on the nation's pride and moral dissolution, and the call of God is for sacrificial action on behalf of the humiliated country. Moreover, the impact of Schleiermacher's sermons during his

[6] Keith W. Clements, "Schleiermacher, A Life in Outline," in *Friedrich Schleiermacher: Pioneer of Modern Theology* (London and San Francisco: Collins, 1987), 32.

lifetime was not confined to those who heard him; seven collections of sermons were published before his death and gained a wide readership.

For seven years, Friedrich Wilhelm was content to bide his time, but after the Russian defeat of Napoleon in 1812 and the loss of some half million soldiers, Prussia joined the anti-French coalition in 1813. In October of that year, the allies won a major victory near Leipzig. Then, in March 1814, Friedrich Wilhelm III and Alexander I, Czar of Russia, marched victoriously into Paris. Napoleon abdicated and was exiled. Prussia's spoils of war included the annexation of Saxony and other territories and recognition anew as a power on the European scene.

The Reform Movement of 1807–19

Thus in Schleiermacher's lifetime the external military and political fortunes of Prussia began with the heights of Friedrich "the Great," fell to the depths of subjugation by Napoleon, and rose again in the latter portion of Friedrich Wilhelm III's rule. Schleiermacher was deeply connected with the Reform movement of 1807–19; consequently, his view of internal political fortunes of Prussia might well have discerned a pattern the inverse of the external fortunes. The Reformers viewed Prussia under Friedrich "the Great" as a "'machine state' in which the individual was to function as a cog in a mechanism."[7] The Reform era marks a high-water mark, when freedom and justice come out from the shadows; then, after 1819, there is renewed repression and authoritarian high-handedness by the state towards its people. Thus, from the Reform's point of view, the internal and external fortunes of Prussia were roughly the inverse of each other in the period 1740–1840.

As it so often does, war and its aftermath created an opportunity for social and political change. Napoleon's defeat of Prussia created a triangulated relationship among three parties: Napoleon, Friedrich Wilhelm III, and the Prussian reformers, led by Baron Karl Freiherr vom Stein, whom Napoleon appointed as the chief minister in Prussia. The goals of the three parties were diverse, with Napoleon and Friedrich Wilhelm at opposite poles and Stein in the middle. Whereas Napoleon wanted to maintain control over Prussia and instigate internal reform along Republican lines, Friedrich Wilhelm wanted liberation from the French and restoration of the monarchy's power, and Stein, in the middle, shared desire for liberation with the King and for reform with the Emperor. In his short 14 months as minister, Stein "left an indelible mark on modern German history."[8] Stein believed in balancing power among different groups and sought to achieve such balance in the reorganization of rural county and urban governments.

Stein's work for the liberation of the peasants bore much fruit, but ironically much of it turned out to be bitter. Friedrich Wilhelm III had already freed his own serfs beginning in 1799. His serfs were freed of obligatory work and of their lord's rule in matters of marriage and inheritance. This was a reform of enormous proportions, as some 50,000 freehold farms were established. But with Friedrich Wilhelm's weak political will and Junker strength, the latter's peasants were only freed on the basis of Stein's edict, signed in 1807. Because of his short time in office, Stein's accomplishments in regard to the peasants were limited, but he did begin a process that

---

[7] Holborn, *A History of Modern Germany*, 2:393.

[8] Holborn, *A History*, 2:396.

would lead after many years to true liberation. In the short term, these changes bore bitter fruit. Although the Junkers' peasants were freed of the worst of their servitude, they were totally lacking in economic and political power. Stein's plans for the renewal of rural government would have given the peasants some voice, but they were shelved when Stein was forced from office. Thus, in the agrarian crises of the 1820s, former serfs and small landowners were rendered destitute. Unable to secure the needed capital, some 50,000 peasant farms and 70,000 small family farms were claimed by the nobility.

Stein also initiated significant educational reforms. At his suggestion as he was leaving office (having been forced out by Napoleon, who had discovered his anti-French activities), Wilhelm von Humboldt was appointed minister of education. Prior to this time, education had been controlled by the nobility and extended only to their children, especially in the form of military training schools. Humboldt opposed this exclusion of the majority of children from schools and succeeded in advancing the principle that general education be available to all children. Over a period of years, *Volksschule* ("people's schools") were established and elementary education provided for all children.

Humboldt put significant effort into the development of the *Gymnasium*, a secondary school he imbued with the ideals of German neo-humanism. The great achievement of the *Gymnasium* was the way it transmitted the spirit of neo-humanism and critical idealism to a large number of Germans.

If Humboldt's work in reforming the universities was the crowning achievement of his career, the greatest single gem in the crown was the University of Berlin, which opened in the fall of 1810. Schleiermacher was Humboldt's chief collaborator in making the university a reality. Balance between the philosophical vision of a universal and coherent system of human knowledge and attention to historical particularity is the hallmark of Schleiermacher's view, and it became incarnate in the new University. The philosophical vision of the interconnection of all knowledge was to pervade all departments of the university; at the same time, Schleiermacher championed such practical and particular fields as theology, medicine, and law against critics such as Fichte who saw no room for them in a true university. Schleiermacher also insisted on the interconnection between research and teaching and on the university's freedom in both fields from State censorship. His vision of the university was just the beginning of his contribution: Schleiermacher helped select the original theology faculty, was dean of theology four separate times, and taught an impressive array of courses in philosophy and theology. In philosophy he taught dialectics, ethics, psychology, pedagogy, aesthetics, and hermeneutics; in theology dogmatics, ethics, exegetical theology, church history, and practical theology. All this, of course, in addition to his work as Pastor of Trinity Church and his other involvements.

The tension between the king and the nobility, on the one hand, and the leaders of the reform movement, on the other, came to the fore especially in the struggle against Napoleon. While both groups shared the objective of throwing off the French yoke, they differed markedly in their visions of a restored Prussia. Although the reformers detested the rule of the French, it opened for them a window of opportunity. This was especially true during Stein's short tenure as prime minister but also true for the first nine years (1810–19) when Prince Karl August von Hardenberg filled the role.

The Reformers blamed Prussia's defeat by Napoleon on the autocratic absolutism of Friedrich II and wanted in its place a state based on broad popular assent and guided by the ideals of the Enlightenment, idealism, and neohumanism. Thus, they believed that the overthrow of the French required the broad support of the people. Movement toward such a populist revolution took different forms: the formation of conspiratorial cells (an underground, revolutionary movement in which Schleiermacher took part) and the establishment of a national guard (*Landswehr*, created in February 1813) and provincial militias (*Landsturm*, created in April 1813) consisting of and led by ordinary citizens, Burgher and peasant alike. As could be expected, the king was ambivalent toward these armies of the people. He desired their support but was concerned lest the democratic spirit of these institutions spread and contaminate the state as a whole.

Friedrich Wilhelm had good cause for concern. The reformers' patriotism, which for many (not least Schleiermacher) spilled over to become German nationalism, was melded with their reformist convictions. There were spirits at work in all this that the King feared and knew he could not easily control. The reformers had been at work in the period 1807–13, drumming up the patriotic spirit of the people. They "had rightly judged that great moral forces were slumbering in the people which could be activated for the state."[9] The result was that the morale of the people was high, and this high morale was a significant factor in the defeats of Napoleon in 1813 and 1815.

The presence and influence of reform-minded people within the ministries and bureaucracy of the Prussian government was drained away in the period 1815–19. The spirit of reform did not die, however, but arose in other places. Most prominent of these were the student associations (*Burschenschaften*); the first was established at the University of Jena in 1815. By 1818 there was a union of *Burschenschaften* that brought together student organizations from universities across the German states. The student associations had been inspired by the Virtue League (*Tugendbund*), which had arisen during Napoleon's occupation and worked to inspire patriotic feeling against the French. Many students had participated in the War of Liberation and returned with a spirit of patriotism and personal and political responsibility. The *Burschenschaften* were open to all students, and, with their commitment to reform in the direction of liberal and democratic ideas, they amounted to a transformation of earlier student associations, which had been exclusive clubs where students could play at being nobility.

An event that quickened the movement of the Prussian government in the direction of monarchical conservatism and brought about repression of dissent arose out of the student associations. Karl Follen, the radical leader of one student group, advocated the union of the German states in a republican form of government and was disdainful of conventional morality to the point of allowing for the murder of unjust rulers. Inspired by Follen, the student Karl Ludwig Sand stabbed to death reactionary poet August von Kotzebue in March 1819. Sand's ignominious deed brought about a strong reaction. Friedrich Wilhelm III was frightened and ordered that reform-minded leaders be spied upon and investigated. This work was concentrated on the universities, and a period of persecution and witch hunts ensued known as the *Demagogenverfolgung*.

---

[9] Holborn, *A History*, 2:425.

Conservative retrenchment

In reaction to Kotzebue's assassination and the general agitation of the *Burschenschaften*, the Karlsbad Decrees, passed by the Congress of the Germanic Confederation in September, 1819, called for the suppression of all "subversive" expression in the press, universities, and Diets of the states. The Decrees were enforced throughout the German territories: freedom of the press was overturned (it had been affirmed in the Federal Act of the Confederation), censors positioned in the universities, spies sent to hear lectures and sermons (for most of the 1820s Schleiermacher could count on his sermons and lectures being reported to the political authorities), and the *Burschenschaften* banned.

The conservative political reaction that gathered momentum in responding to Kotzebue's assassination and dominated the political scene in the 1820s and 30s was supported by a growing tide of religious conservatism in the same period. The religious movement is dubbed the Awakening and is seen as an expression of neo-Pietism. The Awakening united religious and theological conservatism with social-political conservatism and created the "throne and altar" movement—the backbone of popular support for the conservative policies of Friedrich Wilhelm in this period. The leaders of this movement have been defined as antithetical to the thought and action of Schleiermacher. While the neo-Pietists called for obedience to the King and the church and conformity to the status quo, "in an entirely different response, Schleiermacher and some lesser-known clergymen from the ranks seemed to develop and take pride in a feeling of responsibility as representatives and leaders of the public generally and of liberal forces aiming at political and social change in particular.[10] In this way, the "throne and altar" movement is important both in its own right as a player on the Prussian scene and as the political and theological counterpoint to Schleiermacher.

The neo-Pietist movement began in the decade following 1810 and drew heavily on the support of Junker nobility of Pietist convictions. The movement defined itself particularly against the "ideas of 1789" (that is, the French Revolution) and enlisted traditional Protestant understandings of human sinfulness to combat the optimism of the *philosophes*: church and state are needed to preserve order and restrain sin. In 1810, Ludwig Nicolovius became minister of *Kultusabteilung*, the ecclesiastical section of the Ministry of the Interior. Nicolovius stressed the experience of regeneration to the point that it became for him the mark of an authentic theologian, but he also believed that the church could only exist in connection with the state. In this he typifies neo-Pietism: at once holding deep Pietist convictions and pledging unwavering allegiance to the state.

The neo-Pietist/Orthodox coalition succeeded in having Schleiermacher's colleague on the theology faculty at the University of Berlin, Wilhelm Martin Leberecht DeWette (1780–1849), dismissed for inflaming students with liberal passions. The key evidence against DeWette was a letter of condolence he wrote to Sand's mother, in which he affirmed the student movement. When Schleiermacher protested De Wette's dismissal, the conservatives turned their anger on him. It seemed that, he, too might lose his position, but for him the storm passed. However, De Wette's firing and Schleiermacher's escape from the same

---

[10] Robert Biglar, *The Politics of German Protestantism: The Rise of the Protestant Church Elite in Prussia, 1815–1848* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 33.

fate were a portent of the future. Neo-Pietism, with its commitment to "throne and altar," was on the ascendancy, and Schleiermacher was to spend most of the rest of his political life resisting the ideology and action of this movement.

Church and state in the Prussia of Schleiermacher's day

After the crisis period of Prussia's humiliation by Napoleon had passed and the German state had regained its feet as a military and political power, Friedrich Wilhelm III turned his attention to controlling all areas of Prussian life. Not least, he fixed on the church, for with the military, the government bureaucracy, and the monarchy, the established Protestant Church was one of the pillars of Prussian society. Under the ministry of Hardenberg, after 1810, state control over the church was increased as church properties were secularized, making the church financially dependent on the state. Then in 1815, in order to gain control and religious unity in the expanded Prussian state, local ecclesial governing bodies were replaced by new Consistories, which were directly controlled by the state. In 1816, the state, through its newly established general superintendencies, claimed the right to ordain and appoint pastors.

In 1817, the Church of the Prussian Union, bringing together Lutheran and Reformed, was created. On October 31, 1817, on the 300th anniversary of the Reformation, a joint communion service was celebrated in Berlin; the language of its liturgy was framed in such a way that the communion could be understood in either a Lutheran or a Reformed way.

Prussia was not unique in creating a union church; the German states of Baden, Nassau, and the Palatinate did the same in the years 1817–21. But while their union churches were created with the consent of church leaders, the Church of the Prussian Union was imposed from above by Friedrich Wilhelm. When in 1822 he also imposed a particular order of service (*Agende*) on the church, many objected. Thus ensued the *Agendestreit*.

As Senior Pastor at Trinity Church, with its membership of some 12,000 persons, Schleiermacher was the leading pastor in Berlin. He oversaw the life of the congregation, including everything from janitorial service and building repair to confirmation classes and relief programs for the poor. Schleiermacher was also involved at the synodical level; in 1817, at the time of the king's push for a union of Lutheran and Reformed churches, Schleiermacher was the Presiding Officer of the Synod of Berlin. Schleiermacher favored the union and considered himself a theologian of the union (Evangelical) church, but he resisted the imposition of the union by royal fiat. He defended the union in print against conservative Lutheran critics even as he affirmed the church's independence from state interference.

Conflict with the Prussian government came to a head with the liturgical dispute (*Agendestreit*) of 1822–29. Friedrich Wilhelm III wanted liturgical uniformity in the Prussian churches; when the liturgy he proposed was not accepted voluntarily, he imposed it on the basis of his authority as head of state and ipso facto head of the church. Schleiermacher led the opposition; he was one of the "Twelve apostles," Berlin pastors who held out against the king. Schleiermacher found the liturgy "too Catholic," in his view more Catholic than Luther would have approved. He particularly opposed making the sign of the cross, saying the Apostles' Creed, and praying with his back to the congregation. The dispute raged on for seven years, finally ending when the king made an ultimatum:

conform or lose your pastorate. Having won only small concessions that allowed for continuing some local practices which were not part of the king's liturgy, Schleiermacher and the other Apostles gave in.

Although he ultimately lost the battle, in this ecclesiastical realm as in the political realm, Schleiermacher resisted the king's drive for increased control over Prussian life. He exercised his pastoral role in accordance with his convictions and was able to hold out against royal pressure for seven years.

Schleiermacher died in 1834. He had been a key player in the political crises of 1806 and 1819. He inspired the church and the people to political activism in the causes of the liberation of Prussia and then its reform. And when the change in the social-political climate came in the 1820s, he resisted the new direction. After his death, the conservative political wind continued unabated, putting down the revolutionary movement of 1848. In this the church played a key role as a potent political force, rallying against the revolutionaries with the repeated cry of "throne and altar." Schleiermacher's political career was marked by a profound irony: the neo-Pietists continued the political activism of the church, which he had championed, but steered in a direction very different from his. In significant ways Schleiermacher played into the hands of the king and the reactionaries: he led the church into activism on the political front, and it became a tool for the governmental repression of the people. Robert Biglar goes so far as to claim that "The inability of German Protestantism to side with the people during and after the Revolution of 1848 had the baneful consequence of alienating the German masses from the church and eventually driving many of them to embrace the secular religions of Marxism and National Socialism."[11]

This analysis of Schleiermacher's social and political activity demonstrates its striking correspondence with the transformative orientation of his theoretical work, particularly the *Christian Ethics*. Schleiermacher was deeply engaged in reform of the social order, not least in his work to gain independent standing for the Prussian church.

Clearly, the law of unintended consequences is at work in this story. Schleiermacher succeeded in inspiring the church to political activism, but the church moved in a direction opposite his convictions. He had little control over the effects of his actions. He was a significant political player, but the long-term results were not what he had hoped for. Also evident is the enormous power of the nation-state—its ability to sweep away everything in its path and co-opt the church to serve its interests. Schleiermacher was a consistent critic of the Prussian state in a time when political freedoms could not be assumed. In significant ways, he was faithful to the call to resist the social order when it seemed unjust.

This analysis shows that faithfulness does not assure effectiveness. At Schleiermacher's funeral, the people demonstrated their love and admiration for the renowned pastor and theologian; the king paid public homage to one who had often been a thorn in his side. He gained respect and even affection; he was faithful to his reformist convictions. This remains true even though the reform movement itself ended in failure.

---

[11] Biglar, *The Politics of German Protestantism*, 266.

Augustine and Luther for and against Contemporary "Spirituality"

Paul Rorem
Professor of Medieval Church History
Princeton Theological Seminary

So who, one might ask, could be *against* spirituality? And why drag in Augustine and Luther, for *and against* contemporary spirituality? Are we not all *for* "spirituality," even if we can hardly define it? In our neighborhoods and communities, are we pastors not understood to be in the spirituality business?

There's the problem: the spirituality *business* as a profitable boomlet of books, videos, Web sites, and bumper stickers has been a mixed blessing for thoughtful pastors. Spirituality, not religion, has been all the rage, and long enough to prompt parodies and the inevitable backlash. Whenever Hallmark cards and bumper stickers catch up to a grass roots trend and profit from it, we know the satirical counter-trend is not far behind. From my medieval corner of church history, I have watched Gregorian chant recently rise and fall, and then angels ascending and now descending the ladder of popularity and profit. Barnes and Noble has long carried sincere testimonies about visits from angels and more recently added the cynic's guide to "101 Uses for a Dead Angel."

"I'm not religious," went the trend, "but I want to be *spiritual*." A recent issue of *dialog* examined the popular distinction between "spirituality" and "religion," even as *The New Yorker* just then ran a cartoon poking fun at such a dichotomy.[1] A woman at the cocktail party, eager to be hip, asks the man in fashionable clerical collar, "Do you think of yourself as a spiritual person?" The spirituality trend has become a fad, eligible for satire not only at the (Wittenberg) *Door* but even at *The New Yorker*.

September 11, 2001, with all that it meant and means for our awareness of the precious fragility of human life and our awareness of evil, may change the landscape here, too, but it is too soon to know exactly how. Personal spirituality was not enough for those who flocked to church in September 2001. They wanted more, in that crisis. The rituals and communal relationships of *religion* reentered national consciousness, at least briefly, and we do not yet know the results. Seminaries are now receiving record numbers of applications, as some young professionals see the value of the institutional church and of the ministry. (Yet, graduate schools in all fields are having a boom year in applicants, so perhaps all these career changes are prompted less by soul-searching and more by the economic downturn.)

In any case, Christian theologians were criticizing contemporary "spirituality" long before the recent backlash. Such criticism

[1] *dialog* 40.4 (Autumn, 2001). Cartoon by Sipress, *The New Yorker* (October 22, 2001), 70.

seems obvious enough, in hindsight, when it comes to the non-Christian New Age spirituality of the neo-Gnostics, or what Philip J. Lee wrote *Against The Protestant Gnostics* almost fifteen years ago, or even this past Winter Olympic slogan about "finding the light within you." The "inner divine spark" has been an easy target for doctrinal cold water, and there's no need to take new aim. Within Christian communities, however, there is also considerable disagreement about spirituality. Just as some emphasize our prayer lives and spiritual formation, others see here an overly optimistic view of human potential or even a dangerous emphasis on our works and merits. James Kittelson critiqued all this self-help talk as "Contemporary Spirituality's Challenge to *Sola Gratia*" back in a 1995 issue of *Lutheran Quarterly*.[2]

Yet if we want to suggest a Pelagian works-righteousness here, we'd better go back to St. Augustine himself. After an appreciation of the Bishop of Hippo, for and against "spirituality," I will sketch an emerging academic version of spirituality along with an antidote in Martin Luther, and then suggest some implications and application, not for the unsuspecting public but for ourselves as pastors and presiders on Sunday morning.

Augustine, for and against "spirituality"

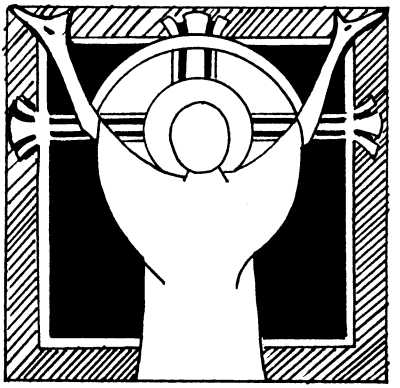
Why does Augustine, especially in his *Confessions*, still command such interest today, and how does his classic work correct the popular notion of "spirituality"? Lutheran pastors usually have a copy of the *Confessions* but often have not spent significant time with it. Some meditative rereading is worth the time here, because Augustine both supports and challenges the contemporary interest in our own spirituality.

Unlike college sophomores, who open this work looking for racy "confessions," pastors know that the title means the confession of sinful pride, a confession of faith and trust in God, and especially the confession of praise. Years after writing it, Augustine said that the work praises the righteous and good God, is intended to excite the reader's mind and affection toward God, and has done so often for himself and for many others. As a prayer of remarkable length, the whole book is about God, relentlessly about God, and thus directly opposed to the *spiritualitas* of Augustine's time and our own.

The problem with "spirituality," from an Augustinian point of view, is not the obvious profit-hungry perversion ("Seven Spiritual Secrets for Fiscal Success"?), but at the very core, the simple starting point of our own "spiritualness" instead of God. This critique of optimistic navel-gazing has some warrant in the Bishop of Hippo's own day, for the very word "spirituality" was coined back then in a letter stressing our ability and responsibility for our own *spiritualitas,* or spiritualness. The very first appearance of the Latin word *spiritualitas* is in this specific text. This letter was long thought to be by St. Jerome but is known now to stem from Augustine's opponent Pelagius or from his immediate circle of followers. Suspicions that today's spirituality industry trades on an (unfounded) optimism about our innate abilities to improve our own spiritual life can cite the very creation of the word "spirituality" as infected with Pelagian works-

---

[2] James M. Kittelson, "Contemporary Spirituality's Challenge to *Sola Gratia*," *Lutheran Quarterly* 9 (1995): 367–90. See also Scott Hendrix, "Martin Luther's Reformation of Spirituality," *Lutheran Quarterly* 13 (1999): 249–70.



righteousness.[3] Etymology and word history aside, the core issue for Augustine is the emphasis on God, on who God is and what God does, rather than any confidence in our abilities, spiritual or otherwise.

Pastors may want to reread Augustine's *Confessions* first because we want to read about him, but when we have the time to take our time, we realize to our own devotional and pastoral benefit that it is all about God. The first challenge is to slow down and adapt to this kind of meditative reading. Pastors need to reclaim contemplative reading, preferably away from the office, and definitely away from any computer! In so much of our reading, perhaps especially as pastors who are busy professionals, we are calculating consumers: How fast can I get what I want? "Instant access" indeed. Our reading is swift, silent, solitary, and sovereign. I'm in charge here, and I'll click when I want. If I am really interested, I may print, but that's all. Don't expect me to ponder it or otherwise get involved. A slower, communal experience, at least in hearing the text in our mind's ear, subjects us to the rhythms and influence of someone else. We're not in charge here, and we might even be changed.

The *Confessions* subtly combine scriptural images with theological-philosophical themes and Augustine's own testimony, all in the genuine voice of prayer. The familiar motif of departure—from home, from mother, from the church, and from God—and then returning again combines elements of the parable of the Prodigal Son with Homer's *Odyssey*. We have here the philosophy of Platonism (procession and return) along with the literary symmetry of chiasmus (Books 1 and 9, 2 and 8, and so on). Here and in many of his works, Augustine's spiritual guidance moves us from the external world of nature in to the interior self as the image of God and then up to the superior realm of God's own nature and attributes. This pattern guides Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity as well as his spirituality and even the literary design of the *Confessions* .

Significantly for pastors, the *Confessions* also seem to assume some critique or challenge to Augustine's own ministry back home. Some said: You fought the church, rebelled, went far away and got converted somewhere else, and now you come back and want us to accept your ministry?! As he elsewhere explicitly opposed the Donatist insistence upon the personal history and integrity of the minister for the effectiveness of the ministry, so he here in the *Confessions* implicitly gives the anti-Donatist reply about himself as a minister of God: Yes, I opposed the church and ran from God, but God pursued me and changed me, and now my ministry in your midst depends upon God's faithfulness and not

[3] On this and many other issues and texts relating to the history of spiritual theology and mysticism, see the ongoing multi-volume work of Bernard McGinn, *The Presence of God*, in this case vol. II, *The Growth of Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1994), p. 473 n. 14.

on my own. The priority, you see, is on God and what God does, not on us and our spirituality.

Augustine's most poignant passages in the *Confessions* press this relentless emphasis on what God has done and is doing, not on us and our spiritual gifts, indeed *despite* our deafness and blindness. "You called and cried out loud and shattered my deafness. You were radiant and resplendent, you put to flight my blindness."[4] He knows that God overcame him, and he is not lamenting a loss of freedom. One loose translation makes it sound like that old love song, "You made me love you," and this is no complaint. The credit, the praise, the glory, and the thanks always go to God.

The *Confessions* reward our contemplative rereading today regarding spirituality because they are all about God, about God's transcendent majesty and humble incarnation, about God's justice and mercy, about God as source and God as goal. Reading the *Confessions* again, slowly, is not finally about a book, or a theologian, or ourselves and our spirituality, but about God. The experience of reading it that way, paradoxically, can change us and our spiritual lives, but only as the by-product of keeping the emphasis where it belongs. If we lose ourselves in the focus on God, we again find ourselves and indeed as changed.

As in Benozzo Gozzoli's beautiful (and fanciful) rendition of Ambrose baptizing Augustine, the text, traditionally from Ambrose himself, says it all: *Te deum laudamus*. We praise you, God. In that beautiful phrase, like the *Confessions* so ancient and so new, is the enduring power of Augustine's masterpiece and the only version of "spirituality" with a future. The main point is what God does—what God has done, is doing, and will yet do.

Luther and contemporary spirituality

It is quite simple, of course, to continue this emphasis on the priority of grace straight into Martin Luther. It is so simple and obvious, in fact, that we should avoid the temptation, for three specific reasons.

First, the harder task is to *apply* the priority of grace to pastoral and liturgical practice, as I will attempt shortly.

Second, Lutherans are too quick to assume that our Martin was the only Augustinian at work in the sixteenth century, when in fact many members of his own order stayed loyal to Rome and made their contributions to the Council of Trent as Augustinian advocates of grace. Sixteenth-century Augustinians split into the Roman or evangelical camps not so much over grace alone—they were all against Pelagius—as over "faith alone" and over the *application* of the emphasis on grace (and faith) to other aspects of Christian life and worship. The Council of Trent taught an Augustinian theology of grace formed in love and condemned those who taught justification by faith alone. Even today, with such condemnations formally lifted, there is not yet ecumenical agreement on how to apply the doctrine of justification to other topics such as indulgences, purgatory, and ecclesiology. We don't even agree among ourselves as Lutherans on how to apply grace to the liturgy, as should be apparent shortly.

Third, and most to the point here, I'll not bother invoking Luther as an Augustinian champion of grace because there is

---

[4] Augustine, *Confessions* 10. xxvii (38), trans. Henry Chadwick (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 201. There are so many good translations readily available that the issue is not availability of his text but commitment of our time.

another trend in modern, or rather post-modern, spirituality needing his critical help, namely, a destructive variation on "apophatic" or negative theology.

The apophatic tradition in Christian theology recognizes first and most of all the transcendence of God beyond all our names, words, and thoughts. The classic exponent is the Dionysius long thought to be apostolic, the Areopagite from Acts 17 now called Pseudo-Dionysius, my long-standing research interest and suddenly the darling of some postmoderns who want to "retrieve" the apophatic dimension in theology. The apophatic way, meaning the way of negations, first establishes the utter transcendence of God. "We offer worship to that of the divine which lies hidden beyond thought and being. With a wise silence we do honor to the inexpressible," said Dionysius himself.[5] Thus all affirmations about God fall short, and only negations about God are really true: God is invisible, ineffable, beyond our names, beyond our words.

For Luther, saying that the transcendence of God remains hidden in darkness is just the beginning.

The current academic interest in negative theology is fueling a new movement in spirituality. The apophatic tradition is being used to qualify all our names for God, even the biblical revelation, indeed to destabilize all talk of God, such that anyone's knowledge of God is relative and becomes strictly an issue of private preference or irrefutable religious experience. No one can really know God, so my experience is what counts, whether the light within or dreams or daydreams. This nihilistic post-modern isolation of the apophatic insight from its larger context in traditional theological method is not really Dionysian in the end and should not be charged (or credited) to the Areopagite's account. His use of negations is to separate ourselves from everything that is not God, and thus to find oneself in mystical union with God, a union without distinction of self and God, which is another topic. Yet it is Martin Luther's critique of the Dionysian understanding of negative theology that may equip us to refute the growing interest in this apophatic move by academic post-modernity.

Luther knew negative theology well, as medieval mysticism had inherited it from Pseudo-Dionysius.

> Therefore Dionysius, who wrote about "negative theology" and "affirmative theology," deserves to be ridiculed. In the latter part of his work he defines "affirmative theology" as "God is being." "Negative theology" he defines as "God is nonbeing."
>
> But if we wish to give a true definition of "negative theology," we should say that it is the holy cross and the afflictions in which we do not, it is true, discern God, but in which nevertheless that sigh is present of which I have already spoken.[6]

---

[5] *The Divine Names*, chapter 1, in *Pseudo-Dionysius, The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 50. Further, see my *Pseudo-Dionysius: A Commentary on the Texts and an Introduction to their Influence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

[6] Regarding Psalm 90 (1534), *Luther's Works*, American Edition, 55 vols., ed. Pelikan

For Luther, saying that the transcendence of God remains hidden in darkness is just the beginning. The question is, Then what? Not a retreat to private experience, to the divine within, as the spirituality enthusiasts would have it! Precisely because God's transcendence is beyond us, we must look to God as revealed in Christ, specifically on the cross. Negative theology, for brother Martin, points us away from God's transcendence to God's incarnation and even death. That's the darkness or cloud of unknowing, to Luther.

> I have been reduced to nothing and know nothing. Entering into darkness and the cloud, I see nothing. I live by faith, hope and love alone, and I am weak (that is, I suffer) for when I am weak then I am stronger. This leading the mystical theologians call going into the darkness, ascending beyond being and non-being. Truly I do not know whether they understand themselves, if they attribute it to [humanly] elicited acts and do not rather believe that the sufferings of the cross, death and hell are being signified. The CROSS alone is our theology.[7]

Yes, God transcends all our names and concepts, such that the apophatic tradition will always contribute a helpful corrective to earthbound simplicities. Nevertheless, the next move is neither despair nor some inner light but rather the simple Christian confession of Christ, and him crucified.

Luther's critique of the Dionysian apophatic, however, is not some Protestant innovation, as I have documented in my *Lutheran Quarterly* essay. St. Bonaventure made the same point in the thirteenth century; the divine darkness of Dionysius really means being crucified with Christ. Even the earliest commentators on the Areopagite's negative theology made almost this same point. Maximus the Confessor said it best back in the seventh century:

> The knowledge of himself in his essence and personhood remains inaccessible to all angels and men alike and he can in no way be known by anyone. But St. John, initiated as perfectly as humanly possible into the meaning of the Word's incarnation, claims that he has seen the glory of the Word as flesh, that is, he saw the reason or the plan for which God became man, full of grace and truth.[8]

Before any of them, St. John the Evangelist said it first of all: "No one has ever seen God, but God the only Son, close to the Father's heart, has made God known" (John 1). Luther adds a distinctive emphasis here not merely on the incarnation in general as the revelation of this otherwise transcendent God but more specifically on the cross, on the mortality and passion and death of this God the Son, for us.

In a way, this second trend in contemporary spirituality, this postmodern turn of the apophatic, is the opposite of the first, more familiar trend of Pelagian spiritual disciplines. The Pelagian stressed what we can do and know, out of an optimistic anthropology. The apophatic stresses what we cannot do and cannot know, out of a pessimistic epistemology. In both cases, the main point in response is what God does—what God has done in Christ and what God is doing and will yet do. The crux of it is Christ crucified, for you and *pro me*, and the challenge for pastoral ministry is to get this across from pulpit to pew, from table to communicant, from the church to

---

and Lehmann (St. Louis and Philadelphia: Concordia and Fortress, 1955 ff.), 13:110 ff. For the fuller context, see my essay "Martin Luther's Christocentric Critique of Pseudo-Dionysian Spirituality," *Lutheran Quarterly* 11 (1997): 291–307.

[7] *Operationes* on the Psalms (1519–1520), *Luthers Werke, Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. J. F. K. Knaake et al. (Weimar: Bohlau, 1883ff.), 5. 176. 27–33. The capital letters emphasizing "cross" are apparently original.

[8] Chapters on Knowledge, II, 76. *Maximus Confessor: Selected Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 164.

the world. People in our spirituality culture are seeking more yet do not even know what they seek. We have a word to speak, a liturgical and corporate word of life that goes beyond private spirituality. It is nothing less than life and salvation in the words "for you, for the forgiveness of sin."

Implications and application

We learn from Augustine and Luther that the essential emphasis is not on what we do or offer or know (or do not know) but on what God has done and does and offers us. What are the implications and application for pastoral practice regarding contemporary spirituality?

Of course we need to evaluate critically (that is, theologically) the popular spiritual trends in these New Age greeting cards or so-called negative theology. Yet we must go beyond self-satisfied critiques of the unsuspecting well-intended laity and eager yet inexperienced seminarians. Let us reexamine ourselves here, as Lutheran pastors who preach and preside. In our Sunday worship habits and patterns, is the clear emphasis really on what God does in Christ crucified for us, or is it rather on what the congregation does and offers? After September 11, people need more than subjective individualized spirituality, and that's where the gospel comes in, in Word and sacrament.

Early in 2002 Bishop Mark Hanson told the New Jersey Synod that the ELCA is formulating a set of "principles for worship" so that new worship materials can be developed accordingly and that he hopes this will mean reclaiming the phrase "means of grace" with all that it entails. The American public knows and likes the word grace, as in "Amazing Grace," and our local congregations, in Word and sacrament, can offer the concrete means of such grace, the very way God's gracious love comes to us, he said. The Augustinian and Luther-an emphasis on God and Christ, not on ourselves, the clear priority on the means of grace, has multiple implications for our liturgical decisions, I think, and some of them are perhaps unsettling and thus unwelcome in our midst. Pastors know that worship patterns are hard to change, not only for our members but also for ourselves. There are no absolutes here, no condemnations; but the priority of grace at least raises questions about our corporate habits, and I here suggest some implications regarding the means of grace.

Consider, to start with, which sacramental name befits the means of grace. Should we call it the Eucharist or the Lord's Supper? Set aside for a moment whether in-house ecclesial terminology such as Eucharist helps or hinders evangelism, as compared to common names like "supper" and witness words like "Lord." The question is whether to name it after *our* thanksgiving, Eucharist, or after the gift itself, the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:20).

Well, comes the obvious response, how simplistic; it is both the gift and the thanks. Yet if our time calls for a clear emphasis, as in Augustine and Luther, should that emphasis not be on what God does in Christ, on the means *of grace*, rather than on what we do, on our spirituality, on our means of thanksgiving? It is first of all the gift of the Lord's Supper. To name the sacrament "eucharist" is to displace from the center the gift itself—the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation—and to emphasize our gratitude, our thanksgiving, our spirituality, our Eucharist. Where such an inversion prevails, the eucharistic tale has wagged the evangelical dogma (you should forgive the pun). As if we can take for granted the gift of God's grace in Christ, as bestowed elsewhere, some other way, perhaps long ago or directly to the individual heart, without

such here-and-now corporate means as words, bread and wine. In that case, the words and the elements could be taken over by our celebration and offered to God in our sacrifice of our praise and our thanksgiving, namely, our spirituality. Yet such an emphasis converts the sacrament from a means of grace to a means of thanksgiving and furthermore suggests that our thanksgiving is dominated by worship rather than flowing out into the work and witness of daily life.

Naturally, this priority emphasis on God's gift, "for you for the forgiveness of sins," rather than on *our* eucharist or thanksgiving, which should follow, also applies to the so-called eucharistic prayer, or Great Thanksgiving. Those who agree with my Augustinian and Luther-an emphasis on what God does in Christ may already proclaim the "words of institution" as gospel, as grace, "the body of Christ, given for you," instead of enclosing them in *our* prayer, *our* thanksgiving, *our* spiritual self-offering to God. An ecclesiology of the whole Christ, including his body the church offered to the Father, is still a Godward direction, whereas the gospel emphasis should be "usward." Luther himself was clear about the difference in direction. "The one [the Words of Institution] comes from God to us; . . . the other . . . from us to God. The former descends, the latter ascends."[9] The sacrament is not our sacrifice or even our prayer but the gift of God, as proclaimed and given to us. Then, our thanksgiving spills over into lives of witness and service to the neighbor.

Going out into the world suggests one last implication regarding an offertory procession, again as a challenge to our trends and current emphasis. Biblically, historically, and theologically, there is a growing ecumenical consensus that the offertory procession of bread and wine wrongly

The sacrament is not our sacrifice or even our prayer but the gift of God, as proclaimed and given to us.

emphasizes our initiative, our offering, again our spirituality, instead of God's gracious gift in Christ crucified coming *to us* in bread and wine. Anglicans who once promoted this as the first of the "four-action shape" have been particularly critical. Bishop Colin Buchanan here makes my Augustinian and Luther-an point: "to emphasize *our* provision of [the elements] is to distort the simplicity of the central concept in the sacraments—that God affirms and uses his created order as a means of his grace."[10]

If we want the emphasis to be on God's gifts to us, we do not presume to initiate the exchange. The bread and the wine come to us, and then we give ourselves to God's world as we go out to serve. If the Lord's Supper, as a means of God's grace, is clearly Christ's self-giving for and to us, for the forgiveness of sins, with the bread and wine on or near the table until they are given to us, *then* our true self-offering can

---

[9] *Luther's Works* 36:56. For a fuller statement, see my essay "Luther's Objection to a Eucharistic Prayer," *The Cresset* (March, 1975): 12–16.

[10] Colin Buchanan, *The End of the Offertory* (Bramcote: Grove Books, 1978), 38. For more detail, see my "The End of All Offertory Processions," *dialog* 35 (1996): 247–50.

follow, from the post-communion thanksgiving (now so brief) through our departure out the doors to give ourselves to God in the world all week long.

Church exit signs imply the subtitle of "servants' entrance," for beyond those doors we serve others with the grace and strength we here receive.

Imagine, for a fanciful moment of liturgical re-creation, a post-communion offertory and processional out into the world. The ushers could start the collection at the back, passing the plates and moving forward. In post-communion thanksgiving, the earthly gifts of our resources and daily lives are offered to God first in prayer, with specific intercessions for the members' weekday ministries, and then in the actual processional down the aisle and out the doors. The ushers lead the way, and the money is symbolically aimed at God's purposes in our world. The worshipers follow in the self-giving of daily life. Church exit signs imply the subtitle of "servants' entrance," for beyond those doors we serve others with the grace and strength we here receive. When the liturgical emphasis is on what God does in Christ given for us, our self-giving as response is not in ritual but in ethics and evangelism.

Conclusion

When the emphasis is on what God does, as in Augustine and Luther, God's Spirit moves us out into the world, in witness and service. Mission statements regularly make this same move, from God's Word to the church's mission to the world. In that movement, the goal is not our own self-absorbed spirituality but evangelism for the world's sake and social justice for the world's need. The movement is not our self-offering to God at the altar but God's self-offering to us in Christ and *then* our self-offering to God in the world. Augustine and Luther may point the way, but the emphasis on God's gracious love in Christ for the world's sake must be renewed in our time as the only version of spirituality with a real future.

Christ Crucified: Lutheran Missiological Themes for a Post-Christian Century

Mark Thomsen
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

The Lutheran theological tradition, as other Christian traditions, has unique insights to contribute to an understanding of the mission of God. Lutheran missiological themes are rooted in biblical theology; however, they have been molded in powerful and particular ways by the sixteenth-century context, which produced creative theological initiatives and limitations for attempting to translate a biblical vision of mission into a twenty-first-century context.

The original sixteenth-century context included: a medieval piety that claimed that salvation or justification was the consequence of God's action and required a human response of humility or obedience; a medieval church that claimed absolute authority in both the areas of the spiritual and the secular; a Roman church that had a vision of the universal or global mission of God and that claimed to speak and act on behalf of that mission; and a Protestant Reformation that included communities that were more radical than the Lutheran response. Surprisingly, we find that a theology molded by this medieval context has the potential for constructing a dynamic foundation for a contemporary vision of the *missio Dei.*

Salvation is sheer gift

Justification by grace through faith. Paul's proclamation of the saving power of the crucified Christ received by faith (1 Cor 1:17, 23–25; Rom 1:16) became the heart of Luther's theology.[1] Luther rejected the medieval piety that insisted on a required human act of merit in the process of salvation and the Roman Church's power through papal indulgences to control humanity's eternal destiny. (It must be clearly stated that much of contemporary Roman Catholic theology has rejected this medieval understanding of the church and salvation.) Lutheran theology is formed by a rejection of these claims and in contrast affirms that salvation is totally gift—justification is by grace accepted in faith. This theology directly implies that God loves the world and all sinners; that human life has value, mean-

[1] For two examples of this theme see "The Freedom of a Christian (1518)" in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings,* ed. Timothy F. Lull (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 30–49, or in *Luther's Works* (*LW*) 31: 39–58; also" Preface to the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans" in *LW* 35 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1960), 365–80.

ing, and purpose; and that human relationships with God are gifts. When grace is accepted in repentance and faith (also gift), justification and the transformation of life become realities. Destructive egocentric life is transformed and becomes Christocentric identification with the mission of God. The focus upon God's grace and salvation as gift is at the heart of the New Testament message. The Jesus movement proclaims that in every time and in every place this gospel has the power to transform life. A Lutheran missiology begins and ends with grace and faith. In a post-Christian century it will further explore the depths and breadth of grace in order that the Jesus movement might be transformed by the awesome wonder of the gospel!

The church is a gospel-created and gospel-proclaiming community. Lutheran theology is molded by its radical critique of the medieval Roman Church embodied in a priestly hierarchy, which claimed that the church through the sacraments enabled all of Christendom to participate in eternal salvation. Furthermore, the Roman Church had a vision of the universal mission of God for which the pope was ultimately responsible. This global mission was to be carried out through the office of bishops, mendicant orders, and political institutions, which could be designated by the pope as instruments within the mission of God.

Luther rejected this Roman claim as arrogant and demonic. He argued that the church was not a transnational ordained priestly hierarchy but a congregation (community of saints or people of faith) in which Christ is alive and active through the proclamation of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. The community designated as church is a gospel-created, gospel-proclaiming people (Augsburg Confession, VII). The whole community is a priesthood responsible for declaring the wonderful acts of God (1 Peter 2). The entire community is responsible for the mission outreach of the church. A remarkable illustration of Luther's understanding of mission is seen in Luther's vision of Christian witness among Muslims or Turks. He views this as a lay ministry of evangelism as Christian and Turks intermingle within the conflicts of war. Christians caught behind enemy lines or imprisoned by the Muslims had the opportunity of witnessing to Christ in deeds and also in words.[2]

In their reaction to what they saw as papal arrogance, Luther and early Lutherans said that since the time of the apostles no one person had a mandate for carrying out the universal mission of God. Instead, each bishop and pastor had responsibility for the gospel in their own region.[3] The gospel would gradually encircle the world as Christians would witness through very ordinary means to those with whom they came in contact. For Luther the gospel did not leapfrog around the world but moved out like waves from the center of a circle created by a stone disturbing the water.[4]

Although Luther's image of mission as waves moving out from the center of a circle proved detrimental to understanding

---

[2] Ingemar Oberg finds this dimension of mission in Luther's "Heerpredigt wider den Turken" in *Dr. Martin Luther's Werke, Weimar Edition* (WA), Vol. 30, Part 2, No. 1, pp. 192–94. Oberg's observations are found in a manuscript to be published by Concordia entitled "Luther and World Mission: Historical and Systematic Studies with Special Reference to Bible Exposition," translated by Dean M. Apel.

[3] Luther's comments appear in an exposition of Psalm 82:4 and is found in *LW* 13:64–65.

[4] See "Sermon on Auffahrttage (May 22, 1522)" in *Dr. Martin Luther's Werke, Weimar Edition*, 10 Band, Dritte Abteilung, p. 140.

the possibilities of global outreach, the analogy has powerful implications for mission within our own communities and societies. With Luther, mission outreach will focus upon lay persons as they in the name of Jesus engage the world of home, work, and society. The church is made up of the priesthood of all believers, and as such lay persons are over 99 percent of that priesthood and spend more than 98 percent of their time outside the gathered community. This often-unrecognized and scattered community, in their homes and at work in their communities and societies, are on the cutting edge of the mission of the church. Our congregations as a gathered priesthood meet for the purpose of being equipped for mission in the world. As the priesthood gathers, persons are healed, equipped, and empowered for their own ministry, which moves into society like leaven in a loaf. Only secondarily is the corporate and institutional community equipped to participate in that mission as an institution or agency. In the twenty-first century, lay persons will not be passionately involved in the institutional mission of the church until the institutional church is passionately concerned about the ministry in daily life of homemakers, students, teachers, farmers, truck drivers, police officers, factory workers, corporate executives, lawyers, bankers, builders, and nurses.

I served as an ELCA staff person for the first eight years of that institution's life. I consider the greatest mistake of those years to be the almost total neglect in developing an adequate program for affirming and equipping lay persons for their mission in the world. The future will focus upon the role of the lay person in the world, or the church will wither in a death spiral of institutional maintenance. On the other hand, if the future belongs to the priesthood of all believers, the clergy and the gathered community will have opportunity to find their own unique role in the mission of God.[5]

With Luther, mission outreach will focus on lay persons as they in the name of Jesus engage the world of home, work, and society.

Creation is good and is the arena of God's presence and mission. The Lutheran affirmation of the God-given value of creation and God's creative law of life embedded in all creation and humanity has given the Lutheran tradition an appreciation for that which is good, beautiful, and true in every people, culture, and religious tradition. For example, Luther insisted that the natural law summarized in the Ten Commandments was written not only in Scripture but in the hearts of all humanity.[6] The natural law called all people to their roles and responsibilities. Marks of God's inner law can be found manifest in the dignity of life present among Muslims, Jews, and others outside the communion centered in Christ.

Luther's assertion of the value of creation also came to expression in his insistence that the finite, or creation, has the

[5] An excellent discussion of this topic is found in Mark Gibbs and T. Ralph Morton, *God's Frozen People* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964).

[6] See WA, Vol. 39. I, p. 454, line 4ff.; also *LW* 25, exposition on Romans 2:15.

capacity of holding/embodying the infinite, or God—*finitum capax infiniti*. This insight, emerging from the Protestant debate between Luther and Zwingli on the Lord's Supper, reveals the very heart of biblical faith.[7] God is not only transcendent creator but is present and active "in, with and under" creation. Creation has God-given value, but it is also the realm of the holy. Salvation is not to be sought outside the realm of everyday but is present and engaged within the common and ordinary.

Human activity responding (knowingly or unknowingly) to God and having eternal consequences includes feeding the hungry, giving life-giving water to the thirsty, clothing the naked, and visiting the lonely (Matt 25:35ff.). In responding to "the least" one encounters in, with, and under creation the Holy Representative of God who ultimately judges the nations. Visions, miracles, and powers are possible, but compassionate involvement in the "suffering least" within the flesh and blood of physical existence is the essential dimension of the mission of God.

Luther captured the centrality of the common and secular when he said that all baptized Christians belong to one priesthood and are only distinguished by the role or occupation that they have within the community. A shoemaker, a smith, or a farmer has a God-given occupation as the priest or bishop does.[8] Here and now one is justified, and here and now one is grasped by the infinite and swept into creation and humanity in order that one might participate in the new creation (2 Cor 5:16–20). Here in flesh and blood, stuff and matter, one meets the gracious and calling God and participates in the mission of God by following God's servant, Jesus. It is this biblical, creation-centered perspective that calls the Jesus movement into mission. Luther himself practiced and celebrated that divine secularity as he led monks and nuns out of convents and monasteries into challenging vocations in the world.

Hold to Christ, and for the rest be totally uncommitted. Lutheran tradition has not bound the gospel to particular rites, ceremonies, or institutional forms. According to the Augsburg Confession, Article VII, it is sufficient for the unity of the church to agree on the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. Cultural forms that have molded rites, ceremonies, theological symbols, and ecclesiastical structures are *adiaphora,* nonessential, and may change as the gospel moves from one context to another. In the words of Herbert Butterfield, who is not a Lutheran, "Hold to Christ and for the rest be totally uncommitted."[9] This evangelical freedom enables a Lutheran missiology to enter every new context with freedom and flexibility in order to proclaim and live the gospel in ways that are relevant and meaningful to the new community of faith.

The Lutheran community has not always taken advantage of this freedom but again and again allowed itself to be imprisoned in the cultural and theological forms of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The Augsburg Confession said that the gospel was to be preached in its purity and the sacraments rightly administered. Orthodoxy identified *purity* and *rightly* with sixteenth- and seventeenth-century cultural

---

[7] The phrase *finitum capax infiniti* does not actually occur in the Marburg Articles or Colloquy but in time became a summary of the Lutheran position. See Paul Tillich, *The History of Christian Thought,* ed. Carl Braaten (New York and Evanston: Harper and Row, 1968), 262.

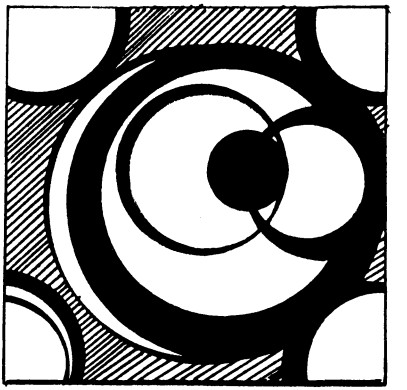
[8] "To the Christian Nobility," *LW* 44:13.

[9] Herbert Butterfield, *Christianity and History* (New York: Scribner's, 1950), 146.

forms. Lutheran orthodoxy became so focused upon "purity" and "rightly" that was imprisoned in the past that it lost sight of the mission of God that had been birthed in a Semitic culture and that, within a generation, thought and spoke theology in Greek. It is essential to recognize that only a church with the capacity for cultural change and adaptability has the potential for being an instrument of the *missio Dei.*

We preach Christ crucified. In his radical critique of the Roman Church Luther developed a theology of the cross and described himself as a theologian of the cross.[10] He emphasized among other elements in this theology that (1) the God of the gospel appears in weakness as the crucified one; (2) in this crucified one, the sinner is grasped by grace and is justified apart from the law or human attempts to justify the self; (3) revelation of the true God is in the crucified one and not in reason, which claims to find God in the splendor of creation and the natural order; (4) good works do not lead to salvation, rather Christians must exercise extreme care to avoid being deceived into self-justification by good works; (5) as Jesus lived in weakness and was subjected to suffering, the Christian should expect the same in life, and suffering is God's way of driving humans to the foot of the cross; (6) Christ, who lives in persons through faith, creates good works within and though them.

In his theology of the cross Luther rightly emphasized that salvation was God's gift through Christ, whose suffering and death made justification and the conquest of death a reality. God's saving power was revealed in seeming weakness as the Son of God hung on a cross. Luther spoke of the hiddenness (seeing the back side) of God since the crucified Son did not appear to manifest the power of God. This focus upon the hiddenness of God and the suffering of the Son has tremendous value in articulating a missiology for the twenty-first century. It obviously speaks to a world that experiences lostness, suffering, and oppression and the seeming absence/hiddenness of God. However, it is particularly relevant to the world of the West and the U.S.A., which avoids like the plague and denies as much as possible the presence of suffering and evil in life. Within this church the cross of the crucified and the crucified people is often hidden behind dollar signs and happy faces.



Luther's own theology is grounded in his own intense personal religious experience. It concentrates upon the individual sinner in the presence of God. Luther's theology of the cross focused on the sinner's absolute need for the gift of justification and the sinner's capacity in self-deception to use "good-works" to attempt to justify the self. In developing his thought Luther used the Pauline image of dying to an old self in order that the sinner might be raised as a transformed new, living self of faith (Rom 6:1ff.).

---

[10] "The Heidelberg Disputation (1518)" in Lull's collection, pp. 30-49; also in *LW* 31, 39–58.

Luther's thought is so centered upon the self that his theology fails to see the theology of the cross as a missiological resource for anything other than other than the preaching of justification. The preaching of justification is a powerful dimension of the theology of the cross; however, it is a much richer resource for missiology than that which is articulated by Luther. The remainder of this essay suggests ways in which a contemporary missiology may tap a broader understanding of a theology of the cross.

Christ crucified for a post-Christian century

A biblical understanding of the cross and the mission of the church is a powerful way in which to attempt to develop a biblical missiology for our time and context. Catholic Latin American liberation theologian Jon Sobrino has done precisely that in articulating a mission theology molded by the cross for his context.[11] Interestingly, he writes that he has been accused of being influenced by the Lutheran tradition.

In developing a theology of the cross for the twenty-first-century context, a number of significant factors within the contemporary situation must be addressed.

1. Religious pluralism is a challenge to our understanding of the *missio Dei*. Within this pluralistic world, the cross has been a symbol of Christianity. Tragically, it has been seen as a symbol of Western and Christian military, political, and economic power. The fact that the flag of the British Empire was marked by a cross reinforced this identification of faith and politics. A missiology of the cross will deconstruct this demonic imperialism of Western Christendom.

2. There is a horrendous global divide between the powerful who possess and the weak who have been dispossessed. This widening gap must be challenged by any Jesus movement particularly because some Lutheran missiologies have understood justice issues as of peripheral concern to the heart of the gospel.

3. There is a dying Christendom identified with Western secularism and contrasted to a global church that encircles the world and is alive, speaking and acting in a thousand new cultural contexts and forms. The dying Christendom of the West will ignore this spiritual awakening at the risk of their own survival.

4. Evil, divisive powers manifest in violent conflicts, racism, and sexism permeate all of life. Participants in the reign of God will identify all evil powers destructive of life in order to challenge them in the name of Christ.

5. The changing role and status of women force the church and society to hear new voices and to rethink old values in order that all human resources might be enlisted in the mission of God.

6. The world of materialism is a spiritual desert, and the Western church is often more fully integrated into that relativistic, materialistic, militaristic desert than into the life-giving kingdom of God.

7. A postmodern world often has given up speaking of a Reality that is the sacred source or ground of all of life. A theology of the cross has the possibility of pointing to an awesome mystery that, if not trusted, will at least be longed for by every human heart. Only a seemingly hidden, suffering God is a realistic vision for a world marked by pain and absurdity.

---

[11] Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator: A Historical Theological View, Part IV* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1999), 195–271. Sobrino develops themes such as the suffering and death of God, God's solidarity with the oppressed and conflict with evil, and the vulnerability of the Servant and servants of God.

A theology of the cross for a "post-Christian century"—what it is not!

First, an authentic theology of the cross is not a glorification of suffering and death, although Christian theology has often done just that. Recently, several feminist theologians have severely criticized these horrendous and distorted understandings of the cross, which they describe as divine child abuse.[12] This refers to atonement theories in which the Father punishes the innocent Son in order that God's honor might be restored or retributive justice might be fulfilled. There is no question that this type of Anselmian theology is prevalent within Christianity and has led to destructive consequences for abused persons and to the legitimization of retaliation within social and political relationships.

However, in contrast to this type of theology, an authentic theology of the cross affirms that life and the transformation of life, not suffering and death, are the ultimate purposes of God. The reign of God is embodied in Jesus as Jesus challenges powers that are destructive of life, heals the sick, cleanses lepers, makes the blind to see and the crippled walk, center-stages the marginalized, empowers the weak, forgives the ostracized and "damned," and creates a reconciled community. In the words of John 10:10, "I have come that they might have life, and have it abundantly." The transformation of life is the purpose of God. Within this mission context Lutheran theology will reaffirm a positive theology of creation. The cross is to be placed within God's creative and sustaining work, within humanity's potential, which is rooted in the image of God; within the kingdom of God, which transforms a broken humanity and the story of our cosmos within an eternity of billions of Big-Bang universes.

Second, a theology of the cross is not a doctrine of the atonement, and in particular it is not the reiteration of an Anselmian one. The suffering of the Son is not the propitiation of the wrath of God, although Luther certainly accepts this view.[13] Furthermore, Luther's view that suffering is an expression of God's wrath for the purpose of driving persons to the foot of the cross is to be seen within the ambiguities and complexities of experience. Although suffering may shake one's confidence in oneself and may move people to God, and although destructive actions may lead to self-destruction, suffering and death can not simply or always be identified with the judgment of God. A contemporary theology of the cross must also speak more clearly of the consequences of evil or the demonic as they are embodied within the protagonists and peoples of history.[14]

Third, the theology of the cross is not a doctrine of the atonement. It is much more than that, because it redefines God, Christ, the *missio Dei*, the church, everything. The theology of the cross is also

---

[12] See Joanne Carlson Brown and Rebecca Parker, "For God So Loved the World," in *Christianity, Patriarchy and Abuse: A Feminist Critique,* ed. J. C. Brown and Carole R. Bohn (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim, 1989), 1–30.

[13] See "A Meditation on Christ's Passion" in Lull's collection, pp. 165–72, particularly 166–67 where Luther speaks of the severe punishment of the dearest Son.

[14] In particular, Lutheran orthodoxy has had a tendency to minimize the role of evil in speaking of human suffering and to dramatize the role of God's judgment. One might call this the demonization of God within orthodoxy. For another interpretation of this theme see *The Scandal of the Crucified World: Perspectives on the Cross and Suffering,* ed. Yacob Tesfai (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994), particularly chaps. 1 (Tesfai) and 10 (C. S. Song).

rooted not in particular biblical passages concerning the saving effects of Jesus death but rather in Jesus' total life, mission, death, and resurrection understood within the prophetic faith of Israel.

A theology of the cross for a "post-Christian century"—what it might be!

1. The cross means dying to private dreams in order to participate in the vision of the kingdom of God. A theology of the cross is grounded in Jesus' prayer that led to his cross: "Not my will but your will be done." The Gospels witness to the reality that Jesus' mission and death were not the private dream of a Jewish carpenter but were rooted in the vision of reality whom Jesus addressed as "Father." If nothing else, Jesus was a person possessed by the reality of God. Jesus believed that he was called by God, empowered by God, and led by God, even if it meant being faithful to a vision that ultimately led to the horror of Golgotha. The central theme of his proclamation was the kingdom of God. From the perspective of Jesus and the early disciples, Jesus surrendered his heart, mind, will, and life to God. The cross meant dying to personal dreams and visions in order to be open to the reign of God.

Paul would use this theme of dying to the old and being raised to the new creation as a way of communicating the gospel within the mystery religions of the Roman Empire. Luther used that Pauline theme to focus on the theme of "personally dying and rising with Christ." Luther's theology of the cross so focused upon this dimension that Luther limited the wider missionary significance of the cross. A theology of the cross for the twenty-first century will use the theme of dying and rising to speak of dying to personal egocentric and corporate dreams in order to participate in God's vision of a new creation. Christian discipleship is dying to an old self with its limited, distorted, destructive visions in order to be conformed to the cruciform mission of the kingdom of God.

2. A theology of the cross announces that God is in solidarity with life, pain, and suffering in the world. The resurrection confirms that the way and word of Jesus, which culminates in the crucifixion, is God's way of being present and active in the world. God's identity is defined not out of a philosophical tradition but in Jesus' living and Jesus' dying.

Resurrection faith trusts that Jesus is fully transparent to the present and living God. If God is identified with Jesus' dying, it means that God has entered into total solidarity with the human family, even into the depths of human pain, suffering, and death. Biblical faith does not limit this compassion (agonizing-with) to a few moments of suffering on the cross but traces the depths of this solidarity from antiquity into the present. God hears the cries of ancient Israel and knows (experiences) their suffering (Exod 3:7–8). God weeps over the desolation of Israel where people, cattle and birds no longer are seen or heard (Jer 9:10). God passionately cares for the population and cattle of Nineveh, graciously desiring their salvation (Jonah). God's compassion sweeps through history. It is embodied in Jesus as Jesus weeps over Jerusalem (Lk 19:41) and is present wherever suffering and pain are present in life today (Matt 25:31ff.).[15] Suffering often

[15] Terrence E. Fretheim has written brilliantly on the theme of the suffering of God in the Old Testament. See *The Suffering of God: An Old Testament Perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984). In a recent article Fretheim uses this theme in developing a Christology. See "Christology and the Old

marks that which is destructive of life. However, "suffering-with" marks love that is so deep that it is moved by the pain of the other and enters into the suffering of the other for the transformation of life.

Jesus' own suffering and cross participated in the pain-love of God (a phrase used by Asian theologian C. S. Song) that is the Ultimate Reality within a broken, pain-filled cosmic order.[16] This dimension of a theology of the cross must be viewed within a Lutheran theology in which God values life and creation. As noted above, Lutheran theology recognizes the world of flesh and blood as the location of the sacred where salvation as a new creation is birthed. It is significant that a multitude of persons living under conditions of oppression have intuitively been grasped by this dimension of Jesus crucified. Black slaves sang of the one who knew their suffering. The outcasts within Indian society see Jesus' suffering as solidarity with the "crushed ones" or Dalits of India.[17]

God's solidarity with brokenness springs out of passionate concern for the world. A church marked by and enticed by a comfortable life—mountaintop experiences apart from pain-filled valleys—is irrelevant to the *missio Dei.* An authentic Christianity, in the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, is called to share the suffering of God in the world![18]

3. The cross means that evil has incredible power in the world. Identifying the mission and death of Jesus with the reign of God means that faith experiences and acknowledges that evil and Satan have incredible power in the world. God's very best is pushed out of life and onto a cross. The past and contemporary history manifests this continuing power of evil as life, the good, the true, and the beautiful are crushed again and again. People of the cross will seek to identify and acknowledge the presence of the creative word of God within all creation and all human cultures/religions. They will also fearlessly name evil in all of its forms (the idols of the nations) and as participants in the reign of God will struggle against the forces of Satan in every context in order that life might be transformed. A contemporary Lutheran theology of the cross will reclaim Luther's own acceptance of demonic reality and humanity's struggle with evil.

Gustaf Aulen's classic theory of the atonement recognizes this divine-demonic clash but fails to place that clash in the middle of history and life.[19] The clash, however, can never be identified with ethnic, political, national, or international clashes within history. It is a conflict far deeper—between the Abba and Spirit of Jesus and the demonic powers that embody less than the depths and breath of the love of God!

4. God is in a messianic struggle against evil. Identifying the mission and death of Jesus with the messianic reign of God declares and manifests that God is in a life-

---

Testament," in *Who Do You Say I Am?* ed. Mark Allen Powell and David Bauer (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999), particularly p. 212.

[16] Choan-Seng Song, *Third Eye Theology,* rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1979), 83–88.

[17] Arvind P. Nirmal," Doing Theology from a Dalit Perspective," in *A Reader in Dalit Theology,* ed. A. P. Nirmal (Madras/Gurukul, 1990).

[18] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison,* enlarged ed., ed. Eberhard Bethge (New York: Collier Books, Macmillan, 1971), 361.

[19] Gustaf Aulen, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Types of the Idea of the Atonement* (New York: Collier Books, Macmillan, 1969).

Jesus was not sent to die; he came to live and to challenge Satan and all his powers.

and-death struggle with evil. Jesus was crucified as a direct consequence of his prophetic ministry—his messianic mission against the powers of evil. He challenged the religious and political values and institutions of his era that limited, impoverished, or destroyed life. Jesus combated legalistic religious authorities who relegated sinners and the spiritually marginalized to the realm of eternal destruction and the sick and unclean to societal oblivion. He engaged and challenged the rich and powerful who dominated and manipulated the weak and dispossessed. Jesus' prophetic mission enraged his opponents, and they conspired to destroy him (Mk 3:6). They crushed Jesus by hanging him on a cross.

Jesus was not sent to die; he came to live and to challenge Satan and all his powers. Jesus was crucified in God's struggle for righteousness, truth, and the transformation of life. The resurrection is the sign of hope in the midst of a raging battle that God ultimately will have God's will done. Therefore, we hopefully pray, "Your kingdom come; your will be done!" That prayer leads to conformity with the cruciform mission of God. It leads in every new context to an involvement in the mission of God's struggle for justice, righteousness, and the transformation of life.

The Lutheran theological tradition has often emphasized that Jesus came to die rather than that he was sent to fulfil a mission that culminated in his death. In interpreting Jesus in this way, Christianity has been seen as a faith that offers a means of facing death without the fear of the judgment of God. Lutherans more often than not prepared for death and the afterlife. A missiology for the twenty-first century will prepare the church for its struggle against the life-destroying demonic in this world with the incredible promise that if you lose your life in it you will share the victory of the reign of God (Mk 8:35).

5. God wills to be vulnerable in the world. A theology of the cross asserts that in this struggle against evil God limits Godself to the power of noncoercive, persevering love in bringing forth the new creation. Out of the depths of compassion Jesus cared, spoke, preached, touched, healed, exorcised, raged, and turned over tables. But he did not attempt to lead a violent revolution in order to establish a political kingdom in the midst of the Roman Empire. Rather, his revolution included the power to name evil, confront powers, heal and empower people, and love and weep over enemies even as he was nailed to the cross. This reign of God is solidly and passionately in the world but is not of the world.

Within this present age the Messiah and the Messiah's followers do not seek to coercively impose the will of God upon the earth. One Chinese Communist party member said to me, "You cannot possibly run a country this way." That is absolutely correct. You cannot run a political institution without the use of coercive power. Jesus recognizes that his kingdom is not of this world; it belongs to a different order of being. Instead of building a new world though law and order, God through the Spirit creates a servant people who perme-

ate the world and undermine the values and institutions that destroy life in order that a new creation might appear. It is this cruciform *missio Dei* alone that can be identified with Jesus' vision of the coming reign of God. The reign of God will not be politically institutionalized but, like leaven and light, will be loose in the world. This messianic reign will always be vulnerable to the coercive forces of evil. Nevertheless, it will cross cultural, political, and ethnic lines. The new creation of authentic community and relationships can never be imposed coercively but must be drawn out of human beings by the Spirit. The Spirit creates new relationships which embrace even the enemy.

For three hundred years, the Jesus movement lived out this nonviolent, vulnerable mission of Jesus. This faith tradition is courageously lived out today in the pacifist Christian communities who continue to literally follow Jesus. Early Christianity was transformed when the Emperor made a previously persecuted faith the established religion of the Roman Empire. Suddenly, bishops called upon their pacifist communities to take up swords and defend the Empire.[20] How could the followers of Jesus live in this new world? Lutheran theology has had a unique answer to that question.

Two reigns of God. God intends to bring forth a totally different order of being, a new age, "a new creation," and a new way of relating. However, from a Lutheran perspective this does not exclude God from continuing to preserve the present age or "the old creation." In order to keep the present age from self-destructing while a new age is being born, God may and does use coercive power. People of faith are swept into this life and find themselves called to be participants in the struggle to maintain the present age from self-destruction. They make laws and enforce them in order to preserve life. Luther calls this the kingdom of God's left hand. The followers of Jesus also experience being called as participants into God's messianic mission to bring forth a new creation through a vulnerable mission of love. That mission is made concrete in words of forgiveness, challenge, and hope, and in noncoercive actions of compassion and justice. Luther called this God's kingdom of the right hand. In commenting on this twofold kingdom, Luther interestingly said that, in participating in the right hand of God's work, I am called in my personal life to turn the other cheek; but when called to participate in the work of the left hand of God, I am not called to turn my neighbor's cheek.

For Luther, God is ambidextrous. God is motivated by love in acting with both right hand and left hands.[21] With God's left hand, God was struggling with coercive force against powers that threatened life itself. With God's right hand God was in Christ bringing into reality a new order of being. The gospel is preached and with acts of love and compassion brings forth a new creation.

The cruciform *missio Dei* for the twenty-first century will embody the vulnerability of God incarnate in Jesus. Particularly in relating to people of other faiths, the body of Christ will denounce every manifestation of imperialistic Christendom and with Jesus will be a serving and reconciling community. In the words of an

---

[20] See George Forell's discussion of the Council of Arles (318 A.D.), where Christian soldiers are threatened with excommunication for throwing "down their weapons even in times of peace," in *History of Christian Ethics,* Vol. 1 (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1979), 58–60.

[21] Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luther's Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966).

African proverb, the Jesus movement will walk softly into a distant place.

There will continue to be pacifist Christians who will identify with the nonviolent agenda of Jesus in every situation. There will also be others who, like Luther, believe they are called to participate in an ambiguous world within two reigns of God. However, the cruciform *missio Dei* will reject every effort to identify the reign of God with an ethnic, nationalistic, political, or ideological agenda. No one can implement in the name of Christ a political or nationalistic program, because no one can use the name of the Abba of Jesus to speak for a fraction of the human race. Nor can anyone in the name of the nonviolent Christ fight a war, even against terrorists (Mk 10:42 ff.).

Theodicies and the atonement. A theology of the cross implies that, even though righteousness and compassion are often crushed within history, the reign of God is never snuffed out or eliminated. The reign of God is always present and hidden and always has the potential of reemerging to struggle with the powers of darkness. The resurrection is God's promise that the reign of God always comes back and ultimately will prevail.

This means that in the world of theodicies faith trusts that there is life on the other side of death. Faith may not have rationales for defeats, suffering, and death. However, faith hopes and within tears rejoices that since Christ lives, we too do and will live.

This also means that within atonement theories God will never fail to bear responsibility for the divine-human relationship; God will refuse to let us go! The resurrection is the promise that God, even though God's chosen one has been despised and rejected, has not deserted the planet or humanity but persistently comes back. In love God has chosen to absorb into God's own being all of the hate and rebellion of the human family. This divine bearing of sins, divine responsibility-taking, makes forgiveness, justification, and life possible. John the Baptizer points to Jesus as the incarnation of this reality and says, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." God whispers from eternity, "You may not wish my blessing, but I will go through hell to give it to you." God will never let us go! This understanding of the atonement asserts that God is in Christ reconciling the world to Godself (1 Cor 5:18–21). It also sees any atonement theory in which Christ is not transparent to the Abba of Jesus but in some ways transforms the Father's attitude to humanity as contrary to the gospel.

A number of theologians have recently articulated a vision of the atonement in similar images. The Japanese theologian Kitamori speaks of God as grieving over God's children—grieving because even though God's wrath wills to purge his children of sin as they destroy one another, God in love refuses to give them up. Grieving love wills to bear their sinful brokenness and will not let them go.[22] Douglas John Hall describes God's suffering love embracing humans who in freedom choose to walk contrary to the will of God. God refuses to forfeit the relationship distorted by human sin and instead chooses to bear the sin of humanity.[23] Jürgen Moltmann describes the suffering of the Father who wills to send the Son into the world. The Father "gives up/over" the Son to a suffer-

---

[22] Kato Kitamori, *The Theology of the Pain of God* (Richmond: John Knox, 1965), 119–21.

[23] Douglas John Hall, *God and Human Suffering: An Exercise in the Theology of the Cross* (Minneapolis; Augsburg, 1968), 98, 113.

ing mission resulting in death because only a vulnerable mission can reconcile humanity without destroying human freedom and therefore humans themselves. Rather than destroy the human community, the Father and Son bear the sins of the world in suffering.[24] In very similar terms Elizabeth Johnson speaks of God's suffering love as the power to resist evil and continue to create anew.[25] The cross testifies to a love that will not let us go. A pain-love that bears humanity's unwillingness to be conformed to the image of God is sheer grace!

This understanding of the atonement has nothing to do with the glorification of suffering or divine child abuse. It has everything to do with compassion that is so powerful and deep that love spontaneously embraces all humanity, bears the rebelliousness of a broken world, and struggles to transform the totality of reality.

6. Expanding the scope of God's grace. It is difficult to fathom why Christian and Lutheran theology have attempted to limit the breadth and cosmic scope of God's suffering love embodied in Jesus crucified. Why would one limit the saving effects of this love to those who have the possibility of hearing a proclamation of Jesus? Is God's life-giving embrace to be limited by the time and place of one's birth? This question is particularly significant today, when our knowledge of the universe is exploding. Soon we will be talking of a multitude of Big-Bang cosmic constructs and the reality of countless havens of intelligent life. How does one speak of God's life-creating and life-transforming power one trillion light years away in a galaxy unknown to our time and space? Is "salvation" within this mystery to be conditioned upon a human mission endeavor traveling at time-warp speeds collapsing time and space? Limiting salvation to those who encounter the Jesus of the Gospels is placing Jesus in a very tiny theological package addressed to a small fraction of the human family within a small corner of the universe. The Abba of Jesus actually comes in a gigantic box inclusive of a multitude of cultures and universes and addressed to a multiplicity of peoples and intelligent life forms. Placing the "finality of Jesus" within the meta-cosmic Abba of Jesus does not minimize the mystery of the incarnation but transposes it into an intercultural and interstellar symphony.

This vision of the mystery of God is already present in the New Testament. The writers of Ephesians and Colossians placed Jesus within this meta-cosmic reality. The God embodied in Jesus was the God unifying the totality of all reality (Ephesians 1, Colossians 1). The God incarnate in Jesus is the Abba who is everywhere and always present and active in the world.

A quick glimpse of the biblical tradition reveals that this universal theme is a basic dimension of the biblical faith. Within the Pentateuch, an unknown king, designated Melchizedek or the king of Righteousness (Genesis 14), blessed Abraham the father of faith; and Jethro, the Priest of Midian and father-in-law of Moses, taught the people of Israel organizational skills for the new community (Exodus 18). Within the prophets, Amos saw God as the Lord of all nations calling and guiding all nations of Israel's world (Amos 9:7), and Isaiah saw Cyrus the king of Persia as God's servant (Isa 45:1).

---

[24] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: the Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), 235–49, particularly 248.

[25] Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is; The Mystery of God in Feminine Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1992).

Within the New Testament tradition, Jesus, Paul, and the letter of 1 Peter understood salvation as a dynamic power through which God was universally at work in the world (the whole cosmos). However, God's saving power, which became incarnate in Christ, was not limited to the historical Christian movement. Jesus, like the Old Testament writers, saw God's saving presence outside the community of Abraham's descendants or his own ministry. In Luke 4:24–30 it is reported that Jesus sees God's saving work in a widow from Sidon and a Syrian military officer, an observation that nearly cost him his life. In Luke 10:25–37, he describes a despised Samaritan as the embodiment of compassion even for the enemy. In Luke 18:9–14, he declares a sinner to be justified and forgiven. In Matt 25:31-45, he teaches that multitudes from all nations are pronounced as participants in God's final victory even though they had not been aware of their encounters with the reign of God. It would appear that if one takes Jesus seriously, faith in the finality of Christ necessarily includes the recognition of God's creative saving work outside of hearing and believing in Jesus Christ!

Paul and his followers, like Jesus, saw God's saving power in Christ universally active. In Rom 2:14-16, Gentiles who know the will of God as it is seared into their conscience may be excused, forgiven, on the day of judgment. In 2 Cor 5:16-24, Eph 1:3-13, and Col 1:15-23, Paul and Pauline theologians see God reconciling the whole of the totality into one unified cosmos in Christ. 1 Peter sees Christ's saving power even in the realm of the dead (3:19).

Early Christians claimed the truth of the creative and saving Logos wherever the good, the true, and the beautiful appeared. Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, and Augustine are striking examples of this universal theme.[26] This theme moved into the dim background for many during the Middle Ages; however, it continued to be present within the Catholic tradition and reemerged at the time of Vatican II.[27] Karl Rahner and Hans Küng have been powerful spokespersons for this vision. Several contemporary Lutheran theologians, including Wolfhart Pannenberg and Carl Braaten, have also reclaimed the universal saving significance of God's power manifest in Christ. Both insist that God is at work throughout the whole of life and history. God's universal transforming work identified in the resurrection of Christ has saving significance for the whole of creation and the whole human family, not just for those who hear and respond to the gospel.[28]

A missiology for the twenty-first century will reaffirm this universal theme as a dimension of the Good News. The finality of Jesus is confessed within God's universal and saving power, not in contradiction to it. Jesus the Christ reveals and for all times and places defines what is the heart of our pulsating universe, the Abba of Jesus who through the Spirit raised the vulnerable Messiah from the dead. The God of this grace is not bound by the limitations of our knowledge, our faith, our message, or our mission.

---

[26] Justin Martyr, *Apology* I.46; II.13; Clement of Alexandria, *The Stomata,* Book I, chaps. 4 and 5; Augustine, *The Retroactions,* Book I, chapter 12, section 3.

[27] Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1997), chaps. 3–5, 84–157.

[28] See Wolfhart Pannenberg, "The Religions from the Perspective of Christian Theology and the Self-Interpretation of Christianity in Relation to Non-Christian Religions," *Modern Theology* 9:3 (July 1993), 285–97, particularly p. 293. See also Carl Braaten, "The Universal Meaning of Jesus Christ," *LCA Partners* (December 1980), 13–16.

Reformation in the Global Context: The Disturbing Spaciousness of Jesus Christ

Kosuke Koyama
Professor Emeritus of Ecumenical Studies
Union Theological Seminary, New York

"Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile; and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare" (Jer 29:7).

In his "Theses for the Heidelberg Disputation" (1518) Luther writes: "Without a theology of the cross, a human misuses the best things in the worst way."[1] The word "misuse" is familiar and relevant to us. The message of the Reformation calls us to emancipate humanity from the "misuse of the best," the misuse of the name of God. I see a connection between the ancient advice of Jeremiah to the exiled people of Judah and Luther's discovery of the gospel as he was pondering over the Epistle to the Romans. Both are concerned with the renewal of the quality of community life. Jeremiah affirms the wholesomeness, *shalom,* of the community, not that of a person or particular group. Luther affirms the righteousness of God that is actively at work among people. The spirit of the Reformation is focused on the building up of a universal blessed community. Hence, its message is relevant to us today, though it needs to be interpreted and translated.

The Buddha, meditating under the tree, maintained his mobility. The Christ, crucified upon the tree, lost his mobility. Mobility is basic to human dignity. Space is only meaningful when we can enjoy our mobility, whether spiritual, intellectual, or physical. When our mobility and space are happily harmonious, we experience salvation. The word "spaciousness" speaks to me more meaningfully than the word "salvation." At the time of my baptism I realized, though vaguely, that from the one who had lost his mobility on the cross came the broad space of new life for humanity. This is a striking paradox—a "scandal" (1 Cor 1:23). This image of paradox comes to me when I hear today Luther's expression *theologia crucis,* "theology of the cross."

My own version of a theology of the cross began emotionally, without any definite form or understanding, when I was 15 years old. In the morning following the midnight carpet bombing of March 10, 1945, in Japan, I saw the sun rise as usual, as though nothing had happened in the human world. The light and warmth of the sun embraced both the dead and the living. The sun quietly erased the distinction between enemy and friend. I became aware that a strange quietness had descended on me. I heard, or felt, the words of Jesus, that

[1] *Martin Luther, Selections from His Writings*, ed. John Dillenberger (Doubleday, 1961), 503.

God "makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous" (Matt 5:45). Those words have come back to me from time to time for nearly sixty years since that morning. When I was baptized during the war, the minister told me that God loves everyone, Americans as well as Japanese. I was baptized not into the religion of the enemy country but into the God of all nations.

How are we to speak about the connection between this healing universality of God and the line of the great hymn "O sacred Head, now wounded, with grief and shame weighed down"? This has been the theme of my ecumenical theology.

The advice of Jeremiah, "Pray to the Lord on Babylon's behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare," is in harmony with the New Testament idea of the kingdom of God. "The Reign of God is a universal reality, extending far beyond the boundaries of the Church. . . . It is the fundamental 'mystery of unity' which unites us more deeply than differences in religious allegiance are able to keep us apart."[2]

Martin Luther King Jr. writes in a similar vein from the Birmingham City Jail: "We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny.[3]

There is no church outside the world. There is no salvation outside the world since the church is in the world. There is salvation in the world because "Christ is hidden everywhere in the mystery of his lowliness."[4] And there is salvation outside the church because "In her sacramental mysterious existence the Church surpasses canonical measurements."[5] *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus* (The slogan "outside the Church there is no salvation" does not originate in the scriptures) is not consonant with the abundant generosity and spacious catholicity Christ created on the cross. Catholicity is, theologically speaking, a more fertile word than universality, because it does not suggest uniformity or imperialism. It is the universality expressed through the image of the "sacred head, now wounded, with grief and shame weighed down." It is a self-giving universality (Matt 16:24). The God of catholicity cannot be confined in the temple (1 Kgs 8:27). The biblical God is a boundary-breaking God. "Any claim to exclusivity or religious triumphalism will eventually run aground on the expansive vision of the biblical God."[6] The Holy Spirit moves where it wills (John 3:8).

Christ is the head of both *kosmos* and *ekklesia* (Col 1:15–18). In human life the sacred and the profane coexist.[7] We are asked to pray for the welfare of the enemy city, "for in its welfare you will find your welfare." When the *kosmos* suffers, *ekklesia* suffers. When *kosmos* is honored, *ekklesia* is honored (1 Cor 12:26). There is a sacramental communion between the two. This is the astounding design and operation of God's *hesed/agape* (loyalty/love) in God's creation. *Kosmos* is being transformed to *ekklesia* and vice versa. This grand ecu-

---

[2] *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences. Documents from 1970 to 1991*, ed. Gaudencio Rosales and C. G. Arevalo (Orbis, 1992), 342.

[3] Martin Luther King Jr., "Letter from the Birmingham City Jail," 1963.

[4] Georges Khodr, quoted in *The Ecumenical Movement, An Anthology of Key Texts and Voices*, ed. M. Kinnamon and B. E. Cope (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1997), 403.

[5] Ibid., 84.

[6] D. Senior and C. Stuhlmueller, *The Biblical Foundations for Mission* (Orbis, 1983), 340.

[7] "It belongs to life's ambiguity that both qualities, the holy and the profane are always present in its structures." Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* III (University of Chicago Press, 1963): 94.

menical message is addressed to twenty-first-century humanity.[8] It is good for us to note with appreciation the teaching of *theosis* (deification) of the Eastern Orthodox Church.[9]

Nailed down, Christ submits himself to the onslaught of human violence. Yet from him no violence emanates. Human violence loses mobility by the power of the completely disarmed defeated victor! Christ, the incarnation of the Word which was "in the beginning" and by which "all things came into being" (John 1:3), was confined in the extreme *Angst* (from the Latin *angustiae,* "narrows"), "the narrow space." The Christ in the *Angst* is the author of the life-giving spaciousness. When he became immobile, he became most mobile. In the great tradition of the holy icons of the Eastern Orthodox Church we see the spacious reality of the divine community. Since the icon is "not made by hands" (*acheiropoietos*) its space is not humanly defined. The sacred quality of space belongs to God. It is God who tells us, "the place on which you are standing is holy ground" (Exod 3:5). The presence of the Orthodox Church in the ecumenical movement is significant because of the positive decision on the use of the icon taken at the Second Council of Nicaea in 787.

"Love your enemies." When the enemy is loved, the structure of violence crumbles. The way of the Sermon on the Mount is that when all diplomacy has failed in hostile international, communal, or personal relations, the last resort is not to go to war but to love your enemies. This suggestion is totally opposite the words I personally remember in the Japanese Emperor's Declaration of War against the United States and Great Britain in 1941: "our adversaries, showing not the least spirit of conciliation . . . our empire . . . has no other recourse but to appeal to arms and to crush every obstacle in its path."

The way of the Sermon on the Mount is that when all diplomacy has failed . . . the last resort is not to go to war but to love your enemies.

When Christ in his last supper broke the bread, eucharistic space was opened up for the whole world. This visual moment is the symbol of the mystery that unites all people in an inescapable network of mutuality. In this space there is other recourse than to appeal to arms. Archbishop Sir Ellison Pogo of Melanesia says, "Christ has shown us a better way than violence."[10] In Hiroshima/Nagasaki, living space itself was instantly evaporated and disappeared. God responds to human violence with the spaciousness of the eucharistic space. God's

[8] The words "ecological" and "ecumenical" derive from the New Testament Greek *oikos,* meaning "house." Both mean "good-house-keeping."

[9] "In fact, in patristic theology the deification of man preserves the absolute transcendence of God and his absolute freedom: He *gives* us His own life. In receiving it, man does not 'possess' God, he does not become God in essence; he participates in that which is given to him and thanks God for His ineffable grace." John Meyendorff, *Catholicity and the Church* (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1983), 73.

[10] WCC News, Oct. 2002.

spaciousness is judgment. But the judgment is not condemnation; it is a call to repentance and new hope.

Space is as sacred as time. This is so because both space and time relate to freedom. When we hear "mystery of unity" or "a single garment of destiny," our association is the life-giving sacredness of space. There is only one space, and that space is crowded with many urgent human topics: ecology, ecumenism, economy, religions, pluralism, globalization, contextualization, medicine, transportation, education, inculturation, multiculturalism, international relations, evangelism, liturgy, human sexuality, generation gap. In all of these there cannot be, according to Jeremiah, a private, just-for-me-alone welfare. The righteousness of community members must be an *imitatio Christi,* the righteousness that makes the unrighteous community righteous. The concern for the community's welfare is central.

This concern expresses the spirit of the theology of the cross. The words "his lowliness" in the sentence "Christ is hidden everywhere in the mystery of his lowliness" intimate the amazing nature of Christ's catholicity, completely free of imperialism, authoritarianism, paternalism, and colonialism. These are the powers that take away the gift of authentic mobility in blessed space. The advice of Jeremiah exposes the destructive power of racism, sexism, caste system, militarism, terrorism, mammonism, religious fanaticism, and exceptionalism.

Exceptionalism—"God, I thank you that I am not like other people" (Lk 18:11)—contradicts the spirit of Jeremiah and Luther. Exceptionalism is a hallmark of the empire complex. It speaks religious language with ease. "Religiously self-centered" is a violent condition. Exceptionalism, like dispensationalism and fundamentalism, arranges time and space for the exclusive salvation of a favored group. It violates the cosmic ecological truth that all living beings can exist and prosper only in the form and spirit of webbed interdependence and mutual respect. It thrives with the idea that the world is moving toward ultimate division rather than toward reconciling community. When exceptionalism infects Christianity, it begins to say, "Christ is hidden everywhere in the mystery of his arrogance." This pseudo "mystery theology" decimated the indigenous peoples of the Americas. It embraces mammonism, teaching that Jesus supplies every material need *just for you.* Exceptionalism is antithetical to pluralism and tolerance. It cannot see that it is pluralism that gives space for a particular religious or political commitment to assert itself. Without pluralism, humanity will only have religious wars. Exceptionalism supports imperial globalization and shows no understanding of Christian ecumenism. Ecumenism abhors any caste system, whether local or global.

> Born outside the caste system, Dalits [in India] are considered worthless and as such are deprived of access to basic human rights. On a daily basis 250 million people suffer humiliation, segregation and brutality. Not only are they discriminated against at every level but as the nation's menial labor force they are also expected to work in appalling conditions doing unthinkable tasks.[11]

Exceptionalism is, to use the words of Luther, *theologia gloriae,* the theology of glory, which calls "the bad good and the good bad."[12] The demonic nature of exceptionalism comes from its repudiation of the truth demonstrated by Christ, that is, "Be-

[11] *Dalit International Newsletter* (Feb. 2002).

[12] Martin Luther, The Heidelberg Theses, #21.

ing as Communion,"[13] when the New Testament affirms that God is love (1 Jn 4:16).

> Love ceases to be a qualifying—i.e. secondary —property of being and becomes *the supreme ontological predicate.* Love as God's mode of existence "hypostasizes" God, *constitutes* his being. Therefore, as a result of love, the ontology of God is not subject to the necessity of the substance. Love is identified with ontological freedom.[14]

That love is identified with ontological freedom can be associated with Luther's theology of the cross, in which the strange work of God (*opus alienum,* "to work his work—alien is his work!" Isa 28:21) is emphasized. Luther's struggle with the revealed God, *deus revelatus,* who is the hidden God, *deus absconditus,* is consonant with the idea that the ontology of God is not subject to the necessity of the substance. Exceptionalism is violent because it rejects being as communion.

By human violence I think primarily of wars. "Deaths from warfare in the first ninety years of the twentieth century would come to 107,800,000 in all."[15] It is appalling that in the face of such massive destruction of human life, theologians are still talking about just-war theory, as Donald Shriver quotes Walter Wink's view.[16] Genocide, ethnic cleansing, racism, economic oppression, sexism, absolute poverty, hopeless slum life, and hunger because of wars starkly demonstrate the reality of human violence. The two world wars of the twentieth century should be called two world mass murders. The cold war was cold murder. Today biological, chemical, and nuclear attacks by humans against humans are a possibility. Western "Christian" civilization is threatening the integrity of the biosphere in which alone life is sustained. Violence is the conscious act of humans destroying the ecological foundation of community. Whenever being as communion is replaced by a dualistic scheme of *us* against *them,* there will be violence.

Exceptionalism, like dispensationalism and fundamentalism, arranges time and space for the exclusive salvation of a favored group.

That morning in 1945, though my vision was impaired by the fire flakes of the great fire storm, I saw that the sun light erased the dualism of us against them. I witnessed the self-destruction of Japan in 1945. Following our own tribal ventriloquistic god, who parroted whatever we said and who specialized in blessing Japan only, we marched to national destruction. Our undereducated god drummed into us the enticing dualistic scheme that Japan was the righteous empire, while America and Great Britain were evil empires.

---

[13] Title of a book written by Orthodox theologian John D. Zizioulas in 1993.

[14] Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1993), 46.

[15] "In war alone, the twentieth century saw the death of humans at an average of one hundred *every hour.*" Donald W. Shriver, *An Ethic for Enemies* (Oxford University Press, 1995), 65. Also, "in the century just past, intelligence was coopted to the service of terror." Shriver, "The Terror in Ourselves," in *Surviving Terror: Hope and Justice in a World of Violence,* ed. V. L. Erickson and M. L. Jones (Brazos Press, 2002), 106.

[16] Shriver, *An Ethic for Enemies,* 65.

Wherever there is violence, there is a false god. According to *Ecumenical News International* (Oct. 21, 2002), five Dalits were beaten to death by a Hindu mob because of the rumor that they had killed a cow. A fundamentalist Hindu leader justified the killing of the five, saying that "the life of a cow is more precious than that of a human being." The crusaders chanted "deus vult!" (God wills!). "War is more humane if God is left out of it," says Roland Bainton.[17] The word "crusade" is problematic. It self-righteously uses the image of Christ suffering to speak of war and campaign. It is impossible to call the Rape of Nanjing an act of Japanese self-defense. What then of the American nuclear attack on two inhabited cities? Was that an act of American self-defense? A tribal god, whether it speaks Japanese or English, has no understanding of the line between self-defense and aggression. A tribal god is immensely popular because it requires no self-examination and encourages self-justification. It is a crusading god.

> The spirit of Protestantism calls for direct examination of oneself before God, *coram deo. I* could be the Police Battalion 101 member who shot Jews in the fields of Poland. *I* could have wielded the machetes that killed eight hundred thousand Tutsis in Rwanda. *I* could have been a Serbian soldier who helped kill seven thousand Muslim prisoners in Srebrenica. . . .[18]

"*I* could be!" This is a shocking thought. But this is the way to free oneself from the snares of dualistic exceptionalism and of the parochial tribal god. When freed, we may understand that we cannot disarm others while we are armed, and we cannot demonize others without demonizing ourselves. The books of the Bible call this moment of realization "repentance." Luther said of himself, "I am dust and ashes and full of sin." This extreme statement can stand only if it was the report of self-examination before the holy God (see Isa 6:5, Lk 5:8). When one is reduced to zero, one has nothing to lose. With nothing to lose, one becomes truly free. One's observation of the world becomes open and unfettered. The Mahayana Buddhist east would appreciate this logic.

In the world today "1.5 billion people live in absolute poverty. Most of these people go hungry every day. Seventy percent of these are women and children. 1.75 billion lack safe drinking water."[19] What is the gospel for this world? Should not the life condition of these billions of people be the theme to ponder night and day? Isn't that the way to find a merciful God? The doctrine of justification by faith that Luther called *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae* (the article by which the church stands or falls)—to what does it call us? The gospel of Jesus Christ for the world today is to provide safe drinking water for 1.75 billion people, abolish the absolute poverty of 1.5 billion people, and to outlaw war and bombing. It is to restore life and hope to billions of children on the earth.

Some may say that I have abandoned the transcendent dimension of the gospel. They will protest that the gospel is concerned with something far more important than providing safe water to drink or even the abolition of war. Is safe drinking water more important than the forgiveness of sins, the elimination of poverty than eternal salvation? Those with safe water to drink would disapprove my "liberal" stand. "My view may be guilty of confusing the two separate kingdoms that Luther upholds:

---

[17] Bainton, *Christian Attitudes toward War and Peace* (Abingdon, 1960), 49.

[18] Shriver, *An Ethic for Enemies,* 110.

[19] *The Local Church in a Global Era,* ed. M. L. Stackhouse et al. (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000), 39.

There are two kingdoms, one the kingdom of God, the other the kingdom of the world. . . . God's kingdom is a kingdom of grace and mercy . . . the kingdom of the world is a kingdom of wrath and severity."[20]

Richard Niebuhr observes that Luther "makes sharp distinctions between the temporal and spiritual life, or between what is external and internal, between body and soul, between the reign of Christ and the world of human works or culture. . . . Luther does not, however, divide what he distinguishes."[21]

Luther's dualism is not metaphysical but historical and Christological. The catholicity of Christ is at the root of Luther's dualism. It points to the dynamic expression of the one sovereign Christ who is revealed yet hidden, and thus "endlessly surprising," to use an expression characteristic of the theology of Second Isaiah.[22] Boldly, the gospel of the incarnate God proclaims that the eternal destiny of a person depends on giving safe water to thirsty persons. "I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink" (see Matt 25:31–46). "Those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen" (1 Jn 4:20). A theologian of the theology of the cross is one "who with the apostle knows the crucified and hidden God."[23] Are not hungry people crucified people? Is not God hidden *in* the naked people? Is not Christian faith the most physical faith of the world religions because of the teaching on the incarnation of God? The vehemence of Luther's essay "Against the Robbing and Murdering Hordes of Peasants" did violence to his own theology of the cross.

The theology of the cross affirms that the righteousness of God that makes the unrighteous righteous through sheer mercy is the God of being as communion. Christ, on the cross "believed in God, hoping against hope" (*contra spem in spem credere*).[24] His death on the cross was the supreme example of fleeing "to God against God" *(ad deum contra deum confugere)*.[25]

The God of being as communion cannot be domesticated. How can we comprehend the hidden God who is a revealed God yet remains hidden?[26] Believers stand before "the wisdom of the cross (*crucis sapientia*) which is hidden in a profound mystery (*abscondita in mysterio profundo*)."[27] How can we fathom the strange work of God in which a human is savingly killed?[28] To know Christ is to "understand God in the midst of the crucifixion of the flesh."[29] God cannot be comprehended. The theology of the Reformation shares the apophatic quality of Eastern Orthodox theology.[30]

The message of the Protestant Reformation for humanity consists of a warning against the abuse/misuse of transcendence. To put it specifically in the language of the cultural zone of monotheism, it is the do-

---

[20] Quoted in H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (Harper and Row, 1951), 171. "The sword" belonged to the kingdom of the world; the business of the church was "the Word." Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology* (Fortress, 1999), 319.

[21] Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture,* 171–72.

[22] Water Brueggemann, *Isaiah 40–66* (Westminster John Knox, 1998), 2.

[23] Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: Reformation of Church and Dogma (1300–1700)* (University of Chicago Press, 1984), 166.

[24] *Operationes in Psalmos* 1519–21. WA V. 84–39.

[25] WA V. 204–26.

[26] Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition,* 166.

[27] WA V. 84–93.

[28] WA V. 512–26.

[29] WA V. 108–9.

[30] Luther "frequently refers also to Chrysostom's treatise *On the Incomprehensibility of God."* Meyendorff, *Catholicity and the Church*, 69.

Conspicuous with the great Eastern sages is the absence of the rhetoric of "enemy," though they clearly distinguished between good and evil.

mestication of God. Domestication here means "wrongful use of the name of the Lord" (Exod 20:7). We read in Luther's Large Catechism,

> It is a misuse of God's name if we call upon the Lord God in any way to support falseness or wrong-doing. . . . In general, a wrong use is seen in the first place in worldly business and in things relating to money, possessions and honor. . . . But its greatest abuse is found in spiritual matters when false preachers arise and present untruthful teachings as the Word of God.

Luther, however, goes on and tells us that there is a right use of the name of God:

> Since it is here forbidden to use this holy name in the service of falsehood and wickedness, it necessarily follows that we are, on the other hand, commanded to use it in the service of truth and everything that is good. . . . We are not to swear in support of evil, that is to a falsehood, or unnecessarily; but we are to swear in support of the good, and for the welfare of our neighbor.

These plain words have world historical importance. The wrong use or the right use of the name of God is a serious matter in the history of humanity. The wrong use of the name of God is bad theology, and the right use of the name of God is good theology. For Luther, the main antithesis is not between philosophy and theology; it is between good theology and bad theology, according to Gerhard Ebeling.[31]

The Chinese sage Confucius was not interested in the world beyond this present life. His concept of Heaven or the Cosmic Law is located within his understanding of human moral integrity. Human integrity is conclusive within this present world. There was no apocalypticism and no prophecy with him. The other great spiritual guide, Gautama Siddharta, the Buddha, focused on the tangible destruction of human greed during one's lifetime. One would find *nirvana* in the destruction of greed here and now. Mahatma Gandhi, a student of the *Bhagavadgita*, held that good is good, evil is evil, without making reference to the ultimate. It is called "desireless action," *niskama karma.* These three religious leaders held humanity responsible, here and now, for the destiny of the world and of humanity. Conspicuous with these great Eastern sages is the absence of the rhetoric of "enemy," though they clearly distinguished between good and evil. It may be that they thought enemy rhetoric is not helpful to the welfare of humanity. The Buddhist admonition is that greed brings forth suffering; therefore "eliminate one's greed!" Notably, the tradition does *not* say "greed is our enemy" or speak of a "war on greed." Its speech is nonviolent. Asia's sages also preferred not to approach the idea of omnipotence or of a divine being, which would confuse the integrity of human moral endeavor. For them, sincere moral effort is not "boosting" oneself.[32]

---

[31] Gerhard Ebeling, *Luther: An Introduction to His Thought* (Collins, 1970), 79.

[32] See Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* I, 16.

The spirit of the West conceals a kind of frustration that seems to breed violence. Perhaps the frustration arises in the gap between knowing the omnipotent God and human inability to become omnipotent as God is. Equally it seems to come from knowing the merciful God yet being unable to be merciful as God is. Radical monotheism does not permit people to relax spiritually. The great museums of the world bear witness to the deep and extensive impact of the stormy monotheistic spirituality upon human civilization. The word "stormy" is advisedly used. The biblical religion infused into human minds that one can celebrate the destruction of the infidels (Exod 15:1–21, 1 Kgs 18:40).

"How do I find a merciful God?" Luther struggled with this turbulent question. It would remain a foreign question for the Buddha and Confucius. But if, instead, we ask, "How do I find meaning in a meaningless world?" the Asian sages have much to say.[33]

In his exposition on Romans 4:7, Luther first develops the idea of Christians being "just and sinner in the same time." He compares this with a sick man who is well in trusting the doctor but is in fact sick. The man is both well and sick.

> He is at the same time both a sinner and a righteous man (*simul peccator et iustus*); a sinner in fact, but a righteous man by the sure imputation and promise of God (*peccator re vera, Sed Iustus ex reputatione ex promissione Dei certo*), that he will redeem him from sin until he heals him totally.[34]

This is a strong theology of trust in the promise of God. Lohse quotes Ebeling, who reads in the *simul iustus simul peccator* "the antithesis between the old and the new man, the 'age of the law' and the 'age of grace.'"[35] If we were able to translate this to the language of moral development by self-discipline, then again the spiritual tradition of Asia has much to contribute. This type of translation poses a serious challenge to the contextualization of theology.

In Luther's Larger Catechism we read, "The confidence and faith of the heart make both God and an idol. If your faith and confidence are right, then likewise your God is the true God. On the other hand, if your confidence is false, then you have not the true God."

The quest after "the right mind" (the Buddhist *samma ditthi,* Pali) is a universal human concern. For the Buddha, the right mind is the mind free from greed. For Confucius, the right mind is the one that is harmonious with Heaven. The right mind discriminates between good and evil. In order to discriminate between the two, one must know about good and evil. Since good and evil come together in human experience, our moral and political judgment is historical and relative. Some such historical judgments become obsolete. Some become suddenly meaningful. Some remain vital for all time. As history changes, the framework of the "field of righteousness" (*dharmaksetre,* the *Bhagavadgita*) changes. One great moment of insight in history is found in the words of Jeremiah, "But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile; and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare" (Jer 29:7).

Jeremiah expresses, in such concise form and with great passion, the essence of the Reformation in a global context—that there is no individualism in salvation. We live only in the context of the human family and human unity. This planet is the Noah's ark on which all living beings live, all six billion of us. If the ark breaks down, we all

---

[33] Tillich, *Systematic Theology* III, 242.
[34] Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology,* 76.
[35] Lohse, 24.

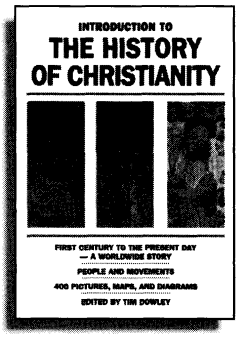
This planet is the Noah's ark on which all living beings live, all six billion of us. If the ark breaks down, we all perish.

perish. Good eschatology recognizes the mystery of unity of humanity on the basis of the mystery of Christ's lowliness. The gospel moves toward the creation of community, not toward division of the saved from the unsaved. We are admonished to pray and work for the welfare of the given community, whatever its religious orientation. For only in its welfare we will find our welfare.

This advice sets the world upside down (Acts 17:6). If followed, it will create ecological and ecumenical wholesomeness in our world. Jeremiah's advice will place us inside eucharistically created blessed space, the space of grace of the one who trusted in God "hope against hope." It is sound eschatology, since it expresses the spirit of "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

We are called to participate in the creation of eucharistic *shalom* space for all people. This is the meaning of the name of Jesus Christ in the 21st century.

Journeys in Christian History



Edited by TIM DOWLEY

Now in paper!

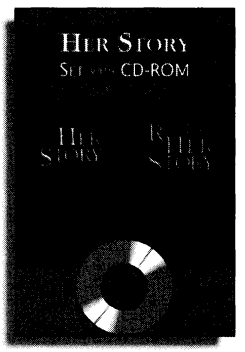
INTRODUCTION TO THE HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY

From the First Century to Today

The most popular one-volume illustrated reference on the history of Christianity ever published.

"Its charts, maps, diagrams, and color illustrations will help readers through the maze of complex Christian history." —*New York Times*

0-8006-3496-9 688 pp paper $30.00 ($48.00 Canada)



BARBARA J. MacHAFFIE

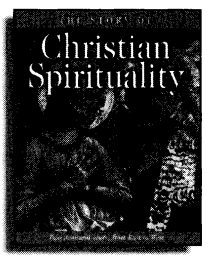
HER STORY SET WITH CD-ROM

Women in Christian Tradition

Two widely used textbooks—*Her Story* and *Readings in Her Story*—are brought together in a completely searchable text with reflection questions and many other creative and helpful pedagogical tools in this CD-ROM.

0-8006-3495-0 436 pp paper + CD-ROM $37.00 ($59.20 Canada)

Recently Published

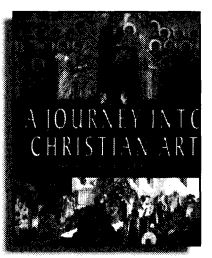


GORDON MURSELL, Editor

THE STORY OF CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

Fully illustrated presentation of humanity's desire for the divine across centuries.

0-8006-3289-3 384 pp jacketed hardcover $35.00 (Can. $52.50)



DENIS R. JANZ, Editor SHIRLEY E. JORDAN, CD-ROM Editor

A REFORMATION READER with CD-ROM

A major anthology significantly enhanced with a CD-ROM.

0-8006-3473-X 396 pp paper + CD-ROM $31.00 (Can. $48.05)

HELEN DE BORCHGRAVE

A JOURNEY INTO CHRISTIAN ART

Over 100 stunning illustrations through two millennia.

0-8006-3240-0 224 pp jacketed hardcover $35.00 (Can. $52.50)

At bookstores or call **1-800-328-4648**

FORTRESS PRESS
Augsburg Fortress, Publishers
fortresspress.com

Local Lutheran Boy Finally Makes Good, Sixty Years Late

David Zersen
President Emeritus
Concordia University at Austin
dzersen@aol.com

All Americans are immigrants, even the so-called native Americans. There is no such thing as a generic American. And sooner or later, we get interested in our roots and in our stories. We are inspired by stories that tell how pioneer hardships were overcome with successes and sobered by tales of how good times dissolved into meager subsistence. It is comforting to be reminded that this is the land of the free and home of the brave, where the future is always open to new and exciting possibilities.

Of course, life does not turn out well for all immigrants, and sometimes the local boy doesn't make good at all. His health may be poor, his education a dead-end street, his chosen profession hard to realize, his marriage faltering, his professional competence weak, and his progeny dead at his tombstone. That, in fact, is the way it seemed to be for Lutheran immigrant Mato Kosyk (1853–1940) until it was discovered just recently that the folks back home in Europe—those who bade him farewell in 1883 either with great hopes and dreams or with a reprimand for having abandoned the Sorbian cause—are now regarding him as their greatest poet and as one of the three greatest Sorbian writers who ever lived! How is it that we in his adopted country didn't even know about it? We had, in fact, almost totally forgotten the local boy. We hardly even remembered that he studied to be a pastor in Chicago! It is time to catch up with the story and learn how we can celebrate his successes, along with those who are already preparing the celebration in Europe, and claim him as one of our own.

Wends/Sorbs and their contributions to Lutheran heritage

Most American Lutherans do not know about the Wends/Sorbs and do not even know that Slavs make good Lutherans, so Mato's story should probably begin there. The Slovaks and the Wends/Sorbs are the only two Lutheran Slavic groups to immigrate to America, and their numbers were not large. Their languages and cultures are similar, however, and the Reformation took place in their settings early in the 1500s. At this time, Wittenberg found itself in a Sorbian-speaking region, a Slavic territory that already from ancient times stretched between Berlin in the North and Dresden in the South, along the Neisse River. Approximately 145,000 of the indigenous Slavs in the area became Lutheran in those early years, not only because they were situated close to key locations of the movement but also because Bishop John IX von Haugwitz (served 1555–81) resigned his Roman Catholic post to convert to Lutheranism and bring his constituencies into the faith.[1]

Prior to this time, the Sorbs had an oral language not yet converted into writing. It could be said, at least in one sense, that Martin Luther fostered the development of the Sorbian language since the first texts in that language were religious materials, specifically the Bible, the Catechism, and hymnals. In fact, Upper and Lower Sorbian Lutheran poetry/hymnody, completely unknown to us in the West, went through many editions until, for example, in the Lower Sorbian edition of 1882 there were 617 hymns[2]—most, of course, translations from German or Latin.

Sorbian presence was strong in Wittenberg because of the surrounding population and because it was a university town. A Sorb served as Luther's assistant. The first Sorbian Lutheran pastor was ordained in 1538, and about forty were ordained during Luther's years there. It was said, however, that the German employed by Sorbian students was often so poor that they used Latin to request Luther's permission to take Communion. Some of these students' names are known to us: Pawol Bosak, Jan Brezan, Miklaws Jakubica. The most prominent, Kaspar Peuker, encouraged contacts with the Slovaks, and many Sorbian graduates of Wittenberg later evangelized among the Slovaks because their languages were so similar.[3]

The Sorbian ties with the Reformation are interesting for at least two reasons. Luther's wife, Katherine von Bora, was born in Lippendorf, a Sorbian-speaking village near Wittenberg, and her father's name, Hans von Bora, suggests Sorbian heritage because "bora" means "fir" in Sorbian. It cannot be proven that Katherine had Sorbian ancestry, but the Sorbian setting and customs were surely second nature to her.[4]

Kaethe's potential Sorbian ties are interesting because of Luther's personal comments about the Sorbs. Luther claimed that most of his parishioners were "arme Laien und Wenden" (poor laity and Sorbs) who for the most part were "aberglaeubisch und heidnisch, in jeder Beziehung als vom Teufel besessen" (superstitious and heathen, in all respects possessed by the devil). Considering himself more a German than a Saxon (which showed a broad yet somewhat condescending viewpoint toward other nationalities), Luther called the Sorbs "die schlechteste Nation von allen" (the worst nation of all.)[5] If Kaethe were a Sorb, there must have been lively *Tischreden* (table talks) about family backgrounds! Some of the confusion about Luther's views may, however, be related to linguistic and historical differences regarding the use of the terms Wend and Sorb. Therefore, before returning to Mato Kosyk, the featured hero of this essay, we should review some Sorbian history, focusing on the differences between the uses of the words Sorb and Wend, as well as on the Sorbian nationalism that gave rise to a poet like Mato Kosyk.

---

[1] Charles Wukasch, "The Influence of the Reformation on Sorbian Culture," paper presented at the conference of the South Central Modern Language Association, Austin, Texas, 2 November 2002, p. 4.

[2] Gerald Stone, "The Sorbian Hymn," *Perspektiven sorbischer Literatur* (Koeln, Weimar, Wien: Boehlau Verlag, 1993), 82. See also Joseph B. Wilson, "Slavic Germans," *The Samartian Review* (April 1995), 2.

[3] Wukasch, "The Influence of the Reformation," 4–5.

[4] Dennis Kastens makes this claim in "The Amazing Katie Luther," *Lutheran Witness* 116:1 (January 1997), 6–9. Martin Treu (Curator, *Lutherhaus* Wittenberg) argues that the genealogical records of the von Bora family do not support Kastens's claim: Correspondence, July 21, 1997.

[5] Wukasch, "The Influence of the Reformation," 7.

Sorbs in their history and their present status in Europe and the world

Today's Sorbian peoples are descendants of ancient Slavic tribes that moved into Western Europe at the time when the Germanic tribes were retreating from Barbarian invasions. Their retreat left a vacuum east of the Elbe River now filled by immigrating tribes that the Germans loosely classified as Wends. Within a few centuries, the Germans realized their "mistake" and, under Henry the Fowler (919), and his son, Otto I (936–973), gradually used frontier Christian dioceses to press German rule over the Slavs east of the Elbe.[6]

The Sorbs' social and governmental structure proved to be their downfall. They employed large family/tribal structures with a type of military democracy with no ruling hierarchy. They therefore could provide little organized resistance when the bishopric of Meissen was established in their midst and the Christianization of the Slavs began. Due to the ongoing *Drang nach Osten* (push toward the East), which some considered the great accomplishment of the Germans in the Middle Ages, increasing German colonization removed characteristic Slavic customs, dress, and language. One area, however, resisted the change, and this was the area in which Mato Kosyk was to be born.

Upper and Lower Lusatia, a region between Berlin and Dresden and west of the Oder River, had more Slavs than Germans, and the German Margraviate was not as centralized as it was in Meissen-Saxony. Here Sorbian individuality was preserved, although it had been lost elsewhere, and strong historic attempts were made to maintain it. The Reformation provided its own interesting attempt to strengthen the Sorbian character by encouraging the use of local language in preaching, liturgy, hymnody, and literature (Bible, Catechism, etc.). This led to the creation of a Sorbian literature, which ultimately became the mark of Sorbian identity.[7] From the mid-1750s to the mid-1850s, a self-proclaimed Sorbian intelligentsia who produced many journals, newspapers, plays, and stories celebrated the arrival of a newfound Sorbian consciousness, the boldness of which captured young Kosyk and encouraged his commitment to it.

Over the course of centuries, Sorbian population was often decimated (almost half of the population died during the Thirty Years War), and Sorbs came to be discriminated against in many ways. As is often the case in countries within which a national culture is being defined by the government or by those who think they have authority (e.g., "Mexican-Americans should speak English!"), Sorbs were repeatedly forbidden to use their own language. Records show that the language was banned in Altenburg, Zwickau, and Leipzig between 1297 and 1327. During Bismarck's *Kulturkampf*, the *Kaiserreich* advocated a policy of Germanization that depreciated Sorbian, and again in Nazi Germany after 1937 it was forbidden to write or sing in Sorbian. It is important to understand the pressures against Sorbian survival that made the Lusatian Sorbs see their setting as the last bastion of resistance if one is to understand the passion and nostalgia in Kosyk's rather monothematic poetry, even in that written from the new world.

The middle of the nineteenth century also provided a dynamic experience in both Europe and America for those considering

---

[6] Ernst G. Schwiebert, *Luther and his Times* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), 70.

[7] K. Blaschke et. al., *The Sorbs in Germany* (Bautzen: Stiftung fuer das sorbische Volk, 1998), 6–7.

immigration. In America, many new territories were opening up, the Civil War came to a close in 1865, an industrial boom in urban areas provided jobs, and millions of immigrants (25 million between 1870 and 1916) flocked to the shores of hope (*Ufer der Hoffnung* is the title of a book on Sorbian immigration by Trudla Malinkowa). Additionally, poor harvests, famines, and political and religious conflicts pressed Northern Europeans to consider the offers from land and factory owners in the country of the second chance. Even educational institutions encouraged students to come and prepare to provide for the spiritual needs of Lutherans in America. Kosyk read such advertising and considered his role in the new world.

Numerous Sorbs made the decision to emigrate before Kosyk left. Some departed in small family groups, and others comprised large migrations. Many of them were affiliated with the "Old Lutheran" movement, groups of Lutherans who objected to the attempt of the government (Friedrich Wilhelm III) to unite the Lutherans and the Reformed in the Union of 1817. Others left for nonreligious reasons. A number of groups left for Australia, the first one from Lower Lusatia led by Michael Deutscher in 1848. A group of over 500 Sorbs left for Texas via Liverpool in 1854, seeking freedom to practice their Lutheran orthodoxy as well as to preserve their Sorbian heritage. This group affiliated with Missouri Synod Lutherans in 1866. Additional small groups emigrated to countries like South Africa, Canada, and South America. Kosyk would meet some Sorbs on the occasion of a visit to Sterling, Nebraska. When Kosyk left for America in 1883, however, his reasons were quite personal, and he sailed into the new world as a lone and independent Sorb.

The country that received these representatives of what some have called the world's smallest Slavic nation hardly understood who they were. Given the changing borders and ethnic diversity in Europe, many immigrants to America found it hard to name their own identities. The 500 or so Sorbian immigrants who arrived in Galveston, Texas, in 1854 were primarily bilingual, speaking German and Wendish, and called themselves German Wends. They spoke an "Upper Wendish" dialect, characteristic of those centered around Bautzen, distinguishing them from those who spoke "Lower Wendish" (from the low country) around Cottbus. Speakers of the two dialects could understand one another, but time and regionalization created two different written languages from the dialects, and Kosyk wrote exclusively in the language of the lowland.

Although the term Wend was commonly used when the emigrants left for Texas (and Texans descended from these still know themselves as Wends), the style and usage has changed in Europe in more recent years. Wend tends to have a pejorative ring, especially in Eastern Germany, and today in all scholarly literature in Europe the word Sorb is preferred to Wend.[8] That term will be used throughout the remainder of this essay.

Mato Kosyk, Lutheran Sorb, prepares for ministry in America

Kosyk spent most of his adult life (57 years of it) in America—preparing to be a pastor, serving in ministry (28 years) and living in retirement (27 years). During all the years in America, and for some years before he came, he championed his language and culture, writing as a poet and journalist. In

[8] Wilson, "Slavic Germans," 1.

spite of his passion, he is largely unknown to Americans. However, Europeans will mark his 150th birthday in 2003 and acknowledge him as the greatest Lower Sorbian poet of all time, and we will do well to sit up and take notice. Furthermore, we need to understand his gifts to language and culture within the context of what has already been said.

Mato Kosyk was born to Juro and Maya nee Zylojc Kosyk in Lower Lusatia in the village of Werben on June 18, 1853. He attended the local school and, at the encouragement of his pastor, the *Gymnasium* in Cottbus where he studied, among other things, Latin, Greek, and Sorbian. It was typical to study Sorbian, even if that was not one's heritage, because artisans and business people would be expected to conduct their affairs in the language of the locals. The studies were structured and formal and didn't have a lot of appeal to Kosyk. Years later in a letter he would say that his mother offered him better instruction in language and creative style than did his teachers in the *Gymnasium*. Kosyk ultimately gave up his studies because the cultural standards of the time did not encourage a higher education in his region ("Wir verloren die Lust am weiteren Lernen"—We lost the desire to continue our education),[9] because the cost of education went up, because he was sometimes ridiculed for his fervent faith by students with nominal belief, and because he acquired a lingering illness.

During the next six years he worked for the railroad in Leipzig. It provided a living for him from which he was able to set aside savings for the years when he moved back with his parents. Most important, however, now settled for the first time in the midst of a large German-speaking population, he came to appreciate the voice of his mother tongue. He began to write poetry in Sorbian at the age of 25. During his free time, he traveled around in the area, made the acquaintance of other Sorbian students in Leipzig, and learned about the grandeur of his Slavic heritage. All this he took with him when in 1877 he returned to his parents' home, unable to continue his work with the railroad because of his lung disease.

Living in Werben he continued his literary interests, helping on the farm, participating in scholarly and scientific organizations, and writing. It would be the first of four periods of literary production in his life and arguably the greatest. Among his output at this time is the great epic poem "The Sorbian Wedding in the Spreewald," a mosaic of Sorbian village life that offers not only a progressive and objective analysis but also a passionately national feeling.[10] During these six years in Werben he also wrote a historical trilogy, some dramas, and a large number of individual poems. Most important for Kosyk was his participation in the revision of the Lower Sorbian Lutheran hymnal, in which he personally edited one-third of more than 600 hymns that were included at that time. He felt this to be among his greatest achievements, because the hymns were regularly sung and memorized, and he was never sure how many read the other materials that he wrote.

Despite the outpouring of creativity during these years, Kosyk longed for the kind of work that would not only give him some freedom to continue to write but would fulfil him personally. He wanted to become a Lutheran pastor. However, the university education he needed for this was

---

[9] Frido Metsk, "Biographische Bilder," in *Mato Kosyk*, ed. Pets Janas (Bautzen: Domowina Verlag, 1985), 88.

[10] Metsk, "Biographische Bilder," 90.

denied him, since he had never finished his *Gymnasium* education and had not received the required *Abitur* (certificate permitting university study). Through the *Lutherische Mission* he became aware of an opportunity to receive theological education in America. Subsequent comments from Kosyk, as well as a return trip to his beloved Lusatia, suggest that his long-range plans may not have included 28 years of ministry in the U.S. However, the circumstances of life determined that the last three phases of creative output for Mato Kosyk would be carried out on foreign soil. He was later to say that there were two places he might call "home" in this world, the Lusatia of his childhood and youth, and the far country, which always remained foreign to him.[11] On Reformation Day, October 31, 1883, Kosyk left his family, friends, and fellow *literati* who gave him his persona, his passion, and his raison d'etre, and sailed via Hamburg to New York.



Mato Kosyk as a seminarian in 1883

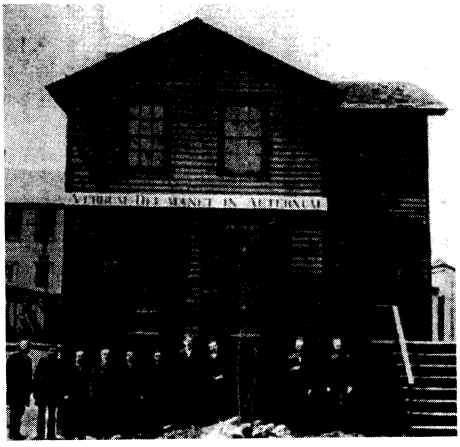
Theological training and parish life in rural America

Kosyk started his theological studies at *Concordia-Seminar* (later to become Concordia Theological Seminary) in Springfield, Illinois. There he met a 33-year-old merchant who had come from Serbin, Texas, to study at the seminary but dropped out after five years because of ill health. Together they reminisced about the homeland, which Mr. August Urban knew only from stories, and Kosyk became moved to tears by the fact that even the children in Serbin, through their parents' singing and storytelling, felt strongly the pulse of their Sorbian hearts.[12]

Kosyk remained only one academic quarter in Springfield before transferring to the German Lutheran Theological Seminary in Chicago Lawn, eight miles from downtown Chicago, operated by the General Synod. This seminary, Kosyk would later write, was more attuned to his theological and ecclesial style, and, furthermore, the students spoke German not only in class but socially among themselves as well. (Kosyk's English was at a beginner level.) There were only about eight students—there had been more than a hundred in Springfield—and they met in a two-story clapboard house with a *Verbum Dei Manet in Aeternum* banner hanging on the street side of the building. Kosyk liked the intimacy and mentor-like tutoring of the one teacher and director, the Rev. F. E. Giese, who had left Carthage College, taking his students with him, to head up the seminary in 1880, three years before Kosyk arrived. Working in the background for the seminary was a Pastor J. D. Severinghaus, who established contacts with German institutions like the Mission Institute at Breklum with a view to sending students to

[11] Metsk, "Biographische Bilder," 86.

[12] Mato Kosyk, "Sorben in Texas," *Sorbisches Lesebuch* (Leipzig: Philipp Reclam jun., 1981), 377.



German Lutheran Theological Seminary
Chicago Lawn

the seminary in order to serve the German populations in America. As with Kosyk, the students from Breklum spent only about a year at the seminary before they were ordained (because they brought some education with them), although the school offered a three-year course in theology. Severinghaus became the president of the institution in 1885, saving it from dissolution, and remained its head for thirteen years. Numerous Midwestern leaders graduated from this institution. Through a number of mergers, it ultimately became the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago.[13]

Upon completion of his prescribed work, Kosyk was offered a position as pastor in rural Iowa, thus beginning his 28-year service in churches of three different predecessor synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. It was ministry in regions not unlike the rural atmosphere of his youth, although the landscape, the people, the language, and the social situations varied. Kosyk's frequent changes from one parish to another hint at the fragile social structures in the very small congregations he served and also at the tenuous personality dynamics operating between him and congregation members. Not much is known of the latter, but Kosyk does on one occasion say that the ethnic backgrounds of members in a congregation made the site unsuitable for him.

The litany of his congregational service gives pause to analysts of church growth principles. He served for a little over a year in Wellsburg, Iowa, a congregation of the Wartburg Synod, and then two years at St. John's Lutheran Church in Ridgley, Nebraska, a congregation of the Nebraska Synod. He served an independent congregation in Princeton, Nebraska, for about 5 years, then Trinity Lutheran Church in Stamford, Nebraska, for three years, and St. John's Lutheran Church in Ohiowa, Nebraska, for eight years. He served Our Redeemer Lutheran Church in El Reno, Oklahoma, for six years. A sampling of the memberships of the congregations at 35, 70, and 45 suggests that these smaller stations probably had some difficulty keeping their pastors and supporting them. Although Kosyk developed some competence in English preaching, his comfort level lay with serving in the German language, a gradually declining need as rural American Lutheranism entered the 1920s and World War I.

When Kosyk resigned his ministry in 1913 and retired to a farm he owned in Albion, Oklahoma, he cited growing deafness as the reason on the "Autobiography of Ministers" form that he submitted to the

---

[13] *Story of Midwest Synod*, U.L.C.A., 1890–1950. German Lutheran Theological Seminary merged with Western Seminary in 1899. Western was reestablished as Central Seminary in 1949, which in 1967 became a part of the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, which itself had been formed in 1962 as a merger of Maywood, Augustana, and Grandview.

United Lutheran Church in America. In his 27 years of retirement, he seems not to have attended a Lutheran church again, there being none in his area (he never owned a car). He maintained ties with the church largely by being remembered as a co-founder of the German Nebraska Synod in 1891 and as a generous donor who deeded significant tracts of land to Lutheran institutions, largely because they were not productive and he could no longer afford to pay the tax on them.[14]

Kosyk's personal life and legacy as a pastor

The detail about Kosyk's wealth prepares the reader to explore some aspects of his personal life, the two breaks in his time of ministerial service, and his three periods of creative output in America. The story of Kosyk's loneliness in the U.S. is not helped by the record since there is no history of the period other than his letters to friends and relatives back home. His poetry makes it clear that he felt abandoned because of his inability to speak in his native tongue (one poem is titled "The Caged Bird"). He had many friends to whom he wrote a moving farewell upon his departure for America,[15] so he must have had a personality capable of making friendships in the U.S. as well, but little is known about this. The lack of a wife was keenly felt, and, upon the death of his younger brother, Kato, in 1886, he resigned from his first parish and returned to Werben in the hopes of fulfilling a number of wishes. There was his father's wish to have his eldest son remain with him now and his own wishes both to find a ministerial post in Lusatia to serve Sorbs in their common language and to find a wife. None of these wishes was realized, and in 1887 he returned to the U.S. to accept his second congregation.

Three years later, however, in 1890, after some correspondence with friends, Anna Wehr, a woman of means, arrived to become his wife. One year later, she gave birth to a son, Juro Ludwig, named after both of his grandfathers. Husband and wife were very different. Anna was outgoing, Mato was introverted; Anna was refined, Mato was of peasant stock. Anna did not speak Sorbian—a significant shortcoming. Futuristic dreaming for the couple was suddenly shattered by Juro's tragic drowning just as he reached the stage of young manhood in which he would have been able to take over the farm and provide for his parents in retirement. The marriage lasted for 39 years, but little is known of the couple's life together except that for years Anna sometimes spent whole days at Juro's grave, which bordered their property, and that Mato turned increasingly inward and wrote poetry. Mato further grieved that his wife did not appreciate or understand the point of his writing poetry.

Anna brought some money into the relationship, which Mato managed well, producing a portfolio of farms and properties that were substantial in terms of acreage but problematic because the land did not produce well and the taxes came to be more than the income. Kosyk solved the problem after Anna's death in 1929 by deeding lands to some Lutheran institutions, specifically Martin Luther Seminary in Lincoln, Nebraska—which through mergers also ultimately became part of the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago.

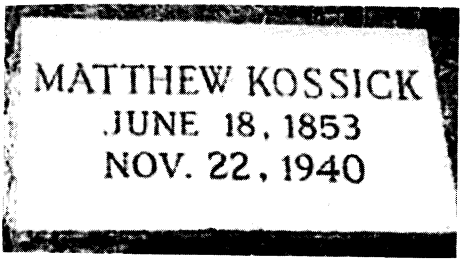
Nine years after Anna's death, as Kosyk became more frail at 85, he offered marriage to his German-speaking housekeeper and nursemaid, Wilma Filter. Two years later, Mato Kosyk died, and the house and

---

[14] R. Dalitz and G. Stone, "Mato Kosyk in America," *Letopis* 24 (February 1977): 49–50.

[15] Metsk, "Biographische Bilder," 93.

property were deeded to Martin Luther Seminary, leaving Wilma with no prospect other than to return to Texas. Whether she took with her Kosyk's books and papers or whether they were simply left in Albion is unknown. Mato was buried in the community cemetery in Albion, remembered on his tombstone in English as "Matthew Kossick," the man who, in some sense, he had come to be in America but one who in his heart of hearts he never really was.



Periods of American creativity and 150th anniversary celebrations

Kosyk's creative output in America is unknown to Americans because his poetry was sent back to Europe to be published and because it was written entirely in Sorbian and has not been translated. His American periods can be divided into three time frames, 1883–1886, 1892–1898, and 1923–1927. Certain characteristics mark each period. During the first, his poems express nostalgic longing for Lusatia set against the background of new experiences in America or concentrate on description of the New World.

The letters from a colleague in Lusatia, B. Swjela, who suggested that poems from Kosyk might inspire students in Lusatia who were now caught up in a new cultural movement, provided the catalyst for the second U.S. period. Kosyk was not only flattered by this encouragement, but his life had changed because of marriage, the birth of a son, and participation in the life of the newly formed German Nebraska Synod, all of which might have provided additional impetus for writing. The poetry in this period is marked by the use of appellative and patriotic themes.

The last period in his career includes poetry with reflections about people (e.g., native Americans) and life in the United States, religious poetry with underlying biblical passages, and poetry dealing with the home that lay beyond—symbolically Lusatia, but also, ultimately, heaven.[16] Such fascination with "going home" is found throughout Kosyk's poetry, all of which is characterized by a nostalgic longing that at times can seem depressing. However, it captures for the poet his transitional status that is the province of all humans longing for that home which is finally and truly Home.

It is a treasure to discover this surprising legacy of poetry, written in the "spare time" of a Lutheran pastor both during his active years and after his retirement. The surprise is all the more mysterious because the poetry that he wrote is not available in English; the five-volume critical edition of his works being published is in his native Sorbian.[17] Celebrations are planned in Europe for the 150th anniversary of Kosyk's birth, June 18, 2003, when he will be her-

[16] Roland Marti, "Kosyk's Writings," at *www.mato-kosyk.de,* 18–21. Marti's analysis of Kosyk's literary output is the only work on this subject available in English. See also Roland Marti, "Mato Kosyk," in *Perespektiven sorbischer Literature*, ed. Walter Koschmal, 131–77 (Koeln, Weimar, Wien: Boehlau Verlag, 1993), 133–34.

[17] Pets Janas and Roland Marti, *Mato Kosyk Spise I* (Bautzen: Domowina Verlag, 2000). The first three volumes are now in print with volumes 4 and 5 to come in 2003.

alded as the greatest Lower Sorbian poet of all time. Somewhere on that day, perhaps someone will read with inflected nostalgia some lines from his "Caged Bird:"

A bird was caught in nature free,
Put in a cage for all to see.
Forced he was to sing to all,
From his new den so dark, so small.

I am just like this lonely bird,
Away in foreign lands unheard.
Oh yes, I lost Lusatia dear,
Heaven's charm is absent here.

Kosyk's reputation is emerging slowly. The American dream expects the immigrant to find the pot of gold and to be heralded within his/her lifetime. In Kosyk's case, even after he died, few remembered him even for those things that he accomplished in his parishes and synods. Now, sixty years after his death, we are surprised that he left such a legacy.

Language has its limitations, and meanings are held captive when languages are bound or forgotten or lost. In a lovely, nostalgic monograph that tells the story of the current plight of Sorbs whose culture is being taken from them by German demolition of villages situated over Lusatian brown coal deposits, Jurij Koch writes, "It is an error to believe that human understanding on this earth would proceed more rapidly if only we had less languages and cultures, thereby making it unnecessary to give much thought to the smallest Slavic language disappearing as yet another casualty."[18]

Language has its limitations, and meanings are held captive when languages are bound or forgotten or lost.

One thinks of Mato Kosyk and the treasures yet buried under his legacy, and celebrates with those who already appreciate his gifts, the varieties, nuances, shades and shapes of clarity and beauty that result when diversity and idiosyncrasy are prized, not suppressed. One also thinks of the smiles that cross our faces as we look at all those around us who may yet "make good" long after we thought there was nothing more to expect.

David Zersen is president emeritus of Concordia University at Austin, the only university in the world founded (1926) largely by the descendants of Sorbian/Wendish immigrant s.

[18] Jurij Koch, *Jubel und Schmerz der Mandelkraehe* (Bautzen: Domowina Verlag, 1992, 42.

Book Reviews

Counseling Families Across the Stages of Life: Handbook of Pastors and Other Helping Professionals. By Andrew J. Weaver, Linda A. Revilla, and Harold G. Koenig. Abingdon Press, 2002. 256 pages. Paper. $30.00.

Andrew J. Weaver is a clinical psychologist, licensed marriage and family therapist, and an ordained United Methodist minister. Linda A. Revilla is a United Methodist laywoman and developmental psychologist who specializes in working with ethnic families. She is a lecturer at the University of Hawaii in the Ethnic Studies Department. Harold G. Koenig is director of the Center for the Study of Aging, Religion/Spirituality, and Health at Duke University Medical Center.

Using case studies, the authors examine twenty life passages such as family issues, marriage preparation, infertility, parenting, and retirement as well as special conditions like dependency, terminal illnesses, and Alzheimer's disease. The book uses different perspectives but has only one motivation: the creation of a culture of caring. According to the writers, participation in faith communities can help one struggle with the isolating effects of punitive religious practices, faceless technology, or special life circumstances.

The first chapters make a case for a partnership between clergy, religious organizations, and mental health professionals for the care of families, stating that religious beliefs and care from clergy or faith communities are essential components for enabling people to cope with mental and physical illnesses or other life stressors by giving hope and stability.

The second part of the book presents case studies. The authors cover work with all of the parties involved in a specific context, including not only the one at the center of attention but also caregivers, health care professionals, the family, and the community at large.

The book is what it promises—a good reference and textbook for when we first encounter a problem in families. Every chapter has an easy-to-follow structure as well as resources and references for making a diagnosis and dealing with cross-cultural issues. This book does not, however, give long-term help in dealing with family issues.

Viktoria Halmagyi
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

Twelve Dynamic Shifts for Transforming Your Church. Edited by E. Stanley Ott. Grand Rapids, MI, and Cambridge, U.K.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2002. 112 pages. Paper. $12.00.

E. Stanley Ott is president of the Vital Churches Institute and the author of *The Power of Ministry* and *The Joy of Discipling*. His work's focus is on leadership whose goal is to grow churches that are dynamic and effective and that equip their members for discipleship both within and outside the church.

Ott's vision involves the transformation of traditional congregations so that they become places where vital ministry happens, where members become disciples who understand ministry as a way of life. He understands that the greatest challenge to this effort is the tension between our comfort with the old familiar ways of doing church and new approaches that seem to be the key to attracting new people to our churches.

Ott provides a vision, motivation, and practical advice and ideas for ways that we might go about transforming a congregation. He recognizes that there will be resistance to change, and his insights for dealing with this are pastoral and yet advance the work of change. He repeats this phrase throughout the book: "Bless what has been, and add what is new."

His work is based on the discipleship model. He encourages church leaders to understand that mission and ministry involve more than having good programs that care for members of the

congregation. He presents a process in twelve steps, which he calls "shifts." These shifts provide both the vision and the plan for accomplishing the transition from a traditional church model to a transformational church model. The shifts concern "Vision and Expectation," "Ministry to People," "Congregational Programs," and "Leadership."

In the *vision* shift we see a change from present goals to those that God may have in mind for the congregation as it seeks to become one with a dynamic vision. The *people* shift is the heart of Ott's vision in that it stresses developing discipleship, a missional focus, and an insight about friendliness and hospitality that is critical. Ott makes a distinction between *friendliness* and *hospitality*: "friendship is warm, sociable and pleasant" while hospitality invites people into our lives in meaningful ways. Hospitality is the key to keeping new attendees and making them a part of the congregation.

In the *program* shift we look at making worship responsive to many needs and explore the importance of small-group ministry. Finally, in the *leadership* shift, Ott advocates shared ministry between the pastor, the leaders, and the members of the congregation.

This practical book offers seven signs of a vital congregation and six principles for going about the practice of vital ministry. This book would work well as a tool for use with the church's board or congregation council when it is determined that a new vision for ministry is needed. It is practical and inspiring, hopeful, and confident that God is at work in every congregation. Ott includes scriptural references that support his message about mission, vision, and God's presence in the church.

The practices of discipleship Ott lists are the "Seven Habits of the Burning Heart." Like the "Six Marks of Discipleship" created by Mike Foss (see his *Power Surge: Six Marks of Discipleship for a Changing Church* [Augsburg Fortress, 2000]), these are spiritual practices that support and sustain the growth of disciples. Ott's habits are concerned with relationships, both with God and with others; well-being—spiritual, physical, and emotional; stewardship; and ministry and work. He reminds us that these tools of discipleship are the work of God's Spirit among us that forms Christ within us.

He advises pastors and leaders to be clear about the present state of their congregation and then to choose which of the shifts are most useful and most easily accomplished in order to begin the change process. He encourages us to be flexible and open to using any of the twelve shifts that we believe we can accomplish, building success on success as we continue in the process of change. In other words, this vision is flexible enough to circumvent or minimize resistance to change—blessing what has been and adding what is new. Ott supports pastors and leaders through this time of transition, acknowledging that these leaders will be responding to the needs of both existing and new members and that it can be a challenging process.

He recognizes that the church is in a time of transition today but reminds us that this is not a new state, that the church is always in some state of transition. Ott offers a very positive definition of transition. He writes, "But I want to offer a new definition of the transitional congregation—a church in transition to a positive, future-embracing vision that says, 'We have not yet experienced this congregation's greatest ministry. Let us bless what God has done among us and add the ministry we believe will touch another circle of people'" (p. 6).

Ott's work is influenced by Easum's "Permission-Giving Church," and his organizational structure is built on this framework for doing ministry. He includes an extensive bibliography with reference to each of the twelve shifts.

This vision—the shift to a transformational church—is a confident and hopeful one, and this is a great strength of Ott's work. He models essential characteristics of effective leaders. Our own faith and our confidence in the changes that we propose to the congregation will be important assets in overcoming people's natural resistance to change. In my favorite quote Ott writes, "Wherever you find yourself as a church, know this for sure: God has an exciting, life-building vision for the whole church and for your congregation. Ask for the faith to believe it, and the grace to see it, and the courage to act on it" (p. 4). To this I can only add, Amen!

Linda Covey
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

Growing True Disciples. By George Barna. Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 2001. 208 pages. Cloth. $19.95.

George Barna is the president of Barna Research Group, a marketing and research firm for churches, industry, and nonprofit organizations.

Barna states that the evangelism efforts of churches are well-intentioned but ineffective because the church has lost its cultural influence. He proposes substituting a methodology that involves letting people discover their passion and then getting out of their way. In order to do this, pastors and congregations must be willing to commit to grow into a discipling church that focuses on a reliance upon God rather than on a we-can-do-it-ourselves attitude, a commitment to personal growth, and the recognition that the church is not an individual private endeavor. However, there will be casualties along the way among those who see the church as their private place open only to those they are willing to let in, those who are uncomfortable with change, and those who do not want to buy into the vision of discipleship.

Barna offers five working models, each of which requires the support of the pastor and an evaluative component to ensure that the vision, mission, and goals of the church are being met. He covers each model's emphasis as well as its strengths and weaknesses: Competencies Model (personal assessment and integration), Missional Model (the church's mission), Worldview Model (biblical transformation leading to personal transformation), Lecture-Lab Model (learning through sermons and small groups to build faith-based relationships), and Neighborhood Model (combines elements of Worldview, Competencies, and Missional Models concentrating on having small groups from the same geographic area).

This work is a solid, practical guide for one's church to have a mission and vision for discipleship.

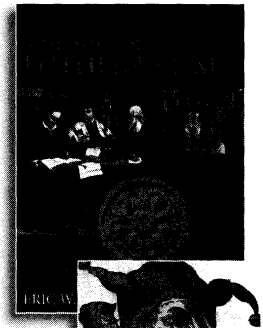
John Sturz
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

Briefly Noted

The Kids' Cartoon Bible. By Chaya M. Burstein (Jewish Publication Society, $17.95). B. is responsible for both the text and the drawings and presents the whole Old Testament in comic-book style for preschoolers and young readers. The stories are rendered in straightforward fashion, with no particular Jewish "take," so that Christians can easily use this book, too. This absence of theology invites the adult who is helping a child to learn the Bible through the book to stop and reflect. Even in telling the story of creation the book states no consequences, such as thanksgiving or care of the earth. All in all, the concept works much better for story sections of the Bible than for Ecclesiastes and Job. In an era of biblical illiteracy, this approach will help some. Worth considering for church libraries. *RWK*

Historical Atlas of Jerusalem. By Meir Ben-Dov (Continuum, $50). People have lived in Jerusalem for 5,000 years, and since the time of David 3,000 years ago it has been linked to Israel and/or Judaism. Jesus and Muhammad created links between it and Christianity and Islam. This book tells that story, century by century, with hundreds of illustrations and maps, unfortunately only in black and white. The last three chapters are a detailed recounting of its history since the British Mandate and the founding of the state of Israel, again with very helpful diagrams and maps. In my opinion B-D is much too confident about the dates in the life of David, and he locates the threshing floor of Nacon (2 Sam 6:6) inside the walls of the present old city—a guess at best. A slip in the introduction (p. xiv) attributes the temple to David. These minor flaws aside, this book provides quite good information for a city that is holy for three religions. *RWK*

Reformation Traditions



ERIC W. GRITSCH

A HISTORY OF LUTHERANISM

This first-ever history of global Lutheranism weaves the story of how the 16th-century Christian reforming movement expanded to its ecumenical presence in the world.

Includes illustrations, photos, maps, chronologies.

0-8006-3472-1 350 pp paper $29.00 (Can. $44.95)

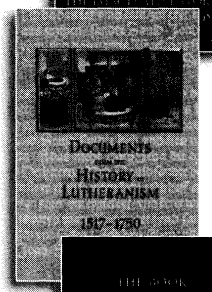


PETER MATHESON

THE IMAGINATIVE WORLD OF THE REFORMATION

A rich view of the Reformation as it appeared in pamphlets, sermons, paintings, poetry, song, and daily life.

0-8006-3291-5 160 pp paper $15.00 (Can. $22.50)

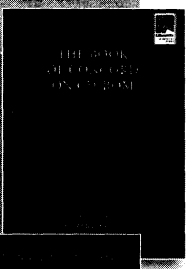


ERIC LUND, Editor

DOCUMENTS FROM THE HISTORY OF LUTHERANISM, 1517-1750

Lutheran historical and theological documents present a full picture of how the movement developed.

0-8006-3440-3 400 pp paper $30.00 (Can. $46.50)



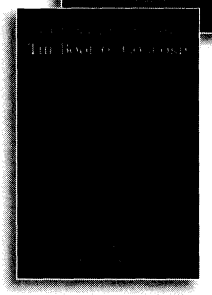
ROBERT KOLB and TIMOTHY J. WENGERT, Editors

THE BOOK OF CONCORD *on CD-ROM*

The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church

This translation with biblical text links illuminates the foundational texts of Lutheran identity.

0-8006-3441-1 $39.00 (Can. $60.45)



ROBERT KOLB and JAMES A. NESTINGEN, Editors

SOURCES AND CONTEXTS OF *THE BOOK OF CONCORD*

This indispensable documentary includes the works of Agricola, Eck, Chemnitz, Melanchthon, and Luther.

0-8006-3290-7 280 pp paper $25.00 (Can. $38.75)

At bookstores or call **1-800-328-4648**

FORTRESS PRESS
Augsburg Fortress, Publishers
fortresspress.com

Historical Atlas of Islam. By G. S. P. Freeman-Grenville and Stuart Munro-Hay (Continuum, $50). Through pictures, text, and black-and-white maps, F-G and M-H describe the history and expansion of Islam from the seventh century to the present. Early expansion was the result of military conquest and the slow penetration of Muslim merchants. Very early, Islam reached Spain in the West and Afghanistan in the East. The spread of Islam brought religious and cultural change, including an extraordinary flowering of literature and the arts. In chapters tracing the growth of Islam after the Crusades, the authors provide physical and agricultural information about the resulting territories inhabited by Muslims in India, Central Asia, Eastern Africa, Western Africa, and South-East Asia. Although the spiritual roots of Islam are in Mecca, Medina, Jerusalem, and the al-Azhar university mosque in Cairo, its greatest numerical strength today is in Indonesia, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, and the Russian federation. Because of the presence of large Muslim minorities in the West and the nonfundamentalist stance of many of the Islamic-oriented civilizations, the authors think that fears of polarization between the West and Islam are much exaggerated. *RWK*

The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls. By Jodi Magness (Eerdmans, $60). Although Qumran, the archaeological site near the caves where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found, was excavated in the 1950s by a team led by Roland de Vaux, only preliminary findings have been published, and de Vaux himself died in 1971. M. admirably surveys what can be said about Qumran and the scrolls fifty years after that excavation and is confident that her interpretation will hold, except for minor details, when and if de Vaux's excavation is published in a complete and scholarly fashion. She carefully guides the readers through controversial questions and publishes ample bibliography at the end of each chapter. She dates the founding of Qumran to ca. 100 B.C.E. (thirty years later than de Vaux) and concludes that the buildings that have been discovered were for community functions and not the place where the Essenes actually lived. The private toilet discovered at Qumran shows that the people who worked there did not defecate in view of others—unlike most of their contemporaries! She also concludes that on the Sabbath day they refrained from defecating altogether, without explaining how this is possible. Women and children were present at Qumran in a minimal fashion, though their graves were marginalized. The pools found at Qumran, to which she gives extensive attention, were originally covered and were used for ritual bathing and not for drinking. *RWK*

Grammatical Concepts 101 for Biblical Hebrew. By Gary A. Long (Hendrickson, $19.95). The subtitle discloses the approach: "Learning Biblical Hebrew Grammatical Concepts through English Grammar." Way back when, we used to say that we first understood the structure of English when we took high school Latin. This book turns that epigram on its head and uses analysis of English expressions to help beginning Hebrew students understand direct objects, nominal sentences, verb tenses, etc. The book is laid out well, and the graphics are both pleasing and clarifying. As the book moves on and things get more complicated, I fear that the struggling student who needs a book like this may get lost in an explanation such as: "The *vayyiqtol* commonly functions to discourse a story's mainline, yet it may also denote something we can label SIDELINE or EXPOSITION. In written etic discourse, which is, after all, a linear string of syntagms, one may need to 'break off' in order to 'enflesh' a character. . . ." I'll confess I have never used "discourse" as a verb. *RWK*

Books reviewed in *Currents* can be ordered through the **LSTC Book Center**
1100 East 55th Street, Chicago, IL 60615
(773) 256-0753

Preaching Helps

The Holy Trinity—Eighth Sunday after Pentecost, Series B

Moving Right Along

Early in his book *Why Religion Matters* (HarperCollins 2001) Huston Smith cites with approval Rainer Maria Rilke's suggestion "that we think of God as a direction rather than an object." That's a new one on me, I thought. But then I began to recall various passages of the New Testament speaking of the Spirit of God. Maybe thinking of God as a direction is not so new after all. Maybe I have just not been paying attention.

To Nicodemus in their nighttime conversation Jesus said that the Spirit resembles the wind. "Spirit" and "wind" are both *pneuma* in Greek, so Jesus plays with the word. "The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes" (John 3:8). Today I suppose we could make the case that meteorologists have become extraordinarily clever in tracking and even predicting the course of the jet stream and of huge windy events like hurricanes and tornadoes. But it is still true today that the whence and whither of the wind remain outside of our control.

Again linking wind and Spirit, Luke opens his description of Pentecost in Acts 2 with the following words: "Suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind" (Luke here uses the Greek word *pnoe*).

The wind of the Spirit blows from heaven, from above, from God. That's where it is coming from, but where is it going? In what direction is it traveling? Jesus in John 3 speaks of the goal as the surprise of rebirth, the astonishing breakthrough to new life. And as John's Gospel unfolds, we see that what is new about that "new" life is oneness with Christ in his self-giving love. It is new in seeing the glory of God in the *agape* of God and in the *agape* practiced in the community of believers.

Paul struggled in his congregations with believers who had strong convictions about the direction in which the Spirit of God was moving. For many at Corinth and other Pauline cities, being moved by the Spirit meant having the gift of tongues or miracles or healing or prophecy. And possession of those gifts became the basis for laying claim to a position of high leadership in the commu-

nity. The spirit-filled boasted of their gifts and traded on them in a quest for status. Paul had no wish to quench the Spirit (1 Thess 5:19), but he wanted very much to reorganize the community's thinking about the Spirit, so he talked about the direction in which God is moving.

Paul's great "hymn to love" in 1 Corinthians exalts love (*agape*) as "a still more excellent way." Paul is not trying to eliminate the varied gifts present in the community. He will not throw cold water on them, but he is anxious that the use of all spiritual gifts be guided by the exercise of love. "Pursue love and strive for the spiritual gifts," Paul writes at the beginning of 1 Corinthians 14. I think he means that Christians should keep two things in view: (1) "pursue love (*agape*)" and (2) "strive for the spiritual gifts (*pneumatika*)." Too many craved spiritual gifts and wanted to use them without having *agape* as their end or aim.

In fact, "God is *agape*," as the Elder reminds us in 1 John 4:16. He makes that assertion in the context of a discussion about the "spirits," the spiritual winds blowing in his communities, the inspired ("windy"?) prophets on the move in his part of the world. "Test the spirits," he says, "to see whether they are from God" (1 John 4:1). Some are, and some are not. He recommends two tests: one is "christological" and the other is "ethical," we are told. Those are probably not the best words to describe what he suggests. What are the tests to be applied? (1) Does the inspired prophet teach and live in accord with what you know of God and God's direction when you remember the earthly life ("the flesh") of Jesus Christ? (2) Do the prophet's life and teaching accord with the fundamental conviction that "God is love"? The Elder says, "Those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them" (1 John 4:16). Both of these tests (if indeed these are two and not one) are simultaneously christological and ethical.

So God's Spirit not only pushes and propels us in the direction of *agape*; God "is" *agape*. God *is* that movement, that wind, that trend, that subterranean river, that transcendent and restless energy always on the go, filling all things, sustaining all of us, forgiving and freeing us, coming down from above, welling up from below as the power of new life, the power of *agape*.

Elizabeth Johnson writes of the Spirit and love in *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (1994). She says that "while love characterizes God as a whole, it is an especially apt term for that distinct manner of divine subsistence which is actually present and active in the world and which people call Spirit." Naming the Spirit as "love" and "gift" points to "both the inmost nature of divine mystery and the outermost reach of God's power freely streaming around creation to quicken and renew," empowering all creatures "to birth and rebirth in the midst of the antagonistic structures of reality" (142–43).

Love and God, love and the Spirit, are everywhere closely connected in the New Testament. Paul writes in Galatians that the "fruit," the natural growth and yield of the Spirit, is "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Gal 5:22-23). We cannot see the wind, and its whence and whither are mysterious. But where this fruit is present, God's Spirit is active. These fruits are all "directions" (with a small d) as evidence of God as "Direction" (with a big D.) And "love" heads this list of spiritual fruit.

I heard of a congregation that asks its new members to compose a "spiritual plan." New members are not immediately told, "We have these twelve committees, and we think you might fit in nicely with this committee or that." Rather the pastor seeks to enter into conversation with new members about their spiritual goals. What are you seeking? What is the direction (!) in which you want your life and the life of your family to move? How can our congregation with its various resources assist you in moving in that direction?

Congregations do planning. Businesses write plans. Why shouldn't Christian folks write up a spiritual plan? Many individual members of congregations and many pastors have sought out "spiritual directors." Much ambiguity and diversity surrounds the concept, but the Pentecost season is surely an opportune time for reflecting on the Divine Wind and the direction in which it is blowing.

In a January 2003 broadcast, Garrison Keillor was talking with guest Jearlyn Steele, a singer with Pentecostal background. She grew up singing all kinds of warm and joyful songs and still enjoys them. Keillor said to her, "I bet the church services of your youth were long." She replied that they could go on for more than two hours. "But as a Pentecostal," he continued, "you probably did a lot of jumping around in those services." She laughed, and he went on, "We sat quietly through our services." "Was it uncomfortable?" she asked. He responded, "We were brought up to welcome discomfort; it was part of being saved. We Lutherans skip the second chapter of Acts; we focus instead on 'Be still and know that I am God.'" She replied, "What about 'making a joyful noise'?" They laughed with one another and turned to song.

Their easy banter reminds us in good-humored fashion that people have often thought of the Spirit as having a peculiar connection to the emotions. And some of us are leery of speaking about "the Spirit" because we are suspicious of the emotions. But their exchange might also serve to loosen us up so that we might talk with one another about the Spirit and address the really urgent questions, What is the Spirit doing among us? What are the Spirit's aims? How do we know when we are in the grip of the Holy Spirit of God? What's the difference between the Spirit of God and the spirit of the times? And, what are my "spiritual plans"?

Helping all the rest of us to ponder these matters as we enter the Season of Pentecost with its astonishing biblical texts is **James Bartos**. He has been pastor of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Charlotte, North Carolina, since 1993. Jim previously served six years in campus ministry and in congregations of the upper Midwest. When he lived in Wisconsin, he learned Nordic skiing but says that he is not going back where the snow lies deep ever again. However, after he wrote that (*because* he wrote that?), didn't twelve inches of snow fall on North Carolina's Outer Banks? God is full of surprises. Anyway, when it is not snowing, he runs, rides his bike, and plays tennis as often as he can.

Jim tells me that his grandmother gave him a leather-bound King James Bible back in 1947. She inscribed these words in it, "May you always love this book and believe its teachings." He still has that Bible. And he writes, "I do love that book, and like Jacob at the Jabbock crossing, have wrestled all night with its teachings, teachings that have blessed and wounded me."

And Jim remembers his parents who were high school dropouts and perhaps for that reason placed high value on education and sacrificed to get him to college. In college he met Carol, to whom he is still married. They have three married children and three grandchildren. When he retires, he hopes to spend more time on tennis courts and make more trips to see those grandkids. I hope he gives or has given them a Bible and that he writes something in it that they will remember and cherish in the days ahead.

Jim writes in his contribution for Trinity Sunday that the three texts for that day articulate "the lofty, the intimate, the mysterious." When speaking of God and the Spirit, it is so easy to slide into the sentimental, but he avoids that peril. In all these reflections he maintains a focus on the strong images of the texts and makes effective use of contemporary images and sometimes earthy vernacular.

Thanks to Jim and to all preachers who stick their hands up into the winds and help us to see which are of the Spirit of God and which are not. The Good Word helps us to move right along and to move along right.

Yours,

Robert H. Smith, Editor of Preaching Helps
Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary
2770 Marin Avenue
Berkeley CA 94708
rsmith@plts.edu

Holy Trinity
First Sunday after Pentecost
June 15, 2003

Isaiah 6:1–8
Psalm 29
Romans 7:12–17
John 3:1–17

First Reading

The prophet "saw God." He names the year that he "saw God." It was the "year king Uzziah died." Everybody remembered that year. We always remember the year the king dies: the year our nation's isolation died (1941), the year our Camelot died (1963), the year our innocence died (2001). You always remember the year the king dies.

Isaiah roots his personal vision in history. And he roots his vision in what is familiar. He "saw God" where God is supposed to be, enthroned in the temple. It is the customary place. You go to church, to the holy place, "high and lofty." But God is much too big for the holy place. The mere hem of his robe fills the holy place.

And attending God, "there be dragons." Seraphs, it says. Flying fiery snakes, with terrible voices that shake the foundations of the holy place. Modest dragons when they attend God, covering their faces as they attend God, and covering their private parts. Protecting the "family jewels," you might say in a more secular place. The prophet becomes as modest, covering his face too. "*Oi vey*!" he says. "I'm dead," he says. "Unclean lips," he says, "yet my eyes have seen the King." The king has just died, but this is *the* King, not Uzziah and not Ahab).

And a seraph, one of the fiery dragons with a foundation-shaking voice, must use tongs to carry the coal that will cleanse the prophet's lips. Even a dragon cannot touch what God cleanses a man's unclean lips with, a man from a people of unclean lips.

Isaiah's eyes, and then his lips, and now ears. "I heard the voice of the Lord." *Ha kohl*, the Voice—it is the Voice that moves the episode from autobiography to mission. From the dead king to the young king, from Uzziah to Ahab. What the prophet hears becomes most important. It is the Bible's principal witness: God speaks, someone hears, things change. "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?"

The change for St. Paul is from fear to family, "a spirit of adoption," he says. We belong! "Papa," we can say. "Daddy." "Abba!" "Children of God" now we are, "led by the Spirit of God." "With Christ" in suffering and in glory.

Then there is Nicodemus in John 3 making his confession of faith: "You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God." Jesus takes charge immediately. That's the Jesus of the Fourth Gospel. He will be in charge of his trial and execution, too. "Very truly," Jesus says—a formula announcing that a weighty teaching is coming. Nicodemus asks the silly question: Able to enter the mother's womb? Preposterous. "Able to enter the kingdom of God" is Jesus' point, and just as preposterous, except "by the Spirit," blowing with the freedom and unpredictability of the wind, because "God so loved the world."

Pastoral Reflections

Pick up the green book and turn to hymn 165. Be sure that your face and your feet are properly covered. When Lutherans sing "Holy, holy, holy," as most of us will on June 15, it will be as far removed from Isaiah's vision of the seraphs as my now dead mother's womb is from the kingdom of God. "You must be born again," some of

our Christian brothers and sisters insist, and they are right. Only I cannot make this birth happen any more than I made my birth happen the first time around.

In these three texts we would seem to have the lofty, the intimate, and the mysterious. Isaiah's frightening image is countered by Paul's picture of a daddy's lap, and St. John brings in mama: a birth, the labor of mother, but "by water and the Spirit" this time.

Both Isaiah and John move on to condemnations, but our texts stop here. For now that's fine. This is not necessarily the time to declare who is in trouble and left out of the kingdom. It is sufficient to know that God loves this world enough to use smoke, fire, earthquake, scary beasts, a gentle embrace, water, and wind, just to save us.

"How can these things be?" Nicodemus asked. "God so loved the world. . . ." How can these things be? ". . . so that everyone who believes . . . may have eternal life." How can these things be? ". . . that the world might be saved through him." How can these things be? ". . . we are children of God. . . ." How can these things be? ". . . heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. . . ." How can these things be? ". . . suffer with him . . . glorified with him." How can these things be? "Here am I; send me." How indeed can these things be?

Oi vey! And we are born again.

Second Sunday after Pentecost
June 22, 2003

Hosea 2:14–20
Psalm 103:1–13, 22
2 Corinthians 3:1–6
Mark 2:13–22

First Reading

There seems to be a question about whether Hosea's experience with Gomer taught him about God and Israel or whether what Hosea experienced of God and Israel taught him about being husband to a difficult woman. Whatever. God is wedded to a philandering people.

There also seems to be broad opinion that chapters 4–14 are muddled, sometimes beyond intelligent interpretation. Our appointed passage seems clear enough. God is not about to let Israel go and is willing to be devious if necessary: "allure," the NRSV says. "Seduce" is another possible English rendering. It is what Jeremiah accuses YHWH of (look up 20:7). The polite NRSV chose "entice." "Deceive" would work too. Jeremiah even goes on to what appears close to an accusation of rape.

In Hosea, the sexual images are equally clear and far less strident. "Allure." "Speak tenderly." Hints of a Sinatra ballad. (Hey, I'm old; so pick your own love song.) YHWH's hope: "she will respond as in the days of her youth." Her "husband" woos the straying beloved. "My dear husband," she will say, not "My master." I hear echoes of Isaiah ("swords into plowshares") and even Psalm 23. "I will take you for my wife in faithfulness; and you shall know the Lord." YHWH is monogamous.

"A new covenant," says Paul to that congregation in Corinth that gave him fits and gave us some powerful material. ". . . not

of letter but of spirit," he says of this new covenant. "You are a letter of Christ," he tells the church, "prepared by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts." Writing with ink, the Apostle to the Gentiles dismisses ink as the arbiter of controversy (here, apparently controversy over Paul's authority to instruct and correct this congregation). "For the letter kills" (think Taliban and the historic pogroms in Christian Europe), "but the Spirit gives life" (think Peter's vision in Acts 10).

Mark could be called America's Gospel. "Immediately" is a favorite word. He wastes no time getting started. No birth narrative. No prologue. There is a nod to the prophets with a quick quote from Isaiah. There is a paragraph on the Baptizer and the voice from heaven. There is the wilderness test and John's arrest—all in the first 14 verses. By the time we get to our text for today, Jesus has called several disciples, healed a bunch of people, preached a little, and offended some folks. He offends a few more in this episode. His disciples are asked to explain Jesus' action (eating with sinners and tax collectors). Jesus will be asked in the next paragraph to explain the actions of his disciples (why they are not fasting like disciples of other significant religious teachers). The questions give Jesus the opportunity to teach regarding his purpose ("I have come to call . . . sinners") and his identity ("the bridegroom"), coming very close to calling himself Messiah. Then come these mini-parables about new and old following the controversy over eating. Mark is definitely America's Gospel.

Pastoral Reflections

Jesus speaks of a wedding feast as a parabolic explanation of why his disciples are not fasting like everybody else, but Hosea does not describe a feast for his wedding. It was no party. Today there are prenuptials: "Get it in writing" is good legal advice. But there is far more in writing when you get a divorce than when you get married. Unless you go in for prenuptials, hardly anything is written in ink when you get married. Sign here. Press hard. And the minister (or a secretary) writes it in the book later. But go see a lawyer when you've decided that divorce is called for and see how much must be written. Not so with marriage. Much more spirit. Much less ink. God's relationship with the people is like that.

We call ourselves "the people of the book," and that is accurate. It is also dangerous. The book, the canon, our principal witness, can be used like a weapon (a cannon?) and has been. We could also call ourselves "the people of the heart" and be just as accurate and just as dangerous. The heart and the book need each other. Expose your heart to the book. Read the book with your heart. "You are a letter of Christ," Paul has said, which places a great strain on our trust in Christ, like new wine in an old wineskin. Interesting that Jesus is caught eating with "tax collectors and sinners." At least in this snippet Jesus does not tell them to stop being tax collectors or even sinners. At this point he just eats with them. We might even call it the Lord's "First Supper."

Third Sunday after Pentecost
June 29, 2003

Deuteronomy 5:12–15
Psalm 81:1–10
2 Corinthians 4:5–12
Mark 2:23–3:6

First Reading

Slaves and aliens become equals with landlords and landlord children on the sabbath. Remember that you were a slave and alien once, God tells the landlords. Tells us. The Exodus version of the fourth commandment bases its claim on creation. Do what God did, it says. Work six. Rest one. God ceased from work, and this cessation made the day *qadosh*, "consecrated," holy. In Deuteronomy it is redemption, not creation, that is the basis for sabbath keeping. "Remember that you were a slave . . . therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day."

Eight of the big ten are about things to avoid. *Lo,* they say. "Thou shalt *not*," they say. Four and five tell us to do things: "Remember." "Honor." Remembering who it is who redeemed you is the way to have "no other gods." Kill, lie, steal, break promises, and you dishonor father and mother. The length and elaboration of the fourth commandment speaks to its importance, as does the promise attached to the fifth. "Observe the sabbath day and keep it holy" is not something we can blow off, according to the Deuteronomist.

Paul piles on metaphors: slave and master, light and darkness, treasure and clay jars (Do you prefer plastic or paper?). Paul credits God for any success in his ministry, somewhat like a wide receiver pointing to the sky after catching a pass in the end zone. This apostle, whom we Lutherans have claimed as ours, seems to have a way of boasting while denying that he is boasting. He is, after all, a clay jar. And death really is at work in him.

The Son of Man has authority over sickness, demons, sin, and Torah. Mark is in a hurry. Even the cross makes an early appearance in this breathless Gospel.

There are continuing arguments about just what "Son of Man" means, but what seems clear is that Mark means Jesus, and Mark is in a hurry. "Lord of the sabbath" goes to the heart of the matter. Sabbath observance is not optional, and challenging it should never be taken lightly when we read this pericope or any like it. This is a grave matter. The decision that he must be "destroyed" begins here.

Everyone in this little episode would have agreed that the sabbath could and should be broken in an emergency. Feeding someone starving. Rescuing someone in danger. But Mark tells us that the disciples were breaking off the heads of grain, possibly doing nothing more than creating a path through the field. They were not eating it. Jesus' explanation seems a stretch (it was not even Abiathar who was the priest in the 1 Samuel story he makes reference to). And in the synagogue, a "withered hand" is not life-threatening. So why is Jesus, "lord of the sabbath," being deliberately provocative? Church and state—Pharisees and Herodians—enter into consultation, and we catch a glimpse of Golgotha.

Pastoral Reflections

"We do not proclaim ourselves," says the Apostle whose modesty is minimal. Bob Jones and Oral Roberts named universities after themselves. Billy Graham has his evangelism association. Pastors will speak of "my" people and "my" council. We could learn from Paul about more things than only justification by faith.

My observation (and my confession!) is that we break the sabbath more often to "proclaim ourselves" than either to provoke folks into decision and action as Jesus does in Mark or to address a genuine emergency. Most of us don't murder and steal. We covet some and say an occasional naughty word, perhaps even invoking the Lord our God in ways we might prefer "our" people and "our" council not hear. We will break sabbath and "our" people will praise us for it. We will not remember who created and who redeemed us. There is too much of the spirit of Bob Jones and Oral Roberts in us, and not nearly enough Paul.

Of course, we should do our work faithfully, even though there seems to be no direct command to work for six days in Deuteronomy. "Six days you shall labor" could be seen as imperative. It is a future construction and is more likely a simple observation for a subsistence society. Not working is no option. Not working for the resident alien and slave is never an option. Except here. Except when God commands it. All of the world becomes equal on the sabbath. All become free, rich, and twenty-one. This the Lord of the sabbath would give us and only the enemies of God would seek to destroy.

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost
July 6, 2003

Genesis 3:8–15
Psalm 130
2 Corinthians 4:13–5:1
Mark 3:20–35

First Reading

The crafty serpent is clearly guilty. "Cursed are you," the Lord God declares, not bothering to ask the serpent where he is or what he's done. But the man, the human, whose name is Dusty or Muddy or Clay, whom we know as Adam, is afraid. He hides. He explains. He blames. The crafty serpent does none of that. Too crafty he must be to even try to hide. Cursed he is, and removed from the drama. The drama continues with the children of Eve.

Adam attempts craftiness and fails. This whole thing is complex, Adam explains to God. "There are subtleties here that you must understand, many sides to the issue," he points out. But for God, it is simple: "You ate."

This episode has the appearance of a legal procedure: there is the apprehension and interrogation of the perpetrators, the indictment, the defense, the judgment and sentence. Adam's defense is the making of excuses. Innocent by reason of nakedness. When that fails, blame the woman (notice that she's not Eve yet; Adam will give her that name later, much as he named the animals at God's instruction in happier days). Craftily, Adam never says "I didn't do it" but "This is why I did it and you will see that it is not really my fault." Like covering up his embarrassing nakedness, he tries to cover up his guilt.

The serpent turns out to be right: they do become like God. He is also right about

God's motivation for not wanting them to eat from those two trees (look ahead to verse 22). Like God, they are on their own and are going to have to make their own way from now on. Except that God does not leave them on their own, beginning with providing a better way to cover up their embarrassing nakedness.

"So we do not lose heart," says the Apostle of grace. Genesis tells the story of the man's humiliation. Paul moves us to anticipate "the eternal weight of glory beyond all measure." The Corinthian Christians knew life outside of the garden, and it is a mess. But, says Paul, "we have a building from God . . . eternal in the heavens." All of this, the raising of Jesus from the dead and the raising of us from the dead, is "for your sake." "More and more people" . . . "increase thanksgiving," God is glorified. "So we do not lose heart," even though Paul's "earthly tent," his own ugly body, is soon on its way to Rome and execution.

Jesus is in the house. A house that is divided against itself, it would appear. His family "went out," Mark says, to try to get him under control. "He has gone out of his mind," people have said. The theologians are more focused: "He has Beelzebul." Jesus' defense against the theologians is to point out how stupid it would be of Beelzebul if their theory were correct. His response to his family is to redefine family. His mother and his siblings are "standing outside," and that house is not divided against itself. "Here are my mother and my brothers," he says looking around at those inside. "Whoever does the will of God."

Notice that no one questions Jesus' ability to heal and exorcise demons. The only question is how. The slander to the Holy Spirit (who drove Jesus into the wilderness for his test in chapter 1 and will be there speaking what needs to be said when the disciples are under persecution in 13) is the one obstacle to membership in this family of Jesus that cannot be removed. He's out of his mind, the people say. It's demonic, the theologians explain. This is serious, writes Mark. And the "they" in verse 30—is it only the scribes who are accused, or is it also "his family who went out to restrain him" because of what people were saying about him? Hmmm.

Pastoral Reflections

Sin is what people do in defiance of God. We may struggle with a precise definition of that "tree of knowledge," but we know defiance of God. We know shame. We know cover-up, denial, and blame. Christ's "house" in Corinth is divided against itself, and every preacher could name a few people who have worried about their guilt over some "unforgivable" sin.

The serpent is cursed, and God never takes that curse away. The humans are punished, and God spends the remainder of the story trying to keep the damage to a minimum.

Adam did not say "Yes" when God asked, "Did you?" And he never says "I'm sorry." Adam loses a lot by that failure, but what he does not lose is his freedom before God, to engage God and be engaged. Only the serpent, who is never addressed by God again, is so cursed, so unforgiven. Adam and Eve with their knowledge of good and evil do not lose their freedom to engage the Almighty, nor do their children—not Cain and Abel, not Abraham, not Job, not you and me. Cursed we are not. Nor are we beyond forgiveness, beyond the house where Jesus is central and his family gathers.

Paul quotes Psalm 116, "I believed and so I spoke." He makes a bold claim that he "has the same spirit of faith that is in accordance with scripture." It is his credential as a preacher. What's yours?

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost
July 13, 2003

Ezekiel 17:22–24
Psalm 92:1–4, 12–15
2 Corinthians 5:6–10 [11–13], 14–17
Mark 4:26–34

First Reading

Ezekiel is the allegorical prophet (vine, bride, birds, lion; "Take a brick," he is told in chap. 4; "take a sharp sword" in chap. 5; "set on the pot" in 24; he sees wheels in the sky and a valley of dry bones). He offers up a messianic allegory here: the messiah as branch of the cosmic tree. In chap. 17, it seems that empire and YHWH have similar agendas. It is an eagle who takes the "top of the cedar" in verse 3. In verse 22, "I myself will take a sprig from the lofty top of a cedar . . . a tender one" to be planted by the very hand of YHWH "on the mountain height of Israel." YHWH, the God of reversals, will bring the superpower down (here Babylon, but all empires should be afraid) and raise up the defeated and exiled. "The word of the Lord" comes to Ezekiel again and again and again. *Ben Adam*, God calls him. "Mortal," it is rendered in the NRSV. "Son of man" is literal. Empire's agenda is currently in place. YHWH's agenda is future, but because it is YHWH's, it will happen.

". . . everything has become new!" says Paul. "All this is from God," he goes on to assert in the verse just beyond the assigned lection. Fully agreeing with Ezekiel, the Apostle to the gentiles speaks with confidence. ". . . there is a new creation," he flatly states even as the old creation (yet another empire) is carting him off soon to prison and death. "For if we are beside ourselves," he says in v. 13 as though this might have been a claim made against him by his detractors so that he must establish his authority (go back to v. 12, "We are not commending ourselves to you again," which is exactly what he is doing, commending himself, but for you, "giving you an opportunity to boast about us."). Yes, he seems to say, I am beside myself, appropriating the accusation: "it is for God." For you, however, "we are in our right mind." "Look!" (*idou*) he says. "See!" the NRSV says, rightly adding the exclamation point. If he'd had one, Paul would have used a pink highlighter.

Mark tells the purpose of parables in 4:10–12: the *mysterion*, the "secret of the kingdom of God" (NRSV) has been given "to you" (i.e., "those who were around him with the twelve"). ". . . but for those outside, everything comes in parables" so that though they "look," they will not "perceive." They "may indeed listen, but not understand." And the curious conclusion, "so that they may not turn again and be forgiven." Verse 34 completes this section of Mark, "he explained everything in private to his disciples." Which makes me wonder if Mark didn't write chapter 4 after someone from his church asked him, How come we get it and they don't? It's because Jesus wanted it that way, he seems to say here and leaves the mystery stand.

Our pericope uses some intriguing words. Verse 28 gives us *automate*, the earth producing on its own accord, "automatically." Verse 29 has one of Mark's repeated adverbs, *euthus*, "immediately," and *apostellei*, the farmer "sends out" his sickle for the harvest like an apostle "sent out." Maybe. Verse 32 would seem to echo our Ezekiel text and then the question in v. 40 (beyond our assigned reading), "Why are you afraid?" He's explained everything, and they wonder who this Teacher, who has been explaining everything, really is. "With what can we compare the kingdom of God?" Jesus asks in v. 30, and answers his own

question: "a mustard seed," the "smallest of all seeds." (Not really the smallest, but for a parable it will do.) *Anabaino* is the word in 32, for "it grows up." The word is used elsewhere for resurrection. And then come Ezekiel's birds to make nests.

Pastoral Reflections

This is life lived in the promise of God. Do your work. "Sleep and rise." "There was evening and there was morning, the sixth day." Genesis 1, of course. Perhaps our horticultural sophistication, genetic manipulation, fertilizers, irrigation, herbicides, and insecticides have jaded us to the mystery of growth, what the earth does "automatically." If we were all raptured tonight, North America would be a glorious forest and lush prairie in a humiliatingly short amount of time. I can hear the spotted owl and American bison praying for the rapture to happen soon and to include all human beings, true believer or not.

It would seem that metaphor, allegory, and parable are the best vehicles for the word of the Lord. To understand these vehicles for their life-giving truth, one must be intimate with Jesus, at least according to year B's good news narrator. You need to be one of "those who [are] around him along with the twelve" (v. 10), one of Jesus' *idiois*, his own of v. 34. "And he walks with me and he talks with me," in that hymn we Lutherans love to hate. Jesus does tell me things he does not tell anyone else, according to Mark, yet not to me alone but "those who were around him along with the twelve." Things he does not tell "the very large crowd" that began this chapter. To grasp the meaning of the miracle stories that follow chapter 4 and that puzzling concluding verse 8 of chapter 16, you need to be among those "around him along with the twelve." Paul is one of those "around him along with the twelve," but in an unexpected way, which may account for his irrational exuberance for Jesus, an exuberance that is misunderstood ("For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God") and must be explained ("We are not commending ourselves to you again. . ."). I get the feeling that Paul is misunderstood (by me!) because he is so darned Greek and not Jewish enough. His Semitic storytelling gene seems to have become recessive, and that makes his elaborations tough going for weaker minds like mine.

Which is the very thing that makes Ezekiel my favorite prophet. He would be writing for Wonder Comics today. Paul goes into his treatise about the body and judgment, and I have to parse and struggle, yet his "See!" is clear. It is Ezekiel's message, too. We are already a new creation. Here is the future. Do not be afraid. Only empire needs to be afraid.

Anyone "around him along with the twelve" has had it explained.

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost
July 20, 2003

Job 38:1–11
Psalm 107:1–3, 23–32
2 Corinthians 6:1–13
Mark 4:35–41

First Reading

The very first words from God's mouth in Job 1 are questions addressed not to Job but to Satan: "Where have you come from?" and "Have you considered my servant Job?" Except for repeating the questions in chapter 2 where the ante is raised, God is silent until now when God piles question upon question, chapter after chapter, up to 40:3. Job then manages to squeeze in a word for two verses, and then the Lord continues the

questions for two more chapters. "Who is this?" roars the Almighty, knowing perfectly well who this is. It is "that man" introduced in the first verse of chapter 1, "blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil."

There is no apparent "steadfast love enduring forever" from the Lord God in Job. The psalmist sings beautifully of what happens to those who are delivered from calamity by the Lord called "good." "Some wandered in desert wastes," "some sat in darkness and gloom," "some were sick through their sinful ways," "some went down to the sea in ships." The Lord "redeemed them from trouble," says the poet. "Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love." Job is not invited to say "thank you."

Now if only all of us preachers could say together with Paul, "We are putting no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry." I am not so sure that St. Paul actually pulled it off in every case himself. Then in verse 12 he does something your homiletics teacher would never let you get away with. It's not me, says the apostle to the Gentiles. It's you. Still, the urgency Paul expresses is one that remains: "now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation!" So does his understanding that grace can be accepted "in vain." Grace will change you. "Open wide your hearts" is the change, with "no restriction . . . in affection," like my heart, he says.

Reading 2 Corinthians is somewhat like listening to one end of a telephone conversation (annoyingly common in public places now) where you do not hear the other voice and you can't be entirely sure you are hearing all from this side, for that matter. But the reading is clear enough.

In the psalm, the sailors "were glad because they had quiet" from the storm. In Mark, the sailors (disciples this time) are frightened when "the wind ceased, and there was dead calm."

This episode moves from mega-squall to mega-calm to mega-fear, litanylike in the evangelist's Koine Greek. Jesus accuses them of being timid, perhaps cowardly, in v. 40. They are afraid, in 41. The disciples in the boat are not afraid of the wind or the waves or the swamping of the boat. They are angry with the sleeping Jesus: "do you not care?" they say, not even asking for help from him. I believe this is deliberate on the storyteller's part. Jesus rebukes the wind and the sea, and then rebukes the disciples. The wind and sea obey him. He has less success with his disciples. And what of those "other boats" in v. 36? How many? Who is in them? How did they handle the storm? The calm? My curiosity. If these things mattered, Mark would have told us. Or, is that us in those boats?

"Who then is this?" the disciples ask. They call him "Teacher." But who is this, "that even the wind and the sea obey him?" The wild man in the Gerasene cemetery (or is it Legion, the demons in him?) knows who this is: "Jesus, son of the most high God." That's the episode that happens after these boats get to "the other side." The author has already told us readers with the first stroke of his pen who this is: "Jesus Christ, the Son of God." Teaching is what Jesus has pretty much been doing since 1:21 when he astounded the folks in Capernaum with his teaching. Even the miracles become teaching moments more than once. At 1:38, Jesus identifies his mission as "proclaiming the message." But now, the Teacher whom they took into their boat "just as he was" (reflect on v. 36 for a while when you have a quiet moment or two) is more than they thought he was. "Who then is this . . . ?"

On "the other side" there will be healings and a resurrection. In chapter 6 Jesus will "astound" the people in his home town,

and after another evening storm, there will be more terror and astonishment among the disciples (this at 6:47f.). Mark will explain, "their hearts were hardened." And they remain "utterly astounded."

Pastoral Reflections

Job and Mark end in questions. The word of the Lord today is a question that we can neither escape nor answer. The word of the Lord today is a question that silences complaints, demands, and facile explanations.

There are multiple voices in Scripture, and we need every one of them. Human experience is multidimensional. There are questions that reduce us to silence, calamities that drive us to sing loudly when we have survived them. No blaming. No fault finding. No hearings to determine guilt. No errors named that can be avoided next time. Only hymns of praise, like the psalm. Only prayers of intercession, like Job's at the very end of the book.

Job and Mark do not give us images of the Divine that we can cuddle up to, be chums with. And Paul always seems just a bit prickly with a few notable exceptions. There are other voices in the Bible in other places that lend themselves to the intimacy of a loving papa, a tender motherly presence of the Divine, even a suitor, a lover, as well as a reasonable, persuasive teacher. But not here. Not today. Today, "I will question you, and you shall declare to me," so "gird up your loins like a man."

The church is still afraid at Mark 16:8; timid, cowardly, as it is here in 4. Mark makes sense to me as a sixteen-chapter parable, drawing me into the story the way parables are supposed to, putting me in one of those "other boats," putting me in 16:9 perhaps, or, after these two millennia, chapter 36 somewhere. Jesus' question, "Have you still no faith?" is frighteningly modern. Gird up your loins, indeed.

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost
July 27, 2003

Lamentations 3:22–33
Psalm 30
2 Corinthians 8:7–15
Mark 5:21–43

First Reading

Lamentations 3 is an acrostic on the Hebrew alphabet, each letter given three lines: three *alephs*, three *beths*, three *gimmels*, and so on. Our text is down to *heth*, *teth*, *yod*, and *qaph*. We are reading a skilled poet as well as a challenging theologian and sensitive social commentator, all the things a prophet needs to be.

The *teth* lines repeat the word God speaks at creation when the work of each day is pronounced "Good." *Tob,* the poet says. What is declared *tob* by the poet depends on God's maternal instinct. The word rendered "mercies" in verse 22 and "compassion" in 32 is the verb that gives us the noun that would be rendered "womb" in English. "Steadfast love" in both places is the familiar *chesed.*

Note the quotation from Exodus 16 that Paul inserts encouraging the Corinthians to finish with fresh enthusiasm what they began. God provides enough for the day. Not commanding anything from these Christians, but only giving them his advice. "Your abundance," he says, is a fair balance to "their need." It is money he is referring to. Dangerous for preachers, he does it skillfully: "in order that there may be a fair balance."

And a double-barreled salvation story in Mark. *Sozo* is your Koine dictionary entry: heal, save, preserve, rescue, keep from harm. A rich word for Mark to employ in these skillfully told parallel episodes.

The man and the woman are both people of faith. The man, named and identified; the woman, anonymous. The man comes with confidence, shows proper deference, and announces what he believes. "Come . . . lay your hands . . . made well . . . live." The woman secretly speaks her faith. "If I but touch his clothes . . . made well." Jesus will tell Jairus not to be afraid, "only believe." The woman believes and then is afraid. Note too the twelve-year flow of blood and the twelve-year-old girl. Note that Jesus calls the anonymous woman "Daughter," and the unnamed "daughter" of the leader of the synagogue, although the words Mark uses for each are different.

Each of these stories could stand alone, and that is the way we used to read them in church. Now it seems patently clear that they belong together. If nothing else, Mark would seem to be telling us that there is no fixed pattern for healing/salvation. There is no standard behavior for belief. Jesus hears a variety of faith-driven prayers, even the ones tinged with what appears to be superstition. Nor is it a matter of enough faith. That is not at issue. There is amazement and fear around these stories, including the disciples' rather testy response: "You see the crowd!" They are evidently amazed that he would remark about being touched. We know, because the ubiquitous writer tells us that this was a faith touch and that "power had gone forth from him." The mere proximity of disciples and a "large crowd" did not take power from him. The response of his disciples is echoed in the derisive laughter from the weepers and wailers in Jairus' house. The story ends with overwhelming amazement and Jesus' command that the girl be given something to eat.

Amazement and fear are frequent in Mark's Gospel. This chapter begins with Jesus frightening the Gerasene swineherds and the amazement among those who heard the testimony of the man whose demons had been exorcised. There was amazement in Capernaum at the beginning of Jesus' public life and at pretty much every page after that. The amazement in the story-within-a-story here is that Jesus could perceive someone touching him and that somehow power had gone out from him to another and he did not know who, this simultaneous secret awareness of both Jesus and the woman. Mark does not tell us that anyone else was aware a healing had happened. She believed, and then she was afraid. In contrast Jesus must tell Jairus "Do not fear," and then, "only believe." And the leader of the synagogue disregards the advice from his own house that he need not "trouble the teacher any further."

Pastoral Reflections

"Do not fear. Only believe." A good message for preachers, 21st-century leaders of the synagogue, the gathering places of God's people. Do not fear the reports coming from the house. What you believed at the very start (see Mark 8:21) is still true. What you believed when you applied for seminary admission and accepted that first call and submitted to ordination is still true. Do not heed the bad news coming from the house. Pay no attention to the good advice that you "no longer need trouble the Teacher." Keep on troubling the Teacher. Your daughter (your preaching, your ministry, your effectiveness, your imagination and energy and skill) is not dead, but only sleeping.

The witnesses of the Transfiguration are here in the room, a transfiguration of Jesus from teacher like Elijah and Moses to the one with power over death itself, a power only God has. These same three will be with Jesus again in chapter 14, but in spite of the amazing things they have witnessed, they'll sleep through Gethsemane. That's when Jesus will be amazed at Peter, James, and

John. "Are you still sleeping?" he will say. He will awaken them with the unpleasant news of the betrayer at hand in contrast to the gentle awakening here.

Jesus will be amazed in chapter 6 at the unbelief in his hometown. Unbelief does not amaze me. Belief that touching the hem of his garment as he passes by on his way somewhere else is amazing. Belief that the Teacher can raise someone from the dead is amazing. Not believing is what amazes Jesus. He is not amazed when someone is healed and lives. He is amazed when there is someone who refuses to believe, refusing to be healed.

Whatever made that bleeding woman conclude such a thing? Touch the hem of his cloak, indeed. "Why trouble the teacher any further?" Whatever made you conclude that you could preach the gospel and anybody would be touched, healed, saved? Where in the world did that come from?

"Do not fear, only believe."

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost
August 3, 2003

Ezekiel 2:1–5
Psalm 123
2 Corinthians 12:2–10
Mark 6:1–13

First Reading

"Stand on your feet," commands YHWH to this one the Lord insists upon calling *ben adam.* And a *ruach* sets Ezekiel on his feet and he hears. Ezekiel has been looking and looking and looking all through chapter 1. Now he listens. Image is stacked upon image, symbol layered over symbol in a confusing array. What is not confusing is "the Voice." What is perfectly clear is the speech of the indescribable Divinity. The command of God, "Do not be afraid of them," this "impudent and stubborn" people, is focused. Ezekiel will have some hard things to say to Israel. There will also be a time when the prophet must say soft things. The Voice will tell when, and the Spirit will give him breath. There will be judgments pronounced and laments sung. There will be promises and magnificent visions: dry bones coming together and rising to life, a mighty army; a perfect temple and the glory of God returning to dwell there. But now, the command is simple: Don't be afraid of them. Whether they hear or do not hear, don't be afraid of them. "They shall know that there has been a prophet among them."

Like a slave looking to the master, "have mercy upon us," prays a people worn down by the scorn, the contempt of "those who are at ease," "the proud" they are called in this song of lament. This is not the God of the typical praise song. This is the remote and powerful God, with whom the singers cannot be chums. "Mercy" is all the poet can

ask. A helpless, desperate people pray this way.

"My grace is sufficient for you," reports Paul, not boasting yet boasting of his secret revelations ("I will not be a fool"). What can be spoken must be spoken, even in the boastings of this apostle-come-lately who must struggle to establish credibility, is "the power of Christ," the all-sufficient grace of God.

The twelve will gather around Jesus again in verse 30 of Mark 6, telling him "all that they had done and taught." Jesus had sent them and given them authority. He equipped them with authority over "the unclean spirits" but no "authority" (*exousia*) over their human audience. "If they refuse to hear you, leave!" is Jesus' directive. It is what Jesus did. He has modeled in the first five verses what he now sends the twelve out to do, going with only this "authority" and the things that enable them to travel: sandals and a walking stick. Anything else would impede their mobility and distract from their mission. Unlike Ezekiel, who is commissioned to keep on talking even if his audience is not listening, the twelve are told to move on.

Notice that Jesus gives authority (*exousia*) to his disciples even as his own ability (*dunamis*) is restricted by the unbelief that astonishes him. Jesus is discounted as a mere technician, a *teknon*. "Is not this the carpenter?" they say at the synagogue where they know his mother by name and even his sisters whom they do not bother to name. And the Son of God is able to do "no deed of power" (*dunamis* again), "except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them." Here is the answer to WWJD. Jesus cures those who are open to it, and then he goes on his way.

Mark does not name Jesus' home town (*patrida* is all he calls it) or the other villages he goes on to or the places where the twelve are sent. And he only "*began* to send them out two by two." It is not clear that they all went away at once, leaving Jesus by himself. Nor are we told who paired up with whom (who was Judas's partner?). They preach repentance (from what to what is left unsaid). They exercised their authority over the demons, casting out "many." They anointed and healed "many." The twelve were not given a goal—this many villages, this many exorcisms and healings—only the task and the authority and what to do when no one wants to listen.

Pastoral Reflections

Faces and hearts, the Lord tells his prophet in his commission. Obstinate, stubborn, impudent, hard. The seen and the unseen. Faces and hearts. The public and the private. God is more honest than any call committee in an initial interview. And can't you imagine your bishop's response when you include in your annual report, "I couldn't accomplish anything here, but they sure knew that a prophet was among them." Yet even God does not know if this is going to do any good. "Whether they hear or refuse to hear," says YHWH, your job is to speak what I tell you to speak and do not be afraid of them. If you and your bishop are both stood on your feet by the *ruach* of God, that's enough. Budget and organizational goals get no help from these texts. Lord have mercy, indeed.

The neighbors intend to insult Jesus, this momma's boy who is just a tech, for heaven's sake. And then Jesus sends out his inner circle like guerrilla infiltrators to spread a little propaganda in enemy territory two by two and maybe not even all at one time.

Jesus is always moving on. Sometimes Mark tells us where and sometimes he doesn't, as here. But Jesus never settles anywhere, "with his disciples." Even at the very end, when the women "went out in

terror," the where they went is unsaid. Mark is an unsettling Gospel, so to speak, and I get the feeling that this is his genius. He will not settle things for you. You must fill in the blanks, like the question of what the disciples called their hearers to repent from and turn toward. Just what is it their audiences were to change their minds about? That's your job, preacher, with your audience, and your authorization to cast out unclean spirits (know any unclean spirits where you live?). Which villages? Well, name one. Somewhere in Oregon, perhaps, or South Dakota or North Carolina. Which disciples paired together? So who is your colleague who helps you decide if it is time to shake the dust from your only pair of sandals and pick up that walking stick again? You must give the pair a name. It is Mark's genius to make us do that. And your own ministry is not always effective, is it? How like Jesus you are. How like the twelve. How you need to look with the "eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress" when you sing the Kyrie each Sunday. The grace that was sufficient for St. Paul, who had plenty to boast about, is also sufficient for you, who may have somewhat less. You will stand up when the Lord says, "Stand!" The Spirit will set you on your feet. You will hear and you will speak what the Lord tells you.

And do not be afraid of that parochial report.

Change of address?

Please contact us by phone or e-mail (*currents@lstc.edu*), or send your corrected mailing label or a photocopy, or any change-of-address form, to Currents in Theology and Mission, 1100 East 55th Street, Chicago, IL 60615, phone (773) 256-0751, or fax (773) 256-0782 (specify *Currents*).

Whether you write or call, please include the six-digit code at the top left of your address label for our reference. Thank you.

Currents in Theology and Mission
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago
1100 East 55th St.
Chicago, IL 60615

Non-profit org.
Bulk Rate
U. S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 26
Paxton, IL 60957