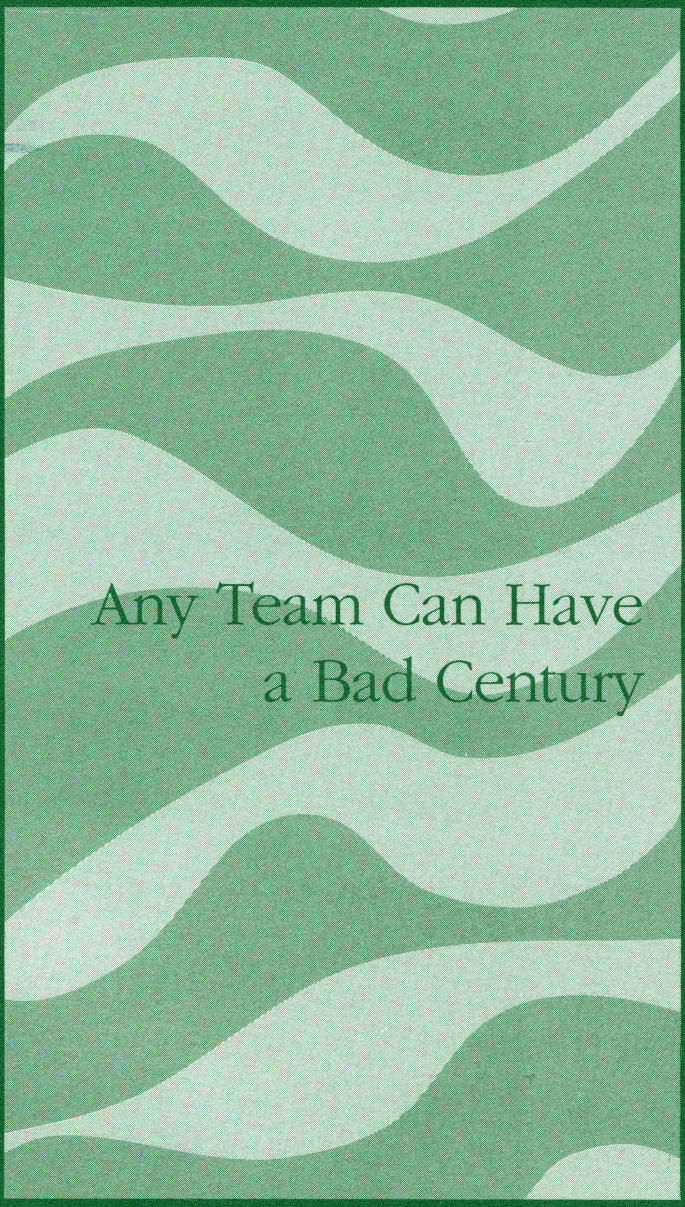
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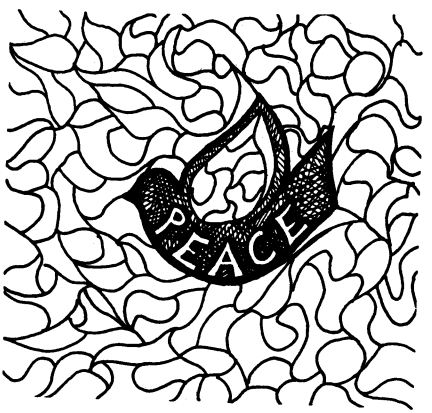
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Any Team Can Have a Bad Century

Jack Brickhouse, the late broadcaster of the Chicago Cubs, once noted, with some chagrin, that the Cubs had not won the World Series since 1906 and added: "Any team can have a bad century." As congregations and seminaries go into summer mode we also make assessments of years good and not so good, of goals met or opportunities missed, and we cry, "Wait until next year!"

Ministry is usually not weighed in batting averages, membership gains, budget surpluses, or articles read or published. Rather, those who lose their lives find them as they follow the invitation to deny themselves, take up the cross, and follow. And yet, if truth were told, we have had a pretty rough century so far, given the events at the World Trade Center and the carnage that now punctuates Israel and Palestine. Our justification by grace for Christ's sake through faith cannot hide the fact that peacemaking, so far, has not been a great accomplishment in this century. Do we expect a "bad century," or can our congregations, our families, our theology, our mission make a difference and provide some hope?

In his inaugural lecture as Professor of Systematic Theology, **José David Rodríguez Jr.** traces the relationship between culture and evangelism in the expansion of Lutheranism during the last century on the island of Puerto Rico. He tells the story of Gustav Sigfrid Swensson, an Augustana College student and one of the first Lutherans to work in Puerto Rico. Swensson's work was partially compromised by its mixture with American colonial interests, but his self-sacrificing efforts were also successful thanks in no small part to an invitation to conduct services by an African Caribbean, John Christopher Owen Browne. A second story recounts the ministries of the first native-born, indigenous Puerto Rican Lutheran leaders. The third story tells of the exciting role of women in the leadership of the Puerto Rican church, particularly the work of Gabriela Cuervos and Dona Juana Díaz Sardén. When addressing the relationship between culture and the practice of faith, we need to acknowledge that each culture makes its own specific contribution. The leaders during the first century of Lutheranism in Puerto Rico are examples of Luther's understanding of the praxis of the theologians of the cross.

Theo Sundermeier describes how we try to understand "strangers." We go by appearance, smells, sounds, language, and the social order to which the strangers belong. The other can be perceived as enemy, as a foreigner to be welcomed like the premodern trader, or as an equal. The weakness of the latter

approach is that we often downplay the real differences with the other. In similar fashion, there are levels to understanding another religion—one can look at the religion objectively from a distance, by participatory observation, by compassionate experience, or with such a blend of sympathy and empathy that the other religion becomes temptation for me. The kenotic structure of the Christian faith belongs to its very nature. It must abandon itself if it wants to be itself, and it has to get deeply involved with the other religion. Interreligious hermeneutics serve to create a sphere of understanding. In that way they enable both pure and honorable dialogue and mutual witness to the truth which is to be believed and which is determinative for one's own life. Making peace between the religions could go a long way to make this a different century.

Edward H. Schroeder notes that the ethical teaching in John's Gospel takes place in the context of a great cosmic trial. In John believers receive the right to be called children of God, not by birth, but by receiving the one who has been sent. The real truth about humans, which Satan tries to subvert and humans tend to deny, is that they are sinners. By receiving the one who has been sent, sinners-in-fact become sinners-in-truth and therefore graced non-sinners. Jesus earns the right to be the final judge by what he does in the "hour" of the cross. As Jesus is lifted up to be eschatological judge, he also becomes the agent who makes believers children of God. The death of Jesus is legal, and at the same time it saves people from the law's case against them. Jesus claims to move sinners into the divine family where according to Moses only the Abrahamic Torah-faithful had any right to be. By taking the side of sinners, Jesus counters the view of Yahweh in the Decalogue, who is not so friendly to sinners. Jesus dies for all, and all are moved to the new ethos of children of God by believing in him. The law that accuses, by which indeed Jesus himself is to die, signs its own death warrant since Jesus really is the Son of God. The cross certifies before the heavenly court Jesus' rights to exempt sinners from the verdict of the accuser. Believing in this vindicated Vindicator vindicates the believers already now.

Craig A. Satterlee outlines a strategy for moving toward more frequent communion that is based on Luther's understanding of the relationship of Word and table. Often we tend to place Word and Sacrament, preaching and the Lord's Supper, in tension or even competition. In a number of sermons Luther articulated the relationship between Word and table, elevating the Word without diminishing the supper. Luther proposed that fear leads to contrition, followed by absolution, which leads to faith, and subsequently to love. Luther's sermons on the Lord's Supper contended against the understanding of the mass as sacrifice, against the reforms of Karlstadt, and the rationalism of Zwingli and the Enthusiasts. The Lord's Supper is not the sacrifice or good

work of sinners but God's promise of forgiveness. Confession with absolution, preaching, and the Lord's Supper are three forms of God's one promise of forgiveness. Luther drew a bond between sermon and sacrament by declaring that both are proclamation, the former public and the latter individual and particular. An obvious place to begin the process of moving a congregation toward more frequent celebration of the Lord's Supper is to make certain that in our worship services Word and table are intimately connected in as many ways as possible. When preaching is authentically God's word of promise, we can ground more frequent celebration of Holy Communion in the Supper's relationship to preaching.

John D. Litke rehearses the little-known story of the daughters of Zelophehad in the book of Numbers, a story that makes a remarkable statement about the dignity and value of women and children as members of the congregation of Israel. A close reading of the story shows that the issue is not so much whether the daughters can inherit but whether they and their family count as Israelites and so should be awarded land by the divine Sovereign. The argument of the daughters is approved as correct, they are counted as members of Israel as manifest by the original land grant, and they are given the right of inheritance for their family. The text provides an inspiring story that the justice of YHWH is status-blind and firmly acknowledges that women can lead families and do count as members of the nation of Israel. This is perhaps the only narrative in the Old Testament where the deity acknowledges an error—and fixes it.

While any sports team can—and sometimes does—have a bad century, we who lead and serve dare not risk such a debacle. I dare to hope that ministries of word-and-sacrament and word-and-service and even word-and-theological-education can make a significant difference in our all too violent world. The peace we pass on a Sunday morning remains also the peace that passes all understanding. Would that we all were better agents of the things that make for peace . . . in home, congregation, seminary, nation, and world. Now.

Ralph W. Klein, Editor

Culture and Evangelism: A Latino Perspective on the Lutheran Mission in Puerto Rico

José David Rodríguez Jr.
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

In 1998 the Hispanic/Latino Ministry Program of the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (LSTC) began the Evaristo Falcó-Esteves lecture series. This lecture series was established as an initiative for the pastoral and theological reflection of lay persons, clergy, seminarians, and seminary, college, and university professors interested in the Lutheran legacy and its relevance in responding to the challenges of today's world, from a Hispanic/Latin American perspective. In this, my inaugural lecture as professor of systematic theology, and in my role as director of LSTC's Hispanic/Latino Ministry Program, I want to continue these efforts with a reflection on the topic of theology and culture. My goal is to join the endeavors of those whose concern for a better understanding of the relationship between history, culture, and human spirituality explores the role of the gospel as a transforming and liberating element of the human predicament. I focus on the relationship between culture and evangelism in the expansion of Lutheranism on the island of Puerto Rico.

Rationale for this study

The rationale for this study is very personal. It has to do with my cultural and religious identity. I have always been intrigued with the fact that when I am away from my country of origin, and this is especially true of my experience in the United States, people perceive a significant conflict between my Puerto Rican and my Lutheran identity. Those familiar with the sixteenth-century European conquest of these lands know that Puerto Rico was included in the Spanish conquest of that time and consequently subjected to its Roman Catholic missionary venture. Given this fact, how can a Puerto Rican claim to be Lutheran?

The answer lies in another significant fact of our historical development that is mostly neglected. Puerto Rico, along with most other people of the cultures indigenous to these lands, was subjected to a second major European conquest that led to the Anglo/Saxon Protestant missionary expansion in this part of the world. The full consequences of these two great events are still being explored.

Methodological assumptions

My approach to this subject follows one characteristic of the emerging Latino theological perspective in the United States, the one developed by an increasing number of Latino men and women who, along with

other sectors of our society and people around the world that have been silent for generations, are now speaking up and claiming an authority that past centuries have denied them.[1]

From its inception, Latino theology has reflected on the implications of correlating faith with the social, cultural, and religious history of our people. Nurtured by the insights of Latin American theology and other liberation perspectives, it applies the hermeneutics of suspicion to our people's experience. This effort leads us to focus on the popular expression of our people's faith and knowledge as a vehicle and witness of divine revelation.[2] While this initiative aims at recovering those foundational elements that give meaning to our identity as a people, it also focuses on those basic dimensions of the church's teachings that make possible a continuous renewal of our understanding and confession of the gospel.

Reading in Spanish as a key for interpretation

My analysis of the Lutheran missionary expansion to Puerto Rico will use as the central key for interpretation what Justo L. González established as a reading *in Spanish* of the history and teachings of the Christian tradition. To clarify this approach, González argues for a reading of the Bible in Spanish. His proposal is not a chauvinistic appeal for Latinos to give up biblical research based on the historical-critical method. Nor does he emphasize using just a Spanish translation of the text. His point is to recover a central feature in the Protestant tradition of making the Bible available to the people in their vernacular. For González, the emphasis of this approach, in contrast to the one characteristic of the dominant culture, is to read the Scriptures as presenting a history of the people of God *beyond innocence,* that is, to view biblical history as *responsible remembrance* leading to *responsible action.* Such an approach provides an interpretation of the Bible compatible with our own history, riddled with ambiguity, joys, and failures. When the Bible turns into a resource accessible to the people, and the people discover in the Bible their own particular perspective, then the Bible becomes the people's book, a subversive book no longer under the control of the dominant groups in society.[3]

Vítor Westhelle, a fellow professor of systematic theology at LSTC, contends that one of Luther's most significant contributions was providing a language to give voice to the voiceless of his time. The reformer's importance for the normative nature of the German language is generally recognized. Yet, his contributions in providing a means of communication capable of empowering the aspirations and desires of the common people in sixteenth-century European society has received insufficient attention.[4] My study intends to provide an

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[1] Justo L. González, *Mañana: Christian Theology from a Hispanic Perspective* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 47–48.

[2] For Latino theology popular religion becomes first and foremost a way of imagining reality and constructing knowledge. It is a bearer of culture and identity. It is also a receiver and witness of our people's understanding and practice of God's self-revelation.

[3] González, *Mañana,* 75–87.

[4] Vítor Westhelle, "Looking People in the Mouth: Luther, Language, and Oppression" (unpublished manuscript). Also see Westhelle, *Voces de protesta en América Latina* (México: Hispanic/Latino Ministry Program at LSTC, 2000). Another valuable study exploring the impact of Luther's understanding of the vernacular for the transmission of ideas in the Lutheran Reformation is Helga Robinson-Hammerstein, "The Lutheran Reformation and Its Music," in *The Transmission of Ideas in the Lutheran Reformation,* ed.

example of the significant impact of this contribution of Luther, reappropriated by the Latino perspective, for a better understanding of the relationship between culture and religion in communicating and witnessing to the transforming power of the gospel.

Popular religion—the vernacular of the people on the margins

In his groundbreaking study of popular Catholicism, Orlando O. Espín argues that for Latino theologians, the importance of the study of popular Christianity is its role as a source for a theological discourse rendered *Latinamente.*[5] For him and for an increasing number of Latinos/as from Roman Catholic and Protestant backgrounds, popular Christianity is not just a collection of beliefs or practices, some exotic, curious, or orthodox by our denominational standards. Popular Christianity is first and foremost an epistemology: a way of imagining reality and of constructing knowledge. It is a bearer of culture and identity. It is an instrument for listening and witnessing to divine revelation in culturally authentic and specific ways, which, among Latinos/as (as among all peoples), bear the impact of both grace and sin.[6] Yet, to avoid a naive perception of this means of expression, Espín alerts us to the fact that the rites, beliefs, and symbols commonly associated with popular Christianity, rather than ends in themselves, need to be discerned as playing the important mediating role of vehicles to a better understanding of the faith of our people in their daily struggles for life.

Alejandro García-Rivera, alumnus of our Ph.D. program at LSTC and presently associate professor of systematic theology at the Jesuit School of Theology in Berkeley, produced a creative study on the power of the religious imagination and the profound wisdom of popular Christianity by examining the devotion to San Martín de Porres of marginalized sectors of society. In his introduction to this publication, Robert Schreiter describes the author's contribution to current research in postcolonial studies:

> In contemporary postcolonial writing, formerly subjugated peoples are trying to reconstruct their identities, not simply by imagining a precolonial past, but by coming to terms with the many strands of culture in which they participate. With the unprecedented migration of peoples around the planet, as well as the impact of global communication technologies and circulation of cultural images in music and video, nearly everyone everywhere is part of a great cultural churning. This creolization or hybridization of cultures undercuts long-held assumptions about cultures being relatively enclosed, integrated wholes. García-Rivera adds to that discussion with his expanded concept of mestizaje, especially to the role of human agency as it encounters the power of the conqueror.[7]

H. Robinson-Hammerstein (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1989), 141–71.

[5] Orlando O. Espín, *The Faith of the People: Theological Reflections on Popular Catholicism* (New York: Orbis Books, 1997).

[6] Espín, "The State of U.S. Latino/a Theology," 34–35. "The rites, beliefs and symbols commonly associated with popular Christianity are *not,* in and of themselves, what is important in this religious universe: rather, they are like doors through which we may sense the faith of our people and their daily struggles for life. Because of this, some Latino/a theologians have argued that popular Christianity is a source for an authentically Latino/a theology." Espín, "The State of U.S. Latino/a Theology" (p. 35).

[7] Alejandro García-Rivera, *St. Martín de Porres: The "Little Stories" and the Semiotics of Culture* (New York: Orbis Books, 1995), xiv.

I want to move these efforts forward by exploring the historical and theological significance of three stories taken from the Lutheran mission in Puerto Rico. These stories are produced partly by integrating the witness of Lutheran missionaries and testimonies of North American and Puerto Rican church leaders, but mostly by the attempt to recover the experience and beliefs of those early Puerto Rican converts emerging from traditionally underrepresented communities and sectors of society. My goal is to pursue and bring to light what Espín has called the "faith of the people," that is, the faith and beliefs of popular Lutheranism in the island of Puerto Rico.

First story: In search of the Messiah in the mission field

The first story takes place at the end of the nineteenth century and relates to the efforts of establishing a Lutheran church in Puerto Rico. I want to place this story in the context of a biblical narrative that has a special significance to the people of Puerto Rico—the story of the Magi from the Gospel of Matthew. The impact of this story on Puerto Ricans has been so great that for a long time, prior to the North American presence on the island, the visit of the Magi was celebrated as a national holiday.

John Shea, a popular contemporary religious speaker, points out that, throughout the history of the church, the original story of the Magi has turned into the symbolic bearer of many spiritual insights that poets, story tellers, and spiritual writers have made into volumes, in their efforts to explore its potential for witnessing to the powerful and transforming experience of God's self-revelation in history.[8] I want to continue this tradition of Christian imagination by reading the Magi story in the context of the late-nineteenth-century Lutheran mission in Puerto Rico.

G. K. Chesterton once wrote an essay on three modern Wise Men. They journeyed to a city of peace, a new Bethlehem. They wanted to enter this city and offered their gifts as passports of admission. The first put forth gold and suggested that it could buy the pleasures of the earth. The second, instead of frankincense, brought the modern scent of chemistry, a scent with the power to drug the mind, seed the soil, and control the population. The third brought myrrh in the shape of a split atom. It was the symbol of death for anyone who opposed the way of peace. When they arrived at the palace of peace, they met St. Joseph. He refused them entrance. They protested, "What more could we possibly need to assure peace? We have the means to provide affluence, control nature, and destroy enemies." St. Joseph whispered in the ear of each individually. They went away sad.

This tale is a critique of contemporary wisdom. The Wise Men come with the benefits of wealth and technology, and they think that those assets will bring peace. The real problem is not what the modern Wise Men had brought but what they had forgotten. They had forgotten the child.[9]

As I have become acquainted with the nineteenth-century Protestant expansion to the Caribbean, I have seen that one of the prominent features driving the spirit of North American missionaries was their struggle against the Spanish religious and sociopolitical rule of the region.[10] In the case of

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[8] García-Rivera, xiv.

[9] John Shea, *Starlight: Beholding the Christmas Miracle All Year Long* (New York: Crossroads, 1996), 128–47.

[10] Shea, *Starlight*, 131.

[10] Two major works that focus on the Protestant expansion to Puerto Rico are Daniel R. Rodríguez, *La primera evangelización norteamericana en Puerto Rico 1898–1930*

Lutheranism, this combative spirit was powerfully expressed in the life of Gustav Sigfrid Swensson. This second-year student for the ministry at Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois, whose missionary-driven initiative contributed in establishing the present Lutheran work in Puerto Rico, expressed this missionary zeal in an article written shortly after his return from the island to the United States:

> The development of the war I followed closely. Finally, Puerto Rico was ceded to the United States. I saw the Puerto Ricans as people in misery, ignorance, superstition and fatal errors. There I could see and learn what the Catholic church is and what fruits she has produced when not influenced by any other church."[11]

As the modern Wise Men in the story of Chesterton, the Protestant missionaries came to Puerto Rico to bring education, health, and a new social order to lift the standards of life of our people. The significant impact in the economic, cultural, and political life of Puerto Ricans was so impressive that it is difficult to avoid. Yet, as in the case of the modern Wise Men, these North American missionaries "forgot the child." Their passion to spread the gospel and the benefits of the Protestant nation blinded them to the fact that this process was imposed by a military rule. Their unfortunate tendency to confuse the gospel with the ideological, social, and political structure of the North American way of life did not enable them to resist the impositions and colonial interests of this military rule.

The enigmatic symbol of the child points to the missing ingredient of modern wisdom. It is not rooted in the graciousness of the divine presence. Often we let our personal interests and self-seeking motives rule, even at the expense of the well-being of others. We need to constantly be reminded that the mind, alienated from God's wisdom, is very seldom life-giving.

The hard search. The Magi were engaged in a very important search. They were in pursuit of the Messiah. Yet, they lacked precise directions and could not travel by daylight. A star led them, a tiny point in the sky. Their quest was mainly darkness and minimally light. The success of their search depended not just in their best resources but on their trust in the gracious divine initiative, coming always from the most unexpected places.

> On December 3, 1898 Gustav Sigfrid Swensson was walking along a San Juan street when a voice called out in English from the doorway of a tailor shop across the street: "Can you preach? You look like a man of God." A student for the Lutheran ministry, forced by lack of money to give up his theological education temporarily, young Mr. Swensson could rely in the affirmative—he had been doing lay preaching for several years. And he had long felt the call to be a man of God. It was his keen missionary zeal that had brought him to Puerto Rico in October. Forthwith he crossed the street and entered into a conversation that founded the Lutheran church in an island where, for four hundred years, Lutheranism had been denied the right to raise its voice and its representatives,

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(México: Ediciones borinquen, 1986), and Samuel Silva Gotay, *Protestantismo y política en Puerto Rico 1898–1930: Hacia una historia del Protestantismo Evangélico en Puerto Rico* (San Juan: Editorial de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1997). Both studies provide comprehensive bibliographical resources for this area of research.

[11] Gustav Sigfrid Swensson, "I Went to Puerto Rico," *El Testigo* (Octubre 1948), 16. The article was found among the papers of the late pastor Swensson. He wrote it shortly after his return to the United States in 1900. It was sent for publication by William G. Arbaugh.



Gustav Sigfrid Swensson

at one time, had to answer the so-called "Holy Inquisition."[12]

Searching for the Messiah has never been an easy task. For the Magi in the Gospel story, it took not just a long and costly search but the crossing of national and cultural borders and the willingness to be led, in trust, by a star and the initiative of others. The experience of Lutheran missionaries in Puerto Rico followed a similar path. The original visionary initiative of young Swensson failed to receive the support of his own denomination. Being critically short of cash, he withdrew from his college studies, borrowed money from a friend, and, upon his arrival in Puerto Rico, looked for a teaching job expecting to begin a new mission field in the island. Other North American Lutheran missionaries followed a similar self-giving ministry by giving up good and stable salaries on the mainland, risking tropical diseases, and depriving themselves and their families of many other comforts. An article narrating the early years of the Lutheran mission in Puerto Rico eloquently describes the sacrifices and resilience characteristic of these early missionaries.

> Their faith was greater than that of the Church which failed to support them, so that one of these pioneers was compelled to accept the hospitality of the United States Navy and come home on a transport because no money was forthcoming either for salary or passage. The burning words of his report awakened many to the great task which lay before our church in the new possessions of the United States, and support was secured for the missionary who remained on the field. Later on other missionaries were sent, but meager support compelled these self-sacrificing workers to hold services and to live in woefully unsuitable and Inadequate quarters. Unfalteringly they persevered, and with more adequate support in later years a work was established of which the church need not be ashamed.[13]

This was also the call to which Gabriela Cuervos,[14] Demetrio Texidor,[15] Eduardo Roig,[16] and a host of other Puerto Rican men and women responded, pioneering with their conviction and initiative new models of lay and ordained ministry throughout these 100 years of Lutheranism in Puerto Rico.

The call of the stranger. The Gospel story mentions that the Magi found the Messiah in the most unexpected place. When they arrived in Palestine, their background and common sense led them to Herod's palace. Yet, they were to find the newborn Christ in

[12] William G. Arbaugh, "Because He Looked Like a Man of God," *El Testigo* (Abril 1948), 16.

[13] Rev. Lewis R. Fox, "The Lutheran Church in Puerto Rico," *El Testigo* (Mayo 1936), 11.

[14] First Puerto Rican Lutheran missionary in the island.

[15] Along with Salustiano Hernández and Guillermo Marrero, they were the first Lutheran Puerto Ricans to be ordained in the field.

[16] First Lutheran Puerto Rican ordained to the ministry of Word and Sacrament.

Bethlehem, lying in a manger, among lowly folk, celebrating the disclosure of God's self-revelation in history.

I've always been bewildered by the scandalous nature of God's manifestation in our midst; a presence that, following the witness of Scriptures, takes place in the least expected places. Luther's narrative of the reaction of the Wise Men upon finding the newborn Jesus is illuminating:

> Let us observe how these Wise Men took no offense at the mean state of the Babe and his parents that we also may not be offended in the mean state of our Neighbor but rather see Christ in him, since the kingdom of Christ is to be found among the lowly and despised, in persecution, misery and the holy cross... Those who seek Christ anywhere else, find him not. The Wise Men discovered him not at Herod's court, nor with the high priests, not in the great city Jerusalem, but in Bethlehem, in the stable, with lowly folk, with Mary and Joseph. In a word, they found him where one could least expect it."[17]

Swensson had a similar shocking experience as he went along in his task of establishing a Lutheran mission in Puerto Rico:

> It happened that on the 3rd of December, 1898, when I was walking home from one of my classes that coming up Sol street an English Negro from Jamaica was standing in the window at number 87 and as he beheld my insignificant being passing by he said to me, 'How do you do! You look like a man of God. Can't you preach?' I stopped and returned greetings and although the Negro, with whom I was not acquainted, did not look very dignified, yet I advanced toward him and with a blush on my face such as I never felt before.... After I conversed with Mr. Browne, for that was the Negro's name, I promised him to come again on the morrow, Sunday, and conduct a meeting at 9:30 AM. Sunday, the 4th of December, 1898, came, and the 1st Protestant meeting was held in San Juan. In the morning about 8 attended and in the evening about 30 officers, soldiers and English speaking Negroes.[18]

In establishing the foundations of the Lutheran mission in Puerto Rico, this young and enthusiastic lay missionary from Swedish-American background, as well as the men and women that followed, had to overcome the prejudices and biases of their epoch and be willing to be led by God's messenger, an African Caribbean tailor, who provided the location, recruited the people, and identified the preacher to hold the first Protestant service in the city of San Juan.[19] This is how the Lutheran mission was established in the island of Puerto Rico.

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[17] Quoted in Roland Bainton, *The Martin Luther Christmas Book* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1948), 64. This section is taken from one of Luther's sermons: "The Gospel for the Festival of the Epiphany, Matthew 2:1–12 (1527)," *Luther's Works*, vol. 52, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1955), 159–286.

[18] Swensson, "I Went to Puerto Rico," 16. In my studies on the Lutheran missionary expansion to Puerto Rico, I owe a special debt of gratitude to Rev. Ronald Will for enriching my research with a number of important documents sent to me for the celebration of the centennial of Lutheranism in Puerto Rico. One document written by Arbaugh after he visited with Pastor Swensson in Detroit, Michigan, in 1948 argues that (1) it was in November, about a month after Swensson's arrival in San Juan, that he was confronted by Mr. Browne; (2) Mr. Browne's tailor shop was at 11 Luna street; (3) while the exact date of the Lutheran service in Puerto Rico is uncertain, Arbaugh favors as most probable the date of November 11, 1898. Arbaugh, "Gustav Sigfrid Swensson and the Puerto Rico Lutheran Mission" (essay written March 22, 1948, and mimeographed for distribution at Frederick Lutheran Church, St. Croix, Virgin Islands, during the 1960s).

[19] The name of this tailor was John Christopher Owen Browne, a Jamaican Negro

Second story: Breaking the mold

The second story takes place early in the twentieth century, at the time of the emergence of Puerto Rican men and women eager to play a leadership role in further developing the Lutheran mission and ministry in the island.

On February 1, 2001, I had the privilege of preaching at the concluding service of the second celebration of the Evaristo-Falcó Esteves' lecture series in Puerto Rico at San Marcos Lutheran Church in the city of Guaynabo. This service also served for the installation of Ms. Carmen Rabell as Executive Director of El Centro Luterano de formación teológica José D. Rodríguez (Lutheran Center for Theological Formation José D. Rodríguez). The center, which LSTC helped establish and continues to support, plays a significant role in the theological education of lay people and candidates for a variety of ministries in the church, the continuing education of pastors, and witnessing to the relevance of the Lutheran legacy in the Caribbean and Latin America. I used this opportunity to reflect on the role of indigenous leaders and the challenges they faced in developing the Lutheran mission in Puerto Rico.

The biblical text for the sermon was Luke 4:21–30. This reading provides a description of the beginning of Jesus' ministry in Nazareth, at a time when he reveals the nature and extent of his mission, thus suffering the rejection of those offended by the radical inclusiveness of the gospel. What captured my attention in this text was its description of the radical inclusive nature of the power of the gospel. Not only is this incident paradigmatic of Jesus' life and ministry, but it is also a reminder that God's grace is never subject to the limitations and boundaries of any nation, church, group, or race. Those who would exclude others thereby exclude themselves. Human beings may be instruments of God's grace for others, but we are never free to set limits on who may receive that grace. Throughout history, the gospel has always been more radically inclusive than any group, denomination, or church. We are called to break the patterns of prejudice, racism, and injustice that set people apart, to struggle for a witness that may show the radical inclusiveness in the power of the gospel.[20]

Francisco Molina, a native Puerto Rican pastor and writer, captured the popular celebration and support for the struggle of those native leaders who pioneered the Lutheran mission in Puerto Rico in a delightful and compelling poem. The poem tells the story of three young men whose candid and faithful yearnings led them to pursue a lifelong quest. As they moved forward in their mission, they confronted a sorceress who tried to dissuade them from their journey. "Don't you know," she said, "the negative consequences of your quest? Give it up, it's not worth it." They replied, "We are willing to pay the price. It's our choice and we want to carry on." Again she tried to discourage them, saying, "Don't you know that when the going gets rough, you'll be disregarded and abandoned by those who now support you?" They answered, "Our convictions will not tremble, for we know well what we are up to." "Fools!" She replied, "yours is an unfortunate quest. You still have time to turn back.

(African Caribbean) of Protestant background who had been in St. Thomas where he formed a decided liking for the Lutheran Church. On learning that Mr. Swensson was a Lutheran he offered his tailor shop as a meeting place for services. Arbaugh, "Because He Looked Like a Man of God," 16.

[20] *The New Interpreter's Commentary on the Bible*, 106.

Give it up, it's not worth it." But the three young men stood their ground. "It's too late to turn around," they said. "Our call is from up high and we are moving on forward." The author ends the poem with the following remarks. "They were 3 courageous young and good men. One has already given account of his stewardship. We hope to have the other 2 with us for a long time. We pray God to have a greater number like them among us."[21]

One of the most intriguing chapters in the history of the North American Protestant expansion in Puerto Rico deals with the challenge posed by the emerging Puerto Rican leaders. For most North American missionaries the idea of integrating these leaders in the missionary project consisted, first of all, in having them assist with congregational tasks or respond to the social needs of the people in the island.[22] The main role of indigenous leaders was to provide the support for North American missionaries to carry out their pastoral ministry. An incident in the history of the Lutheran mission in Puerto Rico places this Protestant missionary experience in a wider perspective, if we are willing to discern it in light of the reading of Luke's Gospel mentioned above.

To prepare capable and competent indigenous leaders, the missionaries established in 1908 a seminary located at Divino Salvador Lutheran Church, in the city of Cataño. According to Arbaugh, the lay preachers had been under the impression that their studies at the seminary in Cataño would eventually prepare them as candidates for ordination. Living costs had risen sharply and had seriously aggravated the chronic financial plight of the workers and of their families. The North American missionaries, on the other hand, had selected three young men to train and instruct them at the "seminary for native helpers,"

Throughout history, the gospel has always been more radically inclusive than any group, denomination, or church.

with the goal of making them efficient collaborators in the missionary work. The missionaries were obviously thinking of their immediate needs and not of implications as to the future status of the student assistants.[23]

In following this procedure our missionaries were doing exactly what most other Protestant missions were doing. They probably did not seriously consider the possibility that the "helpers" would eventually

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[21] Francisco Molina, "Hace muchos años: Para Sergio Cobián y Guillermo E. Marrero," in *Ciudad allende el alba* (Dorado: Sínodo Luterano del Caribe, 1999), 106–8.

[22] For this purpose the early Puerto Rican leaders served as readers of the Bible in the worship services, lay congregational workers and preachers, etc.

[23] This is shown by the practical but elementary course of study provided. Ironically, three-fourths of the preaching and nearly all the catechizing and other pastoral work was performed by the lay assistants, who were not permitted to perform such pastoral functions as the administration of the sacraments, confirmation, and marriage. In addition, the salaries of the lay preachers were never sufficient to allow their families a decent standard of living. Arbaugh, "Fred W. Lindke and the era of Transition: Puerto Rico Lutheran history from 1918 to 1928," *El Testigo* (Enero 1949), 13–16.

stand in line for ordination. They did not stop to think that the situation in 1918 was not in harmony with the best Lutheran practice. At this time the Lutheran mission was mostly focused among the poor sectors of the Puerto Rican society, but there was little effort to develop a more rigorous educational program for the preparation of native helpers to work in this setting. The consequences of this attitude soon followed. The first of these students, Manuel Hidalgo, left the work after two years; the next two students, Lorenzo Hurtado and Pascual López, left within one year.[24]

To be sure, we need to acknowledge the great contribution of North American Protestant missionaries for the proclamation and expansion of the gospel in Puerto Rico. At the same time, we need to point out that this expression of the gospel was strongly influenced by the prejudice in the dominant culture of their country of origin, against our people in the mission field. Swensson, to whom the establishment of Lutheranism in Puerto Rico has been attributed by many, once mentioned in a published article that "I saw the Puerto Ricans as a people in misery, ignorance, superstition and fatal errors. . . ."[25]

As we learned from the reading of Luke, Jesus' proclamation of the gospel cannot be restricted to a specific nation, culture, race, gender, or sexual preference. We are called to witness to God's gracious initiative to all peoples. For this reason we need to resist the temptation to limit not just our understanding of the recipients of this gift but also our perceptions of those that become the most effective vehicles of this gracious divine initiative among us.

Arbaugh states that eventually the native lay preachers studying at the seminary in Cataño were able to successfully complete the requirements established for ordination, and, "In the presence of a large congregation at San Pablo Lutheran Church in San Juan, Demetrio Texidor, Guillermo E. Marrero and Salustiano Hernández were Ordained to the ministry of the gospel on Sunday July 10th, 1926."[26]

Both the installation of Rabell as executive director of El Centro Luterano de Formación Teológica at the Caribbean Synod on February 1, 2001, and Molina's poem celebrate the continuous and collective effort of people from Europe, North, Central and South America, Puerto Rico, and many other countries, in their faithful contribution of their leadership and gifts to the call of expanding the borders of God's reign in the context of the Lutheran mission in Puerto Rico.[27]

Third story: Doña Juana Díaz and the contribution of Puerto Rican women lay workers

The third and final story points to the contribution of Puerto Rican women in advancing the Lutheran mission in the island. The role played by these women in the mission and ministry of the church was, from the beginning, very significant. As I mentioned earlier, the conviction, resilience, and ini-

[24] Arbaugh, 16.

[25] Swensson, "I went to Puerto Rico," 16.

[26] Arbaugh, 7.

[27] My perception of the reasons leading to the decision to ordain these native candidates points to the collective contribution of the following elements: the perseverance and determination of native candidates to request ordination; the vision and creative initiatives of church leaders (Zenan M. Corbé, B. F. Hankey, Hans Naether, and Gustav K. Huf) and two Philadelphia seminarians (Eduardo Roig and Arbaugh) in support of this request to meet the needs for additional partners in ministry for the missionary expansion of Lutheranism in Puerto Rico. Arbaugh, 14.

tiative of these native pioneers served to establish creative models of lay and ordained ministry throughout these 100 years of Lutheranism in Puerto Rico.

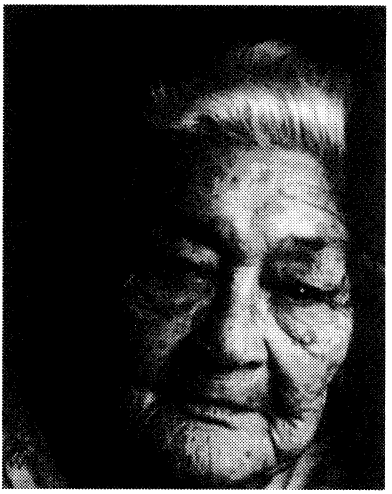
There is a song in the new Spanish hymnal produced by the ELCA for its Spanish-speaking constituency in the U.S. and Puerto Rico that brings to my mind some important dimensions of the contribution of these women. Its title, "Dios hoy nos llama a un momento nuevo" (God's calling now is for a new experience) suggests the type of vision and commitment expressed by these women as they accepted their call to ministry. The hymn is a celebration of the foresight and stimulating witness of these faithful leaders, compelling us to join them today in moving forward the transformative power of the gospel.

God's calling now is for a new experience,
to walk along with God's people.
It's time to transform that which has
no future;
our separation and loneliness
will render barren our efforts.

So, come,
Join us and let's be together with others,
You are very important.
Therefore come,
join us in our circle of togetherness,
your presence is very significant,
so come.

It's useless to believe that things are easy
we are encircled by death-producing
forces
which bring us pain, sadness
and desolation,
that's why we need to strengthen
our union.

The power source that brings life today
empowers us with its graciousness
inviting us to join efforts in sharing
God's love with others.[28]



Doña Juana Díaz

The first Puerto Rican catechetical class prepared by Swensson and confirmed on April 15, 1900, by the first ordained missionaries trained at the Lutheran Seminary in Philadelphia, Rev. B. F. Hankey and Rev. H. F. Richards, consisted of four young women, Gabriela Cuervos, Eufemia Flores, Belén Martínez, and Pascuala Pantojas, from whom Cuervos emerged as the first Puerto Rican missionary. She worked for seven years before being sent to Milwaukee by the Ladies' Home and Foreign Mission Society for training. She returned to her position in Puerto Rico in June 1906 and continued her service in the church. Her tasks comprised teaching,[29] caring for the sick and those in

[28] Translated paraphrase is mine.

[29] Christian education is one of the most important areas where the impact of the Protestant missionary enterprise was felt in Puerto Rico. Dr. José R. Irizarry, my colleague at LSTC, wrote a doctoral dissertation highlighting the contributions of two distinguished Puerto Rican educators/theologians who impacted several generations of pastors and teachers in Puerto Rico and Latin America. See Jose R. Irizarry, Praxis e

For the first three years of her work with the church in Puerto Rico Gabriela Cuervos received no salary.

need, leading Sunday school and evangelism programs, working with youth, elderly, and women, and other church-related activities. Upon her retirement, the missionary society that sponsored her work and studies abroad provided the funds for her residence.[30]

What caught my attention while being acquainted with her story was that for the first three years of her work with the church in Puerto Rico she received no salary. She was not alone in this predicament. Many of the Protestant missionaries from the United States had a similar experience. It is common knowledge that Swensson just had a five-dollar bill with some change when he arrived in Puerto Rico in October of 1898. Yet he had been promised assistance that later supported the work in the island. His income as an English-language teacher in Puerto Rico also served to support him and his work until the arrival of financial assistance sent by Lutheran bodies in the mainland. The situation of native Puerto Rican workers was different. They did not have those additional resources.

While I don't remember ever having a conversation with Cuervos, I do recall the contribution of many other women who followed in her ministry. Doña Juana Díaz Sardén offered one such powerful testimony. During the early 1950s, my father accepted the call as pastor of El Divino Salvador Lutheran Church in the city of Cataño. The church's lay worker at the time was doña Juana, as we fondly called her. Doña Juana was an awesome and terrific leader. She was everywhere doing everything. On Sundays she led the Sunday school program and later sat in one of the pews at the end of the sanctuary, where she took attendance for the worship service. During the week she visited those absent and kept my father and the rest of the congregational leaders informed of the physical, spiritual, and emotional needs of the community. She never failed to attend a worship service or any of the church's activities. She served people in the church and the community at large. She was their friend, confidante, and advocate. She lived a humble life with her spouse and six children in an apartment in the *caserío,* a location equivalent to the public housing projects in big cities like New York or Chicago.

I have been told that once she requested funds from the church to pay for health insurance. At that time health insurance costs ran about $60. For a while, the church refused her petition. In spite of this incident she continued her work faithfully and with enthusiasm. I've always wondered the reason for the church leaders' refusal of her request. My familiarity with the history of the North American Protestant expansion in Puerto Rico leads me to suggest that, rather than focusing on the individual intentions of these church leaders, we might be

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Identidad: Discourse and Practice of Puerto Rican Religious Education in the Work of Domingo Marrero and Angel Mergal (1935–1960), Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University and Garrett Theological Seminary, 2000).

[30] "Doña Gabriela Cuervos Vda. De Marks," *El Testigo* (Abril 1936), 2.

better served by exploring this matter in the broader framework of the economic, political, and ideological context of this Protestant expansion to Puerto Rico.

Recent studies show that while the extension of North American Protestantism in the Caribbean accompanied the military and commercial expansion of the U.S. in the region, it also contributed to the ideological goal of *civilizing* this non-Protestant world. An imperialistic theology based on the writings of Josiah Strong was intentionally developed to connect the twofold intention of the Puritan, Protestant providential vision to civilize and proclaim the gospel in these lands.[31] Lutheran missionaries shared this common vision. An additional consequence of this religious ideological influence was the disposition of Puerto Rican leaders to internalize this foreign and onerous disposition. The sexism characteristic of Spanish, North American, and Puerto Rican cultures at that time aggravated the prejudice against the standing of Puerto Rican women. These and other related elements provide a better understanding of the decision of these church leaders to reject doña Juana's request.

I faced a similar experience when, during my studies for the doctoral degree at LSTC, I solicited from representatives of the synod the opportunity of serving as interim pastor in one of the local Latino congregations. While this incident took place long before the organization of the ELCA, the response to my request continues to disturb me. I was affirmed and supported in my petition but also warned that, given the condition of poverty of many Latinos in the *barrio,* I should expect lower pay for my work in the parish. This was probably the common predicament of those choosing to minister with other communities with lower income.

There is a story in Mark's Gospel that helps me reflect on this issue. It's the story of the widow's gift (Mark 12:41–44). I am convinced that any ecclesial body committed to expanding its mission among ethnic communities whose social and economic history has been characterized by exploitation and racism will need to engage in a thoughtful reflection of economic models more in tune with the gospel than with the fundamental premises of a market or money-making economy. The story in the Gospel of Mark serves as a resource for Jesus to share with his followers an important teaching. Jesus' understanding of the widow's conduct subverts the whole notion of traditional religious economy. In contrast to the sterility of the dominant religion, which tends to give priority to matters of money, the poor widow demonstrates her strength and true faith in God. With God, all things are possible. God's loving mercy grants us that which we don't even dare imagine. It makes a way where there is no way. The future belongs to God who has dwelled among us, making available an enduring and unparalleled power. We are called to live by faith in God's power and promise. I am convinced this was the source for the vision and witness of Gabriela Cuervos, doña Juana, and the host of Puerto Rican women that followed in their footsteps.

Concluding remarks

At the beginning of my lecture I aimed to provide a reading *in Spanish* of the expansion of Lutheranism in Puerto Rico. My efforts have incorporated the collective expressions of stories, homiletical reflections,

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[31] Samuel Silva Gotay, *Protestantismo y Política en Puerto Rico 1898–1930: Hacia una historia del protestantismo evangélico en Puerto Rico* (San Juan: Editorial de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1997), 53–101.

One of the most important learnings is to avoid a naive or romantic approach in reading this story.

visual images, and music, references to first sources, and other documents, in furnishing the testimony of the protagonists of this story. The goal was to render a language closer to the vernacular of the people at the margins. They are the ones who can best judge the success of my labor.

I conclude with the following reflections. First, this study constitutes just a preliminary analysis of a topic requiring further and more probing examination. I consider my contribution to this task not that of an expert but of a devoted student with a great deal of enthusiasm and curiosity to continue to pursue it. I hope to have stimulated enough interest for others to join in this venture. I am committed to continue exploring this topic, hoping that an increasing number of students will come to our programs of studies to further pursue this area of research.

Second, I am confident that this reading in Spanish, or in the vernacular of the Puerto Rican people, has taught us something significant about the missionary experience of Lutheranism in the island. One of the most important learnings is to avoid a naive or romantic approach in reading this story, or, for that matter, history as a whole. It is clear that traditional efforts to stress the heroism of North American missionaries, demeaning the dignity and contribution of Puerto Rican leaders, is based on the limitations and prejudice of those telling the story. To be sure, an uncritical description of the role of native Puerto Rican leaders is equally problematic. A more faithful account will describe the ambiguities, failures, and promise of all these characters.

In assessing the continuing significance of the Christian mission in North America since the sixteenth century, the Rt. Rev. Steven Charleston, a citizen of the Choctaw Nation and currently President and Dean of the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Mass., points to the transformative power of the gospel as producing the legitimate faithful exchange among peoples of different cultures as they encounter each other.[32] This transformative power of the gospel was then,[33] and continues to be today, one of the most important components of the church's ministry and mission.

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[32] Steven Charleston, "The Good, the Bad and the New: The Native American Missionary Experience," *Dialog* 40:2 (Summer 2001), 99–104.

[33] For Charleston, many Jesuit missionaries provided an eloquent model for this witness in their openness to the spiritual and cultural influences of their host communities during their ministry with tribes in North and South America during the Iberian conquest of the sixteenth century. "Many Jesuit missionaries, for example, adapted to the culture of tribes in the United States, Canada and Uruguay. While these Jesuits clearly represented the European Catholic perspective, they were open to the spiritual and cultural influences of their host communities. Given the age in which this occurred, even their partial success was a notable one and proof that the ideal is possible. In fact, it was the degree to which these Christian missionaries were able to blend into the Native American context that eventually caused Rome to abruptly end their activities and seal off the exchange before it could take root and expand. Why? Because while the indigenous people were being

A similar point is made by Luis N. Rivera Pagán when he argues that a careful assessment of Pauline theology may lead to what he calls Paul's Copernican revolution in the biblical conception of divine providence. For Rivera Pagán, Paul begins a significant shift toward a multi-ethnic openness to the gospel in Acts 28:28 where he states, "Therefore I want you to know that God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen" (NIV).

This theological perspective, which deviates from a Greek or Jewish ethnocentric one,[34] does not require the denial of one's own culture and traditions for the sake of the church's mission.[35] What it does demand is the giving up of the traditional distinction between "civilized nations," with its prerogatives and privileges of dominion, and "primitive people," destined for subjection to the former ones. This is what Edward W. Said calls the fundamental ontological distinction between the West and the rest of the World."[36] When addressing the relationship between culture and the practice of faith, we need to acknowledge that each culture makes its own specific contribution, that which describes its identity and historical specificity.[37] Granted this framework of interpretation, all the characters in the stories I shared in my study play, in their unique way, a significant role in witnessing to the power of the gospel, moving forward the Lutheran mission in Puerto Rico.

Vítor Westhelle has argued that the most valuable contribution of Protestantism in Latin America lies in witnessing to what Luther understood as *teologia crucis.* According to Westhelle, Luther chose the use of the expression "theologian of the cross" instead of "theology of the cross" to emphasize the practical nature of this notion and avoid confusing it with a doctrinal locus. The reformer's intention was not to conceptualize another theological topic but

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transformed by the Jesuits, the Jesuits were being transformed by them in return. That was something a racist church could not tolerate. Again, the problem was not with missionary activity as such . . . the 'problem' was (and is) with the perennial undercurrent of racism that denies us all an opportunity to be missionaries to one another." Charleston, 103.

[34] For Rivera Pagán, during the philosophical golden age of Athens, the Greek term *éthnos* was used to negatively designate those outside the context of Hellenistic language and culture. The Septuagint makes the antagonistic distinction between *laós,* designating God's people, and *éthnē,* which stands for the pagan or Gentile nations. While God is described as the creator of all nations *(éthnē),* Israel is given the exclusive distinction of being God's people *(laós).* Hellenistic Judaism practiced proselytism with intensity, yet it continued and intensified the difference between *laós and éthnē.* Converts were to adopt Israel's cultic and cultural traditions. The gentile or pagan nations were destined for perpetual condemnation. Rivera Pagán, "The Word Became Flesh: Incarnation, Gospel and Culture in Latin America," in *Hope and Justice for All in the Americas: Discerning God's Mission,* ed. Oscar L. Bolioli (New York: Friendship Press, 1998), 63.

[35] Bartolomé de las Casas' effort to draw from Western Christendom the provocative Word of the gospel made possible the recovery of our faith's prophetic tradition in the context of the Spanish colonial missionary experience in these lands during the sixteenth century. In this specific matter the Spanish edition of this article corrects the English version mentioned above. Luis Rivera Pagán, "Encarnación, evangelio y culturas en América Latina," en *Diálogos y polifonías: Perspectivas y reseñas* (San Juan: Seminario Evangélico de Puerto Rico, 1999), 138.

[36] Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1993), 108.

[37] Rivera Pagán, "Encarnación, evangelio y culturas en América Latina," 137–40.

to point to theological praxis, that is, a unique form of theological reflection that emerges from and is fundamentally expressed through a liberating practice.[38] It is in this sense that the challenges and hardships experienced by those participating in the Lutheran mission in Puerto Rico, as well as their vision and enthusiasm to continue their witness driven by the transformative power of the gospel, are examples of Luther's understanding of the praxis of the theologians of the cross. The three stories I chose for this presentation focused on the contribution of Puerto Rican leaders in this witness of faith. Those interested in exploring the experience of other characters will provide additional important components of this story.

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[38] "Lo que une a la Reforma y a los movimientos de liberación en Latinoamérica y en el Caribe, es la visión escatológica, un entendimiento de la revelación, una apocalíptica que reconoce el fin y lo posee como propio, igual que como un lugar apropiado para el comienzo. Este espacio escatológico que, para los poderes representa tan solo el límite, es para los que lo habitan, aquellos que se encuentran en los márgenes, el medio donde experimentan la condenación, pero donde la liberación es una posibilidad verdadera. . . . Unidos por la experiencia de "liminalidad," de estar en el límite, tanto la Reforma, como los movimientos emancipatorios en América Latina y el Caribe, estan comprometidos a una gestión fundamental que orienta todo su esfuerzo teológico. Esta se puede expresar en la famosa definición de Lutero: *Crux sola est nostra theologia.* Westhelle, 111. Philip Ruge Jones, another alumnus of our Ph.D. program, wrote, with the valuable guidance of Westhelle as advisor, a doctoral dissertation exploring this topic as it relates to contemporary theological research, including a section examining the contributions of Hispanic/Latina theologians in the U.S. See Philip Ruge-Jones, Cross in Tensions: The Theology of the Cross as Theologico-Social Critique (Ph.D. diss., Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, 1999).

Understanding the Stranger: Aspects of Interreligious Hermeneutics

Theo Sundermeier
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What does "being a stranger" mean?

In Germany, where her father was on furlough, the little daughter of a missionary, who had been raised in Western Africa, saw some Africans at a railway station. She caught her father's hand and cried: "Look, father, there are real human persons!"

This scene focuses our attention on the question of what is familiar and what is strange. From an early age the girl was familiar with African people, with their appearance, their ways of interacting with each other. Africans represented the familiar world of her childhood. They reminded her of her home. With the words "real human persons" she connected familiarity and a sense of belonging. It need not surprise us that she did not name a distinction between the Africans and her parents, who looked quite different. Her parents *and* the African people together represent what she wanted to express. She felt at home again!

We should not overinterpret this example. It shows, however, some issues that are relevant for our question. In the moment of feeling familiar there is also contained the opposite feeling, the feeling of being strange. Strange-yet-familiar, only when related to each other do these terms convey the real question. They do not describe objective facts. They mark limits. Everything deviating from familiar situations is strange to us, while familiar situations are marked by what seems customary and close.

In Middle High German the term stranger (*Fremde*) means that person who comes from a distance. Strange is what does not belong to the well-known place of residence but comes from the outside. However, not everything far from home must be strange. In his famous definition G. Simmel[1] says: the strangers on the star Sirius do not matter to me. They are not strange to me since they are unknown to me. What is strange to me is the *close* stranger, the neighbor coming from a distance.

"Strange" is a relational term. It is defined by the relation to the opposite. A subjective element is inherent to it. Without this subjectivity something strange cannot be defined.

We can distinguish five levels in which strangeness manifests itself as opposite to familiarity.

1. The girl mentioned above spontaneously connected familiarity with the skin color and physiognomy of Africans. That is the way she reacted to the most elementary experience of strangeness or familiarity. Similarity or identity define the familiar.

[1] G. Simmel, *Soziologie. Untersuchungen über die Formen der Vergesellschaftung* (Berlin [1908] 1983).

Another skin color signals difference. This has nothing to do with racism but with the fact that originally our societies were structured homogeneously. Where homogeneity is dissolved and makes way for a more complex structure, fears arise, because an experience of strangeness is connected with appearance. It is the appearance that is remembered and makes one aware of strangeness.

2. The experience of strangeness is intensified by the sense of smell. Smells separate even more sharply than appearance does. If in horror films smells of decomposition could be brought on the screen, this kind of film would quickly disappear from TV and movie theaters. I can close my eyes, I can look away, and I can get used to the sight of the stranger. The sense of smell, however, increases the difference. It is the organ of internalization. That may have its reason in the fact that the olfactory nerves are directly connected to the central nervous system and identify strange smells as a danger. However, this is also due to the fact that the body smell is the most direct feature of a person and distinguishes him or her from every other person. Babies detect their mothers' smell as their very first impression even if they still cannot see. Through smell they learn to distinguish what is good and what does not belong to them. Smells are remembered and stick in one's mind even if the smell has passed. They evoke memories, they make limits disappear, but just as clearly they also set up limits.

3. At the emotional level *sounds* also cause feelings of strangeness, while at the phenomenal level they serve a link function. Sounds include both melodious sounds and dissonances. Dissonances can be dissolved and changed into "consonances" so that uneasiness turns into good-feeling. While strange smells cause defensive reactions, strange sounds force people to listen more sharply. If the dissonance does not end, a feeling of defensiveness may emerge secondarily, but getting used to the sound is also a possible consequence.

4. Sounds connected to foreign languages cause a lack of understanding and displeasure, but they do not cause enmity or disgust like the sense of smell. Sounds will more likely arouse somebody's curiosity to understand the foreign language. If this step is not successful, curiosity changes into indifference, an attitude which at any time can lead to curiosity, thirst for knowledge, and turning to the other one again.

Here another element of strangeness is recognizable. A foreign language is objectively strange to me if I have not studied it. Language promotes communication; it wants to be understood. One must try to learn the foreign language if one wants to communicate with the stranger, or one must put oneself on a third, common linguistic level of communication, the sign level. Understanding, however broken it may be, can be managed by looks and gestures. This presupposes a common basis of signs that make communication possible. This common ground is supported by the conviction that social life everywhere shows the same or at least similar structures. We submit ourselves to this common ground because we want to understand each other and communicate. This basic position is also necessary in the circle of acquaintances and within the family: One can only live together with other people and communicate if the given community is not constantly checked or put in question. But can common grounds really be presupposed in meeting with strangers?

5. With that we have reached a fifth level of determining the feeling of strangeness and familiarity, the social order. It is characteristic of the order in which one is

born and feels at home that one is not forced to again and again put it to the test.

Particularly people from western civilizations usually do not realize the limited validity of their implicit social knowledge. This is true especially in a time when we are used to thinking globally and to ascribing universal validity to our world of experience, particularly when the capitalist economy and the natural sciences have gained worldwide acceptance and determine the world up to the most remote settlements. How much more deeply we experience the shock, if that which is self-understood can no longer be taken for granted and is no longer valid in the private sphere, with the neighbor or with the foreign schoolfriend. If in this way the validity of the self-understood is undermined and what till now has been considered to be normal and correct, beautiful, pleasant, and good is restricted in its importance or even called in question, then more than aesthetic and ethical rules of knowledge are at stake. Then culture as a whole, also one's personal and social identity, seems to be threatened. This feeling frightens people and causes hostile reactions.

It is not necessary to delve into the close net of social relations so that all areas in which experience of strangeness can threaten human self-esteem are mentioned, but those areas shall be picked out which are located in the center of culture and which are occasionally considered as its bond: religion and the arts. I will focus on religion, and mention the arts only in passing.

In the encounter of religions these problems that come to light in the encounter of cultures are reflected in a concentrated form, perhaps still more biting, painful, and aggressive, because in religion the heart of humans is touched.

Although the linguistic derivation of the term *religio* is disputed, in fact the term

From tribal religions we can learn how closely religion and society have been connected and have influenced each other.

absolutely confirms the point: Religion means "bond"—it binds the hearts of people, it forms their life, determines their ethic, and influences their aesthetics. "Bond" means the bond not only with God but traditionally with the society, too, and the society also influences retrospectively religion itself. The increasing individualization and subjectivization of religion is a development of modern times and in some respects is part of the nature of the Christian faith itself. From tribal religions (e.g., Shintoism was once one of these), which still are something like the "basic religiosity" of all religions, we can learn how closely religion and society have been connected and have influenced each other. Religions determine people's "way of life" and rule out other structures of life. Religions bind people inwardly and set limits toward the outside and against other people. They offer people a home, give them instruction, offer counseling, and in times of crisis catch them in a net of spiritual and ritual help so that they can overcome the crises in a community. But they banish those who leave the religious and social basic agreement.

The world religions link the believer to a declared creed to which truth is attributed

and which expresses the truth. Thus they cognitively strengthen this basic binding structure of religion. By this confession to one truth other truths are virtually demoted to untruth.

The difference between what is familiar and what is strange is deepened and cemented by the encounter of religions. Because participation in worship services is not permitted to a person of the other faith, the lifestyle of the other person, his ethical behavior or his ideological convictions remain strange and inapproachable in the end. The partition walls are thick. What should connect, religion, causes separation. Its signs and symbols which strengthen the cohesion inside are at the same time a means of exclusion. The cross on a house excludes Muslims because they are not members of the church. Conversely, Christians know that the call of the muezzin is directed not to them but to Muslims. On different university campuses in Africa thick trees had to be planted between the church and the mosque because "the half-moon is offended by the sight of the cross." The religious symbols become symbols of separation. They create their own worlds, their own space, their own field of relations which gives confidence to the members but signals to the other ones that they are not part of it.

In the cultural or aesthetic area art has an effect similar to religion. It is to such a great extent part of the whole culture and determined by the respective religion and society that art also marks the difference from other cultures and at the same time concisely expresses the inner religious awareness of life.

Bounds of art are more permeable than those of religion, however. Tribal tatoos, for example, the basis of all abstract ornamentation and wood carving of Africa, make tribal membership visible and in their various meanings are only understandable to the initiated. This applies similarly to masks.

Chinese art precisely reflects the conception of the worldview of the Chinese people, which is characterized by Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. It has preserved its nature though the centuries just as the corresponding religious prevailing mood did. Only radical socialism has superseded previous aesthetics and introduced a uniform socialist style.

It is a result of secularization and the separation of culture from religion that our own art tradition shows such rich possibilities of variation; however, this is also legitimate and embedded in the idea of incarnation. The Christian message wants to have influence on a given culture and "incarnate" there, so that the message is formed by the influence of the surrounding world.

Islam has another vision. The prohibition of images, or iconoclasm, means that calligraphy has become the central stylistic means of expression of Islam, but other artistic modes of expression, apart from architecture, could not develop, such as dramatic art, painting, and tragedy in the art of poetry. If Muslims partake in these areas, they must reckon with a charge of heresy, which can lead to legal indictments.

In the following we investigate whether religion can serve as a means of connecting elements, changing strange things into familiar ones. First, however, we must ask how our culture met the stranger until now. We summarize the ways of encountering the other in three models.

Encountering the stranger

We distinguish three basic ways of encountering the other.

1. The alterity model. The stranger is the enemy. The residential area or the country in which the tribe lives is home, or the protection zone which grants safety. Out-

side one's own territory is enemy territory. Whoever meets a stranger there must regard him as a potential enemy. Here, in the unsettled area, the Latin saying is valid: "*homo homini lupus*," "man is man's wolf." For the pre-Islamic Arabs the legal maxim was valid: It is not an act of murder to kill somebody in the desert. Since outside the home territory, enemy was always also a potential slave, the Ashanti called all people living north of them (the sea is in the south) "slaves." From Hegel, who defines the meeting with the other as a fight between master and slave, we learn how deeply this fundamental attitude has been preserved in our culture till today. Victory or defeat, to subjugate or to suffer subjugation and lose national and state identity, this attitude that if you are not for us you are against us (Freund-Feind-Denken), determined to a high degree the relationship between the European states until the nineteenth century.

2. The trader model. At all times and in all societies the traders have been excepted from this fundamental enmity toward the stranger. Traders are considered as an addition, as a resource. We need the trader. We need him as a foreigner because he offers those goods which are not produced in our country and must be imported. The foreign trader is accepted, but only partially integrated. Definite residential areas are assigned to him. He has restricted rights only. In tribal societies and in the Middle Ages he could not marry a native woman. This ban was intended to prevent native families from receiving preferential treatment because of loyalty to the trader's family. His exterritoriality guaranties the reliability of his trade. For exactly this reason kings, princes, and even judges employed bodyguards, who had to be and remain foreigners. This was the reason for the pope's establishing the Swiss Guard. Because they do not have any relationships to the native population, these foreigners are loyal to the prince. He guarantees them protection. The consequent ghetto situation is accepted by both parties. In times of unrest and danger, however, foreigners are easily branded as scapegoats and the ill-humor of the population is directed toward them, which shows the latent danger in which they live.

Here in Germany this kind of functional or partial integration exists to this day. With us nobody is bothered about a Japanese colony in Düsseldorf as long as the Japanese observe their special status and do not give up their ties with Japan. Turks are welcome as foreign workers as long as they keep their orientation to Turkey and return there. As guests they are welcome, but the permanent right of residence, which has other rights a consequence, meets with disapproval. The foreign trader who wants to become a local citizen will lose the good will he enjoyed before. He turns into a competitor and loses his special status. What made him attractive before—trading in strange goods and his own strangeness—now is felt as a threat.

3. The equality model. A third kind of encountering the stranger negates the differences. It is founded on the conviction that all people are equal, think equally, trade equally, and finally have or should have the same ethical moral concepts.

This idea is held in psychology. Strange people as such do not exist; they are always the repressed self. Xenophobia is regarded as repressed or projected self-hate. This attitude suggests a boundless tolerance. Since, however, it is based on the presumption that strange people do not present any real alterity or otherness but only reflect one's own being, tolerance comes up against limiting factors as soon as this basic assumption is called into question and the

stranger proves to be essentially different.

Are the differences levelled out in this model of the meeting with the stranger? Mostly they are, but frequently mixtures arise, as we can see in the New Age philosophy of life. In the field of religion an artificial, synthetic syncretism is recognizable, the contours and inner logic of which are seldom reasonable. Arbitrariness prevails. The other religions serve one's own design and depending on circumstances are used like a self-service store or a storage room if one is weary of a matter of ritual or thinks one no longer needs it because it has done its job.

Hermeneutical levels

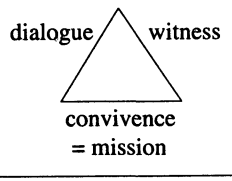
What methodical consequences for an interreligious hermeneutic do we draw from our considerations?

1. Understanding always requires that I really become aware of the other religion as another or different religion and respect its otherness. All the psychological efforts—recently en vogue—regarding the other as being repressed, have no place here. On the first level of approach toward the other religion and culture its alterity must be perceived. The first step requires distance. It is a matter of appropriate perception and description of the phenomena. As in art-historical interpretation, great importance is attached to grasping the phenomenological level as objectively as possible, i.e. without judgment or prejudice. At first we must refrain from any verdict.

2. At the second level of hermeneutical approach toward other religions we need to make up for this deficiency caused by distancing. The phenomena exactly perceived and grasped from a distance must be described at the second level (the sign level) in their own, special context. This can be done only by participatory observation, a methodical demand that has become a matter of course in anthropological research today, but also for the scientific recording of foreign religions and cultures it must be raised to the level of a *conditio sine qua non.*

Whoever wants to enter more deeply into another religion and culture must take part in its rites, because rites are the architecture of a religion. Its signs must be perceived, in turn as objectively as possible, now, however, with sympathy and the will to enter from the sign level into that of symbolism.

3. The symbolism of a religion—its rites, its teachings, its practice of creating community (*Vergemeinschaftungspraxis*) —must be understood on the third, symbol level. This is only possible if one gets involved in the other religion and exposes one's self to its fascination, at least for a moment. This is no longer a matter of participatory observation but of compassionate experience. On this level the area of experience is important, but so is the interpretation of the religion's texts. Now comparisons may or even must be drawn. By comparative text interpretation the symbols disclose themselves, and by such comparison, which records similarity and difference, they become understandable and can be grasped, and communication becomes possible. As with the interpretation of a work of art, one is concerned on this third level with the inner meaning. Here religion must be seen in its totality and its inner logic mastered from the inside. As far as possible the other religion is perceived from the perspective of its adherents. It is indisputable that limits arise even here. However, to give up too early would mean to interrupt too soon the process of understanding. The perspective of the others, of course, is not the only valid criterion of understanding, as we know from anthropology and also by semiotics. For a long time the only aim of

THE PERSON STUDYING ANOTHER RELIGION	SUBJECTIVE ATTITUDE	OBJECTIVE COMPREHENSION	LEVEL OF ACTION
1. phenomenological level	Avoid judgment	descriptive analysis	perception from distance
2. level of signs	Sympathy	contextualization	participatory observation
3. level of symbols	Empathy	comparative interpretation	(partial) identification
4. level of relevance	*a)* Respect	translation/ transfer towards us	convivence
	b) Temptation	the question for truth is asked	

text interpretation was to comprehend the intention of the text with the eyes of the author; this must not be the only question. The members of an ethnic group cannot give the only authentic interpretation of their rites. Comparison with other religions can develop dimensions of symbolism that are not conscious to the participants and must be rescued from oblivion. We know that an artist is not always the right and best interpreter of his work; however, we cannot do without him. So also we cannot do without the interpretation of the members of the religion concerned. They must be able to recognize themselves in the external representation and feel themselves taken seriously.[2]

4. With this third step both the art-historical interpretation and the scientific recording of another religion come to an end.[3] Just as in matters of intercultural and interreligious hermeneutics, we have to enter now a fourth level, the relevance level. Now the intercultural and the interreligious hermeneutics must go their separate ways! At this level intercultural hermeneutics demand the virtue of respect; and its aim is to make possible the peaceful living together of various cultures and the people influenced by them in such a way that every group maintains its own integrity and yet is prepared to learn from the other and to help the other.[4] In interreligious hermeneutics the relevance level deals with another problem. Here the real turning point of understanding is where the other religion, with which I have been involved with sympathy and empathy, is becoming a temptation for me. A long time ago the Hamburg missiolo-

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[2] Similar P. Antes, "Theologie und Religionswissenschaft. Methodische Anmerkungen zu Nähe und Distanz." In *Wege der Theologie: an der Schwelle zum 3. Jahrtausend* (FS H. Waldenfels) (Paderborn 1996), 313–24 at 315.

[3] Compare E. Panofsky, "Zum Problem der Beschreibung und Inhaltsdeutung von Werken der bildenden Kunst," *Logos* 1932, 103–19, R. van Straten, *Einführung in die Ikonographie* (Berlin 1989).

[4] This I have described in detail in my hermeneutic *Den Fremden verstehen* (Göttingen 1996), 155ff. and 183ff.

gist Prof. W. Freytag named this as a criterion for understanding another religion. At this level one's own previous religious existence is challenged. In intercultural hermeneutics aesthetic and ethical questions of mastering common life are concerned; religious hermeneutics, however, asks the truth question here. Everything determining my faith is placed on the test-bed. The other religion becomes a call, an inquiry to my own faith, an appeal to decide where I belong.

Now, one could ask whether we do not go too far by directing such demands to hermeneutics. Non-Christian religions do not expect such a step in the interreligious meeting, nor do they encourage this. The delimiting function of religious symbols on the contrary is to preserve the members of one's own religion from strange ideas and to protect them against undesired influences and to make difficult exchanges, as we can see particularly in Islam. Here we come upon a peculiarity of the Christian religion. As its nature is missionary, this religion lets itself be guided by love. Love, however, wants to understand. There is no other way for it. It has to get involved with the other one, even if it thereby risks itself. And Ch.-H. Ratschow was quite right to refer to another point: The Christian faith is fundamentally a faith that is always contested.[5] In view of the unfathomable reality of God and in view of the reality of our and the other religions' world, Christian faith is always a contested faith. This is the reason for its vulnerability.[6] But this can also be seen as its strength. Its kenotic structure (Philippians 2) belongs to the nature of the Christian faith. It must abandon itself if it wants to be itself, and it has to get deeply involved with the other religion. As Paul says: for Jews become a Jew, for Gentiles become a Gentile. This is the reason why missionaries of all people have brought such progress to the methodology of "understanding the research of religions" and have tried to understand other religions from inside. They have presented them in a way that readers occasionally doubt whether in view of the beauty and depth of the described religions one should really act as a missionary. The object of mission, of the meeting of the church with other religions, is not the meeting of a superior religion with an inferior one but with truth. The answering of the truth question can, however, only be undertaken within the horizon of understanding. Interreligious hermeneutics serve to create the sphere of understanding. In that way they enable both pure and honorable dialogue and mutual witness to the truth that is believed and determinative for one's own life. In this encounter, as R. Otto says, "political systems, economic groups, social interests . . . do not act against each other," but finally "spirit will meet spirit, ideal will meet ideal, experience will meet experience, everybody will have to tell, without cover, what deepest, what sincere truth he has and whether he has anything at all."[7]

Only on this basis can different religions live together, thus serving peace, the most important gift of the coming kingdom, the kingdom of God.

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[5] C.-H. Ratschow, *Der angefochtene Glaube* (Gütersloh 1983).

[6] Compare H.-J. Margull, "Verwundbarkeit. Bemerkungen zum Dialog," *EvTh* 1974, 410–20.

[7] R. Otto, *Vishnu-Narayana* (Jena 1917), 155.

Mosaic and Christic Ethos in the Gospel of John

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"The Law was given through Moses: grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."
—John 1:17

The Gospel of John contains no ethical teaching as we find it in the synoptics or in Paul—no Sermon on the Mount, or on the plain, no God and Caesar renderings, no paraenesis (exhortation), no Haustafeln, no references to the Decalogue or its first and second commandment summaries. So "ethical teaching" in the sense of moral legislation, no. But "ethical teaching" as ethical evaluation in practice, as conflict about human ethos, definitely yes.

If, as Paul Ricoeur notes, the entire Fourth Gospel is a "cosmic trial," then the gospel narrative itself is an event of ethos, the qualitative evaluation of human behavior taking place "in a larger cycle of ideas in a 'juridical' turn where we find such notions as envoy, to testify, testimony, to judge, judgment, to accuse, to convince, counselor. . . . It is in the framework of a suit over rights" that the meaning of justification as vindication surfaces, "which derives its coherence from this horizon of the great trial on which all theology of testimony is projected" (Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics of Testimony*, quoting Preiss, *Justification in Johannine Thought*, 140).

The same is true for ethical theology in the Christian vein: evaluative judgments in the earthly trial lay claim to eventual vindication by the judge of the great and final eschatological trial. Christian ethos understands itself as the quality that accrues to human behavior and behavers by virtue of the divine evaluation.

In John's Gospel that divine verdict is in dispute right from the start, first of all for Jesus and then for his disciples. Beginning in the prologue the seesaw opposition between contesting and attesting unfolds: "He came to his own home, and his own people received him not" (1:11). Testimony is given "to what we have seen and heard; but you do not receive our testimony" (3:11). In this essay we examine the attested/contested ethos of the disciples. It parallels Jesus' own ethos but with one difference: his causes theirs.

Exegetes call our attention to the historical circumstances of John's intended audience. These first hearers are living in the post-70 A.D., post-Jamnia situation of Jewish Christians separated from the synagogues of normative Judaism. The twelfth of the eighteen benedictions (*Birkat-haminim*) in the synagogue liturgy has left them *aposynagogos* (out of the synagogue) (9:22, 12:42, 16:2). The daily life conflict between these two Jewish religious communities is retrojected, pantomimed, and paradigmed into Jesus' own trial. The issue is ethos. Which of these two faith commu-

nities is right, or which has the right to claim to be true? True to doing the will and work of God, to keeping the word of God, to keeping the commandments, finally to being true to the scriptures and its law and its Moses? So in their earthly trial, the earthly and eschatological trial of Jesus does a repeat performance.

John's way of stating the Christian claim that Jesus as the Christ changes human ethos is stated in the prologue as follows: "to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave the right (*exousia*) to become children of God" (1:12). I translate the Greek term *exousia* as a juridical/ethical term for "rights" instead of the NRSV's rendering "power" to follow through on the Ricoeur/Preiss proposal of the cosmic trial. *Exousia* as used elsewhere by John corroborates this rendering.

The right to be children of God arises in the sinner's encounter with Christ

As the Johannine prologue opens, there are no signals that anyone has such right automatically. In fact, the opposite is signaled. As the Sent One, the Envoy, arrives in the world, the world that was made through him, this world "knew him not. He came to his own home, and his own people received him not." The Envoy is "true light," but what he shines into is darkness.

The Envoy has rights to the world and its people. He made every bit of it with no exceptions (1:3). But these rights of the Creator's ownership are contested by the intended receivers. By contesting his claim they signal that they are not children of God. If they once did have the *exousia*, they now do not want it. But some do receive him. Yet, receiving does not signal that they have already been rightful children of God. No, they too are previously right-less, but now they are given the *exousia* to become what they previously were not: "children." And John makes the novelty of this right of procreative passage specific. It is parenting "not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of a male, but of God" (1:13). The right comes by receiving/believing the Sent One. How does that work?

We get an answer by sampling some of the Christ-encounters John offers. John leaves no doubt that people do not arrive on the scene having the *exousia* of children of God (*tekna theou*), call it the *tekna*-cratic ethos. No, all are born of flesh, and flesh stays flesh (3:6). It profits zero (8:63). Everyone "must be born anew" (3:6f.). It is expected that a "teacher of Israel" would understand this (3:10). The lamb of God is to take away the sin of the world (1:29), and no one is initially exempt from this contra-*tekna*-logical evaluation. All are sinners without exception.

John does not think that this is pessimism. He signals a bit of surprise himself that when the "true light" shines, everything else is by contrast so dark—especially things that were so lucid before, like the "man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews." Doesn't this also qualify John's alleged anti-semitism? Isn't John saying: Even the very best Jews, who are the best people of all ("Abraham's children"), are nevertheless dark by contrast with this Envoy? The best human moral and religious luminaries can't hold a candle to him. And if he is "true light," theirs isn't at all.

No one has the divine paternity by bloodlines, by fleshly birth, even as "Abraham's descendants." No one has a priori *tekna*-legitimacy. In fact, to push the parental metaphor, the folks who do claim it apart from the Christ have an alternate heredity from the one claimed: "born of fornication . . . of your father the devil." Satan's

demonry in John is singularly forensic: he is a courtroom liar "and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (8:41–44).

The fundamental untruth that the father of lies passes on to his children is the untruth about themselves. To remain in that untruth is to wind up dead. Hence Satan's own ethos is that of "murderer." All are sinners, but they hold that to be untrue about themselves. Though sinners-in-fact, they remain by their denial sinners-in-untruth.

The first ministry of truth that the divine Envoy exercises is to move such sinners-in-fact into being sinners-in-truth. In the full-scale argument about paternity in John 8 this ministry of truth on Jesus' part fails: "Because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. Which of you convicts me of sin?" For that is the "truth" issue here: Who is sinner? "If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me?" (8:45f.) Their refusal to hear this word of truth about themselves leads to the tragic contra-*tekna* conclusion: "The reason why you do not hear them [these true words of God] is that you are not *of* God" (8:47). Here Jesus' truth-ministry fails. The intended receivers remain in untruth. They adjudge Jesus to be the liar—at least about them. So they take up stones to throw at him—to close the case and carry out the verdict.

In the immediately following chapter 9 we have a Christ-encounter that leads to a happier conclusion, though the antagonists of chapter 8 continue alongside the central figure to highlight the contrast. It is the pericope of the "man blind from his birth." Five times this point is made: he was "born" blind. We might think that this was merely a clinical statement from his medical chart, were it not for John's making birth in the prologue a matter of rights and his using blindness as a metaphor for sin throughout this pericope. This puts us right back at the center of the debate about ethos "from birth." Who is the sinner? The critics put that value judgment on Jesus (9:24) and in their last word to the newly-sighted man tell him that he was "born in utter sin" (9:34).

Note how the man never disputes his genetic malady. In fact he affirms it. I was "a man born blind." He is blind in fact, and, what's more, "in truth." Human beings are "in truth" what they are if they make no pretense to appear otherwise, but will be nothing other than they in fact are.

We might think it would be folly for a man blind from birth to deny something so undeniable, yet that is John's point about the ethos of the sinners here. For people so committed to God's truth, why deny the divine truth about one's self? At least if they did not see it clearly before, now by contrast with Jesus, grace and truth in person, their difference from him is inescapable. But not if they are blind, blind from birth.

The protagonist here is blind/sinner in fact and "in truth," and already with that his ethos is a considerable distance removed from those who are blind/sinner in fact only. His Christ encounter moved him into the realm of truth, albeit sinner-in-truth. But he now moves even further away from the sinner's initial ethos. For Jesus is not only truth for this sinner. He is also and uniquely grace for him, "grace upon grace" (1:16). Jesus "manifests in him the works of God" (9:3), the prologue-designated work of the "true light" to enlighten every darkened one (1:9). "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world" (9:5), he says as the healing begins. And he graces this "true" sinner with the gift of sight, of light. Does that mean that he is now a non-sinner? At first it sounds incredible, yet that is the relentless conclusion to the John 9 pericope.

The first ethical move in the process is to become a "sinner in truth." When some of the Pharisees come to Jesus after the event and ask whether they are blind, he says: "If you were blind [=sinner in truth] you would have no sin [by virtue of this encounter with me]; but now that you say, 'We see' [i.e., we are nonsinners], your sin remains." The clinically blind man's sin does not "remain," not only because Jesus opened his eyes, the physical enlightening action, but because after his exclusion from the synagogue Jesus finds him and moves him to the confession, "Lord, I *believe*." With that confession he qualifies for a new ethos: "to all who received him, who *believed* in his name, *he gave the right* to become children of God." Children of God are graced nonsinners who have moved from sinner-in-fact, to sinner-in-truth, to graced nonsinner: they hold the *tekna*-cratic right. The deuterocanonical pericope of the adulteress (8:1–11) corroborates the sequence: sinner-in-fact, sinner-in-truth, graced ("neither do I accuse you") nonsinner ("sinner-no-more").

Werner Elert has observed:

> The kind of truth which makes its entry in the person of the sinless Christ is totally different from the truth sinners dread. Jesus becomes their associate and friend, he is one of them. In becoming their equal, he makes them his equal. In the Johannine signs [including this one], he eliminates the difference between sinners and himself, even becoming "sinner" like them. Are they then too no longer sinners? It sounds incredible. It could at most be so if the one eliminating the difference were really believable. John claims to believe it, describing the process in the words: "We beheld his glory . . . full of grace and truth." Christ is not only truth in person, but also grace in person, for by making sinners his equals, they become graced sinners. But the question still remains whether this verdict that Christ renders on sinners by becoming their friend, is also God's verdict. Not until we have clarity here will we have a conclusive answer to the question of the consequences that this action of Christ toward sinners has for their total ethos. (Elert, *The Christian Ethos*, 187f.)

In Johannine terms John's Jesus claims to *give* that right to believing sinners. But claims are cheap. Since the claimed right is the "right of children of God," the question arises: Does God concur in this judgment? Does Jesus have the right to extend family rights to anyone, let alone to sinners—and then extend them to such a motley collection of them, the *ochlos*, the riffraff, "the accursed, who do not know the law," whom the law designates *aposynagogos*?

Jesus' own "rights" and thus Jesus' right to extend *Tekna*-cratic rights

In Jesus' own trial his right to be called "Son of God" is at the center of the suit. John is unrelenting in signaling the cross ("the hour") as the denouement that verifies Jesus' right to the title. In every instance where John links the term *exousia* to Jesus directly, the right is associated with life and death. And this linkage is not surprising, since John's Gospel treats life and death as juridical (that is, ethical) events and not primarily as medical, biological phenomena. Let us examine these explicit "rights" references to Jesus.

In Jesus' defense for healing the sick man at the sheepgate pool he says: "For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself, and has given him *exousia* [the right] *krisin poiein* [to execute judgment] because he is the Son of man" (5:26f.).

The right claimed by Jesus here is the right of the Son of Man, the right of the final

judge at the eschatological judgment day. He claims this right, but by what rights? What authorizes God to turn over the grand finale judgment to the Son—and especially to this one? We might be inclined to think that since he is the Father's son, such transfer of duties is merely a matter of majestic magisterial discretion. Not so. Jesus "earns" this right by what he does in "the hour." Even though as the divine Logos, "only Son . . . in the beginning," he does have "life in himself," that does not yet authorize him to bestow that life (=the right to be children of God) to others who rightfully do not have it. That right needs to be earned by effort, by "doing the work" of the Envoy, if that work truly is the work of God.

Jesus becomes the Son of Man "by rights" by virtue of his own trial. This divine judge is not above the fray; in fact, he is not even above being himself indicted, found guilty, and executed. To be sure, he is then vindicated, but not without the continuing marks of an incriminated death (20:27). John draws these two together: the hour of cross/resurrection is the conclusion of Jesus' trial and simultaneously Jesus' elevation to the bench of final judgment as the Son of Man. In both cases he is "lifted up."

There is a double "double-take" here. First of all, the earthly accused one is simultaneously the vindicated eschatological judge. Second, those who entrust their case to this strangely incriminated and vindicated judge get a jump on the final judgment, "heading it off at the pass," "scooping" it before it happens, and thus hilariously getting the final judgment already behind them.

The future judgment already behind them? "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me, has eternal life; s/he does not come into judgment, but has (already) passed from death to life" (5:25). This proleptic bestowal of "right to life" is finally identical with the right of children of God, a right that means biographically "born of God," "begotten, not made," tantalizingly similar (or is it even identical?) to the right to life of the only-begotten Son.

Jesus becomes the Son of Man "by rights" by virtue of his own trial.

But how does the earthly accused become thereby the eschatological judge? The next two *exousia* passages provide an answer. In the Good Shepherd pericope of chapter 10 Jesus says: "no one takes it [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have *exousia* to lay it down, and I have *exousia* to take it again; this assignment [*entole*] I have received from my Father." The divine commission of the Envoy is to do just that, to lay down and take up again his life. That is what makes his dying "right" irrespective of the hanky-panky that may have ensued in the dramatic story line. And that is what makes his resurrection "right"—it is what God sent him to do. But how does that all work to be of benefit for the intended beneficiaries, in this pericope, the mortally endangered sheep?

John, of course, affirms the beneficial results of Jesus' death. In commenting on the Son of Man's "hour" we hear: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth, and dies, it remains

alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (12:25). And a few lines later: "For this purpose I have come to this hour" (12:27). "'Now is the judgment of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out; and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.' He said this signaling what sort of death he was going to die" (12:31–33). The "Book of Signs" in John concludes with this summary signal.

His death is not a tragic accident. It is central to his assignment. Simultaneously as he is lifted up to be the eschatological judge ahead of time, he is also the dying grain of wheat bearing much fruit, the rights-transfer agent for making others children of God. At times Jesus sounds as if the judge's role is not part of his original assignment. "I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. Whoever rejects me and does not receive my sayings has a judge; the word that I have spoken will be his judge on the last day" (12:47–48). By virtue of being savior he attains the right to be the eschatological judge. Nevertheless, verdicts *ad malam partem* (for the bad part) are not his *opus proprium* (appropriate work) but his *opus alienum* (alien work).

How does his death bestow rights to unchildren to become children? In 17:1–3 he prays: "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him *exousia* over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."

Who would want rights to "all flesh"? Bothered as we are with the negative "rights" that each one's own flesh bestows ("remains flesh," "profits zero"), who would want rights to any more, let alone to "all flesh"? Already in the prologue that arrangement of rights was telegraphed ahead to us. The *logos* became flesh—our kind of humanity—in order to get rights over all flesh. Right to do what? Judge them? No, that's not the assignment. Right to give them eternal life. Right to give these unchildren the life and right of God's own self.

How does the cross actually do that? The final *exousia* passage in John takes us into the courtroom exchange between Jesus and Pilate. "Do you not know that I have *exousia* to release you, and *exousia* to crucify you?" says Pilate. "You would have no *exousia* over me," answers Jesus, "unless it had been given you from above." Rights come from the bench. But there is a Bench above Pilate's bench, and that's where the "right" to Jesus' life or death is grounded. And as we heard in chapter 10, that right is one which Jesus himself now exercises, not Pilate at all, even though it is Pilate's decision that implements the Envoy's divine assignment.

But what is "right" about the execution death of Jesus? By what right does he die? At the trial John does not dispute the claim of the plaintiffs: "We have a law and by that Law he ought to die, because he has made himself the Son of God." This claim for the lawfulness of Jesus' execution needs the interpretive linkage that John provides earlier when Caiaphas, the high priest, addresses the Jewish council: "It is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish." John comments: "He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus should die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the *children of God* who are scattered abroad" (11:50–53). The death of Jesus is legal, and at the same time saves people from the law's case against them that they should "perish," that they should die their own rightful deaths.

How does John make all that legal

doubleness compute? The law (of Moses) gives Pilate the right to pass the death sentence on Jesus. Pilate, of course, does not know this. That is a "right" given him from above. But is Moses for Jesus or against him? That is the debate in the entire Fourth Gospel. The opponents view the either/or as follows: either Moses testifies that Jesus is the Son of God, or Moses testifies that he is a blasphemer deserving of death. John's own answer to that either/or is Yes to both, but with an important nuance: He is indeed the Son of God, the *Logos* of the deity, and in his enfleshed way of solidarity with sinners he does perpetrate blasphemy, but a blessed blasphemy, a contravening of God's own (Mosaic) law about sinners. Jesus' blasphemy is his claim to move sinners into the divine family, right into the Father's lap where according to Moses only the Abrahamic Torah-faithful had any right to be, and even, according to John, previously only the only-begotten One had any genetic rights to be (1:18).

Although Moses in John always testifies for Jesus, Moses is conversely always the accuser of sinners. This fate is made even more lethal when sinners-in-fact set their hope upon Moses (5:45ff.). Sinners-in-truth are therefore not likely to be such "disciples of Moses" (9:28). Yet merely "not hoping in Moses" does not get them out from under Moses' condemnation. Flesh and its bread, even Mosaic bread, leaves you dead in the wilderness (chap. 6). Jesus' partnering with sinners, though a genuine Son of God (a nonsinner) himself, enmeshes him in Moses' deadly criticism upon those whose side he takes. Thus it is paradoxically true that "we have a law [Moses' own fundamental death verdict for sinners], and by that law he ought to die." The blasphemy of Jesus' action is not simply the claim: I am the Son of God, but the things he does as he claims to execute that title and its rights. His hobnobbing with sinners and his taking their side in their own controversy with Mosaic criticism and the Mosaic administrators is what is so contrary to the Yahweh of the Mosaic Decalogue who claims not to be friendly toward sinners (Ex 20:5f.). No wonder almost every sign he performs embroils Jesus in juridical argument.

And that juridical realism before the divine bench is what John reads out of Caiaphas' statement, although Caiaphas surely meant it otherwise. "The whole nation" will indeed perish, not by Roman military violence but by Mosaic prosecution before the divine court, if there is no extraordinary intervention. Therefore it is indeed "expedient for you that one should die for the people, lest the whole nation perish," to which John adds, "he prophesied that Jesus should die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the *children of God* [!] who are scattered abroad" (11:50f.). One dies for all, and all are saved, are moved to the new ethos of children of God, a *right* they have *sola fide* (that is, "by believing in him").

This passage reflects John's version of the more familiar Pauline one-for-all solidarity notions (Romans 5 with its Adamic and Christic human solidarity). In diagramming the action taking place at the level of the "Supreme" court, while the action proceeds in the Jerusalem council and before Pilate's court, John in the Gospel does not give us very precise signs. The courtroom scene of Revelation 12 gives a later exposition of this Johannine tradition when it describes how the "accuser" no longer has any rights to accuse Christ-believing sinners.

In accusing the Word-made-flesh (made sinner) at the Jerusalem trial, the cosmic accuser is exercising his necessary rights. In fact, he *has to* do it. He has Mosaic authorization for demanding the death verdict. Yet the one he is accusing is

the Son of the divine majesty, "one with the Father," whom to accuse is to incriminate oneself of the selfsame first commandment blasphemy charge. Thereby the accusing law by which indeed Jesus ought to die is caught signing its own death warrant for rebellion and blasphemy, if the one being accused to death really is the Son of God. If he is not, the law's verdict will stick. If he is, the law's verdict will counterindict the law itself and Jesus will be vindicated.

Easter is his vindication. Easter is the Law's Lord confirming the divine right of the Son-in-the-flesh to bring sinners into the family. Easter exposes the law's forfeited claim to rights over sinners. No surprise then that the first words of the Risen One after the shalom-greeting (i.e., good news to *these* sinners) is their assignment to forgive sins as his envoys with the grim reminder that for whomever they neglect to do it, for those folks sins are "retained." The accuser still has his rights to them.

In carrying the trial of Jesus all the way to his execution the "ruler of this world" loses his rights. We tend to overdemonize this character in John, I think. Who runs this world? Law runs this world—sometimes lawfully, often not, but when it does work, the law (even the very best law—the law of Moses) is the prince of this world. And in a 1-2-3 sequence of the only times this world's ruler appears in John, the Evangelist signs to us the consequences of Jesus' trial for the rights of the law. (1) In describing "this hour" Jesus says, "Now is the judgment of the world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out; and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all to myself" (12:31f.). (2) "I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over me [literally, 'He has nothing *on* me']; but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father" (14:30f.). And finally, (3) the Paraclete's threefold assignment to convince/convict the world *re* sin, righteousness, judgment: by virtue of Jesus' going to the Father "the ruler of this world is judged" (16:8–11).

The cross certifies before the heavenly and eschatological court Jesus' rights to exempt sinners from the verdict of the accuser. It gives him rights over these sinners, or, in John's language, "right over all flesh to give eternal life to all." That right he does not clutch to himself but gives gratis "to all who believe in him." They were the intended beneficiaries from the very beginning. Believing effects the rights-transfer. Believing in this vindicated Vindicator vindicates the believers already now before the final Supreme court. They trump the otherwise valid accuser by the blood of the Lamb. They are granted the ethos of nonsinner, children of God, and they have it by rights, both by Mosaic rights in the paradoxically legal right/wrong death of Jesus, and even more by family ownership rights of Jesus' own grace and truth.

In John's Gospel that human ethos actualizes itself in behaviors that are in this Mosaic world but of the new world of grace and truth. Bilateral agape is one, prayer in Jesus' name another, witnessing and working a third, and bearing persecution another, to name a few of John's favorites. But that's another essay.

Moving Toward More Frequent Communion: A Strategy

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Recently Mark Bangert and I were privileged to spend time talking with a group of pastors about the ways the Sunday celebration of Word and Sacrament nourishes the spiritual life. As the members of the group shared their own hunger for more frequent reception of the Lord's Supper, the conversation turned to the question of how to move congregations toward weekly celebration of Holy Communion. I find that my students, nourished by weekly celebration of the Lord's Supper as part of their formation in seminary, ask this same question as they look ahead to first call.

The ELCA's *The Use of the Means of Grace: A Statement on the Practice of Word and Sacrament*[1] rightly describes the practice in many congregations when it both affirms the place of preaching and calls for more frequent celebration of the Eucharist. Echoing *Lutheran Book of Worship* Ministers Edition, *The Use of the Means of Grace* declares, "Only under extraordinary circumstances would the sermon be omitted" from the Sunday and festival service of Holy Communion (p. 9a). At the same time, this statement also reminds our church that celebrating Holy Communion every Sunday and festival "remains the norm for our practice." This statement encourages all our congregations "to celebrate the Lord's Supper weekly" and lifts up our continued need for "consistent pastoral encouragement and instruction relating to Holy Communion . . . pointing up Christ's command, his promise, and our deep need" (35, 35a, 35b).

The question posed by pastors and seminarians is a real one. How do we move congregations toward more frequent celebration of Holy Communion? The answer, it seems, is education. But what do we teach? One approach is to teach that weekly Communion is, in fact, a "Lutheran" thing to do. Unfortunately, for many in our congregations, it is not enough to know that, "according to the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Lutheran congregations celebrate the Holy Communion every Sunday and festival," that "this practice was reaffirmed in 1989 by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America," and that "all of our congregations are encouraged to celebrate the Lord's Supper weekly, but not every service need be a Eucharist" (35, 35a, 35b). For many, the weekly celebration of the Lord's Supper strikes them as "un-Lutheran"

[1] Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, *The Use of the Means of Grace: A Statement on the Practice of Word and Sacrament* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1997).

because it somehow competes with, de-emphasizes, diminishes, and even threatens the preaching that they hold so dear. This reaction may be somewhat justified. So often we tend to place Word and Sacrament, preaching and the Lord's Supper, in tension or even competition. We take sides. The liturgy, we say, is but window dressing for the sermon. Or, the sermon interrupts and is even disconnected from the flow of the liturgy. We may catch ourselves chiding people to "grow beyond" their notion of preaching as the "main event" in worship. We may even allow preaching to diminish so that the Supper may increase. *The Use of the Means of Grace* encourages congregations to "avoid either a celebration of the Supper without the preceding reading of Scriptures, preaching, and intercessory prayers or a celebration of the Supper for a few people who remain after the dismissal of the congregation from a Service of the Word" (34a). Such encouragement suggests that these practices are happening somewhere in our church.

Faced with a choice between preaching and the Eucharist, our people know well that Martin Luther's greatest contribution to the reform of worship was the restoration of the Word to its rightful place. Writing of Luther in his classic work *A Brief History of Preaching*, Yngve Brilioth rightly observes, "No person, before or since, has so exalted the word, not only the written word, but the living word on the lips of the preacher."[2] What we tend to forget and what is even more remarkable is that he did not ask his people to choose between Word and Sacrament. In fact, Luther elevated the Word and emphasized the importance of preaching without minimizing the primacy of the Eucharist in the church of his day.

As a contribution to "consistent pastoral encouragement and instruction relating to Holy Communion," this essay examines Luther's understanding of the relationship between Word and table, preaching and the Lord's Supper, as he articulated it in his sermons on the Eucharist. These sermons include *Sermon von dem neuen Testament, di. von der heiligen Messi* (1520), Luther's eight Invocavit sermons (1522), *Confession and the Lord's Supper* (1524), *Easter Monday, or Second Easter Day* (1524), *A Beautiful Sermon on the Reception of the Holy Sacrament* (1525), *The Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ—Against the Fanatics* (1526), and the *Second Sermon for the Second Sunday After Trinity 1535*. We chose sermon material for our study because, as Dennis Laskey correctly contends, Luther's reforming program began with theological reflection upon church practice, which only subsequently led him to rethink and attack the theological underpinnings of that practice.[3] This pattern of concern over practice giving rise to theological reflection is found most obviously in Luther's reservations, and later his disgust, with the threat posed by the practice of indulgences. This pattern also holds true for Luther's treatment of the relationship of preaching and the Lord's Supper in the mass. After exploring both Luther's understanding of the relationship of Word and table as it is expressed in these sermons and the way he elevated the Word without diminishing the Supper, we then consider whether this relationship and approach offer any insights on how pastors might help their congregations to embrace more frequent celebration of the Lord's Supper.

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[2] Yngve Brilioth, *A Brief History of Preaching*, ed. K. Mattson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965), 110.

[3] Dennis A. Laskey, "Luther's Preaching on the Lord's Supper: A Comparison with Preaching in the Middle Ages," *Concordia Journal* 12 (1986): 167.

Luther's understanding of the relationship of Word and Table

Luther shared the prevailing attitude of his day in regarding preaching as a calling and an activity to be held in high esteem.[4] However, Luther differed from his contemporaries in that he looked upon preaching not as a most solemn duty by which Christians were moved to be contrite enough to merit God's mercy but as the activity of Jesus Christ himself calling Christians to flee to God's grace and trust in God's promise. Luther understood the preaching of the gospel as Christ's continued advent, the means by which Christ comes to every generation in order to establish fellowship with Christ's own and offer the righteousness that Christ obtained by his death on the cross. While it can be said that Luther maintained the same goal in preaching as his predecessors, namely to create sincere contrition in his hearers, Luther redefined the meaning and purpose of sincere contrition. Rather than frightening sinners into being sorry enough to move God to forgive them, culminating in the need to make satisfaction, Luther understood sincere contrition as sinners being so distressed by their sin that they have no recourse other than to trust in God's promise of forgiveness and flee to God's grace, culminating in faith.

Abandoning his predecessors' plan of the way of salvation—fear leads to contrition, which leads to appropriate expressions of sincerity, which leads to forgiveness—Luther adopted as his model fear leads to contrition, which leads to absolution, which leads to faith, which leads to love. In this model, preaching serves to both terrify the conscience (law) and proclaim God's promise of forgiveness (gospel). This concept of preaching flows from Luther's understanding of the Lord's Supper not as a sacrifice by which sinners merit God's mercy but as God's promise of forgiveness conferred upon the individual.

As we turn to a survey of Luther's sermons on the Lord's Supper, it is important to remember that from 1520 onward all Luther's teaching on the Eucharist is controversial, though the battlefront changes. First, Luther fights against the Roman misuse of the mass, particularly in the doctrine of the sacrifice. Next, he fights against Karlstadt, who moved from theological debate and introduced practical reforms that Luther found offensive. Finally, Luther opposes the "rationalism" of Zwingli and the "Enthusiasts," who explained away the element of mystery in the Lord's Supper. In our discussion of Luther's sermons on the Lord's Supper we see that, although the issues he addressed change, there is an increasing connection between preaching and sacrament that serves to elevate the place of the Word.

Luther first opposed the Roman understanding of the mass as a good work and a sacrifice in his *Sermon von dem neuen Testament, di. von der heiligen Messi* (1520). Roman theologians applied the idea of *opus operatum* to the sacrament, and this affected their understanding of the presence of Christ. The sacraments were defined as "effectual signs" (*signa efficacia*), because a certain rite by its mere performance (*opus operatum*) was supposed to effect the pres-

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[4] Ian D. K. Siggins demonstrates that there was at least as much preaching at the end of the fifteenth century as there is today. Attendance at sermons was regarded as a Christian's most solemn duty, and the pulpit was a focal feature of the religious culture for the laity of the imperial cities in the decades before the Reformation. Siggins, "Luther and the Catholic Preachers of his Youth," *Luther: Theologian for Catholics and Protestants*, ed. G. Yule (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1985), 59.

ence of Christ. Thus, the benefits of Christ's presence were divorced from the faith of the recipient. The elements of the Eucharist, for example, did not even need to be distributed to the congregation.

In the first part of this sermon, Luther develops the idea first articulated in his *Sermon von den guten Werken*, that

> Christ instituted "a memorial-celebration or anniversary, to be celebrated daily throughout Christendom, and attached to it a glorious, rich, great testament, which he also determined and ratified, not of revenues, gold, or worldly goods, but of forgiveness for all sins, grace and mercy unto eternal life, that all they who attend this celebration might receive this testament; and by his death he has made the testament permanent and irrevocable."
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> This New "Testament," foreshadowed in the promises of the Old, is given us in the words of institution; and just as in an earthly testament "a man does not only express his meaning in words, but adds thereto a seal or lawyer's token, that it may be permanent and authentic for all time, so has Christ done with his testament, attaching to it the strongest and noblest of signs and seals in his word, that is, his own true body and blood under bread and wine."[5]

Luther understood the Lord's Supper not only as a memorial of Christ's death but also as evidence of God's forgiveness of all sins and promise of eternal life. Luther located God's promise in the words of institution, understanding these words as the pledge (*Verheissung*, *Zusagung*) by which Christ has promised to be present to grant forgiveness and life whenever bread and wine are administered in his name. Just as a couple exchanges wedding rings as an enduring token or sign of their marriage vows, so in the Supper Christ attaches to his word of promise his true body and blood under bread and wine. Christ's death on the cross makes this forgiveness and promise true. Thus, for Luther, God's word of promise is the essential part of the sacrament. From this sermon we see that the action in the Supper is God's, not ours: the Lord's Supper is not the sacrifice or good work of sinners but God's promise of forgiveness.

Luther had no doubt of humanity's need for God's promise of forgiveness. He envisioned human existence as the ongoing attack of powers seeking to take human beings captive. These powers include Satan, death, secret thoughts and desires, and sin. For Luther the ultimate question facing human beings is how to face the hour of death. However, when preaching on the inevitable hour of death, Luther's goal was not to terrify his hearers into acts of satisfaction but to motivate them to flee to God's grace for forgiveness, to trust in God's promise, and to live as God's children. In March 1522, Luther came out of hiding to assume the pulpit at Wittenberg and preached eight sermons in which he opposed Karlstadt's method of forced reform and by which he reversed most of the reforms Karlstadt had initiated. The first of Luther's eight *Invocavit Sermons* (1522)[6] provides an excellent example of how he used the familiar concern with the hour of death to move his hearers through faith to love: "The summons of death comes to us all, and no one can die for another. Everyone must fight his own battle with death by himself, alone. We can shout into another's ears, but everyone must himself be prepared for the time of death, for I will not be with you, nor you with me. Therefore every one must himself know and be armed with the chief things which concern a Christian"

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[5] Yngve Brilioth, *Eucharistic Faith and Practice: Evangelical and Catholic* (London: S.P.C.K., 1965), 98–99.

[6] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works* 51:67–101.

(p. 17). The "chief things which concern a Christian" include faith in the grace of God revealed in Jesus Christ, which results in love for God and neighbor. Luther said that "we are children of wrath, and all our works, thoughts, and intentions are nothing at all" and "that God has sent his only begotten Son that we may believe in him and whoever trusts in him shall be free from sin and also a child of God" (p. 17). But "we must also have love and through love we must do to one another as God has done to us through faith. For "the kingdom of God . . . does not consist in talk or words, but in activity, in deeds, in works and exercises" (p. 18). Thus, in this sermon we see how, beginning with a familiar theme, Luther lays out a new model of the way of salvation.

In 1524, Luther preached on the topic of the Lord's Supper at what was considered the appropriate time, Passiontide. In the sermon for Palm Sunday, *Confession and the Lord's Supper*, Luther connected preaching and the Lord's Supper to confession by defining all three as God's promise of forgiveness or absolution. In this sermon, forgiveness of sin was seen as the "benefit, fruit, and use of the sacrament."[7] Luther reminds his hearers of what they heard in his *Sermon von dem neuen Testament, di. von der heiligen Messi* (1520), namely, that the essence of the Lord's Supper is God's word of promise: "If you cannot grasp the Word that is bright, clear, and certain, you need not grasp the sacrament; for the sacrament would be nothing if there were no Word."[8] Luther is saying that those who do not "grasp" God's word of promise should not go to the table.

How can one be certain God's word of promise will be spoken so that it can be grasped? Luther turns to preaching. The purpose of the sermon is to ensure that the word of promise is proclaimed. In this same sermon, Luther said of preaching:

> If I preach the forgiveness of sins, I preach the true Gospel. For the sum of the Gospel is: Whosoever believeth in Christ shall receive the forgiveness of his sins. Thus a Christian preacher cannot open his mouth unless he pronounces an absolution. Christ also does the same in the Gospel lesson when he says, "Pax vobiscum," Peace be unto you. That is, I proclaim unto you, as of God, that you have peace and forgiveness of sins; this is even the Gospel itself, and absolution." (p. 198)

Luther then explains how confession, preaching, and the Lord's Supper as three forms of God's one promise of forgiveness work together to bring the Christian to faith: "For in Confession as in the Lord's Supper you have the additional advantage that the Word is applied to your person alone. For in preaching it flies out into the whole congregation, and although it strikes you also, yet you are not so sure of it; but here it does not apply to anyone except to you" (p. 199). Confession, sermon, and Supper are all God's word of promise, but they serve different functions. The sermon proclaims and explains God's promise of forgiveness, while confession and the Lord's Supper confirm that the promise made publicly in preaching is meant for and applicable to each person individually.

Luther's attention turned next to the question of who rightly should participate in the Lord's Supper. In his *Sermon for Easter Monday or Second Easter Day* (1524), Luther spoke of worthy reception of the sacrament, declaring that those "who are worthy to receive the Lord's Supper

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[7] Dennis A. Laskey, "The Concern for *communio* in Luther's Preaching and Liturgical Writing: 1524–1530." *Concordia Journal* 12 (1986): 47.

[8] Martin Luther, *The Sermons of Martin Luther*, II (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989).

[are] . . . those who by the Word of God are moved in their hearts to believe" (p. 267). In discussing what Christians should do when they feel they do not need the Lord's

Confession, sermon, and Supper are all God's word of promise, but they serve different functions.

Supper, Luther describes how God's word works to make Christians worthy recipients and bring them to the table:

> For as long as you feel that you are not yet lost and not yet so wicked as those described above [you do not think that you need the Lord's Supper]; for you always wish to burn with zeal. Therefore you must do as follows: Take to yourself the Word of God, go and hear it preached, read it, write it or even sing it, only so you live it and keep busy with it, then you will experience something. Then go to the Lord's Supper and say: Lord, I am a lazy character; but I come so that you shouldst help me and kindle my heart. . . . Is it not enough that you possess God's Word that draws you, and besides that you feel your distress driving you to it? And then Christ is there and waits to help you. . . . From this you see why God instituted and ordained that his Word should be preached; and therefore it ought not to be despised. (pp. 274, 276, 278)

Luther instructs that, when Christians are "busy" with God's word, when they hear it preached, read it, or even sing it, this word will convict them and they will feel distress. This distress will drive them to the Lord's table and to ask for Christ's help. And Christ is there to help them. Here we find an idea that we first encountered in Luther's first *Invocavit Sermon*, that fear leads the Christian to seek Christ's forgiveness, and the result of this encounter is faith.

In 1525, Luther preached *A Beautiful Sermon on the Reception of the Holy Sacrament*. Once again, Luther described the purpose of the sacrament as confirming God's promise of forgiveness. He located Christ's presence in the words of institution and described the bread and wine as a token of Christ's presence: Luther said, "The words which Christ spoke at his Last Supper are the Sacrament: 'Take, ye, this is my body, which is given for you; this is my blood that is shed for you, for the remission of sins.' Therefore, Christ instituted by these words the bread and wine, under which are his flesh and blood, for a token and a seal that his words are true" (p. 226). Once again, Luther links worthy reception with trust in the promise. He says that Christians are ready to receive the Supper "when the faith comes that lays hold of the Word, and says: 'These words Christ spoke and I believe they are true, and I am ready to die trusting in them, and I am certain and sure that he is there present, that he has given himself to me and he is mine, as if it were my own possession which God has bestowed upon me" (p. 227).

Luther replied to Zwingli and the Enthusiasts in a series of sermons, collected in the autumn of 1526 under the title *The Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ—Against the Fanatics*.[9] Here we meet a new line of thought: God is everywhere, in all

[9] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, American ed., ed. Helmut T. Lehmann, Vol. 36 ("Word and Sacrament, II").

created things, in stone and in fire, in water and in a rope; but God wills not that we seek God there, but only where God's word is (p. 342). Still, we find familiar themes. Once again Christ's presence in the Supper is located in the word. Luther said that "[Christ] has put himself into the Word, and through the Word he puts himself into the bread also" (p. 343). Luther also located Christ in preaching: "I preach the gospel of Christ, and with my bodily voice I bring Christ into your heart, so that you may form him within yourself. If now you truly believe, so that your heart lays hold of the word and holds fast within it that voice, tell me, what have you in your heart? You must answer that you have the true Christ . . ." (p. 340).

Inasmuch as Christ is present in preaching, Luther asserted that "there should be preaching at the mass at all times" because "the words: 'Do this in remembrance of me' are as much as to say: 'As often as you do this, preach of me,' as Paul interprets it in I Cor. 11[:26] when he calls it 'proclaiming the death of Christ'" (p. 349). While the medieval understanding of *remembrance* consisted of a dramatic representation of the passion of Christ and the Enthusiasts' idea of remembrance was that of an inner effort, an ascent of the individual soul to God, Luther identified remembrance with the sermon as well as the sacrament because he understood the remembrance in preaching as public proclamation and, therefore, part of God's redemptive work (p. 349).

Finally, Luther once again distinguished the difference between the remembrance in preaching and remembrance in the Lord's Supper:

> Therefore we too are preaching the death of Christ according to the words: "Do this in remembrance of me." However, a distinction has to be made here. When I preach his death, it is in a public sermon in the congregation, in which I am addressing myself to no one individually; whoever grasps it, grasps it. But when I distribute the sacrament, I designate it for the individual who is receiving it; I give him Christ's body and blood that he may have forgiveness of sins, obtained through his death and preached in the congregation. This is something more than the congregational sermon; for although the same thing is present in the sermon as in the sacrament, here there is the advantage that it is directed at definite individuals. In the sermon one does not point out or portray any particular person, but in the sacrament it is given to you and to me in particular, so that the sermon comes to be our own. For when I say: "This is the body, which is given for you, this is the blood, which is poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins," I am there commemorating him; I proclaim and announce his death. Only it is not done publicly in the congregation but is directed at you alone. (pp. 348–49)

Luther draws the bond between sermon and sacrament by declaring that both are proclamation, the former public and the latter individual and particular.

In his *Second Sermon for the Second Sunday After Trinity 1535*,[10] Luther calls preaching "the great and glorious supper with which [Christ] feeds his guests" (p. 39) and explains how preaching helps sinners to flee to God's grace:

> But how shall we be constrained, as God does not want any forced worship? He constrains us by having the Gospel preached to all men: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be condemned." Here he shows us both heaven and hell, death and life, wrath and grace, and reveals unto us our sins and ruined condition, so that we may be awakened on account of it, because we hear that a man

[10] Luther, *The Sermons of Martin Luther*, IV.

> as soon as he is born, naturally belongs to the devil and is condemned. This is part of this constraint, by which one is terrified at the wrath of God and desires grace and help from him.
>
> When this has taken place by preaching and the hearts are thus stricken and awakened, he then desires that we should preach thus: Dear friend, do not despair because you are a sinner and have such a terrible sentence passed upon you; but do this, go forth and be baptized and hear the Gospel. Here you will learn that Jesus Christ has died for your sake, and made satisfaction for your sins. If you believe this, then you will be safe against the wrath of God and eternal death, and you shall eat here at this glorious supper and live well, become hearty and strong. (pp. 51–52)

Having surveyed the place of preaching in Luther's sermons on the Eucharist, we can make some general observations about the way Luther restored the Word to its rightful place in the mass without minimizing the primacy of the Eucharist. First, rather than placing Word and Sacrament in tension or even competition, Luther accepted the primacy of the Supper. Drawing upon the *Formula missae et communionis pro ecclesia Vuittembergensi* (1523) and the *Deutsche Messe und Ordnung des Gettesdienstes* (1526), Gottfried Jordahn shows that Luther regarded the mass as instituted by Christ and the rite that is genuinely God's.[11] As a divine institution the mass provides the occasion for the proclamation of the Word *and* the administration of the sacraments. Rather than displacing the sacrament, Luther began by acknowledging the Supper as the high point of the mass.

Luther located Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper in God's word of promise found in the words of institution. Bread and wine are tokens of that promise. Luther then elevates preaching by claiming that this same word of promise is found in confession and preaching in that all three are forms of absolution.

Then, in discussing worthy reception of the Lord's Supper, Luther further elevates preaching by showing how it prepares Christians to worthily receive the sacrament. Those who can rightly receive the Lord's Supper are those who have heard and believe God's word of promise. The purpose of preaching is to guarantee that this word is proclaimed. Accordingly, Luther's preaching differed from that of his predecessors in that, rather than an immense range of subject-matter,[12] Luther's one and only *thema* is Christ, and all his sermons are variations on this great theme.

In guaranteeing that the promise is proclaimed, preaching, confession, and the Supper as three forms of absolution work together to bring the Christian to faith according to a public-private dynamic. In the sermon the Word is proclaimed publicly, while in confession and the Lord's Supper it is applied to the individual alone. In this

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[11] Gottfried Jordahn, "Martin Luthers Kritik an der Messliturgie seiner Zeit." *Archiv fur Liturgiewissenschaft* 26 (1984): 1.

[12] The subject matter of Scholastic sermons included an immense range of topics and occasions. Sermon themes included the properties of food, drink, and dress; almsgiving and the status of the poor; the spiritual significance of wind and weather; Christ's coming in judgment; the nine circles of the angels; salutary and unsalutary grief; veneration of the Blessed Virgin; worthy communion; marriage; prayer and self-discipline; Christians most liable to backslide; the example of the saints; purgatory; the virtues; the works of holy mercy, physical and spiritual; the status of women; alien sins; elicit magic; and the entire spectrum of doctrine, morality, church law and social regulation. Siggins, "Luther and Catholic Preachers of his Youth," 63.

way confession and the Lord's Supper confirm for the individual what the sermon proclaims to all. Preaching also drives the Christian to the sacrament and confession by creating for the individual despair over sins committed and then announcing God's promise of forgiveness. Convicted of their sin, Christians flee to the table for the assurance that God's promise of forgiveness applies to them personally. In this way Luther showed that preaching is an indispensable part of God's work of redemption, restoring it to a prominent place in the mass.

Moving toward weekly communion

These observations of the way Luther restored the place of the Word in worship can inform and guide pastors and congregations seeking to restore the place of the Sacrament in terms of more frequent celebration of Holy Communion. In fact, remembering that Luther restored the rightful place of the Word without minimizing the primacy of the Eucharist offers the church in our time a way to lift up the importance of the weekly celebration of the Lord's Supper without lessening the central place that the reading of the Scriptures and preaching hold in Lutheran worship. A better approach is to take seriously the statement in *The Use of the Means of Grace* that "the two principal parts of the liturgy of Holy Communion, the proclamation of the Word of God and the celebration of the sacramental meal, are so intimately connected as to form one act of worship."[13] An obvious place to begin the process of moving a congregation toward more frequent celebration of the Lord's Supper is to make certain that in our worship Word and table are intimately connected in as many ways as possible.

More than this, we can help to move congregations toward more frequent celebration of the Lord's Supper by acknowledging that, in a church where "only under extraordinary circumstances would the sermon be omitted," in a church where "we continue to need consistent pastoral encouragement and instruction relating to Holy Communion," preaching is "primary." We need to take seriously that Luther's greatest contribution to the reform of worship was the restoration of the place of the written and proclaimed Word and that this contribution shapes our worship in powerful ways. Luther took the primacy of the Eucharist in his church seriously and did not attempt to undo it in order to elevate preaching. When we assume the primacy of preaching in our church, we will not choose between Word and Sacrament. In fact, we can learn from Luther's approach how to celebrate preaching in a way that moves people to the Lord's table.

Celebrating the primacy of preaching in our church calls us to strive for excellence in our preaching. What do we mean by excellence? For Luther the purpose of preaching is to guarantee that God's word of promise is proclaimed. In order to move people to the Lord's table, people must be assured of hearing God's word of promise. Preaching, therefore, needs to be nothing other than God's word of promise. As on the eve of the Reformation, the subject matter of many sermons today includes a whole host of topics—compelling stories, historical and exegetical lectures, political agendas, the promotion of parish programs, advice for living, the struggle for justice—while the clear promise of the gospel, as well as its implications for all these topics, is often lacking. Some preachers take the gospel as a given and start from there. Others simply rehearse the gospel message:

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[13] ELCA, *The Use of the Means of Grace*, 34.

"Justification by grace through faith." It is not enough to simply say the words or to assume that people know the message. God's word of promise must be proclaimed in a meaningful way, that is, in a way that is full of meaning for these hearers. To preach God's word of promise in a meaningful way is to proclaim our need of God and announce the good news of God's activity in Jesus Christ to meet our need in ways that address people's real lives. In Luther's day, the burning question was how one faces the hour of death. For many today, the burning question is how to face the next hour of life. Luther says that, when Christians hear God's word of promise preached in a way that both authentically names their need of God and is a vessel through which they experience God meeting that need, this word leads them to the Lord's table, where they receive the promise for themselves. And when Christians do not feel they need the Lord's Supper, it is the word of promise that works to make them believe and brings them to the table.

When preaching is authentically God's word of promise, we can ground more frequent celebration of Holy Communion in the Supper's relationship to preaching. Luther located Christ's presence in both preaching and the Supper in God's word of promise. When God's word of promise is preached, pastors can follow Luther's example and proclaim that the Supper is more than the place where individuals go when they need forgiveness. It is also the place where God confirms that the promise preached in the sermon is meant for every individual. As we eat Christ's body and drink Christ's blood and hear that they are given and shed "for you," Christ is present to apply God's promise proclaimed publicly in the sermon to each individual alone. While the sermon proclaims and explains God's word of promise, the Lord's Supper



confirms that the promise made publicly in preaching is meant for and applicable to each person individually. The issue is not whether people feel they have sinned enough to need the sacrament. The issue is God's need to give God's word of promise to each person individually—to the one who cannot believe the word of promise in the sermon, to the one doubting that the promise applies to her, to the one tempted to put limits on the promise, to the one who needs God to get in his face and say it directly to him. While that one may not be me on any given Sunday, it's me often enough. And on each and every Sunday that one is someone. And even when I am the one who knows the promise and clings to it for life, God still wants to remind me that the promise is meant for me. And so the church celebrates the Supper each and every Sunday to confirm the promise preached in the sermon for the sake of every one, so that God can bring the Word of promise individually to all. Luther would say that the place to begin moving people to the table is in the pulpit, with God's clear and meaningful word of promise. The Supper is God's way of insuring that the promise gets heard.

A way to lift up the Supper is by elevating the Word.

The Daughters of Zelophehad

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Numbers 27:1–11 is the story of the daughters of Zelophehad and their challenge to the implications of the second wilderness census. It is a little known text, rarely appearing in any lectionary sequence and inheriting the general neglect of the book of Numbers. At initial reading and according to the prevailing interpretive tradition, it is just one of many texts to prescribe specific legal principles for the people of Israel.

However, if we view the narrative as a received text from a specific historical setting and ask what it might be saying as text,[1] the narrative makes a remarkable statement about the dignity and value of women and children as members of the congregation of Israel. Particularly because of the generally negative textual witness in the Hebrew Testament about women, this unique text is an important countercultural witness to a different point of view.

Text.[2]

Num 27:1. Then-came the-daughters of-Zelophehad, the-son of-Hepher, the-son of-Gilead, the-son of-Machir, the-son of-Manasseh, of-the-clan of-Manasseh the-son of-Joseph: and-these (are) the-names-of his-daughters; Mahlah, Noah, and-Hoglah, and-Milcah, and-Tirzah.

2. And-they-stood before Moses, and-before Eleazar the-priest, and-before the-leaders and-all the-company, by-the-entrance-of the-Tent of-Meeting, saying,

3. Our-father died in-the-wilderness, and-now-he not was among the-company of-them-that-gathered-themselves-together against the-LORD among-the-company of-Korah; but in-his-own-sin died, and no sons had-he.

4. Why should-be-done-away the-name-of our-father from-among his-clan, because no son he-has? Give to-us a-possession among the-brothers-of our-father.

5. And-Moses brought their-judgment before the-LORD.

6. And-said the-LORD to Moses, saying,

7. The-daughters of-Zelophehad speak right! Give give to-them a-possession-of an-inheritance among their-father's brothers; and-you-shall-cause-to-pass the-inheritance-of their-father to-them.

8. And-you-shall-say to-the-sons-of Israel, speaking, If a-man die, and-has no son, then-you-shall-cause-to-pass his-inheritance to-his-daughter.

9. And-if he-has no daughter, then-you-shall-give his-inheritance to-his-brothers

10. And-if he-has no brothers, then-you-shall-give his-inheritance to-his-father's brothers.

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[1] Katharine Doob Sakenfeld provides a succinct review of the issue of interpretive stance as a determinative of meaning. See "In the Wilderness, Awaiting the Land: The daughters of Zelophehad and Feminist Interpretation," *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 9 (1988), no. 3:186ff. For the sake of brevity, this essay explores only the literary strategy.

[2] This translation is derived by the author.

11. And-if-his-father-has no brothers, then-you-shall-give his-inheritance to-his-relative that-is-next to-him of-his-clan, and-he-shall-possess it: and-it-shall-be to-the-sons of-Israel a-statute-of judgment, as-the-LORD commanded Moses.

Larger literary context. The basic text of Numbers is probably exilic with significant post-exilic additions. Many scholars view chaps. 27–36 as a 'miscellaneous collection,'[3] but I do not agree. Chaps. 1–25 tell the story of the death of the rebellious generation in the wilderness. Chaps. 26–36 is the story of the new, obedient generation, who they were, the obedience expected of them in worship and fidelity, and the final reward of being given a portion in the promised land.[4] This provides the larger context for the Daughters of Zelophehad narrative.

Possession of inheritable land within Israel was a major part of the covenantal promise.[5] Land was considered to belong to YHWH[6] and entrusted to the people of God. This assignment of land was eternal and inviolable[7] and hence the significance of the Jubilee year (Lev 25:13–28) to restore to members of the community land lost through penury. To violate this allocation of place and land was cause for divine punishment (1Kgs 21:16–19, Mic 2:1–5). Thus having a land possession within Israel became tightly related to keeping the name of a family within the lists of the people of God. Conversely, *to have one's name cut off* means variously to be shunned, banished, removed from membership in the covenant people, or killed. Therefore one lives both metaphorically and literally within the covenantal relationship, covenantal people, and covenantal land.

The form of the acquisition of land in Numbers is a gift or bestowal from the Sovereign YHWH. The means of preserving this gift and its implications for the people of YHWH is inheritance. This distinction between the gift of a possession and the preservation of it via inheritance is important to the analysis of the larger context as well as of the subject narrative.

Chapter 26 begins after the cessation of the plague that kills the remainder of the first generation of the people. The chapter recounts how, camped on the west bank of the Jordan in sight of the promised land, the member households were identified that would participate in the land grant from YHWH. Chapter 27 provides the narrative of the Daughters of Zelophehad. This story challenges the implications of the census in chap. 26 and evokes a modified ruling from YHWH. Once the issue is settled, the author introduces new leadership in 27:12–23. Following the designation of new leadership, we have a remembrance, in narrative form, of the key essentials of obedient covenant-following. There is a description of proper worship and adjuration that the heads of household are responsible for the avowed commitments of their families. A recounting of experiences that bear on the implications reinforces these key ingredients. Proper worship required maintenance of purity that is illustrated by the example of war booty distribution from the defeat of

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[3] E.g., Sakenfeld, *Journeying with God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 8, 11.

[4] I do not claim that this section has no incidental material, only that the majority of its material is part of a coherent attempt by the editor(s) to recount the conditions of entry into the Promised Land.

[5] See Exodus 3, Leviticus 20, and Deuteronomy 6, among many other examples.

[6] Lev 25:23. Josiah Derby also cites this as the primary motive for the postscript in Numbers 36. See "The Daughters of Zelophehad Revisited," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 25 (1997): 169–71.

[7] Contingent on obedience in some texts (e.g., Leviticus 18, 22).

the Midianites. Responsibility for commitments is illustrated by the warning to the Reubenites and Gadites that they were still responsible for taking the land as YHWH instructed even though they wished to remain outside Canaan proper. Chapter 33, in traditional Hebraic fashion (cf. Deut 26:4 ff.), recounts the context-providing history of how they came to Transjordan before repeating YHWH's instructions about proper behavior to retain the promise of land. Thus we have a threefold repetition of the necessity of obedience—directly in chaps. 28–30, in story form in chaps. 31–32, and in direct address from YHWH in 33:51–56. Given these adjurations, the details of land distribution follow in chaps. 34–35, including an acknowledgement in chap. 36 of practical implications of YHWH's ruling from 27:1-11.

To review, chap. 26, culminating in v. 53, specifies who is counted as an Israelite and thereby will receive the gift of land from YHWH. The narrative of the Daughters of Zelophehad then follows. Conventional scholarship[8] sees this narrative as concerned with inheritance rules. N. H. Snaith unconventionally proposes that it is to account for the fact that the tribe of Manasseh held land to the west of the Jordan.[9]

In contrast, I propose that the narrative is primarily about neither but rather a challenge to the divine instructions of whom should be counted as belonging to the nation of Israel.

Basic narrative structure. The narrative spans eleven verses, set in three episodes: the daughters present their case, YHWH pronounces judgment, and YHWH instructs future generations. The narrator provides only an introduction of the participants and notes who is speaking. The only active characters are the daughters, introduced individually but speaking collectively, and YHWH.

The narrative is in the formalized style of a juridical court proceeding. The conventional pattern introduces the court and pleaders, summarizes their case, commends the case to the court, and reports the judgement of the court. Within this pattern there is no overt motion in time or place. We don't know much about the legal system of the pre-monarchic period, but we can infer some information from related countries' practices and texts such as Lev 24:10–15, Num 9:6–13, Num 15:32–36, Ruth 4, and the monarchic period example in 1Kgs 21:12. These examples suggest that the court often met at the gate of the town or, in the wilderness period, at the gate or entrance to the Tent of Meeting. All the townspeople (i.e., of-age men) were sometimes cited as the judging authority. In the wilderness period, an inability to decide often resulted in a formal consultation of YHWH using Moses as the intermediary to pose the question and receive the answer.[10]

Because the formal court proceeding literary structure dominates, we must pay close attention to the specific choice of words of the active characters.

Major themes. The theme of death vs. life is very significant. The narrative is in the

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[8] E.g., Timothy R. Ashley, *The Book of Numbers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993); Jacob Milgrom, *Numbers* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1990), and many others.

[9] N. H. Snaith, "The Daughters of Zelophehad," *Vetus Testamentum* 16 (1966): 126.

[10] Exodus 33 notes that the Tent of Meeting was a place where Moses alone met with YHWH and the people stayed in their tents. Later texts have the people gathering "before the entrance to the Tent of Meeting" for important meetings.

midst of the larger literary contrast between the death of the rebellious and the beginning of new life in a new land. Death is named in v. 3 as well as implicitly in the rebellion of Korah that led to death. The metaphoric death of having one's name removed from the lists of those counted in Israel is also cited. Life is represented as having possession among YHWH's people, particularly when we remember that a common expression for death or being killed is to be *cut off from among the people.*

The theme of living in community or congregation also pervades the narrative. One is *among* one's relatives as a statement of well being, being *among* the rebellious is a citation of grave sin, and to be *removed from among* relatives is cited as a grave punishment.

Finally, the themes of justice and equity underlie the narrative. The basic supposition of the daughters is that the ruling of YHWH in chap. 26 is not right and must be made so. Implicit in the request is that YHWH's essential attributes include fairness and integrity, and so the pointing out of an unfairness or inequity must result in a change of YHWH's decree. This deep confidence in the nature of YHWH is a major but unvoiced attribute of the daughters that gives them the courage for their daring speech.

A close reading

Episode 1: The daughters present their case.

Introduction of the characters (v. 1).
Then-came the-daughters of-Zelophehad, the-son of-Hepher, the-son of-Gilead, the-son of-Machir, the-son of-Manasseh, of-the-clan of-Manasseh the-son of-Joseph: and-these (are) the-names-of his-daughters; Mahlah, Noah, and-Hoglah, and-Milcah, and-Tirzah.

The narrator introduces the daughters in standard fashion by recounting their patrimony back to the most significant forebear. This establishes their connections to the community. In this case seven generations are traced, whereas most of the families in chap. 26 are traced only to the second or third generation.[11] In addition, the sequence of names in the list in the preceding chapter has the half tribe of Manassah in the seventh position rather than the more conventional sixth position. The author seems to be signaling that they are significant rather than just the accidental family that had a complaint.

Although we do not know this yet as a reader of the story, the daughters' half-tribe of Manasseh will choose to settle in Transjordan (Num 32:33), not in Canaan. This increases the dramatic tension over the theme to be demonstrated that the story is about whom is included in the nation of Israel.

That the daughters are named is notable, suggesting they were important at least to the narration. Names are usually given in status order. Thus Mahlah is first and Tirzah least, which suggests Mahlah is the eldest. Names are usually signifiers of the nature of the persons, and these names can be rendered as *disease*, *motion*, *partridge*, *queen*, and *favorable.* This suggests that Mahlah either was of frail health or was born during difficult times and Noah in optimistic times. Further, the third, fourth, and fifth daughters are introduced by the particle for *and*, but not the first two. This suggests that the latter four may be a group, the mother Noah and her three daughters.

[11] It is often observed that biblical genealogies are not constructed literally, but forebears selected for their relevance and the number of generations chosen to suggest significance (cf. the genealogy in Ruth 4).

Another possibility is four daughters by a second wife. With these observations, *daughters* may not be a literalism but a symbol[12] for all the non-male members of the house of Zelophehad. The eldest or most able (Mahlah), her sister Noah and Noah's three daughters courageously represent such a group before the court.[13] Interestingly, they are not named again in this narrative other than by the collective *daughters* or a plural pronoun.

Setting of the court scene (v. 2).
And-they-stood before Moses, and-before Eleazar the-priest, and-before the-leaders and-all the-company, by-the-entrance of-the-Tent of-Meeting, saying,

The second verse notes the court scene in sparse detail by recounting only who was present. The verb *stood before* appears to be ambiguous. If we interpret this as a court scene wherein they were the accused, then standing-before implies they were in the place of the defendant, which is a risky and inferior position. But the words are also used to mean stood-up-before in the sense of addressing a group. Because leadership is spoken of in this way, such an interpretation gives the daughters significant status. Subsequent analysis confirms that this is the intended meaning. The obvious next question is: Before whom did they stand?

The assembled persons include Moses, the priest Eleazar, and the *leaders and all the congregation.* This latter construct is usually a way to mean first that everyone was there, and second that each major clan put forward its senior patriarch to represent it. This could suggest that the leaders, Moses, and Eleazar were the judges and the congregation was the witness to the proceedings. However, subsequent narration suggests rather that the citation of attendees means that the case was very important. The narrator will later report no deliberation by any party but rather the immediate presentation of the plea to YHWH for judgment and YHWH's response. This supports the interpretation that the assembled dignitaries were not there as judges but as witness to the seriousness of the claim being presented. Finally, the modifier *and before* does not appear before congregation, suggesting that *leaders and all the congregation* are to be interpreted as a unit rather than two separate entities. This is additional evidence that the leaders are not to be interpreted as a separate group that judged but as the totems of the nation.

This verse also introduces the key word *edah* for a gathering or a company or a congregation. It will be used in the narrative to denote the social locus for the validation of sense of self and belonging. To *be in* a particular company or congregation is a key definition of identity. A related sense of this word is a *testimony*, as in Gen 21:30, or a *divine precept,* as in Ps 119:22ff. Thus being in the congregation of Israel can be imbued with the meaning of being a formal witness of the divine covenant. So identity and relationships are nearly indistinguishable.

The place of the narrative is *by-the-entrance of-the-tent of-Meeting*. This is the usual narrative device to mean that people gathered to ask something of YHWH (cf. 6:13, 10:3, 12:5, 16:18–19, 17:15, 20:6). In preceding cases (Lev 24:10–15, Num 9:6–13, Num 15:32–36) it is clear that the assembly or leaders had the decision authority and could not decide. They then asked

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[12] More frequently encountered is the symbol of *sons* for all descendents of a person.

[13] Some commentators assume these were all underage women, whereas the text makes no note of their age. See "young women" in J. Weingreen, "The Case of the Daughters of Zelophehad," *Vetus Testamentum* 16 (1966): 519.

YHWH to render a decision. In this case, the plea will be made directly to YHWH, and so the entrance to the Tent of Meeting is the appropriate place.

The verb describing the daughters' action is *amar*, to say. This normally is followed by what is spoken and does not usually have a reference to whom the words are directed. Later we will see that the word *dabar*, to speak, is used where the thing spoken and the person spoken to are both part of the construction. Is it a matter of choice of words here, or is there significance? Given that one could readily write "The Daughters spoke to the congregation, saying . . ." as in v. 6, this suggests that the person(s) to whom the speech is addressed is deliberately not named.

Given the subsequent narrative development, this further suggests that the daughters' speech was directed toward YHWH and not toward the court at all. Indeed, the verb *give* in v. 4 can only be understood as an imperative toward the One who has the right to give land. At the time when the narrative took place, the leaders or Moses do not have such a right. Zvi Ron notes the unusual process whereby the case is immediately presented "to Moses" without first going through the lower courts as prescribed in Exod 18:19–26.[14] It is my conclusion that this straight-to-the-top approach is evidence, first, that the case is against YHWH and not the juridical system, and second, that the daughters are bold and fearless at pressing their claim.

This then places the daughters in a remarkable light. They, as those who do not count in the nation of Israel, have the courage and confidence to directly address YHWH before the whole company of Israel as witness. The threefold audience of Moses, Eleazar, and assembled Israel is witness to the important twofold interaction between those who do not count and YHWH.

Statement of the case (v. 3).

Our-father died in-the-wilderness, and-now-he not was among the-company of-them-that-gathered-themselves-together against the-LORD among-the-company of-Korah; but in-his-own-sin died, and no sons had he.

This verse begins the testimony proper. Brueggemann has noted that the presentation of the case by the witness is crucial, as their choice of the terms of the claim determines the scope and latitude that the court has for decision.[15] Thus the basis upon which the daughters construct their case is important.

The statement of facts with which they begin alludes to the late head of their family, not to themselves. Thereby they immediately gain the status of disinterested advocate. Because the daughters' argument supposes the then prevalent theory of retribution, their argument is based on justice. They begin from the premise of Num 26:53, which states that those who were counted in the second census are defined to be those worthy of a land grant from the Sovereign. They will not claim that the land grant nor the method of apportionment is unjust. Rather, they claim that the mechanism for determining who is *of Israel*, or more poetically *of the sons of Israel*, is unjust and that YHWH, as a just God, must rectify it.

The daughters' next rhetorical move is to give assurance that *our father* was not guilty of a capital offense of rebellion. The *our father* citation, rather than use of the proper name Zelophehad, puts them in the role of innocent victim, a good position to elicit the sympathy of the court. The essence of the upstanding character of

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[14] Zvi Ron, "The Daughters of Zelophehad," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 26 (1998): 261.

[15] Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 121.

Zelophehad is cited as *not-being among* the *company* of Korah, the rebellious one. This is stated in two parallel constructions of *among the company of.* The premise of the last half of Numbers is that the new generation is not rebellious and that rebellion against YHWH was what cost the forebears the loss of the promise of YHWH. Thus the argument both admits the "ordinary" rebelliousness of Zelophehad (died in-his-own-sin) and disclaims any extraordinary action of rebellion (such as that of Korah) that might merit additional sanctions.[16]

Next is a rhetorical gap that must be filled in by the reader to understand the import of *no sons had he.* We must remember that the membership in the nation of Israel for the purposes of claiming a part of the Sovereign's land grant was the presence of males over the age of 20. Thus families with many elder sons get more "credit" than those with few. The census has been done, and the lack of such males has meant that the house of Zelophehad does not count. Many commentators have observed that the lack of a son must mean that their mother did not or could not take advantage of Levirate marriage to obtain a son.[17] This is quite beside the point. The permanent allocation of land is based on a count at an instant in time, and the use of Levirate or other means to obtain sons at a later time is irrelevant—only those alive on the date of the census count. Thus the daughters' claim rests on the validity of using of-age sons on a specific date as a just surrogate for a family.

The claim of the daughters (v. 4).
Why should-be-done-away the-name-of our-father from-among his-clan, because no son he-has? Give to-us a-possession among the-brothers-of our-father.

The claim of the daughters is stated as an interrogative or rhetorical question, but later verses give the statement the more impressive status of a judgment or decree. The daughters' argument does not proceed to speculate on why there were no sons. It could be construed as an accident of patrimony, or as a weakness of Zelophehad or his wife or wives, or even as a direct punishment from YHWH.[18] The rhetorical form of the question avoids these speculations to presume the accident of patrimony cause and go directly to the claim of injustice.

The daughters' speech was directed toward YHWH and not toward the court at all.

The daughters have presented a clever argument. Their father was not extraordinarily rebellious and paid the due penalty of the previous generation. The decision of who constituted Israel was made on the basis of battle-age sons on a specific date and thereby ignored families with no of-age sons on that date. If lack of sons was a great

[16] Additional sanctions for rebellion were imposed in the monarchic period in the case of Naboth. Weingreen argues that this is the formal legal reason for the daughters' caveat, but I think it is more likely that the daughters are forestalling objections rather than meeting the strictures of established case law.

[17] Milgrom, *Numbers*, 231, and Philip J. Budd, *Numbers,* Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 5 (Waco: Word Books, 1984): 301.

[18] Later texts (e.g., Ps 127:3–4, Deut 28:11) that sons are a direct evidence of fragment reward, and in the theory of retribution, lack of such a reward could be construed as evidence of sin.



misfortune, how much greater would be the loss of membership in Israel for no just cause? The words chosen claim that the name of the father, which is the symbol of the family or clan, would be removed from the middle of the family. The verb is "be done away" or "be taken away." They do not use a related word meaning to cut or sever, recalling the phrase "to be cut off" as a statement of banishment, death, or execution. Thus the argument uses words implying theft or erasure by another party rather than a forfeit or capital punishment.

It is important that the issue is not whether or not the daughters inherit but whether they and their family count as Israelites and so should be awarded land by the Sovereign. The rectitude of the law of YHWH is challenged by its injustice or unfairness. Because this question is addressed to YHWH, the daughters as petitioners are not addressing a court of the whole assembly but directly confronting YHWH.

The petition of the daughters ends in a dramatic statement of the just answer. There is no respectful request to the judge to decide but a statement of what justice requires. Give us, they say, an *inheritable-land-grant among* (or in the midst of) the father's relatives. Note that they do not claim an inheritance but the land grant (*achuzzah*) of the Sovereign. By the imperative mode, they assert that the only just response to the claim is that they and the members of their family count as Israelites and as such should be granted the signifier of land.

Presentation of the case to the judge (v. 5). *And-Moses brought their-judgment before the-LORD.*

This verse forms a chiastic structure with v. 6 (*Moses, verb, LORD* in v. 5 and *Lord, verb Moses* in v. 6). This section will dramatically end with YHWH, and the next section begins with YHWH's reply. The word rendered as judgment is *mishpat*, a term connoting the decision of a judge that concludes a legal case. This choice of word by the narrator suggests that the daughters (in v. 4) made a strong statement of what is right or a strong demand for justice, not a deferential request for relief or support. Indeed, the same word is used in v. 11 at the conclusion of the narrative to firmly set the decision in the obligations of the legal code of Israel.

Jacob Milgrom reports that some midrash say that Moses' action in asking YHWH is a sign of weakness on Moses' part for not knowing the implications of the existing law and thus he is humiliated by the women's pointing it out. In contrast, I believe the narrative presents the daughters' challenge to the definition of Israel as pronounced by YHWH, not a challenge of the subsequent administration of the census or the inheritance rules. Since it is a challenge to YHWH, Moses is correct to pass the issue to YHWH rather than asking the court to decide.

The daughters have made a very courageous statement. The no-counts stand before all the do-counts and challenge the

divine Counter. There is no if-you-please language such as Abraham used pleading over Sodom but an unambiguous claim that justice requires they be counted. In other biblical scenes, those who dared to challenge the Holy were summarily punished, but the daughters have great confidence in a just God. The narrator ends this first episode with the daughters and all Israel awaiting the decision.

Episode 2: The decision is rendered.

The judge decides (v. 6).

And-said the-LORD to Moses, saying,

The verse introducing the decision episode uses a repetition of *mr*, to say. This emphasizes the fact that the ruling came from YHWH. Brueggemann notes that *mr* and *dbr*, when used for God's talk, usually have the sense of *swh* or command.[19] However, in this case I prefer the rendering of *say*, as the next word for communication from YHWH will be *dbr* which is stronger, and then the final word (in v. 11) is *tsavah* or command. The resulting intensification of directness fits the narrative better.

The daughters are vindicated (v. 7).

The-daughters of-Zelophehad speak right! Give give to-them a-possession of-an-inheritance among their-father's brothers; and-you-shall-cause-to-pass the-inheritance of-their-father to-them.

The decision is rendered in three short imperative clauses: the daughters' claim is vindicated by YHWH, the daughters' request is granted, and they are given an honorable standing in the community.

The narrator chooses the word *dabar* to describe their previous act of speaking, a word suggesting more directed speech than *amar*, which had been used in v. 2 to describe their direct address. YHWH affirms their speaking as right, true, correct. There is no equivocation here but a complete affirmation of their speech. This statement is much weightier than just affirming their claim for a land grant. It affirms their argument. Indeed it is a direct admission by YHWH that the process for determining who is *of Israel* in chap. 26 was not just. Vindicating the daughters' confidence in a just God, YHWH does not rationalize that Moses got the procedure wrong or develop a technicality in the rules but directly proceeds to provide the just resolution.

The narrator uses another repetitive construct with the verb *nathan*, to give, grant, or bestow, to emphasize that it must be done. They are to be given an *achuzzah* (as they requested), which is possession of things by gift from a Sovereign. They get *achuzzah* of an *nachalah* (inheritable thing). The bestowal given is specifically not an inheritance but a land grant from the Sovereign. (This particular choice of words provides additional support for my focus on the issue of the justice of the counting process that determines land grants rather than on inheritance as most commentators do.[20])

YHWH goes on to grant a further benefit. Moses is to "cause to pass" their father's inheritance (*nachalah*) to them. This is a statement of transference of standing which is not used for a son but only required for daughters that were not normally in the inheritance chain of precedence. Sons were considered to be an extension of their father for inheritance purposes. Thus this wording specifies that the rights of inheritance are specifically transferred to a distinct group rather than passing to the "natural" extension of the father as manifest in the son. This phrase speaks of transferring an inheritance which, technically, does not exist at

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[19] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 182.

[20] E.g., Budd, *Numbers*, 300.

the instant. Thus it should be interpreted to mean transferring the right to inherit that will become real once the land is occupied and the land assigned by lot. By additionally granting the daughters this benefit, they have standing in the community as any other head of family might have.

The end of the second episode is a resounding affirmation of the daughters in three ways: their argument is approved as correct, they are counted as members of Israel as manifest by the original land grant, and they are given the right of inheritance for their family. This symbolically complete (threefold) vindication is remarkable, but there is yet more, as YHWH is not finished.

Episode 3: The inheritance law is changed.

The codification of the standing of daughters (v. 8).
And-you-shall-speak to-the-sons of-Israel, speaking, If a-man die, and-has no son, then-you-shall-cause-to-pass his-inheritance to-his-daughter.

The last episode is a pronouncement of YHWH directed to the nation (via Moses) rather than to the daughters in particular. This part of the narrative extends the decision on the daughters' case to apply to inheritance in general rather than to the original census and its implications. For most commentators, this is the climax of the narrative.

YHWH has established by v. 7 that the non-male-lead family has a place in the community and a claim upon the Sovereign. Now the question is to consider the implications. Many passages in Scripture allude to the belief that a person's place in Israel is both confirmed and manifest by possession of land. The grant of land by YHWH must be maintained, for to become landless was to lose one's place in the community. The customary social method of preserving the land within a family or clan was to choose one sex and attach the inheritance rights to that sex. Inheritance would be divided among children of that sex, and they would always be considered to remain members of the birth family, clan, or tribe, so the land apportionment remained stable over history. For Israel, the male sex was the chosen bearer of inheritance rights. For this to be a stable solution, the opposite, female sex was considered to become a member of the family into which she married. Since she customarily did not carry inheritance rights, this solution did not disturb the initial allocation by YHWH.

What happens in the case where there is no male to inherit? Given the precedent of the daughters of Zelophehad that women were counted as members of Israel, transfer of inheritance via daughters was a viable solution. This pronouncement provides for that case. It is addressed to *sons of-Israel*, the conventional collective meaning "all Israel." (If one is sensitive to its patriarchal emphasis, one can also conclude that YHWH was specifically addressing the male power structure with an unambiguous directive intensified by the duplicated "speak" term.) The text again uses the verb *cause-to-pass* because the inheritance right assignation is outside the normal convention.

There is an interesting codicil to this decision in chap. 36. In this postscript, the leaders ask whether the new inheritance regulations may not thwart the intent of the divine decision in chap. 27 wherein daughters could inherit. Because daughters became members of their new family by established custom and such membership usually meant transferring owned property rights,[21] marrying outside the clan and tribe

[21] Strictly speaking, this is conjectural, but most commentators presume it.

would change the established land grants of YHWH. This was a question for the legal administration of a principle established by YHWH rather than a challenge to YHWH's original action. The resolution is to limit the daughters that carry inheritance responsibilities to marry in such as manner as to not thwart the land grants of YHWH.

Extension of the precedent (vv. 9–11).
9. And-if he-has no daughter, then-you-shall-give his-inheritance to-his-brothers
10. And-if he-has no brothers, then-you-shall-give his-inheritance to-his-father's brothers.
11. And-if-his-father-has no brothers, then-you-shall-give his-inheritance to-his-relative that-is-next to-him-of-his-clan, and-he-shall-possess it: and-it-shall-be to-the-sons of-Israel a-statute of-judgment, as-the-LORD commanded Moses.

The final part of the extension decision spells out the inheritance rules should the patriarch have no surviving children. It follows the standard agnatic principle by naming the various male relatives in a priority order. The final specification (v. 11) uses the term for kinsman that is generic rather than gendered. This suggests that if the steps still fail by the father lacking brothers (and given that males in the order of relation have already been cited), women may again become inheritors. It is also interesting that only six instances of relationship are noted (original male, son, daughter, brothers, father's brothers, other next of kin), suggesting that the inheritance precedent is deliberately left open for further interpretation. Indeed, the regulation may be meant not as a legal dictum but rather as an extended account of a principle of inheritance administration, indeed a principle that includes women as valid participants under appropriate circumstances.

This latter conjecture is supported by the unusual *statute of- judgment* language used only here and in Num 35:29 (at the end of the text about the cities of refuge). The usual word choice is *statute of Torah*, particularly when the text discusses rules about the sanctuary and worship. The locution here reuses the *mishpat* term that describes the daughters' claim as presented to YHWH by Moses and supports the interpretation of *judgment* as *discerning reasoning*. By not using the Torah term, it is distinguished from the fiercely guarded worship regulations. In both Num 27:11 and 35:29, the text may record a command of YHWH that defines a principle of reasoning rather than a fixed suite of rules.

Reflections on the text as a whole

The narrative has conventionally been interpreted in the context of formal inheritance legislation. The primary documents with this point of view are rabbinic interpretations codified many centuries after Christ and the many Jewish and Christian commentaries that follow this strategy. From the point of view of canon, this is the received meaning.

However, biblical texts derive their authority from their ability to confront us with our forebears' experience of God. Previous generations may have held interpretive suppositions (e.g., patriarchy) different from our own. This does not determine the nature of God but only their perception of the nature of God. Each generation must encounter the Divine for itself in continuity with the tradition but not in the thrall of tradition. For example, although this narrative does use terminology (e.g., inheritance) from later historical periods, the narrative setting clearly implies that there was nothing to own or inherit at the time that the daughters made their claim. That com-

mentators neglected this obvious component of the story need not compel us to do so.

The text provides both an inspiring story that the justice of YHWH is status-blind and a firm acknowledgement that women can lead families and do count as members of the nation of Israel—not just as components of male-headed households but as persons in themselves who count.

In form, the story is a legal confrontation between YHWH and the daughters of Zelophehad. All other characters contribute only by their presence and formal, muted roles. The daughters speak first and assume the dominant role, while YHWH replies using their words and reasoning to justify YHWH's response. This clearly illustrates that an important meaning is the relation of women to YHWH, not the specific point of argument. The specific point of argument, too, reinforces this judgment as it is about the right of the women to count rather than the recognition and codification of that right in the inheritance legislation. Finally, the final portion of YHWH's ruling that codifies women's standing in legislation is further evidence, as it makes permanent in historical process what is declared as true at the instant of the second, defining census.

The plight of a family that had only underage sons at the time of the second census is similar in implication to the plight of the family of Zelophehad but is not discussed. This is further evidence that the gender issue is the key point of the text, not the issue of families left out because of the structure of the qualifying census. In the patriarchal culture of the time and in subsequent centuries, it is remarkable that the women are named, that they address the deity directly, and that they are called *right* or *just*. A further confirmation of the status of the daughters is that they are given the status of name bearers of their father's family symbolized by the transference of inheritance to them. This is the only narrative in the Hebrew Scripture that I know of where God implicitly acknowledges an error and fixes it. Other texts talk of God's remorse (e.g., the Flood story), or being influenced by a patriarch (e.g., Abraham and Sodom), but this story implies that YHWH erred in the original instructions.

Of the commentators on this text that I found, only two seem to have glimpsed the revolutionary implications of the narrative. Zvi Ron, reflecting on the note by Josiah Derby, comments that the women sought and were granted the role status of men. Ron could be interpreted as commending my proposal that the daughters sought and were granted status as valid receivers of the Sovereign's land grant, although he does not say so explicitly. Sakenfeld in her article (but not in the later book) identifies the courage and boldness of the women but still casts the issue in terms of economics rather than in terms of the integrity of female personhood.[22] It is unfortunate that the success of the daughters at confronting an error of the deity, and their vindication as full-status holders of family place in Israel, has not supported more empathetic reflection on the relative role of women and men before God.

Finally, if the unusual concluding phrase, *a statute of judgment,* is understood to mean that YHWH's ruling is not a legalism but a narrative example of how to deal justly, and if the narrative emphasis is on the just way to reckon non-males as equally Israelite, then this is a crucial text about the worth of persons that should inform reasoning about how we live together. It is a pity it has been so hidden by the cultural suppositions of past centuries of readers.

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[22] Sakenfeld, "In the Wilderness," 181.

Book Reviews

The Genesis of Perfection. Adam and Eve in Jewish and Christian Imagination. By Gary A. Anderson (Westminster John Knox, $24.95). A., Roman Catholic and a Harvard professor, draws a comprehensive picture of how Jews and Christians in the first centuries of the Common Era retold and relived the story of Adam and Eve. In addition to ransacking Jewish and Christian commentaries and such ancient works as the "Life of Adam and Eve" (fourth century C.E.) and Jubilees (second century B.C.E.), he explores Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Christian art (Michelangelo, orthodox frescos). The tradition is divided about where Adam and Eve first enjoyed sex—outside of Eden if the garden was sacred space, or inside Eden if primeval joys were to mirror eschatological joys. He explores the relationship between Eve and Mary and the development of the doctrine of original sin. He even examines the tradition that Christ grabbed Adam and Eve by the wrists and pulled them to freedom when he descended to Hades. He pays attention to both the history of biblical composition and the history of the Bible's interpretation. Fascinating. *RWK*

David's Secret Demons: Messiah, Murderer, Traitor, King. By Baruch Halpern (Eerdmans, $30). H., who is writing a full-length history of Israel and is co-director of an archaeological expedition at Megiddo, here writes a biography of David that is at once conservative and excessively daring, popular in style and at times very tough sledding. It is conservative in that it dates 2 Samuel very early (during Solomon's reign) and even thinks 2 Samuel 8 is a transcript of a display description posted by David. David is historical (despite the wild cries from Copenhagen), but ruler of a *very* modest kingdom. But H.'s David did not kill Uriah, and H.'s Solomon is the son of Uriah and Bathsheba! The second half of the book presents an easy-to-read narrative reconstruction of the life of David, but scattered throughout the first part and in an appendix on the archaeology of the tenth century are highly technical treatments, studded with jaw-breaking words (David attainted Absalom's family) or normal words used in unusual senses (e.g. filibuster is not a long-winded speech in the U. S. Senate but an irregular military adventurer; Abigail "treats" with David = negotiates). To my taste H. claims to know too much about the history of David and is somewhat inattentive to the literary character of the Davidic picture in the Bible, let alone its theological importance. *RWK*

The Illustrated Torah. Paintings by Michal Meron. Edited by Alon Baker. Introductory notes by Ellen Frankel (Jewish Publication Society, $60). M., an Israeli female folk artist, offers simple and delightful illustrations of the *sidrot* (Torah/Pentateuch portions) and their paired readings from the Prophets (*Haftarot*). Each *sidrah* has an illustration by M. in bold colors, excerpts from the standard translation of the Jewish Publication Society, and brief summaries of the biblical content by F. M. is working on a second volume that will offer illustrations for each of the psalms. *RWK*

Studies in the Archaeology of the Iron Age in Israel and Jordan. Edited by Amihai Mazar (Sheffield Academic Press, $85). The thirteen essays in this volume were first delivered at a colloquium in London in 1996. Four essays deal with settlement patterns based on recent archaeological surveys. Six essays report on temples, including the ones at Dan and Arad, and iconography, and a final three essays describe excavation results in Jerusalem, Beth Shean, and Busayra (in Jordan). *RWK*

Lutherans and Episcopalians Together. A Guide to Understanding. By G. Scott Cady and Christopher L. Webber (Cowley Publications, $11.95). In a series of votes between 1997 and 2000, ELCA Lutherans and Episcopalians adopted a proposal known as Called to Common Mission (CCM). This book is intended to help readers understand these two ecclesiastical tra-

ditions and explore the consequences of this new agreement. There are chapters on denominational history, theology and tradition, liturgy, administration and authority, the role of bishops, lay and ordained ministry, local congregations, and changes that might enhance our common mission. C. and W., ordained respectively in the Lutheran and Episcopal traditions, are pastors of congregations that together studied CCM. The authors challenge their churches to proclaim the gospel and to address the needs and concerns of the poor, the homeless, the sick, and those in prison. *RWK*

Life in Biblical Israel. By Philip J. King and Lawrence E. Stager (Westminster John Knox, $39.95). This is a book about how everyday life took place in the Iron Age and is written by two of the leading archaeologists of our time. Chapters include the Israelite house and household; means of existence (agriculture, water, arts and crafts, transportation); cities, water systems, and warfare; culture (dress, music, literacy); and religious institutions (altars, feasts, death and burial, afterlife). There are 228 pictures of archaeological finds and artistic depictions of daily life, printed on glossy paper, almost all of them in color. K. and S. achieve their goal: to recreate the lifeways and mental attitudes of the ancient Israelites. An ideal book for church libraries. *RWK*

Witness at the Crossroads: Gettysburg Lutheran Seminary Servants in the Public Life. Edited by Frederick K. Wentz (Lutheran Theological Seminary, $10). Herein are chronicled the godly lives of nineteen lay and ordained Lutherans who in one way or another were associated with the Gettysburg Seminary. Among these "sight-lifters": Daniel Alexander Payne, the first African American Lutheran seminarian, Samuel Simon Schmucker, William A. Passavant (by LSTC *emeritus* professor Robert H. Fischer), Charles Porterfield Krauth, Abdel Ross Wentz, Stewart W. Herman, Jr. (first president of LSTC), John Garcia Gensel, George E. Mendenhall, and Bertha Paulssen (who fled Nazi persecution and was the first woman tenured at a Lutheran seminary). *RWK*

Untold Stories. The Bible and Ugaritic Studies in the Twentieth Century. By Mark S. Smith (Hendrickson, $29.95). On May 14, 1929, the first of the Ugaritic tablets was discovered on the Mediterranean coast of Syria, and these tablets have revolutionized our understanding of the religion of Canaan and shed valuable light on the Hebrew language as well. S., who is producing a major commentary on the Baal epic found at Ugarit, tells the story of the finding and decipherment of these tablets and of the progress made in Ugaritic studies over the last seventy years. He chronicles the major scholars (Albright, Pope, Greenfield, Cross, Held, Dahood, Gaster, Gordon, de Moor, Pardee, and many others). He also describes the graduate programs in Ugaritology and the special contributions of these departments. Pastors and seminarians will profit most from his judicious assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the comparative studies between Ugarit and the Old Testament. *RWK*

The Book of Jubilees. By James C. VanderKam (Sheffield Academic Press, $14.95). VK. is a professor at Notre Dame and the leading authority in the world on this book, which retells the stories in Genesis and the first half of Exodus. Jubilees was composed about 160–150 B.C.E. apparently in opposition to those who wanted to unite with the Gentiles (cf. 1 Macc 1:11–13). Instead of this idea, the author calls for a renewed emphasis on the one ancient covenant which from earliest times separated Jew and non-Jew. Jubilees is an all-out defense of what makes the people of Israel distinctive. Like the authors of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the author was probably an Essene and was a strong supporter of the solar calendar (counting 364 days to the year). In this calendar, every date falls on the same day of the week every year. A lifetime of scholarship is made readily accessible in this volume. *RWK*

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Preaching Helps

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost—St. Michael and All Angels, Series A

Treasures and Pearls

Proceed with caution! This is not a book review, even though it may look like one, because I want to talk about the multi-volume commentary that Ulrich Luz is writing. Luz, Professor of New Testament Studies at the University of Bern in Switzerland, has been working for the past several years on a large commentary on Matthew's Gospel. The German edition will appear in four volumes. The English edition is in the process of being issued by Augsburg Fortress in three volumes. Volume 2 contains Luz' comments on Matthew 8–20 and has just recently appeared in English (2001). Its 606 pages offer rich material on the Gospel selections for the midsection of Pentecost, and I want to take this opportunity to share some of what has been catching my eye as I read this work.

If this were a review, I would have to comment on the way Luz has laid out his work, how he articulates his principles, the methods he adopts, and the results he achieves. For many it will be enough to know that this volume is in the Hermeneia series. That means it is full of all the learning we expect in that series (long bibliographies, countless footnotes, and judicious remarks on issues of textual criticism, structure, context, and sources).

In sections labeled "Interpretation" and "Tradition" Luz traces " the interpretive horizons" within which the author of the Gospel was working. Then he sums up what others call "background" and describes how Matthew used earlier Jewish and Christian tradition as he wrote his story in the way he has done.

But then comes material that is not found in other volumes of Hermeneia. Luz turns to the "History of Interpretation," asking "What impact has this pericope made in century after century of use within the various Christian communities?" This is truly wonderful stuff and is a gold mine for preachers. Often Luz renders judgments about how the later interpreters did or did not represent Matthew's own intentions. But he is himself very open and frequently expresses his astonishment and appreciation at what he finds.

In Luz's language, the individual narratives in the gospel have been "realized" in various ways in Christian thought and piety. Commenting on the ways in which

the controversial pericope on Peter (Matthew 16:13–20, Pentecost 14) has been received in the different Christian communions, Luz writes that "some of the truth of Christian faith is alive in all of them. What that means for me is that if in the name of one interpretation of our text others are suppressed and disciplined, part of the Christian faith is suppressed" (p. 376).

Luz usually does not let a pericope go until he has offered what he sometimes calls "Summary" and sometimes "Meaning for Today." In this section we hear the voice of a wise interpreter thinking about how we may use the text in teaching and preaching and thinking in our contemporary context, so different from Matthew's historical context.

So instead of being a review I hope this may be a *preview* for some of you. Here are some few words culled from hundreds of Luz's pages. These selections are the barest hint of what is in store for the reader of his commentary.

Luz has a long and rich discussion of the parable of wheat and weeds and its interpretation (Matt 13:24–30, 36–43, Pentecost 9). He takes up the familiar designation of the church in Matthew as a *corpus mixtum* or "mixed body." He warns of dangers in this phrase. "The *essence* of the church according to Matthew is not that it is a *corpus permixtum.* While it is true that the church in *reality* is (still!) a *corpus permixtum,* its task is to become wheat and not darnel" (p. 272). Luz concludes, "Both the church and the individual bear in themselves the possibility of wheat and the possibility of tares" (p. 274).

The parables of the treasure hidden in a field and of the precious pearl (Matt 13:44–46, Pentecost 10) focus, says Luz, not on the great value of the treasure/pearl, nor on the joy of the lucky finder, but on the decisive human action: the finder in each case "went and sold everything" (vv. 44 and 46; cf 6:19–34; 19:21) in order to gain the treasure and possess the pearl. Luz notes that the only direct ethical exhortation in all of Matthew 13 is the call to renounce riches in order to possess the kingdom. And he comments that "the exhortation to renounce possessions almost disappeared from the history of interpretation" while other lessons have been drawn from these two parables. Thus many have waxed eloquent concerning Christ or the gospel as the treasure/pearl or have celebrated the joy that comes with the experience of grace. Luz explains this state of affairs by simply quoting Matthew, "The care of the world and the deceit of riches choke the word" (13:22).

Luz notes six symbolic interpretations of the feeding of the 5,000 (Matt 14:13–21, Pentecost 11). (1) In the salvation-historical reading the five loaves correspond to the five books of Moses, the two fish to the prophets and the writings, the twelve baskets to the twelve disciples. Thus Jesus changed the Torah and prophets into new spiritual food. (2) The moral interpretation sees here a lesson in sharing

and in living simply. (3) The social interpretation emphasizes God's care of the body. (4) The spiritual interpretation says that we cannot live on bread alone and sees the fish and bread as symbols of God's mercy. (5) Then there is the eucharistic interpretation. (6) The ecclesiological interpretation reads the event as prefiguring the role of priests or pastors in distributing Christ's goods to the people.

Luz finds something to affirm in each of these modes of interpretation. And then he sums up by writing, "Important for Matthew . . . was the absolute sovereignty of Jesus, who concretely demonstrates his power over illnesses and hunger. It was important for [Matthew] that the people once more experienced the power and the attention of their Messiah" (p. 315)

Concerning Jesus and Peter walking on water (Matt 14:22–33, Pentecost 12), Luz writes that Jesus made his way to the "other shore" by being obedient to the will of God and so by means of suffering love. That makes clear what Peter's way and our own way on the water should look like. "It is not just any way; it is the way of love and obedience. To be sustained by Jesus in the water's abyss does not mean *somehow* to grow beyond oneself and to have experiences of transcendence; it means to yield to Jesus' way of love and then, in an abysmally loveless world, to experience being carried by him" (p. 323).

Luz writes that the story of the Syro-Phoenician woman (Matt 15:21–28, Pentecost 13) "might receive new power, ecumenically explosive power, if an interpreting church community were ready to try to identify with the Pharisees and scribes from whose territory Jesus withdrew rather than with the Canaanite woman or her daughter as is usually done. For, according to our text, church happens where God responds to human faith, not where an institution calls itself church" (p. 341).

Matthew understands bearing the cross (Matt 16:21–28, Pentecost 15) to mean "orienting oneself to Jesus as the model for life and knowing the experience of being borne by the exalted Lord" (p. 383). Those who carry the cross are carried by their Lord!

Matthew 18 (Pentecost 16–17) is Jesus' great "Discourse on Community." Luz comments that "in the perspective of Matthew 18 a fundamental characteristic of the church is that it time and again *bursts the boundaries* that it is compelled to draw. . . . Seeking the lost (vv. 12–14) is more important than is eliminating *skandala* ("snares"). Unending and unlimited forgiveness (vv. 21–22) is closer to the perfection that the father desires than is 'brotherly admonition' or expulsion from the church. What corresponds to God's own behavior . . . is only searching, not eliminating—only forgiving, not earthly 'binding'" (p. 479).

The parable of the workers in the vineyard (Matt 20:1–16, Pentecost 18) speaks to us of "a just God's *freedom* to be gracious. It does not offer a new

system of unmerited graciousness that will take the place of the normal standards of a justice that grants to all what they have earned. Instead, the standard values are 'disrupted' by the appearance of God's love, and they thereby lose their deadly universal validity. The scope of the parable includes a new attitude toward one's neighbor which the experience of grace makes possible. Those who make God's justice the dominant principle and do not permit his graciousness to appear alongside it are incapable of solidarity. . . . In v. 15 the owner of the vineyard makes the 'spokesman' aware that the *principle* of achievement leads to arrogance," and arrogance never leads to solidarity (p. 534).

Luz' commentary is a treasure, a real gem. I do not say to you, "Sell all you have and buy it." But I will suggest that you by all means get your hands on it in some library. Take it for a test drive. Do your own review and see whether it is right for you. It is long, and it is not always easy reading. It plunges into many issues that are far from the business at hand in the congregations that I know. But few commentaries are as satisfying as this one if our purpose is to understand Matthew and make use of Matthew in teaching and preaching.

Assisting all of us in making that complex set of moves required of the journey from study to pulpit is **Peter Rehwaldt**. After serving as pastor in congregations in Missouri and Kansas, Peter entered a Ph.D. program at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California. I have come to know Peter here in Berkeley. But seeing his materials on the texts for the middle of the Pentecost season, I realize that I always have more to learn about him. His writing reminds me of how much he loves music and of the fact that he has been known to write a hymn at the drop of a hat to celebrate a retirement or a birthday or a congregation's anniversary. Peter has written for *Preaching Helps* in the past, and I am delighted to have his contributions in these pages once again.

I am grateful to Peter, and I am genuinely grateful to all you "scribes discipled to the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 13:52, Pentecost 10). Luz thinks those "scribes" are "biblically literate" members of the community who have the special task of teaching the "new" (the gospel of the kingdom) together with the "old" (the old scriptures). Their task is to show how the "new" (long hidden mysteriously) and the "old" (now seen not as antiquated but as primal) are made known in Jesus.

Best wishes,

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Ninth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 11) July 21, 2002

Psalm 86:11–17
Isaiah 44:6–8
or Wisdom 12:13,16–19
Romans 8:12–25
Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43

First Reading

Both Isaiah and the Wisdom of Solomon forcefully assert that "the Lord of hosts" who says, "I am the first and the last" is without peer. "Besides me there is no god."

In Isaiah, God is the one who works in human history to move and guide it according to the divine will and promises. In Wisdom, God is described more clearly in colors we might call "ethical." God's strength is "the source of righteousness." God judges and destroys but never acts against those who do not deserve it. But Wisdom moves beyond cool righteousness or begins to define righteousness in terms of mercy. "Your sovereignty," says Wisdom, "causes you to spare all." "You judge with mildness, and with great forbearance you govern us." God's way of dealing with humankind is meant to teach "that the righteous must be kind" and is designed to fill the children of God "with good hope."

The themes of righteousness and good hope are picked up in the New Testament readings. Paul in Romans 8 holds up the great good hope that "the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God." Paul thinks of our groaning, and we do groan, not as the pained and forlorn cry of the hopeless. He likens it instead to "labor pains," the outcry that precedes the birth of new life and the gift of unimaginable joy.

Matthew 13 records a parable of Jesus and its interpretation. Both parable and interpretation contribute to the themes of righteousness and hope. The parable (Matt 13:24–30) raises questions we all ask about the persistent and disturbing presence of evil in the world that our good God has created. Why are there weeds among the wheat? Why is human history so full of injustice and terror and cruelty? What are we to do? How should we deal with the weeds?

The servants at first wonder whether the owner isn't responsible. Did he do something wrong? Did he purchase and sow some second-rate seed? No, says the owner, I sowed only top grade seed, but an enemy is responsible for the weeds. Then the servants want to rush out into the field and pluck up all the weeds. But the owner restrains them. They are agitated about the presence of the weeds. The owner is calm, announcing that at harvest time (judgment day), he will oversee the process of binding the weeds into bundles to be burned as fuel in the ovens, while the wheat he will joyously gather into his barn.

The interpretation of the parable (Matt 13:36–43) fixes our attention on that final act, what happens at "the close of the age." A terrible fate lies in store for all those who cause others to stumble and fall away from God (cf Matt 5:19; 16:23; 18:6–7), for all evildoers, literally "workers of lawlessness," and that means all who are careless about the loving will of God (cf. 7:23; 24:12). On the other hand, the final state of the "righteous" will be as bright as the state of the evil will be dismal. "The righteous," says Jesus, "will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father." That word of Jesus echoes a promise spoken in the last chapter of the book of Daniel: "Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and

everlasting contempt. Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever" (Dan 12:2–3).

Pastoral Reflections

September 11 and its aftermath have revealed once again the awful depth of human cruelty and hate, the power of the will for revenge and of the will to retaliate, and the apparent weakness of the forces of reconciliation and peace. In the days after 9/11 it seemed as though a great collective groaning went up all across the nation. Many people spoke of an end of optimism, an end of our faith in progress, an end to our sense of safety and invulnerability protected from enemies by an ocean to the east and an ocean to the west. All kinds of people expressed a sense of frustration and depression. And as our nation began to respond to the attacks on the Trade Center and the Pentagon, questions were raised. Are we descending into an everlasting round of striking and counterstriking? Is there no better way forward? Is there any way forward at all? We do not see a clear and easy path ahead for us and for our children and our children's children, for the children of Israel and Palestine, for the children of Hindus and Muslims in India. Isaiah, Paul, and Matthew are in wonderful agreement about the fact that human beings can never really read the future. We would like to, and we may try to. But the future does not yield its secrets to our probings. However, prophet and apostle and evangelist turn us to God. And they remind us as forcefully as they can that we know the One who knows the future and who will give us a bright future.

Neither prophet nor apostle nor evangelist tells us that all we need to do is "keep the faith" and "be of good cheer." No one of them proclaims "pie in the sky by and by." They clearly do not tell us that "these are the last times, and there's nothing we can do but wait for God to act."

The themes of the day are "righteousness" and "good hope." Both together. We are not given a set of specific instructions: "Do this! Do that!" But we are most certainly called to live lives of "righteousness." In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness; they will be satisfied" (Matt 5:6). Blessed are those whose deepest desire and most urgent prayer is for God to touch this world of ours with healing hands to make it "all right." Blessed are those who, healed by God's touch, move out into the world in all their callings as agents of God's healing and freeing and saving righteousness. RHS

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 12) July 28, 2002

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

First Reading

Treasures: On a seminary choir tour (years ago), we choir members sang—night after night—Bach's Motet III, "Jesus, Priceless Treasure." Bach took the hymn text by Johann Franck and alternated portions of Romans 8 with it (including today's passage), and I have yet to find a commentary that surpasses what Bach had to say about this passage.

Now there is no, no, there is no condemnation for all those in Jesus Christ. "No condemnation at all," sings the choir, repeated again and again with growing em-

phasis. "Don't you get it?" says Bach. "Paul really means what he's saying here: no condemnation! And with no one to condemn, there is nothing to fear . . . not death, though it stands nearby; not the grave, though it will turn us to dust; not all the raging fiends of the world." The choir sings with power: "Go, all fears, and cease. . . . I stand firm, decisive!" Then, with more smoothness and quiet confidence: "God's great power guards me each hour."

A new movement begins, and the choir starts it quickly, firmly, strongly: *You are not of the flesh, but you are of the Spirit.* You belong to God, says Bach. This strength continues, even grows, in the movement that follows: *Hence, hence, hence, all fears and sadness.* Away with you fears! Begone, you sadness. *For the Lord of gladness, Jesus, enters in. . . .* The one who raised Jesus from the dead will give me life, for God's Spirit lives in me. Once more, the choir's quiet confidence returns: *Yea, whate'er I here must bear, still in thee lies purest pleasure: Jesus, priceless treasure.*

In 1 Kings, we read more of treasures. Solomon, new to his throne, was not exactly the obvious choice. He was not David's eldest living son, and he had his share of rivals for power. Chapters 1 and 2 tell of David's choice of Solomon over Adonijah and the execution of Solomon's enemies. Chapter 3 then shifts from the bloody succession to a more peaceful portrayal of Solomon: in a dream, he is told to ask for what he desires by God. Solomon asks for wisdom—not for riches, not for long life for himself or short life for his enemies (though he seems to have taken care of that already). This request—the gift of discerning what is right—pleased God, much as a parent is pleased when a child does something right.

In Matthew, Jesus paints a picture of the kingdom as treasure. To what lengths do we humans go to possess earthly treasure? Jesus speaks of the wonder and joy of finding. Earthly treasures can bring great joy to the merchant. How much more should we be searching the kingdom?

"Have *you* understood all this?" Jesus asked his disciples. "Yes," they said, and so Jesus calls them "scribes trained for the kingdom" and charges them to use *all* the treasures, both new and old, in their work as disciples (perhaps the only place in the gospels where Jesus uses "scribe" in a positive way).

Pastoral Reflections

All too often, treasures old and new are pitted against one another rather than yoked together. It happens in family life, in workplace life, in civic life, everywhere. In parish life, perhaps this is nowhere more obvious than in worship. What hymns shall we sing? What instruments shall we use? Where shall the altar be placed? Which Lord's Prayer shall we say? Contemporary or traditional liturgy? How often shall we celebrate the Eucharist?

In the *LBW* Calendar of Festivals and Commemorations, July 28 is a date set aside to remember the witness of three great church musicians: Johann Sebastian Bach, George Frederick Handel, and Heinrich Schütz. Today these are seen as "old" treasures, but in their days, they were the new ones—and the same battles were fought then as today. Bach quarreled with his church council, arguing over what were and were not his duties and the proper kind of music for worship. ("That's not the way the last cantor did things!") Handel was a German-turned-Englishman in the English royal court, surely stirring the ire of those with purer (whatever that means!) English bloodlines. Schütz ended his long life and musical career just as the Pietists/orthodox controversy over church music erupted in full force. The Pietists wanted only simple hymns and no

other music in worship; the orthodox were open to a larger use of musical gifts. Eighty years later, this struggle was still going on in Leipzig, a part of the struggle between Bach, the pastors, and council members at St. Thomas Church.

Despite the arguments, it's good to have so much treasure to sort through. German chorales, Taizé chants, Watts- and Wesley-style hymns, modern praise choruses, and a growing body of church music making its way from the third world to the first—what blessings, and yet what a source of dispute!

Perhaps that's why the Romans text jumps out at me most, for in the midst of conflict, it gives comfort. With Paul I am convinced that neither pipe organs nor praise bands nor African drums, nor hymnals nor supplements nor projection screens, nor weekly or biweekly or monthly Eucharist, shall ultimately separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. (I do have my opinions on these matters, mind you, but we can talk about them another time.) PR

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 13) August 4, 2002

Psalm 145:8–9, 15–22 (14–21 NRSV)
Isaiah 55:1–5
Romans 9:1–5
Matthew 14:13–21

First Reading

The servant-prophet speaks to the exiles, with the hope-filled voice of a poet: "Come to the waters. . . . Come, buy without money. . . . Come, buy that which is priceless! . . . Listen, carefully, while you delight in the feast. . . . Listen, and come . . . listen, and live! . . . See, I have made a witness . . . see, you shall be a herald, and those you do not know shall run to you! Why? Because God the Holy One of Israel has glorified you. Come, listen, and see."

The servant-apostle speaks to the followers of Jesus, with the voice of a distraught brother to his siblings: The promise to Abraham and Sarah and their children forever remains, the covenants, the law, the prayers, the praises, the promises, and their adoption as the children of God. Even so, I lament that I am separated from them and wish with all my heart that this were not so. Why? Because the Messiah, the promised one, is over all, blessed by God forever. Listen, my brothers and sisters!

The evangelist speaks to the community of the faithful, with the evocative voice of the storyteller: John had been beheaded, and Jesus withdrew by boat to be alone in the wilderness, but the crowds came to him anyway. In the evening, the disciples came to him, asking permission to disperse the crowd. "There's no food here for them" (and no prayerful retreat for us—Can you hear their plea for peace and quiet?). But Jesus replied, "Feed them." And then, "What's that you say? No food? Then bring the people to me." (Can you hear the compassion?) They came, and from five loaves and two fish, they ate. 5,000 men ate their fill. Plus the women. Plus the children. And there were leftovers. Come, says the storyteller, can you see God at work?

Pastoral Reflections

A deserted place, a huge need, and few resources in evidence. And yet for God, that's enough.

In the grand scheme of parish life, it's the details that seem overwhelming at times. "Pastor, we're out of toilet paper in the bathroom." (Is there no custodian about? No member of the property committee? Is the supply cupboard locked?) Did the education materials get ordered? How many

worship folders should we print for the funeral on Saturday? What about *this*? What about *that*? Is that his job? her job? my job? your job?

Pastor, people, do you see overwhelming scarcity, or do you see potential abundance?

Sometimes it is the negatives that wear on a pastor, wear on a community: We had more people in worship five years ago. The K-Mart that wore down the mom-and-pop stores has announced it is now closing. Tax revenues in town are down, and the city budget is in trouble—what's going to be cut?

People, pastor, do you see death, or do you see life?

Sometimes it is the unknown that seems overwhelming. What will this new pastor, this new musician, this new community be like? Facing life in a wheelchair after a lifetime of athletic living. Friends, neighbors, children moving from one place to another. Even getting on an airplane.

Friends, do you feel fear, or do you feel hope?

It's easy to paint pictures of scarcity, death, and fear. Strike up the music from *Jaws* or any of a thousand scary movies, maybe add some thunder and lightning, maybe mix in some trash in the streets, and of course there's no one around, save for some things that go bump in the night. "If you elect my opponent, all of civilization will collapse." "If the school even talks about birth control and sex education, every kid over the age of 8 will be running around having sex." If, if, if . . . and then it's the end of the world. We know how to paint hopeless, helpless pictures of scarcity and death. The realities they point to are all around us.

But the church has a better picture, a more compelling picture, a picture of abundance, life, and hope. The music changes key, the clouds are blown away, when we remember what God can do even in a wilderness, even with five loaves and two small fish. PR

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 14) August 11, 2002

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

First Reading

Reading the story of Elijah in the cave is like coming in halfway through the movie. Here's the faithful servant, victorious in the first ten minutes of the film over his politically powerful and well-placed tormentors, enjoying a spectacular triumph with a great ball of heavenly fire that consumes the opposition's henchmen. But then their leader, Jezebel, rises up and swears a terrible oath to make Elijah's life like the life of one of her own servants, not just "one of these days," but "by this time tomorrow." Elijah, no fool is he, goes on the run.

Now we enter the story, and we see our hero hiding out, feeling abandoned by God and alone against the world. "I've done everything you've asked," says our hero to God, "and everyone else is dead. Why don't you just kill me now and save Jezebel the trouble?" The answer is not at all what Elijah expected. After the great fire from heaven in act 1, we get mountains torn in two, tornado-like winds, an earthquake, and a wildfire, but then the series climaxes in silence—sheer, stunning, and absolute. And in the silence we hear the voice of God. "What is my heroic servant doing here? You need to do what prophets are called to do: anoint new kings and anoint a new prophet.

You are my prophet, and I promise you that your words—my words—are not without power. You go and do what prophets are supposed to do, and I'll take care of the rest."

That word, says Paul the servant-apostle, is not far away. It's a word that makes no distinctions but is offered to all. It's a word with power, and a promise of grace and salvation. And it's a word for you to give to others, for how else is the world to hear it?

"Take heart—it is I," said Jesus to his terrified friends in the midst of the storm-tossed waters. "Come," said Jesus to Peter, who then started to walk on the water toward Jesus. "Why did you doubt?" says Jesus, plucking Peter out of the waves. And the wind ceased, and the waters calmed, and the terror disappeared.

Pastoral Reflections

A couple of years ago, I was asked by a small, financially struggling congregation to provide pulpit supply three or four Sundays a month for the foreseeable future. Not regular interim ministry, but only pulpit supply, as that was all they could afford. The beloved pastor of this parish had been arrested for sexually abusing a mentally-challenged child, a member of the parish. The scandal hit the front page of the newspapers and became the lead story on the local TV news. They called me, because they knew that I lead workshops on child abuse and child abuse prevention, and they hoped that I could help them. I was not in a position to agree to full-time interim ministry, but to this extended pulpit supply I could and did agree.

The reactions to the pastor's arrest were mixed and confused and highly emotional. Not our pastor! Well, maybe so. Not in our church! Well, why not here? Not with this child! Some left the church, including the victim's family, while others stayed away in shock, and still others remained, wondering what was next.

Next, of course, was the pastor's trial, and there was also a civil lawsuit not only against the pastor but also against the congregation for failing to adequately supervise the pastor. Losing the pastor, as devastating as that would be, was minor compared with losing the civil suit. That would be disaster, for the congregation's insurance was hopelessly inadequate to cover the potential damages. They would have to sell the property and close the church. On top of all of this, the bishop told the congregation that he did not want them to even think about beginning a call process until the suit was dealt with, either by settlement or by trial.

The criminal trial came first, and dragged on, month after month, with depositions of members, scientific tests of various kinds, and legal motions by one side or the other. Finally, the pastor came to trial, finally the verdict was rendered—guilty—and finally the pastor was sentenced to prison. But now came the civil lawsuit.

They felt alone and abandoned at that parish, and even God felt distant. How could God have let this happen, not just to the child, but to us? They knew how Elijah felt as he ran for cover in the cave. We were doing God's work, and now everything is in tatters. We have seen God at work in this place (sometimes spectacularly!) blessing our lives and our ministry, and now what? Why don't we just close the place and be done with it?

But they didn't. They kept gathering, to sing and pray, to lament and praise, to eat a little bread and drink a little wine. They collected offerings for church expenses and cans for the neighborhood food pantry. And they waited.

As the civil suit approached the trial date, a settlement offer was made. It asked

more than the congregation had hoped, but less than they feared. A settlement was agreed to, and the suit was over. Finally.

And in the silence that followed, they wondered "What now?" but they already knew the answer. We do what God's people have done all along: we gather to eat and drink, sing and pray and lament and praise. We visit the sick and homebound, we work to make the world and this church safe for children, we gather food for the hungry, we comfort the grieving, and we welcome the stranger. And we share the story.

They taught *me* this, not the other way around. My ministry with them for a couple of years was usually just to hold the mirror, so they could see what they were—what God was—already doing. They're still small, still struggling financially, and in some ways still coming to terms with what they've been through. But they know that God is near, not far away, and they hear the voice of Jesus. The wind has ceased, the terror has fled, and the parish is now looking for a new pastor. Anyone interested in an interview? PR

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 15) August 18, 2002

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

First Reading

Moses is quite clear in Deuteronomy 23: no one with damaged genitalia is acceptable in the assembly of the Lord. Second Isaiah has quite different ideas about who is and is not acceptable to God, and is equally direct about it in chapter 56: welcome the eunuchs and the foreigners (literally "children of strangers"), all who keep the Sabbath and hold to the promises. Their prayers are welcome and their sacrifices acceptable. Isaiah knew that if you're going to go against Moses and scripture, you had better make your point as forcefully as possible, so he punctuated this word from God not just with a simple, prophetic period, "ne'um Yahweh—thus says the LORD," but with a prophetic exclamation point using the fuller "ne'um Adonai Yahweh—thus says the LORD God." "All peoples are welcome in this house," says the prophet, "and I mean all. God means all."

The lectionary crafters seem to have sided more with Moses than Isaiah, and (perhaps unwittingly) provide us another example of what Isaiah is out to end. The committee cut out the words about the eunuchs in verses 2–5, but they really ought to be read—not just in the preacher's study but in worship. *All* the outcasts are to be gathered, after all, not just the ones we feel comfortable mentioning in public.

Paul, like Isaiah, tries to reconcile an old word with a newer one. Have the people of old been forsaken and the promises of old forgotten? Never! The new does not replace the old but stands alongside it, with each calling to its own disobedient audience with God's message of mercy.

But Isaiah and Paul are speaking in the abstract; it's an honest-to-God foreigner who comes up to Jesus in the Gospel reading. After a confrontation with the Pharisees and scribes over tradition and the law at the beginning of chapter 15 (not in the reading at all) and a back-and-forth tutorial on the same subject with the disciples (the optional part of the reading), Jesus is met by a real flesh-and-blood Canaanite woman with a real, sick-as-a-dog little girl. He knows the law and the tradition, but what does he do about the child of a stranger who stands before him?

These two meet in the area of Tyre and Sidon, outside of Israel, beyond the dominion of Herod, on the coastal plain of Syria. Geographically, Tyre and Sidon are closer to Nazareth than Jerusalem is, but in almost every other way these cities would have felt like the other side of the world to a pious Jew. They were cosmopolitan seaports (and you know what they say about seaports!) and were filled with Phoenician sites of worship. Foreign, to be sure, with all kinds of less-than-holy folks around.

But while the Pharisees refused to be taught, and the disciples had trouble with the lessons, Jesus accepted the teaching of the Canaanite woman. That's right. She taught him! In Jesus' first answer to the woman, he sounds a bit like Moses: "I'm here just for Israel, thank you very much." But she doesn't let him go so easily. Did she know Moses and Isaiah? I don't know, but she knew enough to say that at the great feast of God, there would be something for all, even if it's only crumbs for the dogs under the Master's table. That sounds a lot like Isaiah to me, and apparently to Jesus as well.

Pastoral Reflections

"Along comes this horrible vice and secret, evil plague of security and boredom. Many regard the catechism as a simple, trifling teaching, which they can absorb and master at one reading and then toss the book into the corner as if they are ashamed to read it again. . . . Are we not most marvelous fellows, therefore, who allow ourselves to imagine that, after reading and hearing it once, we know everything and need not read and study it any more? We think we can learn in an hour what God himself cannot finish teaching, though he were to teach it from the beginning of the world until the end!"

So says Martin Luther, in the Longer Preface to the Large Catechism [6, 16], addressed to pastors, preachers, and theologians of the church. "Security and boredom" are the secret and evil vices that plague the leaders of the church not only in Luther's day but in ours as well. We know it all already and refuse to be taught any more by any one. They certainly plague me, and I know that I'm not alone.

But what if we, like Jesus, were open to being taught anew? Who would be the Isaiahs to remind us of the mercy from God that overflows all the levees that try to hold it in? Imagine an eight-year-old child preaching in tandem with a regular pastor. An eight-year-old sees the world differently, after all, and might just teach some of the rest of us something about the grace of God if we shake off our security and look at the world from her point of view. Don't laugh—I've seen it done, and it changed my view of God, ministry, and preaching for the better.

Curmudgeons are one thing, anxious to vent some of their anger or cynicism at anyone who walks by, especially if it is a leader. They are interested not in teaching but in stirring up controversy. But then there are folks like that eight-year-old who are all too often ignored, treated with condescension, or otherwise dismissed. And there are the African newcomers to Lutheranism in a congregation of tenth-generation Lutherans of German heritage. How could they possibly have anything to teach us about being Lutheran? Then there are the divorced. How could they possibly have anything to teach us about what makes for a good marriage?

The Pharisees and scribes refused to be taught, but not Jesus. Perhaps this is one more aspect of that "great exchange" whereby Jesus put aside the glory of God, so that God might make God's home among mortals. After she blessed Jesus with her vision of God's mercy, Jesus blessed the Canaanite woman. May we be open to receiving such blessings, that we may show God's blessings in return. PR

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 16) August 25, 2002

Psalm 138
Isaiah 5:1–6
Romans 12:1–8
Matthew 16:13–20

First Reading

The prophet Isaiah speaks to the leaders of a nation full of itself. "We're holy people, God's chosen, and we can do as we please," say these leaders. But Isaiah points their vision elsewhere. "Look at Abraham and Sarah"; they were nothing before God came along. Now look around. The wasteland and wilderness you see will be like Eden, the garden of the Lord. "Listen," says God, "for my teaching and justice will be a light to the peoples, and hope for the coastlands. Look at the heavens and the earth—they will wear away before God's salvation wears away. My justice will last," says God, leaving unspoken but absolutely clear the future of the works of Israel's leaders.

"Look at your bodies," says Paul. "They are holy, acceptable to God, and are called to be transformed to discern and do God's will." "Look at the community," says Paul, "look at the Body of Christ." Made up of our holy bodies, it too is holy, and each part has its gifts and functions, good and acceptable and perfect.

"Look at me," says Jesus to the disciples. He had been arguing with the Pharisees and Sadducees about signs from heaven, and now he turns to his friends. "Who do others say that I am? Who do you say that I am?" Peter gives the pleasing answer, and Jesus reacts with delight: "Blessed are you!" Then and there is the gift of the keys that bind and loose, and then there's that command. Sternly, Jesus says it: "Don't tell anyone that I am the Messiah."

There's more to this story, but that's next week's Gospel reading. Suffice it to say that the "secret" is really a statement: You won't understand until after Easter, so don't tell anyone.

"Look," say all the readings. Look at what God has done in the past. Look at yourselves, the Body of Christ. Look at Jesus, the Messiah, the anointed one of God. Look, friends, open your eyes and look around.

Pastoral Reflections

A storm has been brewing in the ELCA. Some would say it is about sex, others homosexuality, and still others would say it is about order in the church. Maybe it's about all three, plus some other things besides. Some point with pride to their concern for justice, praising extraordinary ordinations and the blessings of same-sex relationships, and lamenting the pastors removed from the clergy roster and congregations expelled from the ELCA. Some point just as proudly to their reverence for scripture and order, and lift up the value of due process and assembly actions rather than ecclesiastical disobedience as tools for needed change.

A new task force has been appointed, charged with leading the church in this discussion. From the ELCA press release, it looks as though the Church Council listened to Paul's words about the body and its many gifts and members. There are clergy and laity; men and women; theological, psychological, and medical professionals; folks with a variety of ethnic backgrounds; and each one has his or her own sexual orientation and history, different from the others on the task force. Not a bad start to this church-wide discussion. Now if they—and we—can listen to one another, really hear one another.

Of course, we've tried something like

this before. We had not one but two tries at a social statement on sexuality during the 1990s. We've had the "don't ask—don't tell" guidelines for ordination candidates, followed by "Vision and Expectations." Neither of them managed to settle things.

Maybe we need a reminder of something more basic. Back in the days of the Commission for a New Lutheran Church (CNLC), the ELCA was but a dream. Farther back there was a monk named Martin with a terribly guilty conscience, when the Lutheran Church wasn't even a dream. Back farther still there was this carpenter with a fiance who gave birth in a stable. You get the idea.

God has been in the transformation business for quite a while and will be at it for some time to come. In the midst of conflict and dispute, there is a call to transformation. There is a call to embrace one another as brothers and sisters, there is a call to acknowledge one another as parts of the same body of Christ.

Back in 1980, the ALC adopted a statement on sexuality. After noting in a certain place that the church was holding to a traditional interpretation of the issue under discussion, the document states "we nonetheless remain open to the possibility of new biblical and theological insights" (p. 8). Is this perhaps a time when we in the ELCA will be less full of ourselves—as individuals and as a church body? Is it possible for us to be "open to the possibility of new biblical and theological insights"? Look at what God has done in the past, look at the Body of Christ and its many members with their many gifts. It's the body, all right. It's the Body of Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of the living God. PR

Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 17) September 1, 2002

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

First Reading

When it comes to God language, Jeremiah offers us an interesting set of images: God the oppressor of the faithful, God the deceitful brook, God the party-pooper, God the un-healer. The reading includes Jeremiah's second complaint against God, and it won't be the last. It actually started back in verse 10, where we can add God the persecutor and God the enslaver to the list above. The leaders of the nation are against me, says Jeremiah, and your help for me, God, dries up like a creek in the summer. Thanks for nothing! And I can see Jeremiah turn his back in a huff, like a child angry with his parents. "So there."

So there? Well, says God, if you just turn around again, I'll forget about this little tantrum. You speak to the people, and they *will* turn to you and not the other way around. In this time of international intrigue between Judah and Babylon, in this time when the leaders of the nation do not seem to take God seriously, I *am* with you, says God to his pouting prophet. Despite what you think, your enemies will not prevail against you.

If Jeremiah is tired of talking to God's people, Paul seems to have no problem speaking to the community. Listen to all the imperatives, all the very direct commanding verbs, most in the positive but about a third in the negative: hate, outdo, do not lag, be ardent, serve . . . thirty-two in just thirteen verses! Some are more passive than others ("let love be genuine" and "do not be over-

come," for example), but the implication is clear. Paul—and God—have some very specific ideas about the kind of life we people of God ought to live: a life of harmony and peace with all. Unspoken is the contrast with the way the world teaches us to live: get what you can while the getting is good; step on anyone between you and the top; take advantage of others to get what you want. And God? The only language about how God is at work in all of this is hardly comforting: "Leave room for the wrath of God. . . . Vengeance is mine; I will repay, says the Lord." Ouch!

Matthew picks up on last week's reading, where Jesus follows his command to the disciples for silence about his Messiahship with a prediction about his future ministry. In Jerusalem, the geographical heart of God's people, the Messiah must suffer at the hands of the leaders, be killed, and be raised again. Chief priests, killing the Messiah? "Never!" says Peter, but Jesus rebukes him (using the same verb used previously for dealing with demons). This is how it must be with me, and if any want to be my followers, it will be this way with them as well. Try to save your life, and you will lose it; lose your life for Jesus' sake, and you will find it.

Pastoral Reflections

Quite a contrast there, between God's ways and the world's ways. Jeremiah tries to stick up for God and feels beaten down and abandoned by that same God. "The world is winning, and you don't seem to care." Jesus in Matthew's Gospel provides his followers with sayings that turn the world upside down: Real life is found by giving it up. Paul is perhaps the most direct in describing what that given-up life looks like: "so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all." Self defense is not precluded, but going over onto the offense is out. "Live in harmony with one another." Hmmm . . . that reminds me of another song, this one from Sesame Street.

Ernie, Bert, and their friend Herbert Birdsfoot were down in the dumps. They wanted to sing, but they couldn't figure out what. "I can only sing the high part," sings Herbert in his high tenor voice, sounding somewhat sad. "It's the only part I know. And when I sing the high part, this is how I goes: la, la-la-la-la-la-la, la/la, la-la-la-la-la-la." Ernie then takes the second stanza, a bit lower, also sounding a bit sad: "I can only sing the middle. It's the only part I know, I know. And when I sing the middle part, this is how I goes: . . ." Finally Bert chimes in with his deep bass voice: "I can only sing the low part, low part; it's the only part I know, I know . . ." Ernie interrupts with "That's beautiful, Bert," as his old buddy Bert launches into his la-la-las. Each singer has a certain pride in his voice, but there's also a sad sense that something's missing too, until the fourth stanza, sung by all three: "When we put them all together," sings the trio, voices blending in harmony, "I am sure you will agree, agree, the whole sounds better than the parts, as you can plainly see. la, la-la . . ." (available on *Bert and Ernie's Greatest Hits* at finer music outlets everywhere).

It's hard to convey in writing, but the experience of the song matched the words. Each muppet's words had different notes and different rhythms, but they blended together to create something more powerful than any one of them could have done alone.

Is this, perhaps, at least a hint of what Paul was talking about? Love one another, outdo one another in showing honor, contribute to the needs of the saints, extend hospitality to strangers, do not be haughty, take thought for what is noble, live peaceably, live in harmony.

I've sung in choirs where the prima donnas (male or female) sucked the life out

of the music, with terrible effect on the other musicians and the audience. These people are too good to associate with ordinary folks and cannot bear to hide their voices by blending with the rest of the singers, no matter how hard the director tries to gather everyone into a single singing unit. "I just have a solo voice," they sigh, justifying the way they stick out in the crowd.

When faced with lessons that contrast the way of the world with the ways of God, many preachers will pound on the evils and in only the most general terms describe the goodness of God's way of life. Paul, on the other hand, spends twice as much time in this reading speaking positively (Do this) than negatively (Don't do that), and I wonder if we preachers might try to do the same.

Many choirs take a break during the summer, but this might be a Sunday to ask the choir director to get a few folks together and preach with you. Create your own little musical drama, one that lets the congregation experience giving up one's life, finding peaceable harmony, not cacophony, competition, and chaos. In other words, give them a glimpse of the dominion of God. PR

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 18) September 8, 2002

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

First Reading

Jerusalem is about to fall to the Babylonians, and God has two messages, one for the prophet and another for the nation. The prophet is warned to be faithful in preaching God's word of judgment and justice, or be willing to accept the punishment that is due the sinners. The nation is to be summoned once more to hear the message, "Turn back, turn back from your evil ways." Implicit in both is God's yearning for life, not death.

Today's selection from Paul is preceded by an exhortation to "be subject to the governing authorities." All are called upon to give to others as it is due them: taxes, revenue, respect, and honor. Paul continues this theme, summing up the whole of the Law as loving one's neighbor as one's self, and calling on the community of God's people to live honorably. That is, live with the inner dignity that is yours in Christ, and do not worry about the outward esteem and prestige that others might bestow upon you. No, those kinds of honors can be bought with bribes, or extorted via blackmail, or obtained through deceit and trickery, or coerced through the use of force and power. Instead, says Paul, love one another, and thus fulfill the law.

Despite its history in the church, Jesus' words in Matthew 18 are not a procedure manual for expelling dissidents from membership in the church. Instead, they are a reminder to those who have been sinned against that they are not in this alone. God's

will for the community is wholeness, not brokenness, and when the Body is in pain, it must be healed. Go first to the one who has hurt you, next time bring one or two others with you when you confront the sinner, and if this fails, tell it to the church. You are not alone, Jesus is saying to the victim of sin, and it is the work of the whole church to support you in trying to bring about justice and peace.

If even telling it to the whole church fails, then treat the sinner "as a Gentile and a tax collector." Ah, but do we remember how Jesus treated the sinners? Healed their children (the Canaanite woman's daughter) and ate in their homes (Zacchaeus). Reach out to them in love, reminding them that they are missed. We're talking about the church as the Body of Christ. Where two or three are present in Christ's name, the body that is present is Christ's.

Pastoral Reflections

These are "in-house" lessons, addressed not to the pagan, barbarian, irreligious world "out there" but to the sometimes faithful, sometimes faithless people of God. So no fair looking outside the doors of the church for sinners and brokenness, quarrelling and jealousy. We've got plenty right here.

Quarrelling and jealousy, in the church? Where?

The property committee is angry with the youth group for disrupting the cleaning schedule with their lock-in at the church. The worship committee and the fellowship committee are at odds over the length of the service. The pastor and the council disagree about the time the pastor spends doing this or that. The choir and the Sunday school staff are fighting over that "extra" space downstairs. Should it become a rehearsal room or the Sunday school chapel? And the finance committee? Everyone seems upset with them.

If God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, why do we act as if their death would be the solution to all our problems? "If so-and-so would just leave, then we could have some peace." Of course, that is no real peace, just a respite to the war until the next so-and-so comes along. The goal of Matthew 18, after all, is to regain your brother or sister, not eliminate them.

I am thinking of two pieces of practical homiletical strategy. First, I suggest a bit of humor. Imagine that you're standing between two angry people with large weapons in their hands. (For some pastors, that may not be so hard to picture!) This is not a time to start yelling and screaming. That might just push them over the edge. I'm not suggesting opening with "a pastor and a rabbi went into a bar." But you might paint a humorous picture of conflict over something so minor that everyone can see that the energy put into the fight is outrageous when compared to the offense. "Once upon a time" lowers the defenses of a quarrelling, jealous, suspicious group of hearers, and opens them up to be surprised by what God has to say. "Once upon a time, St. Enid's Church needed new carpet. Old Edith Maxwell had died, and she left a sizable gift to the church to pay for it. All that was needed was for the council to pick out the carpet. The head of the council remembered that Edith's favorite color was orange, and so . . ." I think you can guess what might have happened next. Give it a twist, where the conflict is defused and living honorably takes the place of quarrelling. I think of Jesus' use of stories and parables.

The second suggestion has to do with airing dirty laundry in public. Airing dirty laundry for the sake of vengeance or manipulation is one thing, and to be avoided. That's not what these lessons are talking about. But when there's an elephant in the room, someone ought to point it out, and

maybe we can usher it toward the door and clean up the mess on the carpet. Please, no shouting—we don't want someone to be crushed—but for God's sake, and the sake of the community, let's not pretend that it isn't there! PR

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 19) September 15, 2002

Psalm 103:[1–7] 8–13
Genesis 50:15–21
Romans 14:1–12
Matthew 18:21–35

First Reading

In Genesis 50 we are near the end of the great saga of Joseph and his brothers. The envied brother who was sold into slavery in a distant land now holds power over the ones who sold him away. Joseph's honest evaluation of himself ("Am I in the place of God?") was completely unexpected by his brothers. "Have no fear," he said, noting what they had in abundance, "for God is at work here today preserving a numerous people."

In Romans 14 we are nearing the end of Paul's great epistle to the church at Rome. Like Joseph, Paul is pleading for peace, not vengeance. We all have our pieties, but let's not confuse pious practices with profound principles. "We are the Lord's," says Paul, whether we eat meat or abstain, whether we observe all the lesser festivals or not, whether we live or die. Twice he says it, once near the beginning and once near the end: "Who are *you* to pass judgment? . . . Why do *you* pass judgment on your brother or sister?" That's what *God* will do when we all stand before the judgment seat.

In Matthew, the meaning of the parable of the unforgiving slave seems almost too obvious. A slave is forgiven an enormous debt but refuses to forgive the pittance that another owes him. Other slaves see the obvious double standard and tell the king all about it. The king, in turn, says to the first slave, in effect: "If you want to live without mercy, that can be arranged."

Jesus' parable lets the disciples in on the way God's realm is incompatible with the common "pay-up-or-else" mentality. That kind of thinking would be "a hell of a way" to live.

Pastoral Reflections

For good reason, the lectionary moves us from one part of the Bible to another, so that over the course of three years we get a good sampling of the variety of scripture. One of the trade-offs, however, is that we begin to view scripture in small pericopes, rather than see some of the larger stories. The two exceptions are on Palm/Passion Sunday and Good Friday, with the reading of the entire passion story. Today seems like a day for sharing a good long story.

Some congregations are quite familiar with the "big" stories of the Bible, like Joseph and his brothers. In other congregations, by contrast, a pastor who says, "And we all know about Joseph and his brothers" will be met with blank stares. In either congregation, this might be an opportune time to retell the saga as a whole. I'm not suggesting that you read Genesis 37–50 on Sunday morning, but you might retell it in a way appropriate to your parish setting.

Think about the appointed portion of the story for today. Why are the brothers so fearful of Joseph? What kind of power does he have? Why would he bear a grudge against them? What is the crime of which the brothers speak? And why would Joseph say that God is at work in all of this?

Such a retelling of the story is demand-

ing. It demands that the preacher know the story well and be able to share it, not merely read it with his or her head in the book. It demands that the preacher have a sense for the community: Do they know the story well, a little, or not at all? Probably there is a mix of all three kinds of hearers in any parish. Which episodes do I relate? Which details do I include and which do I exclude? Finally, it demands that the preacher get out of the way at the end. Nothing ruins a good story faster than having storytellers tell us what they meant. Instead, at the end, move gently from the world of Joseph and his brothers to our contemporary world and contemporary community. "It's a family story, handed down from generation to generation, from one set of relatives to another, from folks long ago to us here today. Look at them closely, Joseph, Reuben, Simeon, and note the family resemblance." PR

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 20) September 22, 2002

Psalm 145:1–8
Jonah 3:10–4:11
Philippians 1:21–30
Matthew 20:1–16

First Reading

Today's first lesson is the end of the story of Jonah, but in our studies at least we should read the whole of the book. By the end of the story Jonah the reluctant prophet has become the greatest of preachers, able to get the entire populace of the great capital city of a powerful foreign nation to repent of their evil ways and beg for forgiveness, from the king right down to the cattle. (Most preachers would be happy with getting a handful or two to repent.) Having heard their repentance, God is no longer interested in punishment, much to the dismay of Jonah. This wildly successful preacher is angry, because the people actually listened to his words! He wanted fireworks. He wanted wailing and gnashing of teeth. He wanted Nineveh to be destroyed in fire that would make Sodom and Gomorrah look like an insignificant spark from a dying coal in the barbecue pit. And when he doesn't get it, he pouts. Poor Jonah. And then God rubs it in with the wilting bush. Poor, poor Jonah.

Philippians carries none of the sarcasm of the story of Jonah but does speak to the same struggle to live as God's faithful servant. There's suffering here, too, for God's servants as they strive to live lives "in a manner worthy of the gospel."

Jesus' parable of the different groups of laborers in the vineyard combines the style of the first two readings. There is a bit of sarcasm and irony here, but it is not as strong as what we find in Jonah. The owner of the vineyard tries to explain to the first workers hired that they have no reason to complain. Didn't they get what they were promised? Is the owner not free to give the same to the later workers? Are the grumblers envious of the wage paid to the latecomers? Are they angry at the owner's generosity?

How do the "good people" react when sinners are forgiven? That's the question posed by Jesus' glimpse into the workings of the kingdom of God, by Paul's letter to the Philippians, and by the old story of Jonah.

Pastoral Reflections

The story of Jonah is like that story of Joseph. We get only a piece of it in the lectionary, but it begs to be told in its entirety.

The nagging question in our readings is this: How do "good people" react when sinners are forgiven? Of course, Jonah was

not exactly the most upstanding of folks to begin with. He ran from God's commission, working hard to avoid obeying. But the workers in Jesus' parable, those who were hired first, seem upright enough. They worked the whole day through, with no complaints about the quality of their labors. At the end they whine and complain.

Of course, when I am the sinner, I know how to react to being forgiven: "Thank you very much, and it will never happen again." Of course, some of these sins have a way of reappearing, despite my best intentions. Still, I really am grateful for the forgiveness, and I mean it when I say that it will never happen again.

Why is it so different when the sinner is someone else? Suddenly thoughts of "fairness" are right there, front and center. But forgiveness is not about fairness. It's about letting go of the pain that someone caused you in the past, so that you will not spend the future letting that old pain rule your life. (See almost anything written by Lewis Smedes, and you won't be disappointed.)

Jonah wanted fairness. The Ninevites had it coming, after all. Just look at all the evil they had wrought. The all-day workers wanted fairness. We have more coming to us than these latecomers. I want fairness. You want fairness. All the good people want fairness. And Jesus says, "Too bad. Life in my dominion isn't fair. Get over it."

And if we say, "That's not *fair,*" then Jesus responds, "Right! Now you get it." PR

St. Michael and All Angels
September 29, 2002

Psalm 103:1–5, 20–22
Daniel 10:10–14; 12:1–3
Revelation 12:7–12
Luke 10:17–20

First Reading

Lesser festivals make some people nervous. Too catholic, say some. Too strange, say others. Just give me the regular Sundays, plus Christmas and Easter. But if we go that route, we miss out on some interesting parts of our family history. Given the prevalence of angels in popular culture, maybe it's a good thing that we have a day to speak about them in Sunday worship.

Daniel shows us the archangel Michael as the protector of the people of Israel. Protection is one of the various roles assigned to angels in scripture. For Daniel, Michael is a sign of God's help, and so the voice can say to Daniel, "Do not fear."

In Revelation 12, John describes a battle of angels: good angels versus evil angels, Michael versus Satan (the dragon and deceiver). The winner in John's vision is Michael, with the devil thrown down and all his angels with him. The voice from heaven in this apocalyptic vision cries out "Rejoice, you heavens!" for evil has been thrown down, but "woe to the earth and the sea" for that's where the devil has landed.

Luke shares Jesus' brief description of seeing Satan fall from heaven and his proclamation to the seventy that they, too, have the power to tread on snakes and scorpions like this. But wait! Jesus says that the real blessing is not this extraordinary power but the fact that your names are written in heaven.

All these readings are filled with the echoes of another time, another worldview, and yet there is a resonance today. Having

one's name written is a sign of citizenship, which was no small thing in the days of Rome, especially in the provinces. "I am a Roman citizen" was a statement of great honor (for a biblical example, see Acts 16: 35ff.), and noncitizens were wary of how they treated Romans. But greater still, says Jesus, is to be called a citizen of heaven.

Allan Boesak, a black South African minister, wrote a commentary on Revelation during the apartheid era entitled *Comfort and Protest: The Apocalypse from a South African Perspective* (Westminster, 1987). Throughout the text, he describes how this genre of literature is the voice of the oppressed. Symbols, numbers, fantastic beasts, and a spectacular vision of the future are designed to comfort the persecuted faithful even as they protest the oppressors who attack them. The symbols are designed to obscure the subversive, supportive message from the ruling powers, just as the words of the spirituals functioned in the days of slavery. Like those spirituals, rather than being a complicated puzzle of the future, Revelation is a powerful source of support to the people of God in the present who are faced with unrelenting evil.

Pastoral Reflections

Back in late September of 1989, when I was a newly ordained pastor in St. Louis, one of my heroes died: Theodore Geisel, a.k.a. Dr. Seuss. If you want to understand apocalyptic literature, go read Dr. Seuss. He used fantastic images, talking animals, numbers, and symbols to express profound political ideas—the very essence of apocalyptic literature. "Yertle the Turtle" was nothing more and nothing less than a treatise against totalitarianism. Written in 1958, as Sputnik was circling the globe, Geisel attacked the notion of a single authoritative leader ruling over the masses and used a simple turtle named Mack to bring down the whole house of cards.

But that's what apocalyptic literature does. It captures the tensions in the events of the day (Rome and the Jewish/Christian people, or the U.S.S.R. and the U.S.A.), and recasts them in all these fantastic images. After Yertle piles up turtle on turtle to be his glorious throne, the little turtle on the bottom (Mack) burps, and all the hundreds of turtles come tumbling down. "And today, the great Yertle, that Marvelous he/is King of the Mud. That is all he can see./And the turtles, of course, . . . all the turtles are free/ as turtles and, maybe, all creatures should be." That's apocalyptic literature, and it's found on almost every parent's bookshelf.

So what word should we preachers bring? We know the powers and principalities arrayed against God's world and God's people in our neighborhoods, powers that care nothing for the people that get in their way. Can we raise a vision of God's protection in the face of evil? A voice that cries out, "Do not fear"?

The fear seems quite easy to spot, whether we are speaking of rural family farmers, urban city dwellers, or suburban middle managers. Life feels precarious, and ruin is but a day or two away. And yet, Michael and all his angels circle round us.

Today is a day to hold fast to the promises of God. "Your people shall be delivered," says Daniel. "They have conquered [the deceiver] by the blood of the Lamb," says John. "Nothing will hurt you," says Jesus to the seventy.

Spirituals and Dr. Seuss. St. Michael and all Angels. Promises of hope, promises of comfort, and promises of protection. And let the people rejoice—the slaves, the oppressed, the hopeless, and the downtrodden. Their names are written in heaven, and the enemy has no power over them. PR

Responses
are welcome!

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