December 1999 Volume 26 Number 6



CURRENTS

in Theology and Mission

Currents

in Theology and Mission

Published by
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

in cooperation with
Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary
Wartburg Theological Seminary

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

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

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

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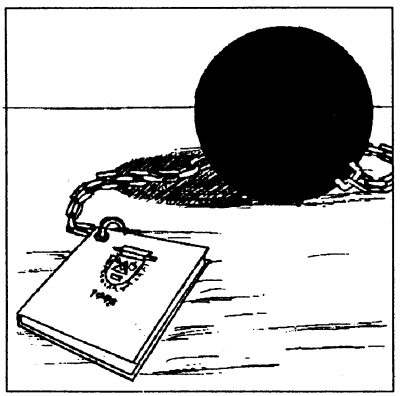
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Free at Last

It measures only 3" by 4 5/8," it is bright red—and it's gone. I refer to my 1999 Augsburg Fortress Appointment Book, my daily companion and boss for as long as I can remember. I discovered the loss about two weeks ago, but was quite certain the little red fellow was in my "other jacket" or at my seminary office or under the front seat of the car or in a suitcase I took to North Dakota. I have a feeling it fell off (or jumped off?) my desk into the nearby wastebasket and that it is now part of some great Chicago landfill, alongside assorted bottles, bags, cans, and boxes.

My first reaction was denial, then panic set in. A few of the dates were in my computer, a few more could be reconstructed from the season tickets to the Court Theatre and the Lyric Opera. A few more I found by calling up adult forum leaders and my doctor and saying sheepishly, "Didn't we have a date in February or is it March?" But some of those dates are just gone. So if I don't show up at a soiree in your town, it's not because I'm absent minded, or not just because I'm absent minded. Maybe some of the lost dates are committee meetings I won't have to attend, letters or essays I won't have to write, or an annual report I won't have to send to my bishop. Hence my third reaction, after denial and panic, is joy. Maybe I threw it away.



In this euphoric state of mind I reread the essay by **Stanley J. Grenz**, who reminds us that we must be careful not to endow our work with more significance than is warranted by the Bible. God does not evaluate our work on the basis of productivity, but on our faithfulness. Even Christians erroneously look to work to provide their sense of identity, but identity begins and ends in our baptism. Grenz finds a crucial antidote to burnout in a biblical understanding of leisure. Sabbath rest is the context for work, not the goal of our work. We work because God has already granted us leisure as a gracious gift. We engage in work as an expression of gratitude for the divine grace we have received and in anticipation of the glorious future rest

that still remains for the people of God. Even without our overly diligent efforts, the church will not fall apart and God's work will be done.

Norman P. Dake, a prison chaplain for twenty years, notes that we live in a violent world and a violent country and we are violent people. All sorts of things trigger violence: hurt feelings, the inability to distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable violence, the availability of guns, substance abuse, practicing learned aggression, reacting to perceived injustice, head injuries. The violence inflicted on Jesus on the cross is God's ultimate act of peace and love in response to human violence. When we love our enemies, they are no longer enemies. We can practice anger management and learn conflict resolution. Each of us has a shadow of violence, but if we begin at the cross with the love of Christ, we can grow in our love for ourselves and our neighbors, and we will have both fewer victims and fewer villains.

Dean M. Apel rehearses for us Luther's relationship with Muslims in general and Turks in particular. Luther was opposed to a war against the Turks even though their threat had precipitated a religious and political crisis in 16th century Europe. He thought of the Turks as a tool of God's discipline or, contrariwise, as one of the Satanic threats of the end time. Luther condemned the Quran as a threat to the authority of Scripture and branded Islam a religion of law. His apologetic was designed mostly to strengthen and preserve in the faith Christians who were actual or potential captives of the Turks. Luther was convinced that the gospel would eventually be preached among the Turks even if not in his lifetime. Luther is no model for current Christian conversations with Muslims, but he did feel obligated to read and study their own writings and he gained thereby a fresh understanding of the center of Christianity. Luther was unwilling to compromise his faith for the sake of finding common ground with Islam.

Jennifer Hockenbery explores the impact of Christmas on philosophy and asserts that belief in the Incarnation overthrew the ontology, axiology, and epistemology of late antiquity. When Truth became part of the material world, the ontology of the Platonists was turned on its head. Axiologically, Christmas affirmed that the body is not bad and that flesh is not the cause of sin. Christian philosophy claims that instead of the philosopher trying to drive a chariot to the Truth, Truth comes to us and becomes a vehicle that carries us toward Truth. Augustine found that the Intelligible Absolute climbed down into the world of images and imagination so that the human hand, eye, ear, and tongue could touch, see, hear and taste that which transcends the world. Wisdom was given by a God who cared to help those who seek wisdom find it.

Howard S. Olson has authorized us to publish his hymn "All Nature's Praise is Manifold," as well as his commentary on it, letting us know, in poetic prose, the theological and biblical roots from which this hymn arose. Stanza one evokes the variety in nature; stanza two extols God for the predictable particularity of the tandemed seasons; stanza three invites everyone to praise the Lord for the spendthrift grace outpoured on us.

Mark Wegener provides an article-length review of a recent book on Jesus by N. Thomas Wright. Wright is an opponent of the Jesus Seminar and reconstructs Jesus as a Jewish prophet in an eschatological mold. In his view Jesus anticipated that God would break into Israel's history and vindicate his people soon. Jesus also anticipated that his subversive retelling of Israel's story would create conflict and he would be killed for his efforts. This is the second of five volumes Wright plans to write about Jesus, and Wegener provides an accessible summary and a thought-provoking critique.

About the time you receive this issue of *Currents,* I expect that Augsburg Fortress will send me a copy of their little red book for the year 2000. In the popular counting, we will be on the shore of their third Christian millennium, hoping to weather the assaults of the Y2K bug, and preparing to celebrate the 2,004 birthday of Jesus of Nazareth—give or take a year or two. I will dutifully fill out and I hope to live out the pages of that book, all the richer for having lost the 1999 edition since that loss reminded me once again *who* and *whose* I am.

Ralph W. Klein
Editor

Burnout: The Cause and the Cure for a Christian Malady

Stanley J. Grenz
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"How ironic," I couldn't help thinking as I set down the telephone receiver to grab my Day Timer. Could I write an essay on work and burnout, and have it ready in less than a month? The editor of *Faith Today* waited as I went through the usual mental gymnastics: "The project seemed worthwhile," I mused. And a quick survey of the calendar suggested that I could free up a few uncommitted hours here and there to complete the job within the time frame. "So that settles it," I thought. Following a pattern I had built up over the last twenty-five years—namely, to respond positively, if at all possible, to every "ministry opportunity" I am asked to do—I cheerfully announced my willingness to accept the assignment.

Despite feeling the burden of an already full schedule, I congratulated myself for finding a way to shoehorn yet one more worthwhile "Christian" task into an overloaded month. And I was pleased with myself for once again being obedient to the call of God voiced through the Christian community. But in the midst of the self-adulation, I couldn't shake the sense of irony entailed in my willingness to crowd into an already overloaded life this particular writing assignment. I, of all people, need to *read* a piece on work and burnout, not *write* it.

Christians and work

Why do we seem driven to overload our calendars? Why do we so readily view every request for our participation in a worthy cause as the voice of God? And does all this make us vulnerable to burnout?

The tendency of Christians to work so hard arises in part, I am convinced, out of our profound sense of the importance of work. We are convinced that work is godly—and with good reason, for the Bible repeatedly links work with God.

The biblical understanding of work arises ultimately from its portrayal of God as one who works. In the beginning, God engaged in the "work of creating" (Gen 2:3). God continues to work in sustaining creation and accomplishing human salvation. Jesus himself spoke about the ceaselessness of the divine activity: "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working" (John 5:17). God's work, it seems, is never done. And our understanding of God as the unrelenting cosmic worker motivates us to devote ourselves to our work as well. We work hard, in short, because we believe that in so doing we are like God.

Not only does God work, the biblical God gives us work to do. Our divinely



given human task began in the primordial garden: "The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it" (Gen 2:15). To this nurturing dimension of our human purpose, the Fall added an additional role—work became the means of procuring our livelihood: "By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food" (Gen 3:19).

Even the coming of Christ did not revoke this situation. The New Testament writers took for granted that Christians—like other humans—would work to meet their physical needs. Thus, Paul and his colleagues worked hard with their own hands so as not to be a financial burden on the fledgling Christian communities (1 Cor 4:12; 2 Thess 3:8) In keeping with his own example, the apostle commanded his readers to "earn the bread they eat" (2 Thess 3:12), reminding them that he had given them the rule: "If a man will not work, he shall not eat" (2 Thess 3:10).

Aware of this important biblical teaching, we number slothfulness among the "seven deadly sins." We take seriously the scriptural warnings against laziness (Prov 6:6; 19:15; Eccl 10:18). And even as we pray, "Give us today our daily bread" (Matt 6:11), we find in the Bible confirmation of the assumption that our livelihood in the present and our hope for a worry-free retirement are dependent upon our diligent work.

For many Christians today, however, the work necessitated in "earning our daily bread"—as consuming as it is—is not what tempts us to overload our calendars. Nor is it what leads to burnout. Instead, our tendency to take on more than we can handle and then to grow weary in the process of trying to accomplish it all arises from another biblical aspect of work. We know from the Bible that it is our duty as Christ's disciples to engage in "the Lord's work" (cf. 1 Cor 16:10; Phil 2:30; 1 Thess 1:3). And in our diligence in doing the work of the Lord we are motivated by a keen awareness of the shortness of earthly life, as well as the coming day of judgment. These theological truths make it imperative, we believe, that we make every moment count.

Many biblical verses provide the foundation for a sense of urgency in our work. We work hard because we know well the Preacher's sobering directive: "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work . . . in the grave, whither thou goest" (Eccl 9:10 KJV). We likewise do our best to be obedient to Paul's penetrating admonition, "Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain (1 Cor 15:58). We redouble our efforts whenever we hear the somber funeral epitaph: "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord . . . they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them" (Rev 14:13). And aware of the biblical teaching about the coming judgement day, we work hard in the hope of gaining our Lord's commendation, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things" (Matt 25:21).

Work and burnout

We dare not minimize the importance the Bible places on work. Nevertheless, we must be careful not to endow our work with more significance than is warranted by the Bible. Doing so only makes us susceptible to burnout.

We risk giving unwarranted significance to our work when we confuse work with productivity. Taking a cue from modern industrial society, Christians often erroneously assume that the meaning of our work arises from what our efforts produce. On this basis, we all-too-readily value ourselves (and others) according to our ability to be productive. We measure our personal worth (and that of others) by looking at the fruit of our labors, especially the material benefits that accrue from our work. Thus, even Christians find themselves speaking about "net worth" in purely financial terms. Or in our more "spiritual" moments we look to the intangible accomplishments that engender the accolades of others.

Regardless of which of these paths we follow, it doesn't take long before we find ourselves working, even overworking, ourselves in a never-ending quest to produce an ever-increasing output and thereby to attain an ever-elusive standard of "success" or to "earn" an ever-fleeting sense of esteem. Enslaved to the productivity treadmill, we become susceptible to burnout.

Yet the God of the Bible doesn't evaluate our work on the basis of what we produce. God's standard of measurement is not productivity but faithfulness. God does not ask what we have accomplished but whether we have been faithful to the task entrusted to us. Our Lord reiterated this principle when he encouraged his disciples to be "faithful and wise" as servants whom their master has put in charge of his household (Matt 24:45; cf. 25:21, 23). Jesus' servant parables also underscore the biblical principle that faithfulness to our divinely-given task includes concern for others (cf. Deut 24:19–22). Consequently, accomplishments that from our modern perspective might result in a person being upheld as a model of the successful entrepreneur—such as expanding one's holdings and eliminating the competition—can instead evoke divine condemnation (e.g., Isa 5:8).

We misunderstand work as well when we look to our work to provide what God never intended it to. The Bible presents work as a vehicle through which we respond in gratitude to God's goodness toward us. Work is a means whereby we can glorify our Maker and Redeemer. On this basis, Paul suggested that even slaves should do their work well, not for the sake of the economic well-being of their masters, but as disciples who are working for their Lord (Eph 6:7; Col 3:23).

Despite such biblical teaching, Christians, taking their cue from modern industrial society, erroneously look to work to provide their sense of identity. Why?

In the sixteenth century, the reformers asserted that all Christians, even those engaging in so-called "secular" tasks, can serve God through their work. They declared that every line of work—and not merely "full time Christian service"—is a divine "vocation." In this manner, the reformers transformed all work into "the Lord's work." People today, however, have replaced the Reformation focus on vocation with "careerism." Rather than seeing the work we do as a divine vocation—as a means to glorify God—even many Christians identify themselves in accordance with their "chosen career path."

Careerism leads us to derive our identity from our career or from our current standing on "the corporate ladder."

Careerism leads us to determine "who I am" from "what I do" (i.e., my career). Even those of us in vocational Christian leadership fall prey to the temptation to view ordained ministry as a career path and to find our identity through what we do "for the Lord." No wonder, then, that we overload our calendar with a host of worthwhile projects and risk burnout in our desperate attempt to accomplish so much!

God, however, never intended that our work become the source of our identity. At the heart of the gospel is neither human merit nor personal achievement, but divine grace. The good news is that our identity is God's gracious gift and not the product of our efforts (Eph 2:8–9)—we *are* God's children (e.g., 1 John 3:1–2). According to the Bible, engaging in the "Lord's work" is not the means to *becoming* God's beloved children. Work is not what we do to *gain* our identity. Rather, Christ's disciples work in the Lord's vineyard, because they already *are* God's children. Work, then, is a divinely-given way for us to respond to God's grace (Eph 2:10). As those who have received divine grace, we desire through our work to offer thankful service to our gracious God

Despite all our rhetoric of the centrality of divine grace, however, reminiscent of the Judaizers that Paul confronted in his epistle to the Galatians, we so often work hard in a vain attempt to gain a sense of personal identity and worthiness. No wonder our work becomes wearisome. No wonder we teeter on the brink of burnout. No wonder we find ourselves resonating with the Preacher's rhetorical question, "What do people gain from all the toil at which they toil under the sun?" (Eccl 1:3). Our attempts to acquire from work what our labors were never intended to provide leads not only to physical but also to psychological and spiritual fatigue. In such a situation, Jesus' words come as good news even to his own disciples: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest (Matt 11:28).

Christians and leisure

If burnout is partly due to a misunderstanding of work that leads us to fill our calendars in an ill-fated attempt to gain a sense of identity, then perhaps a crucial antidote lies in a rediscovery of leisure. Indeed, many contemporary physicians of the soul tout leisure as the cure for what ails us. Yet only a biblically based understanding of leisure offers hope. Any truly helpful understanding must arise out of the biblical concept of sabbath.

The first creation narrative concludes: "By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done" (Gen 2:2–3 NIV). Although the "day of rest" was the seventh day of creation, for humans—who were created on the sixth day—the sabbath was the *first* day. Therefore, the sabbath, which followed God's work, actually *preceded* human work.

Because God hallowed the seventh day, God's Old Testament covenant people were to keep the sabbath (Exod 20:11). Although important, the foundational purpose of the sabbath was not to provide humans a needed reprieve from the weariness of work; above all, sabbath observance formed the context for human work. Nor did God intend the sabbath to be an occasion for humans to glory in what they have accomplished through their work; rather sabbath was a time to celebrate God's own work.

This perspective provides the foundation for an outlook toward leisure that differs

radically from what our modern consumerist society propagates. Today's leisure culture sees work as the necessary means to what is vaunted as the true goal of our labor—leisure. We work so that we might enjoy leisure time and be able to afford leisure activities. As a consequence, we quickly come to view leisure as ours by right; we believe that we deserve time off because we work so hard. This attitude finds expression in the typical Friday afternoon sign-off, "Have a great weekend!" Ultimately, however, the consumerist understanding of leisure cannot provide a helpful antidote to burnout. It can only lead us to devalue work.

Its connection to the biblical idea of sabbath suggests that rather than being the goal of our work, leisure actually is the context for work. Because the divinely-given sabbath precedes our working, we do not work to *earn* our leisure—indeed, we could never work hard enough to earn leisure as a right. Instead, we work because God has already granted us leisure as a divine, gracious gift. We work because we are grateful for God's provision of leisure.

Further, viewed from the perspective of sabbath, true leisure involves above all the worshipful celebration of God's work on our behalf—the extolling of the divine work that offers us rest. Viewing leisure as worshipful celebration does not mean, of course, that all we're allowed to do on Sunday is pray and read our Bibles, as my grandmother advised my father when he was a boy. Rather, it refers to the kind of attitude we ought to bring to all leisure activities and even to leisure itself. Worshipful celebration is first a matter of the heart, therefore, and only secondarily a function of the specific activities we do or do not do on Sunday.

This understanding of sabbath leisure suggests why the early church appropriately came to view the first day of the week rather than the seventh as the "Lord's day" and the day of worship (Rev 1:10). The Christian week rightly begins with the celebration of God's great work accomplished in the resurrection of Jesus. And this celebration anticipates our final rest—that day when God rests from the work of bringing creation to its divinely intended goal. In the meantime, as those who enjoy even now the fruit of God's labors, we engage in work as an expression of gratitude for the divine grace we have received and in anticipation of that glorious future rest. But even in the midst of our work, we engage in leisure as an expression of gratitude that ultimately it is the God who works who offers us eternal rest.

> We risk giving unwarranted significance to our work when we confuse work with productivity.

Although some Christians buy into the leisure culture of our day, many more end up transforming leisure into yet another variety of "work." These Christians "rest" so that they can be more effective in their work for the Lord. This is evident in typical Christian talk that admonishes us to live balanced lives—including taking time for rejuvenation—so that we can be more productive Christian workers.

Proponents of this view routinely appeal to our Lord's own example. Jesus did not minister constantly to people, they remind us, but also took "time off." He spent

Those of us who are prone to overcommitment . . . need to view our work and our leisure from a radically biblical perspective.

time alone with his Father, and thereby recharged his batteries for another week of ministry. Lying behind this picture of our Lord's conduct, of course, is the assumption that the "real" task of the Christian is the business of the ministry. Leisure, in turn, has value merely in so far as it enhances our productivity in the Lord's work.

Seeing leisure in connection with sabbath calls into question this basically utilitarian understanding of rest. Of course, resting one day in seven is a constant reminder that as finite creatures we cannot work indefinitely; we need rejuvenation. But its implications run deeper. People who attempt to go on working without adequate rest and leisure generally harbor the covert—if not overt—belief that not only their livelihood but more importantly God's program in the world is dependent on their work. Deep within their soul is the lurking suspicion that in the end it all hinges on them. Without their diligent effort the church will fall apart and God's work will not get done.

Sabbath leisure puts us and our work in proper perspective. It reminds us that we do not rest primarily so that we might be more effective and productive in "ministry." Instead, sabbath leisure is the celebration of the divine work in creation and redemption. By reminding us that our work begins and ends in the divine work, sabbath leisure keeps before us the truth that our work is not what brings to pass God's program, but is from beginning to end the response of grateful believers to the divine grace.

So, then, is burnout the inevitable result of squeezing an ever-increasing number of worthwhile projects into an ever-decreasing among of available time? Not necessarily. Can we solve the problem of burnout simply by saying "no" more often? Not likely.

Those of us who are prone to overcommitment and hence appear to be primary candidates for burnout need above all the renewal of our minds. We need to come to view our work and our leisure from a radically biblical perspective. We need the Holy Spirit to teach us what it means to engage in the Lord's work out of the sabbath rest God graciously provides and conscious of the new identity God graciously lavishes upon us. When we begin to learn this, we will greet whatever work our Lord calls us to do as an occasion to offer our gratitude to the one who continually offers us rest for our soul.

Violence: Victims and Villains

Norman Dake
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The scope of the problem

We live in a violent world. It's been that way since Cain killed Abel (Gen 4:8), only now our weapons are even more potent and vicious, and our reach more global. Archaeologists and anthropologists have traced a pattern of homicide and mass murder dating from prehistoric times. Violence is nothing new.

We live in a violent country. It's been that way since before Columbus got "lost" on his way to the Orient, "discovered" the Americas, and named the inhabitants he encountered Indians because he thought he had found a shortcut to India.

The Native Americans he encountered had been here for 4,000 years. They were known to afflict one another with acts of violence to control food supplies and hunting grounds and to acquire slaves. With the coming of explorers, colonists, and immigrants, the violence increased in a struggle to control land, natural resources, trade, and travel.

The United States was founded on violence. Yes, we are a nation of laws with a constitution. But this country was brought to birth through violence. We call it the Revolutionary War, and we glory in it.

The Union was preserved through violence as it struggled with the violence of slavery. We call it the Civil War, and we glory in it. Violence has been a big part of our nation's history from its conception to this very moment.

We are a violent people. I'm not talking about the nebulous "they" who live "out there" somewhere. I'm talking about all of us—male or female, youth or adult. All of us have within us the capacity for violence. Each of us possesses the potential, if not the proclivity, to do violence. Each of us has the capability—in a harmful way, in an evil way—to coerce, control, deprive, or destroy by force or by intimidation.

It's in all of us. St. Paul might call it our human nature, the Old Adam, the Old Eve, our sinful self. Carl Jung, one of the founders of modern psychiatry, might call it our shadow.

Each of us has a shadow, the negative side to our personality that most of us learn, more or less, to channel in a nondestructive way. To deny our shadow is unhealthy and dangerous. When a certain prosecuting attorney launched a campaign to crack down on prostitution and the sale of pornographic videos, and was subsequently arrested for soliciting sex from an undercover policewoman posing as a prostitute and accused of using money from his office petty cash fund to buy X-rated videos, it was a classic case of denying his shadow.

It is usually much easier for us to see the shadow in our community and in other people; we have 20/20 vision for that. But it is much more difficult for us to see the shadows in ourselves. Jesus admonishes us to pay attention to the telephone pole in our

Violence

Violence

own eye before we try to remove the splinter from our neighbor's eye (Matt 7:4; Luke 6:41). Carl Jung would contend that the splinter in our neighbor's eye *is* the log in our own eye. What we tend to find fault with in other people is often a part of ourselves that we are not able to see. One of the logs that we have difficulty identifying in ourselves is our tendency toward violence.

My experience in twenty years of jail chaplaincy is that those who have committed the most horrible crimes are often the nicest people. Sometimes we read about these people in the newspaper—a Girl Scout leader who kills her own daughter, or a Sunday School teacher who commits a brutal rape and murder. Often family members, neighbors, and fellow church members cannot believe that this person could possibly have committed such a heinous act. It seems so out of character and we wonder what happened. What has happened many times is that these people have failed to make friends with their shadows. They have so denied and repressed this negative side of their personalities that they cannot see it, let alone control it.

That was Klaus's problem. I'll call him Klaus because he looked like Santa Klaus, a pleasant and jovial man with a heavy-set frame and fluffy, thick beard. Klaus was very knowledgeable about the Bible. He had taught Sunday School prior to his arrest, and he had a ready supply of Bible correspondence courses he worked on while awaiting trial. He had been raised in a strict religious family where negative feelings had been condemned and negative behavior severely punished.

Klaus was accused and convicted of murdering a young woman and dumping her body in a remote area. The evidence was overwhelmingly incriminating, and the jury had little difficulty finding Klaus guilty. Yet Klaus always maintained his innocence, not just with me because I was the chaplain and not just with other people in the jail who might try to use anything Klaus might say for their own advantage, but with himself. It was evident that Klaus believed in his own mind that he was innocent. He had so repressed his shadow that, when it manifested itself, Klaus could not see that that was him or at least a part of him.

Sometimes people will describe a sensation of "snapping" or "flipping out." It's as though their shadow has been so repressed and denied that when it comes out they not only can't control it, they can't even see it as being a part of themselves. It is like putting our thumb over the top of a pop bottle, but all the time that bottle and the soda inside are shaking. Then when our thumb slips off the top of the bottle, we have soda all over the ceiling. We simply can't hold it in any more.

Certainly this does not explain every act of violence, and other contributing factors will be identified in the following paragraphs. But it does illustrate the fact that violence is not "out there" somewhere. It's inside of us—all of us. Unless and until we can identify, own, and channel in a nondestructive way the shadow that is in each of

us, we run the risk of giving expression to the violence that is within us.

What triggers the violence?

The violence within us can be triggered by any number of things. Here are some of them.

1. Hurt. Hurt that cannot be expressed with tears. When children get hurt, they cry. But as they grow older the message is often communicated, verbally or nonverbally, that tears are no longer acceptable. Young males especially are shamed into quietude by being told that "big boys don't cry." Why not? Who says so? What happens to the hurt?

I'll call him Manny because he wanted to be a man. Manny was 18 years old and the quietest, shyest resident in the whole jail. Simply by looking at him, one would never guess that Manny was in jail for a series of armed robberies.

Most 18 year-old males would like to think of themselves as being grown up. In their minds being a man means being tough, together, and in control. But what happens when you're 18 and you're *not* tough, together, and in control? Can you tell your mother? She might think you're not so grown up after all. Can you talk to your girlfriend about it? She might think you're less of a man. Can you cry? That's not regarded as being very manly.

What did Manny do? He pretended that he was tough, together, and in control. Only he did it by packing a pistol and sticking people up.

Violence is often a substitute for tears. When I've made this statement from the pulpit, I've had women come up to me after the service and tell me, "I think you described my ex-husband. He used to beat me, and now I think I understand why. He was hurting, but he couldn't talk about it and he couldn't cry."

The shootings at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado seem, at least in part, to be an example of this phenomenon. Two young men felt ostracized by their classmates. Without an empathetic setting in which to express their feelings, and with access to weapons, violence became a substitute for tears.

2. Availability of guns. Weapons up the ante in any disagreement. A gun can turn a heated argument into a deadly confrontation.

It also got Paul nineteen years in the penitentiary. I'll call him Paul because at one time he had been a police officer. Paul knew guns. He was trained to use a gun.

Paul had been living with a girlfriend whose house had been broken into, so he decided to keep a gun in the house. One day Paul and his girlfriend got into an argument. What normally would have been a war of words became a murder. When the argument got hot and heavy, Paul got his gun and shot his girlfriend.

While many defend their right to bear arms and protect themselves against perceived threats to their well-being, their loved ones, and their property, this choice is not without its risks. Those with a gun are five times more likely to use that gun on a family member or a friendly visitor than on an intruder. Those with a gun run the risk of having children, who may not have had training in gun use or safety, get their hands on it in an unsupervised setting—with deadly consequences. Those with a gun run the risk of having it stolen if their home is burglarized, putting yet another weapon into the hands of those who might use it in an act of violence. Those with a gun, like Paul, run the risk of having an unpleasant dispute escalate into a deadly argument.

The days of fist fights, black eyes, and skinned knuckles have given way to assault weapons and drive-by shootings. While the

tendencies toward violence are as old as humankind, the weapons of violence are ever new and ever more devastating.

Some of my friends have expressed concern for my safety because I work in a jail. Jail, however, may be one of the safest places to be, because there are no guns. Think about it. Unlike some of our homes, schools, post offices, and churches, there are no guns in jail. Our institution may house the biggest, baddest dudes in the county, but they have no guns.

3. Blurring the lines between socially acceptable and non-acceptable violence. We condone violence in certain circumstances. When violence is used by the military or the police, we may not give it a second thought unless it is overly brutal. When it occurs in a sporting event, especially football, hockey, or boxing, we may even cheer it.

It is not always easy to turn the violence on and off between one setting and another. Should we really be surprised when a football player drags his wife around by the hair, when a hockey player goes into the stands after a fan who has jeered instead of cheered, or when a boxer rapes his girlfriend? This is not to suggest by any means that every athlete who plays an aggressive sport is a beast. But when we cheer the violence in one setting, should we be surprised if it spills over into another setting?

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, after the Viet Nam War, there were so many veterans in prison accused of violent crimes that at least one penitentiary had its own VFW post. What happened? We trained people to be soldiers and to kill, and then we put them in an environment (war) where it was often either kill or be killed. When they were discharged and came home, they were in an environment where the rules were very different. But they were never retrained or deprogrammed, so that they brought home with them the attitudes and behaviors that helped them to survive a war. At home, however, those attitudes and behaviors got them into all kinds of trouble.

It's not easy to turn the violence off when one has been trained for it, cheered for it, or survived because of it.

4. Substance abuse. Some illicit drugs, such as PCP or angel dust, make people very violent. Some drugs are so addictive that a person will do almost anything, including engaging in violence, to get the next fix or the next hit. Some chemicals lower a person's ability to control violent behavior.

I'll call him Al because he was an alcoholic. Al's alcoholism cost him his job, wife, and family. But Al could be quite charming when he wasn't drunk, and he soon struck up a relationship with another woman. He moved in with her until she, too, got tired of the drinking and kicked him out. Al left their apartment, only to return later in the day, still in a drunken stupor, but with a gun. A neighbor saw Al enter the apartment with the gun and called the police. Instead of trying to talk Al into putting down the gun and coming out of the apartment, the police began to kick in the front door. Al panicked, pulled the trigger, and killed his girlfriend. He's now serving a life sentence.

When Al is sober he is an intelligent, warm, and caring person. Under the influence of alcohol, a very different side of his personality emerges. Substance abuse brings out the violence in a great many people.

5. Acting out of learned aggression. Again and again the lesson is taught that violence is the way to deal with people who have given offense. When Saddam Hussein gave offense by invading Kuwait, we sent in the armed forces and cruise missiles. When convicted killers are judged to have offended us, we put them to death. When the "bad guys" on TV shows or cartoons do

violence, the "good guys" respond with violence in kind.

Then we wonder why a 9 year-old punches out a teacher over a classroom assignment. Or why a 44 year-old grandma assaults four teachers because her grandson is suspended from school. Or why a para-military-type person blows up a federal building in Oklahoma City in response to an FBI assault in Waco, Texas. Violent behavior is repeatedly modeled, sometimes unintentionally.

Not only violent behavior, but violent attitudes, are learned and imitated. Should we really be surprised at the disrespectful attitudes and violent behavior of even very young children when that is what they have been taught? The message they too often receive is, "You don't take any guff from anybody. If somebody 'disses' you, you stand up to them. You fight back. You take them out." When this is compounded by rap music that explicitly advocates violence, or pornography that graphically depicts women or children as sex objects subject to the whims of those who seek only their own pleasure, it is little wonder that more and more people become the victims of violence. We are reaping what we have sown. We have created a culture of violence.

6. Perceived injustice. Life in this world is not always fair. When we believe that we have been unjustly treated, what do we do? We are likely to feel hurt, whether or not we are ever moved to tears. We may also believe that we have the right to get what we think we deserve, by force if necessary.

All of us have certain needs for food, housing, health care, education, and jobs. Most of us learn how to make our social and economic systems work for us so that we can meet the needs of our families and ourselves. But there are also many others who believe that the system does not work for them. They experience prejudice, discrimination, and injustice. Sometimes these people decide not to play by society's rules, because the rules don't work very well for them. Instead they make their own rules, and those rules can be terrifyingly violent, just like the Old West.

Life in this world is not always fair. When we believe that we have been unjustly treated, what do we do?

When I was a hospital chaplain I saw countless patients who had become victims of violence. They had been beaten, shot, or stabbed. When I asked these people if they knew who had victimized them, many acknowledged that they knew their attacker. When I further asked if they had notified the police, the answer too often was, "No, I'll take care of it myself." In a world of injustice, where some have no confidence in our society's ability to right the perceived wrongs, violence begets more violence.

In addition to our needs, all of us have desires. We live in a materialistic culture. We are bombarded with messages that encourage us to consume. We want more, bigger, and better. One day I read in our local newspaper that nine classmates of one of my sons had skipped school to buy a new, expensive pair of limited-edition athletic shoes. When I discussed this with my son he said, "Oh, there were a lot more than nine who cut school."

Our love for others ought to begin with the children.

When our desires outreach our means, temptation can rear its ugly head and the voices in our own head grow ever louder: "Go ahead, take it. You deserve it. You've got it coming." With all of the media messages and peer pressure, some people decide that they are entitled to get whatever they perceive "everyone else" to have. Violence is one means to that end. We are reaping what we have sown.

7. Head injuries. Some neurological injuries precipitate violence. Individuals who were dropped on their heads as children, involved in an accident, or hit in the head are sometimes prone to violent behavior.

I'll call him Willie because he was confined to a wheelchair. Willie had been beaten over the head with a stake from a horseshoe pit His injuries left him partially paralyzed with no strength in one leg and one arm. Willie developed a most violent temper that first landed him in prison and ultimately wore out his welcome with his family once he was released.

Willie was brought to the hospital that I served because he had no place else to go. Whenever Willie was aggravated by seemingly little annoyances, he would launch into a violent tirade against anyone who happened to be in the way. Most often his targets were the nurses that Willie depended on to take care of him. When I was around, Willie would listen to me as I tried to calm him down. He would say, "Yeah, you're right," and he would mellow out for a while, until something else aggravated him and he would lose his temper yet again.

Willie was both a victim and a villain. In a sense so were Klaus, Manny, the Viet Nam vets, Paul, and Al. While we must hold people accountable for their actions, we must also recognize our contributions to a society and culture that fosters violence. All too often we have helped to create the villains, whom we then condemn when they do violence to their victims.

What are some solutions?

1. It starts at the cross. The cross of Jesus Christ is humanity's ultimate act of violence against God. The cross is also God's ultimate act of peace and love in response to human violence.

When Jesus was nailed to the cross, he prayed that those who were guilty of this grave injustice might be forgiven (Luke 23:34). Jesus did not respond to violence with more violence. He responded with love and forgiveness instead. Jesus absorbed the violence that was inflicted upon him and did not respond in kind. The cross is God's answer to violence. The message of the cross is love, forgiveness, peace, and nonviolence.

2. Love. Jesus calls us to love our neighbors as ourselves (Matt 19:19; 22:39; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27). We cannot love our neighbors unless and until we love ourselves, including our shadows. If we fail to identify, own, and channel in a nondestructive way the shadow that is in each of us, we are at risk of giving vent to the violence that is within us.

Our love for others ought to begin with the children. Prior to my first public presentation on violence at Washington University in St. Louis, I happened to mention to a

sheriff's deputy of my acquaintance that I had received an invitation to share my perspectives on this topic. He asked me, "What are you going to tell them?" I said, "I have lots of things to tell them. But I would hope that if they hear nothing else they will hear this, 'Love the children.'" That is where we can begin to break the cycle of violence. Those who are inclined toward marriage and parenthood should love their children. That is the most powerful thing they can do to foster a nonviolent world. Those who are not inclined toward marriage and parenthood should love somebody else's children, or we will reap what we have sown.

Love transforms relationships. So much violence is fostered by an "us-them" attitude: my gang against their gang, my race against their race, my gender against their gender, my country against their country.

Jesus tells us to love our enemies (Matt 5:44; Luke 6:7). This may sound at first like "us-them" language, only we are called to love "them." But as we reflect on these words we may come to realize that, if we love our enemies, they can't be our enemies any more. There can be no more "us-them." It's just "us." Love transforms the relationship.

3. Practice anger management. Anger can be a feeling, a thought, and an action. Feelings are neither good nor bad, right nor wrong. We feel what we feel, and we do well to be aware of what we're feeling. What we choose to do with our feelings is another matter. In Eph 4:26 we are admonished to "be angry but do not sin." There is a difference between feeling and acting. If we can slow down the leap from feeling to acting and interpose the thought process, angry feelings do not need to be expressed with violent actions.

These helpful anger management steps can insert a thoughtful process between feelings and actions:

a. Recognize that you are angry.
b. Accept your anger.
c. Relax.
d. Decide if it's a problem you can't change or one you can.
e. Think about helpful and harmful ways to express your anger.
f. Evaluate the likely consequences.
g. Choose a best way.
h. Problem-solve or express your anger in a helpful way.

Distinguishing between passive, assertive, and aggressive behavior can be a key to implementing this strategy. When we are passive, we allow others to trample upon our feelings; that's not healthy for us. When we are aggressive, we trample upon the feelings of others; that's not healthy for them. When we are assertive, we can express our feelings while respecting the feelings of others; that's better for everyone involved.

4. Learn conflict resolution. For two years my younger son attended a fight-free school. All of the students were taught conflict resolution skills. In their simplest form these steps included:

a. Talk it out.
b. Involve an adult/another person.
c. Walk away.

It worked. If children can learn it, why can't the rest of us?

When I talk about conflict resolution in our jail, I might as well be speaking a foreign language. No one has ever heard of it; no one has ever been taught it. What most have been taught is, "You don't take any guff from anybody. You don't back down. You don't walk away. You handle it yourself." The consequences of these attitudes and corresponding actions are not very pretty. We would do well to learn conflict resolution skills and teach them to our children.

5. Play offense. Jesus confronted evil head-on. After Jesus' baptism, he was led into the wilderness "by the Spirit" (Matt 4:1; Mark 1:12; Luke 4:1) to be tempted for forty days and forty nights. When it came to confronting evil, Jesus played offense, not defense.

Playing offense does not mean being offensive or aggressive toward other people. It involves addressing the root causes of violence and not simply applying a band-aid to the symptoms.

Our criminal justice system is not the solution to violence; it is a reaction to the symptoms. That's not to say that some people shouldn't be removed from society for a period of time to protect the rest of us from their benavior, but our jails and prisons are at the tail end of the problem. They are monuments to failure—signs that violent offenders have failed themselves and us, and that we have failed them. We have failed to address those circumstances that contribute to violence in the first place.

If we play offense, we will become more aware of the shadow of violence that is in each of us. We will become more aware of how aggressive and violent behavior is learned and fostered in the culture we have created. We will become astute at recognizing those factors that trigger the violence within us, and we will commit more of our efforts and energies to prevention than to punishment.

It all begins at the cross. There we find lifted up God's ultimate response to violence. In Jesus the Messiah we see the one who blessed those who work for peace (Matt 5:9) and forgave those who crucified him. His resurrection and bestowing of the Holy Spirit unleash the power that transforms individuals and relationships. If we can begin at the cross with the love of Christ, we can grow in our love for ourselves and our neighbors, and we will have both fewer victims and fewer villains.

Suggestions for further Reading

Alberti, Robert E., and Michael L. Emmons. *Your Perfect Right: A Guide to Assertive Behavior.* San Luis Obispo, CA: IMPACT, 1974.

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Luther's Approach to Islam

Ingemar Öberg's Search for Mission Praxis in the Weimar Edition of *Luther's Works*

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In the contemporary debates about dialogue between the religions, it is often supposed that today's global situation presents us with a unique pluralism or multiculturalism which the Christians of previous centuries did not encounter. Although modern communication and transportation technology has indeed reduced the world to a global village, it is clearly not the case that Christians have been unaware of other religions until the twentieth century. The authors of the Old and New Testaments practiced their faith in Yahweh and Jesus in multicultural milieus. Patristic theology was often engaged in dialogue with and criticism of ancient mystery and other religions. And even Martin Luther in what is often considered a monocultural milieu ("the medieval synthesis") encountered and engaged other religions.[1] We may not decide to follow the example of his religious dialogue, but in many respects Luther's encounter with Islam was not so different from ours and may suggest some possible directions for a Lutheran Christian approach to modern Christian-Muslim relations.

In this survey of Luther's writing about the Muslims, Ingemar Öberg's *Luther och Världsmissionen*[2] has served as a comprehensive guide to the sources and the main contours of Luther's meeting with Muslims. Öberg is especially concerned to show how Luther, contrary to the consensus of much historical-theological research, was interested in evangelizing the Turks. There are many passages in Luther which support his main argument. But even when Luther engages the Turks/Muslims on other levels it is impossible to avoid noticing Luther's concern for the evangelization and conversion of the Turks.

The historical occasion for Luther's concern with the Turks

One might well ask why and how Luther came to be concerned about the Turks and their religion at all. The main historical reason why the Turks came into Luther's field of vision was that, during Luther's time, there was a real possibility that they would invade and conquer what we now call Germany. Robert C. Schultz summarizes the Turkish successes in Luther's time:

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[1] See my *Luther as Missiologian to the Jews* in *dialog* 35:174–80.

[2] Ingemar Öberg, *Luther och Världsmissionen: Historisk-systematiska studier med särskild hänsyn till bibelutläggningen* (Åbo, Finland: Åbo Akademi, 1991); text references hereafter noted as *LoV* followed by page numbers. Quotations from *LoV* and from the WA are my translations of Öberg's Swedish.

Luther felt it important to be properly informed about Islam before engaging it theologically, spiritually, and militarily.

"For more than three quarters of a century the Ottoman Turks had cast a menacing shadow over Europe. Constantinople had fallen to them in 1453, and by the end of the fifteenth century they had consolidated their power up to the Danube River. To the east and south, Persia, Syria, and Egypt fell under Turkish sway. Under the rule of Suleiman the Magnificent (1520–1566) the Turks turned their attention once more toward Christian Europe. In 1520 they captured Belgrade. The following year Rhodes fell to the Muslims. Then in 1526 King Louis II of Hungary was killed and his troops soundly defeated in the Battle of Mohacs on the Danube. This sent a wave of terror over Europe."[3]

The Turkish threat precipitated a religious and theological crisis in sixteenth-century Christian Europe. A vast literature was produced to interpret and to suggest how one might deal with this crisis. Some were terrified at the prospect of a Turkish conquest of Europe and called Europe to arms in order to defend Christendom. The rhetoric of crusade was often used in this type of literature. Others felt it best to resign themselves to Turkish conquest and praised a prospective Turkish rule.[4]

Luther, as one living in the German part of the empire, was forced by historical circumstances to enter this debate.[5] His concern for the pope's indulgences was the immediate occasion for his entrance into the Turkish debate. He was opposed to this method of raising funds for a religious war in the name of the pope. As early as 1518, Luther expressed his opposition to crusade against the Turks in his Explanations of the Ninety-five Theses, "To fight against the Turk is the same as resisting God, who visits our sin upon us with this rod" (*Luther's Works* 31:91–92).

The sources for Luther's understanding of and his own writings on the Turks

Luther mentions the Turks often in all types of writings from sermons to commentaries, from his exhortations to temporal authorities to his theological writings. Öberg lists hundreds of these passages throughout his work. But Luther also addressed the Turkish question in several full-length books. *On War Against the Turks* (1529, LW 46: 161–205) considers on what grounds the

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[3] "Introduction" to the English translation of Luther's *On War Against the Turks* by Robert C. Schultz. LW 46:157–59.

[4] See Schultz pp. 157–58 nn. 4–9 for references to some of this literature.

[5] "Neither Zwingli nor Calvin became involved in or wrote something about the Turkish question. This may depend partly on the fact that the leader of their land, i.e. the king of France, was for a time allied with the Turks. Luther and the Germans, however, were in danger of experiencing an occupation by the Turks and a subsequent Islamicization. Therefore, it was impossible for Luther to be silent during the stormy years between 1529–1543." *LoV*, 559.

[6] This is the only full-length work on the Turks in the English *Luther's Works*. There are some passages in the *Table Talk* (LW 54) which concern the Turks. See numbers 206, 322, 1420, 3765, 5386, 5398, 5568.

Empire might defend itself against Turkish invasion. *Heerpredigt wider den Türken* (1529, *Army Sermon Against the Turks*, WA 30 II:160–97) assumes the possibility that Christians would live as either prisoners of war or as conquered subjects in the Turkish empire and encourages them to live as Christians even in that milieu. *Vermahnung zum Gebet wider den Türken* (1541, *Exhortation to Prayer Against the Turks*, WA 51:585–621) was written when the Turks once again threatened Vienna and Germany. Luther encourages the Germans to repentance and prayer as the strongest weapons in the struggle against the Turkish empire.

Luther spent much time and energy trying to spread information about Islam. He thought this was one of the best ways to protect Christians from being convinced by Muslim apologetics (LW 46:176). He also felt it important to be properly informed about Islam before engaging it theologically, spiritually, and militarily. He protested against the "outrageous lies about the Turks [invented] to incite us Germans against them" (LW 46:176). Luther wanted to replace those outrageous lies with facts about Islam and the Turks. Such facts would be more than enough to condemn the religion of the Turks.

Luther had access to some good resources for studying Islam and Turkish life. Already in 1529, Luther had suggested the possibility that if he could only find the time he possessed some parts of the Qur'an which would be worth translating into German (LW 46:176). In 1542, Luther was engaged by the publisher Johann Oporin to urge the city council in Basel to release a Latin edition of the Qur'an.[7] That edition of the Qur'an was given out on 11 January 1543. Luther wrote a foreword to that edition, *Vorrede zu Theodor Biblianders Koransausgabe* (WA 53:569–72)

Earlier he had written a foreword to the Dominican Ricoldus of Monte Crucis' book, *Refutation of the Qur'an*, on the rites and customs of the Turks, *Vorwort zu dem Libellus de ritu et moribus Turcorum* (1530, WA 30 II:205–8). This book was especially important to Luther because he considered it a trustworthy and friendly account of Turkish faith and life. Ricoldus had himself lived among Muslims for twenty years (1280–1300), had learned Arabic, and had thoroughly studied the Qur'an. In addition to the foreword, Luther translated Ricoldus's book and wrote his own refutation of the Qur'an based on Ricoldus's research, *Widerlegung des Alcoran Bruder Richardi* (*Brother Ricoldus's Refutation of the Koran, Translated into German by Dr. M. Luther*, 1542, WA 53:272–396). By comparing Ricoldus's book with the Latin version of the Qur'an, Luther was convinced that he could form a reliable picture of Islam.[8] Öberg (*Luther och Världsmissionen*, 610) and Schulz (LW 46:158, n. 7) refer to other literature available to Luther about the Turks.

If one is to speak of a dialogue between Luther and Muslims, one will have to consider Luther's study of the Qur'an, Ricoldus's book, and the other literature available to him as the Muslim voice. According to modern standards, Luther's "listening" to Muslims is inadequate. Through historical and anthropological research we now

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[7] Öberg recounts the drama of finally overcoming the scruples of the Basel Council in the attempt to publish the Qur'an in Latin. *LoV*, 578 n. 356. The council was afraid that Christians would somehow become convinced of Islam should they be exposed to the Qur'an in a language that they could understand. Luther held the opposite belief.

[8] Öberg admits that the editors of the WA note several passages in Ricoldus's book which are not substantiated in the Qur'an. *LoV*, 577 n. 355.

have more information available to us about Islam and Muslims. In fact, we may speak face to face with Muslims and hear their living voice in a way which Luther could not.[9] More important, of course, is that Luther listened to the voice of Islam with the ears of a critic. He researched Islam in order to expose its lies. This critical stance no doubt made it more difficult for Luther to hear Islam's own inner rationality.

Nevertheless, Luther ought to be commended and remembered for his desire to let Islam have its voice before criticizing it.[10] And he serves as an example for all those who would engage other religions from a perspective outside of them. Before analyzing them, one must know them and take advantage of every resource available to understand them.

It ought to be mentioned here that Luther believed that the Bible was also a source for understanding Islam. He interpreted the little horn with the eyes of a man in Dan 7:8, 24, 25 to be Turkey. He equated the Gog of Ezekiel 38–39 and Rev 20:8 with Turkey (*LoV*, 581–82; WA 30 II:163, 168, 224). If we are suspicious of this type of hermeneutic, it cannot change the fact that Luther was convinced that God in God's Word had predicted this crisis of the possible conquest of Germany, the land of the gospel, by the Turks.

The Turks as God's disciplinary rod and as Satan's eschatological tool

In Luther's attempt to understand the possible invasion and conquest of the Turks theologically, he can speak of them both as a tool of God's discipline to frighten the Christians of the Empire to repentance and prayer and as an eschatological tool of Satan meant to destroy the gospel and Christian faith: "the Turk is the rod of the wrath of the Lord our God and the servant of the raging devil" (LW 46:170). As God's disciplinary rod they have the function of forcing the threatened subjects of the Empire to prayer and repentance. This theme appears in Luther's writings both in 1529 and 1541 when the Turks were menacing Vienna. In 1529, Luther emphasizes the sins of the papacy as the reason for God's punishment. "God cannot forever tolerate persecution of the true faith and its proponents, nor the blaspheming of the Pope, bishops and priests" (*LoV*, 562). In 1541, he seems more concerned with the sins of ordinary Christians: "the spite for the gospel and the unrepentant sinning which continued among all social classes . . . caused God to strike the peoples with the iron rod of the Turks" (*LoV*, 567).

In both cases, the prescription for the disease is the same: the people must repent from their sins and turn to God in prayer. This is the only way to hope for victory against the Turks. "The fight must be begun with repentance, and we must reform our lives, or we shall fight in vain. . . . After people have thus been taught and exhorted to confess their sin and amend their ways they should then be most diligently exhorted to prayer and shown that such prayer

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[9] Schultz (p. 205 n. 129) communicates the only recorded "conversation" Luther ever had with a Muslim. "A few years after the publication of *[On War Against the Turks]* a member of an ambassadorial party in Turkey reported that the Sultan had inquired about Luther. When told that Luther was forty-eight years old, the Sultan replied, 'I wish he were younger; he would find me a gracious lord.'" According to Öberg (*LoV*, 583 n. 66; WATr 2: 508 [Nr. 2357b]), Luther responded by making the sign of the cross and saying, "Preserve me, my God, from this gracious lord."

[10] Öberg finds in Luther's eagerness to see the Qur'an published in Latin the humanistic principle, *ad fontes* (*LoV*, 579).

pleases God, that he has commanded it and promised to hear it" (LW 46:171–72).

Luther opposes any crusade against the Turks for several reasons. First, he believes it is just one more way for the papacy to milk the German Christians of their money. This is his early critique against the papacy's planned crusades against the Turks to protect Christendom. Second, he believes war against the Turks in the name of Christ is a desperate confusion of the spiritual and worldly kingdoms. Third, Luther believes that war in general is against the teaching of Christ. He writes, "They undertook to fight against the Turk in the name of Christ, and taught and incited men to do this, as though our people were an army of Christians against the Turks, who were enemies of Christ. This is absolutely contrary to Christ's doctrine and name. It is against his doctrine because he says that Christians shall not resist evil, fight, or quarrel, nor take revenge or insist on rights [Matt 5:39]" (LW 46:165).

Fourth and finally, physical war against the heresy of the Turks is bound to fail. The only way to fight the devil in the heresy of the Turks is through prayer and repentance. "One can never win against heresy with violence. Heresy is another thing altogether: it is another battle and there is another way to handle it than with the sword. God's Word should fight instead. If God's Word does not succeed in the battle against heresy, so worldly power will neither be able to succeed against it, even if such battle should fill the world with blood. . . . Heresy is a spiritual thing. It cannot be destroyed with iron; it can't be burned with fire; it can't be snuffed out with water" (WA 11:268; *LoV*, 569–72).

Öberg's conclusion is an important element of Luther's dialogue with Islam or the religions in general: "Luther stands against all forms of holy war and all forms of mission by the sword" (*LoV*, 573). One might infer from this that there are illegitimate uses of the worldly regiment to enforce orthodoxy or to evangelize. Among other things, Luther might question the use of development or relief aid for evangelization.

Nevertheless, Luther was also convinced that the Empire should fight against the Turk and that Christians were especially suited for this job. "The second man who ought to fight against the Turk is Emperor Charles, or whoever may be emperor; for the Turk is attacking his subjects and his empire, and it his duty, as a regular ruler appointed by God, to defend his own" (LW 46:184). In Luther's theology, the ruling authorities are entrusted with the protection of their subjects. If the Turks were to threaten the safety of the Emperor's subjects, it should automatically become his God-given duty to defend them.

The Emperor's war against the Turks ought not to be waged in order to protect Christianity or in the name of Christ. The Emperor does not protect Christianity. That is a concern for the spiritual regiment. Furthermore, the Emperor ought not to seek anything more in such a war than to protect his subjects. If the Emperor should fight the Turks for "glory, . . . wealth, the extension of territory, wrath or revenge" (LW 46:185), he would be fighting an illegitimate war. It is easy to perceive how classical just war theory undergirds Luther's understanding here.

Although the Emperor does not act in the office of Christian when he and his armies wage war against the Turks, it helps if he and his soldiers are Christians. The prayer and humility which is available to Christians will make their victories more easily won. "If these two things are present, God's commandment and our humility, then there is no danger or need so far as this

For Luther, the papacy was the Antichrist and worse than the Turks. But the Turks were no less than the flesh of the devil.

second man is concerned" (LW 46:191).

To those who dream of a peaceful rule under the Turks, Luther outlines three reasons why Turkish rule poses a spiritual and civil threat to Christians. First, Islam is a religion of lies which contradicts the truths of the Bible (LW 46:176–78). Second, the Turks do not have a properly functioning civil leadership. Instead of maintaining the peace, protecting the good, and punishing the wicked, they are out to murder and rob (LW 46:178–81). Finally, the Turks strive against a properly ordered domestic life, against marriage itself, with their polygamy, concubinage, and homosexuality (LW 46: 181–82). "What could be a more horrible, dangerous, terrible imprisonment than life under such a government? As I said, lies destroy the spiritual estate; murder, the temporal; disregard for marriage, the estate of matrimony. Now if you take out of the world *veram religionem, veram politiam, veram oeconomiam*, that is, true spiritual life, true temporal government, and true home life, what is left in the world but flesh, world, and the devil?" (LW 46:182)

Luther does not only consider the Turks to be God's disciplinary tool and a civil threat. He also considers them to be one of the most terrifying and Satanic threats of the end times. On the basis of the Scripture passages referred to above and his conviction that his own movement was the center of gospel preaching during his time, Luther comes to the conclusion that the Turks are the predicted Gog (Ezekiel 38–39; Rev 20:8), the tenth horn with the eye (Dan 7:8), who led by Satan himself will persecute God's true believers (*LoV*, 581–82). The Turks belong to the eschatological and evil coalition set on destroying the evangelical faith. They descend upon Christendom from the outside. The pope and his clerics subvert the preaching of the gospel and order in the empire from inside the church. The Jews undermine the public welfare from the inside.[11] And the enthusiasts sunder the unity of the Reformation itself (*LoV*, 575). For Luther, the papacy was the Antichrist and worse than the Turks. But the Turks were no less than the flesh of the devil.[12] This made them an almost invincible power. Their hordes were themselves demons (*LoV*, 563–64). The Christians, however, have powerful tools in repentance and prayer. And, as Luther understands, the Turks will be militarily successful only for a time. Then Christ himself will return and destroy them (*LoV*, 565).

How can the Turks be both God's tool and Satan's? Öberg writes, "In Luther's understanding of history the divine and the transcendental are united with the course of life and the works of ordinary people and the history of the peoples. People in all social classes and callings are God's masks (*larva Dei*) whose deeds God steers as the Lord of both the universe and the smallest

[11] Heiko A. Oberman, *Luther. Man Between God and the Devil.* New York: Image Books, [1982] 1990, 294.

[12] "But just as the pope is the Antichrist, so the Turk is the very devil incarnate." LW 46:181.

thing. Even the history of peoples and the drama of murky history is undergirded and borne by God's righteousness and love, the 'providence' or play with all that is. God and Satan are in constant battle, but the Almighty can use even the devil and demons in order to produce something good" (*LoV*, 565–66; WA 18:782, 790).

Luther's apologetic dispute with Islam

I have already described how Luther felt it important to study the Qur'an and know as much as possible of the rites and lifestyles of the Muslim Turks. Luther also spent considerable time comparing the doctrines of Islam and Christianity. Öberg lists three of Luther's goals in this apologetic work. "The purpose in this apologetic is partly to describe the faith of the Muslims and partly to comfort and equip the Christians so that they are not drawn over to that faith should the Turks invade or should a Christian be taken captive and forced to live among the Muslims. As we shall see, he hopes that at least some Muslims will become Christians" (*LoV*, 576).

Öberg suggests that Luther's view of Islam did not develop much over time (i.e. diachronically) and therefore suggests a classical systematic (synchronic) approach for organizing Luther's dialogue with Islam.[13]

Scripture. Just as Luther reacts against the Talmud of the Jews and the teaching authority of the Roman Catholics, he condemns the Qur'an as the Muslim way to undermine the authority of Scripture. He acknowledges that Islam knows much of the Bible.[14] But he also recognizes that Muslims believe the Qur'an has replaced the Bible in a manner similar to the new covenant's replacement of the old.[15] In Luther's understanding, the Bible was hard to accept for Muhammad for two reasons. First, Islam is above all a religion of reason. (The human eyes on the little horn in Daniel 7 are supposed to represent reason.) Muhammad could not accept the Incarnation, the Trinity, etc., because they were unreasonable (*LoV*, 587). Second, the law which the Old Testament and Christ demand is too difficult. Muhammad's law, just as the pope's, is adapted to the ability of humans to obey it (*LoV*, 610). All this leads Luther to a very condemning view of the Qur'an. In order to satisfy his reason, Muhammad has made "a patchwork of Jewish, Christian, and heathen beliefs" (LW 46:177). This is not the Word of God, but instead the word of humanity.[16]

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[13] However, one must remember that Luther was not a systematic theologian. He was more of a Bible expositor and dealt with issues as they came up in his work with the different passages and books of the Bible, or as he was asked to deal with specific theological, political or social situations in the Empire.

[14] "I cannot deny that the Turk esteems the four Gospels as divine and true, as well as the prophets, and that he also speaks very highly of Christ and his mother." LW 46:196.

[15] "We Christians acknowledge the Old Testament as divine Scripture, but now that it is fulfilled and is, as St. Peter says in Acts 15, too hard without God's grace, it is abolished and no longer binding upon us. Mohammed treats the gospel the same way. He declares that the gospel is indeed correct, but that it has long since served its purpose and that it is too hard to keep. . . ." LW 46:197.

[16] "*The Qur'an as a whole is a book of law* which has parallels in the Jews' Talmud and the Pope's canons and decrees. The rules for life which the Qur'an prescribes can go a long way to encourage good human lifestyle. These rules and laws cannot, however, give a solution to the question about how a person might become righteous before God and cleansed from sin" (*LoV*, 603). Notice here that Luther in Öberg's interpretation can concede the Qur'an's similarity to the first use of the law.

Concept of God. Luther commends Muslims for their monotheism and their belief in the Creator. However, they have arrived at these conclusions by reason. They may know something of God's outer form, but since they do not recognize Jesus as God, they do not know the personal God. They do not know God's heart and will. Luther also objects to Muslim fatalism (*kismet*). Instead the Christian God is living and active and responsive to human prayer. Finally, the Muslim denial of the Trinity is based on reason. Luther urges Christians to believe in the mystery of the Trinity not because it is reasonable, but because it is revealed in Scripture (*LoV*, 591–95).

Christology. Luther appreciates that Islam has a high regard for the prophet Jesus. But this regard is totally inadequate to the person of Christ. For Luther Christ is more than a prophet. And he certainly was not surpassed by Muhammad. "This text, 'And God was the Word,' has been tortured by the Jews, the schismatic spirits, and the Turks, all of whom presume to measure and correct it on the basis of their reason. . . . The Turks likewise regard us as stupid geese devoid of reason and understanding, since we do not realize that one family can have no more than one father; and, they aver, it makes even less sense to believe in, and worship, three gods. The Turks do not believe in Christ. Mohammed, with his Turkish faith, raved and ranted against Christ. To be sure, he conceded that Christ was born of a virgin; but the Turks claim that such a thing is no rarity among them. Well, this may happen and be true among them; but with us those virgins who bear children become women. A virgin who gives birth to a child cannot remain a virgin. . . . Furthermore, the Turks say that Christ was indeed an excellent prophet and a great man; they exalt Him above David, Isaiah, and all the other prophets. They must admit that Christ was the Word of the Father, and yet they claim that Christ was not so great as their Mohammed" (On John 1:1, 1537; LW 22:17–18).

What is absolutely crucial for Luther, however, is not Christ's identity, but his work. Christ is more than a prophet. He by his death on the cross is the Savior of the world. If one replaces his identity as true God and true Man, then all the benefits accrued by his life, death and resurrection among us disappear. "Therefore the Turks think that their Mohammed is much higher and greater than Christ, for the office of Christ has come to an end and Mohammed's office is still in force. From this anyone can easily see that Mohammed is a destroyer of our Lord Christ and his kingdom, and if anyone denies the articles concerning Christ, that he is God's Son, that he died for us and still lives and reigns at the right hand of God, what has he left of Christ? . . . Then Christ is no redeemer, savior, or king; there is no forgiveness of sins, no grace, no Holy Ghost. . . . In the article that Christ is beneath Mohammed, and less than he, everything is destroyed" (LW 46:176–78).

Soteriology. Luther recognizes that the Allah of Islam is a forgiving God and even cites two surahs (3:129 and 4:11; WA 53: 350, 368) to prove it.[17] Nevertheless he

[17] See C. S. LaHurd's "'So that the Sinner Will Repent': Forgiveness in Islam and Christianity" in *dialog* 35 (Fall 1996): 287–92. As we shall see, Luther never denies that Islam has a concept of forgiveness. He rejects instead their emphasis on an obeyable law and their lack of a mechanism for sinners to satisfy a righteous and holy God. In general, Luther would consider strange the modern liberal notion that cultures and religions are merely different ways to express the same abstract concepts (such as forgiveness). The scandal of Jesus' particularity can never, for Luther, be put aside for the sake of an easier dialogue.

maintains that Islam is primarily a law religion. In this and several other respects he bakes them in the same pie with the pope and the Jews. "The soteriology of the Turks, of the Pope and of the Jews is one and the same: the human is saved through his/her own works. Faith in Christ has no place [in salvation]" (*LoV*, 605; LW 46:182). For Luther, this is the basic and decisive difference between Christianity and Islam. "Muslims stand against grace and extinguish the gospel with their doctrine about Muhammad's laws and human merit-winning works. Where the law and works condition the human relationship to God there is no room for faith in Christ" (*LoV*, 606). This means that Muslims cannot have a true theology. They cannot know the true God. And as such they stand outside of Christ and condemned by God and their own self-righteousness.

Ethics. Luther is capable of appreciating certain positive aspects of Muslim lifestyle. He recognizes that they have an orderly worldly government with good laws. They raise their children well. They are pious and loving toward their fellow human beings. They are moderate in regards to their food and clothing. They do not drink wine. They don't swear or curse. The people are quite disciplined as compared to the Germans. Their priests and monks in their spiritual lives put their Roman Catholic equivalents to shame. "Luther can characterize [Muslims] as the most honorable, most reasonable and most religious among human beings if one measures with the measure of civil righteousness" (*LoV*, 611; WA 43:385).

But from his Christian standpoint, he cannot accept all the Turks do and are. As I have already indicated above, Luther believes that the Turks' military campaigns are simply murder and robbery. He disapproves of their mission by the sword and their arrogance in battle, as if the true God were approving of their religion and lifestyle by giving them military victory. Furthermore, their polygamy, concubinage, divorce, male chauvinism, and homosexuality constitute an affront to biblical marriage (LW 46:181–82). Finally, their self-righteousness, the fact that Muslims perform good and pious works in order to please God, is contrary to Luther's view of good works. For Luther, "Christianity is not observance, self-righteous piety and works, but instead faith in the gospel of Christ which gives righteousness before God" (*LoV*, 615; WA 30 II:187–91).

Mission among the Turks

Öberg's chief interest in his survey is to show how Luther also had an interest to evangelize among the Turks.[18] He admits that Luther probably never imagined forming a mission society (in the later sense of that word) in order to evangelize the Turks. At the same time, he finds many reasons to believe that Luther thought making the gospel accessible to the Turks was important. Early on (1519), he chides the pope for arrogating to himself the right to pastoral care throughout the world. If he owns that right and responsibility exclusively, why doesn't he preach among the Bohemians and Turks? (WA 2:225). "But if he had been Christ's vicar so he would have stood up on his feet and gone his way to preach the

[18] He writes that G. Warneck, L. Bergman, M. Köhler, and H. Lamparter have all rejected the attempt to link Luther with mission to the Turks. K. Holl, W. Elert, W. Holsten, H. Lilje, R. Pfister, W. Dörries, W. Stolle, and E. W. Bunkowske believe that Luther did consider a mission among the Turks (*LoV*, 618). Of course, the whole question hinges on one's definition of mission.

gospel for the Turks and risk his limbs and life for that work" (1522, WA 8:708).

Luther has what we might call a theoretical hope for conversion of the Turks when he preaches on Matt 2:1–12 in 1522, "There is no more than one sure sign whereby you can understand where Christ and his church is. It is this star, the holy gospel. Everything else is false and mistaken. But where the gospel is preached, there this star shines, there is Christ, there you find the church, whether it is in Turkey, Russia, Bohemia or wherever" (WA 10 I:1, 711). He even imagines that he might someday preach among the Turks (WA 13:224; WA 17 I:509). Although he thinks it a difficult art (WA 47:463), he believes that it is possible to convert Turks to Christianity. Just as Luther rightly fell away from the papacy and its faith, so a Turk or some Turks might fall away from Muhammad and become "blessed apostates," "blessed refugees" (WA 38:146). Luther exhorts Christians to specific prayer for the preaching of the gospel among the Turks (WATr 5:517 [Nr. 6161]).

But he sets his greatest hope on the Christians who already live in territories conquered by the Turks or those who may soon do so. In fact, *Heerpredigt wider den Türken* (1529) is mostly occupied with equipping the saints who might soon find themselves within the Turkish empire. Luther's apologetic as outlined above was designed mostly to strengthen and to preserve actual and possible captive Christians in their faith (*LoV*, 626–28). He urges that a patient and humble service to the Turks may communicate to some the gospel: "If you instead serve faithfully and diligently, they will adore and praise the gospel and Christ's name so that your master and perhaps many others (however evil they might be) will be forced to say: 'Well then, those Christians are a faithful, obedient, pious, humble, diligent people.' And with this you will manage to bring shame on the faith of the Turks and possibly convert some" (WA 30 II:194). He refers to the accomplishments of Joseph in Egypt and Daniel in Babylon to illustrate God's ability to use captives in hostile lands to accomplish God's purposes.

Luther is, however, pessimistic about whether true Christianity can be preserved in a Turkish milieu intolerant of it. He recognizes that Islam is supposed to be tolerant of the people of the book. But he cannot accept that what the Turks grant is true religious freedom.[19] If the war captives are not allowed to confess and publicly proclaim Christ, their Christianity will be illusory. "What kind of freedom of belief is it when no one is allowed to preach or confess Christ, and yet our salvation depends on that confession, as Paul says in Romans 10 . . . and Christ has strictly commanded us to confess and teach his gospel" (Matt 10:32f.; LW 46:175).

Nevertheless, Öberg wants to emphasize Luther's hope and optimism for the conversion of the Turks. Luther believes, for example, that the common Muslim and Christian confession of Christ's ascension spells destruction for Islam: "The Turks say that Christ in truth has been taken up into heaven. By that very fact they are already beaten. Their Muhammad is dead, but Christ was taken alive into heaven; consequently Christ is greater than Muhammad. God can still do miracles so that they might once again hear the gospel. . . . If a pasha should receive the gospel, one would see how a hole would be torn among the Turk

[19] Öberg notices an inconsistency in Luther's mission praxis here. He wants the Turks to grant Christians religious freedom but is not willing to grant the German Jews a similar religious freedom. *LoV*, 625.

and his people. So he has many sons. It can easily happen that also one of them might receive the gospel" (WATr 5:221).

Luther was in fact convinced that the gospel would eventually be preached among the Turks, even if not in his lifetime. If such is to happen, one must focus on comparing dogma and refrain from complaining about personalities. "I hope dearly to see the day when the gospel will come to the Turks, as is now a real possibility. It is not likely that I will see that day. But you might and then you'll have to deal with the Turk carefully. Personal facts about Muhammad don't affect me, but we must attack the doctrine of the Turks. We must look at their dogma" (WATr 5:221).

Öberg (*LoV*, 647–48) also shows how some Lutherans in the generation after Luther's death did indeed attempt to evangelize the Turks through literature and sending missionaries. Among those he names are Primus Truber (1506–1586), Baron Hans Ungnad von Sonneck (1493–1564), Ambrosius Fröhlich, Blahovic, and Valentin Cless who in 1583 was sent from Germany to Morocco in order to learn Arabic and Islam with the goal of missionizing among Muslims.

Luther's dialogue with Islam

There are several aspects of Luther's dialogue with Islam which can be of special interest to us today. First, Luther represents here a scholarly approach to dialogue with Islam. He did not have access to as much information as we do now. He did not take the time to speak directly with Muslims. (I'm not sure this would have been possible, even if Luther would have had greater freedom of movement and less work to accomplish in other questions.) But he studied carefully what was available to him and campaigned so that even more would be made available. That his work represents a dialogue is evident due to the many parts of Islam of which Luther can approve and compliment: monotheism, high (although not high enough) Christology, Allah's ability to forgive, the exemplary lifestyle of ordinary and clerical Muslims, etc.

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Second, a blessing of dialogue with other religions is that one can gain deeper insight into one's own religion. Luther's consideration of Judaism helped him to focus his christological and trinitarian theology (*LoV*, 480). No doubt his 'dialogue' with Islam helped Luther understand even more the implications of that part of his theology as well as more peripheral issues such as the two kingdoms doctrine and even marriage.

Third, Luther's two kingdoms doctrine may help us also in Christian-Muslim relations. If injustice is done, this must be met by worldly authorities and not in the name of Christ. So if there are unjust wars or terrorism executed by Muslims or Christians they ought to be opposed on grounds of justice. One wonders if Luther would advocate cooperation between Christians

and Muslims in similar such worldly questions.[20]

It is also important to notice in this regard that Luther was not loathe to engage the political, social, and even military questions of his day. He did not pietistically refuse as a Christian and biblical scholar to express what he considered to be God's Word even in those other areas. The God over the worldly regiment was the God of Jesus Christ, and his Word was relevant even in nonspiritual questions.

Fourth, perhaps most foreign to our modern secular understanding is Luther's interpretation of history. In hindsight, Luther's idea that the military advances of sixteenth-century Turkey were foretold in Daniel, Ezekiel, and Revelation seem to us incorrect or even ridiculous. But one can well question whether or not the general perspective he had was more biblical. Luther seems especially influenced in this respect by the Old Testament prophets' understanding of history. The contemporary environmental movement within the church wants somehow to recapture creation for theology. How might a rational, secular view of history be replaced by the conviction that the God of Jesus Christ is controlling all peoples and governments in some kind of interplay with humans and demons? I don't have an easy answer myself.[21]

Fifth and most important, Luther cannot surrender his primary convictions in dialogue with Muslims. He is not able to move outside of his own biblical/theological rationality for the sake of finding common ground with Islam. There is no third perspective (whether that be a general idea of religiosity or something else) outside the specificity of the Christian and Muslim rationalities from which one might be able to compare the two. Luther quickly identifies the important points where the meeting between Islam and Christianity cannot be bridged. Islam cannot accept the Bible. Islam cannot accept that Jesus could be God. Islam cannot accept that we are saved through the death of the Son of God on the cross.[22] Ultimately if Luther were to sit across the table from a Muslim, he would see a sinner condemned by God's holiness and righteousness, a person for whom Jesus Christ, God's Son, died on the cross, and a person in need of receiving that grace in the Word of the gospel and the sacraments. Without that perception of the other, the dialogue would cease to be a Muslim-Christian dialogue. It would have moved over into a dialogue between Islam and something else.

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[20] I think immediately of Muslim-Christian cooperation against apartheid in South Africa. I also recall our Lutheran mission's cooperation with Somali Muslims in the medical work of Northern Kenya.

[21] Perhaps the work of Wolfhart Pannenberg could be considered an attempt to regenerate a Christian view of history in a secular academic milieu.

[22] In my conversations with Muslims in Kenya and in Sweden (African refugees) these have consistently been the major problems: the Bible has been distorted by the Jews and the Christians, Jesus cannot be God, Jesus did not die. Cf. the writings of the South African Muslim apologist, Ahmed Deedat. e.g. *Christ (PBUH) in Islam* (Durban, South Africa: Islamic Propagation Centre International), *Is the Bible God's Word?* and *Crucifixion or Cruci-fiction?* (Riyadh, Saudi Arabia: International Islamic Publishing House)

The Philosophy of Christmas

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"The birthday of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the day on which Truth sprang from the earth and Day from day was born into our day, has dawned once more, brought round again by the cycle of the year to be celebrated by us; let us rejoice and make merry on it."[1] So did Augustine greet his congregation on Christmas Day, some 1600 years ago. In the same spirit, on another Christmas morning, Augustine announced from his pulpit, "Today Truth has sprung from the earth; Christ has been born from the flesh. Celebrate the feast with rejoicing."[2]

Christmas was a festive day for Augustine, the great philosopher. He was never a Puritan staunchly denouncing the commercialization of the season. Indeed, he told his congregation to celebrate the day with as much festivity as the pagans celebrated their Saturnalia.[3] We can imagine this saint singing the most popular carols. He is after all the only church father known for writing a pop song--"ABC against Heresy" was a great hit. Yes, we can well imagine him there in his austere African church singing carols, eating with his friends and family, drinking a glass of wine, and discussing the joyous message of Christmas. For Augustine, the message of Christmas *was* one of great joy—and not just for the usual reasons. In Augustine's Christmas sermons, the congregation was not told of the great sacrifice God made for mere mortals. His parishioners were not reminded that giving is better than receiving. No, in Augustine's Christmas sermons, the pastor was taken over by the philosopher, and Augustine spread the wondrous new philosophy of the Truth which entered the Platonic cave.

I used to have a box of Christmas cards which showed a picture of a Greek icon of the birth of Christ. The Greek Orthodox believe that Mary gave birth not in a stable but in a cave. And this icon, showing a large and intricate cave filled with symbols and saints, placed Mary and Joseph and the tiny Jesus in the innermost recesses of the cave. In the heart of the cave's darkness in the tiny body of a baby, slept God. I don't remember what the message was inside that card, but I remember that before I sent it to friends and family, I wrote under it, "The Sun has entered the cave."

The allusion is of course to Plato's *Republic*, in which Socrates describes a cave, a place where humans are chained with their heads facing forward, unable to see anything except shadows on the wall. One day, says Socrates, a prisoner escapes the cave and leaves to look at all the things

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[1] *The Works of St. Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century. Part III Sermons*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill (Brooklyn: New City Press, 1990), Sermon 184.1.

[2] *The Works of St. Augustine*, Sermon 192.1.

[3] See *The Works of St. Augustine*, Sermon 190.1.



of the outside world—the trees, the flowers, the animals, and most importantly the sun. Allegorically, says Socrates, we are all stuck in a cave—a cave of opinions and dim sight. We must struggle as philosophers to leave this cave, to look for real truth, to see clearly by the light of the sun. But we can do this only if we untie our fetters and get out of the cave. There are some who claim that Socrates knew no human could ever really leave the cave, for we are too tightly bound to our opinions. We are unable to look for real truth.

But the Christmas icon tells a different story of the cave. Instead of exhorting the people imprisoned in the cave to untie their fetters and escape in order to see the clear light of the Sun, the icon says that the Sun, the Light, the Truth comes into the cave to the humans. The Sun is not content to wait outside the cave. The Sun enters the cave, casting light where there was darkness. No longer is the cave filled only with shadows and opinion. No longer is it a cave the philosopher must flee in search of the forms. Instead it is a cave in which the philosopher can rest optimistically. The Truth has come to us. The Truth has come to untie our chains. The Truth isn't out there, for it has come in here.

The image is beautiful, the icon is beautiful, Augustine's sermons are beautiful. In them lies an optimistic message that shocked the world into which Christmas first came. The Early Christian view of Christmas presented a philosophical revolution. It led to a takeover and an overthrow of the late antique worldview in general and the Platonic worldview in particular. Christmas overthrew the ontology, axiology, and epistemology of late antiquity.

Christmas morning sermons are short, and so too this paper. I will not get into apologetics. Rather than explain why Christian philosophers accepted Christmas, here I focus only on how the fact that they did changed their philosophy.

First, ontology is the field of philosophy that seeks to know what is most real, what most truly is. The ontology of the Platonist stated that what is most real is the Truth—the form of the Good. What the Platonist believed is that there has always existed a Form of Truth which is the most real thing there is. As Plato's *Timaeus* explains, the material universe was created to be a material moving reflection of that Form—an incarnate image of the Truth. An imperfect analogy states that the Truth is like a beautiful girl, and the material world like her image in a pool of water. The girl is more real than her image, and if the girl were to cease to exist so would the image. The image is dependent upon her for its existence. So too, the material world is dependent upon the existence of the idea of the Truth—which is most real. In the great chain of being, according to Plato, Truth is many steps higher than the material world.

Christmas, however, shakes up this typical ontology that governed the philosophy of the ancient world. In Christmas, the Truth becomes part of the material world. It is as if the girl were to jump into the water,

so that instead of her image being reflected in the water she is actually in the water herself. The fleshy body of an infant is, according to the chain of being of the ancient world, far less real than the Truth. But at Christmas, suddenly this fleshy body is as real as the Truth. Indeed, it is the Truth. Such a view, which turns the ontology of the Platonists on its head, was sharply criticized in the ancient world. Platonist academies used to proclaim in gold glittering letters the Christian statement "In the Beginning was the Word . . ." only to teach their students quite firmly that Platonists denied the possibility of the Christmas message that the Word became flesh.[4] For them, this was an ontological impossibility. But for those who believed in the Incarnation, ontology had been changed forever. No longer was there a clear chain of being with Truth at the top and matter at the bottom. Truth can be not only reflected but actually present in matter.

Such a new ontology brings with it a new axiology, a new understanding of what has value. In the ancient world and in those first centuries in the common era, because many believed the material world was but a reflection of Truth, the material world was not considered a place of the highest value. Some philosophers hailed the material world as a valuable and beautiful place because it was the reflection of Truth, though of course they maintained that it was clearly less valuable and beautiful than the world of Truth. Others claimed, contrarily, that this material world was actually evil and devoid of value compared to the realm of Truth. Still others claimed that while there was value in the material world, the Earth, the lowest sphere in the cosmos, had the least amount of value in the cosmos. The moon, the sun, and the stars were the higher and more valuable orbs. The general consensus was that Earth and the things of Earth were the least valuable things in the universe.

However, with a belief in the Incarnation, this whole value system is overthrown. Suddenly, the most valuable Thing of all—God, Being Itself, the Good—is present in the fleshy body of a human child, here in this spatial-temporal, material world in which we live. A philosopher in antiquity might have shuddered. Such could only mean that this world is valuable—valuable enough for God to walk upon. It could only mean that human bodies have value—enough value that God could have one. Axiologically, Christmas states that the body is not bad and that the flesh is not the cause of sin. The Christian philosopher can love her body. Christmas states that this world is not bad; it is our home. And a fine home it is, fine enough for God.

And perhaps even most remarkable for the ancient world, Christmas even says this of women and women's bodies. Augustine explained one year, "Let men rejoice, let women rejoice. Christ has been born, a man; he has been born of a woman, and each sex has been honored."[5] On another Christmas morning he claimed, "In order to therefore make it impossible for us with a righteous, horrified indignation to put all the blame for our death on the woman and to believe she is irredeemably damned, the Lord honored both sexes."[6]

We hear Augustine's words and remember, perhaps, the story of Mary from the Protoevangelium of James, held dear by the Orthodox Christians. Mary, the immaculately conceived baby of Anna, shone

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[4] See Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 102.

[5] *The Works of St. Augustine,* Sermon 184.2.

[6] *The Works of St. Augustine,* Sermon 190.2.

with such purity that she was dedicated to the temple by her parents. The happy, joyful, pious little girl lived her young life dancing on the stairs to the altar. She lived among the priests and dwelt among the most holy things. And yet this little girl's heart had to be broken when she was forced to leave her holy home. She had to leave, not because of her sin, not because of any wrongdoing. She had to leave because she, like all females, was going to enter puberty and the priests feared her menstrual blood would desecrate the temple. This fear was one all the ancient world could understand. Thus, she was flung from her home, into the arms of a man she didn't know. And so what joy Christmas brought her, and what a different view of herself Christmas taught her. For with Christmas, God announced to her that her womb was not dirty, that her blood was not sinful, that inside of her, in the place the priests and philosophers called the source of sin, God was going to live. She learned from the highest source that the body was not sinful, that her womb was not dirty, that woman was not damned.

And so with Christmas comes a new philosophy of body, a new philosophy of woman, and a new philosophy of birth. How could Augustine not be moved to announce this new philosophy each Christmas morning he preached? How could he not but with joy proclaim: "Truth by which the world is held together, has sprung from the earth, in order to be carried in a woman's arms. Truth, on which the bliss of the angels is incorruptibly nourished, has sprung from the earth, in order to be suckled at breasts of flesh. Truth, which heaven is not big enough to hold, has sprung from the earth, in order to be placed in a manger."[7]

Christmas announces that what is most real and most valuable, the Truth, entered our world in the way we do. Christmas announces that this world, the Earth, women's breasts, mangers, and even stables are not less valuable than other things. Indeed, they can hold the most valuable thing in the world. "The maker of man was made man, so that the director of the stars might be a babe at the breast."[8]

But this part of the philosophy of Christmas, perhaps, is well known. It is sung in nearly every carol, as those who celebrate Christmas sing the astounding view that this world is real enough and valuable enough to house God. "Offspring of the virgin's womb, veiled in flesh the Godhead see, hail th' incarnate deity. Pleased as man with man to dwell, Jesus our Emmanuel," sings the choir.[9] "Hail, hail the Word made flesh, the babe, the son of Mary," whispers the parishioner.[10]

And perhaps this part of the Christmas philosophy is less interesting to the 20th century philosopher who worries less about ontology and axiology than epistemology. For modernism is more obsessed by the quest of what is certain and how we can know it. Actually, late antiquity was deeply concerned about this question, too. In the ancient world, the Platonists taught that philosophical certainty was difficult. In fact, so difficult did it seem to find certainty that a new wave of Platonism in the third and fourth centuries began to declare that the truth Plato really meant to teach was that truth is elusive. Indeed, the New Academy, as it was called, declared that the only truth humans could hope to find was the truth that very little could be found. So much that was

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[7] *The Works of St. Augustine,* Sermon 185.1.

[8] *The Works of St. Augustine,* Sermon. 191.1.

[9] Charles Wesley, "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing," *Lutheran Book of Worship* #60, stanza 2.

[10] William Chatterton Dix, "What Child Is This," *LBW* #40, stanza 2.

accepted as true was merely opinion. So much in philosophy can be argued from a different point of view. Reason alone can not get us very far, claimed and claim the skeptics.

Augustine himself, in the years before he became a Christian, wondered if the skeptics might not be right. He, as a young man, had believed in the teachings of a Gnostic cult, teachings he later found to be false. He began to believe that perhaps the safest route for the true philosopher was the route of doubt, the refusal to take anything as true. Only this could save him from deception.

But when Augustine became a Christian, and when he accepted the teachings of Christmas, Augustine began to see a new hope for the philosopher. A new hope was present for the Christian and not for the Platonist when the Christian professed the Word become flesh. In that sentence of St. John's was the hope that Truth was so interested in the human seeker of Truth that it would be born in a body of flesh. Christmas teaches that Truth is interested in philosophers, in those who want to know Truth. Not content to wait for the philosophers to find the Truth, the Truth comes to find the philosophers. Augustine preaches in wonder:

> You, once upon a time in paradise, were so fluent that you gave names to every living, animate creature; yet for your sake your Creator was lying there, a speechless infant, and didn't even call his mother by her name. You there, in the broad acres of groves of fruit trees, lost yourself by neglecting obedience; he out of obedience came as a mortal to a cramped and crowded lodging house, in order by dying to look for you who were dead. You though you were a man, wished to be God, and so got lost. He, though He was God, wished to be a man and so find what had been lost. Human pride pressed down on you so heavily, that the only thing which could lift you up was divine humility.[11]

With Christmas comes a new philosophy of body, a new philosophy of woman, and a new philosophy of birth.

Christmas proclaims that Truth wants to be known. Moreover, the Incarnation that began at Christmas actually worked to make Truth known. The baby in the manger grew up to speak with a human mouth using words that could be heard by human ears, telling human minds in a way they could understand that Truth was interested in them. Interestingly, Peter Brown notes, the most popular icon of the fourth century was Christ portrayed as a teacher before a crowd of students.[12] Augustine certainly believed that Easter had an important message for all humans, for in Easter Christ first and foremost secured the salvation of humankind from sin and death. But Augustine never lost his wonder of the philosophical lesson taught by Christmas, the lesson that the Truth promises to help those who seek wisdom find it.

Indeed this Promise is what saves philosophy from skepticism. Augustine writes,

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[11] *The Works of St. Augustine,* Sermon 188.3.

[12] Brown, *Augustine of Hippo,* 42.

[13] *The Works of St. Augustine,* Sermon 184.1.

> So let the humble hold fast to the humility of God, in order that, helped by this wonderful conveyance as by a vehicle for their weakness, they may arrive at the heights of God. . . . As for the wise and the prudent there, they aim at the loftiness of God without believing in his humble lowliness; and so, by overstepping this and not reaching that, they remained, empty and weightless, inflated and elated, at a windy middle level, suspended between heaven and earth. . . . Because if they were possessed by true wisdom, which is from God and is God, they would understand that it was possible for flesh to be taken on by God with his being changed into flesh . . . his divine power was confined in the body of an infant without being withdrawn from the wholeness of the universe.[13]

With Christmas, Christian philosophy claims that instead of the Platonic philosopher trying to drive a chariot to the Truth itself, Truth comes to us and becomes our vehicle and carries us toward Truth itself. Truth must do this, because human reasoning is limited. It is true that very little can be known by our reason alone; Christmas accepts that. But the philosopher can remain hopeful, for born on Christmas morning is Truth itself. Not only in the year of Christ's birth, but eternally. Truth comes to us, says the believer, seeking to help us find the Truth. Not because we deserve it or work hard enough, but because Truth graciously comes. "Look for merit, look for a cause, look for justice, and see whether you can find anything but grace," says Augustine.[14]

While the Platonists spoke of a dividing line we had to climb from the world of images and imagination to the world of intelligible forms and understanding, Augustine found that the Intelligible Absolute climbed down into the world of images and imagination so that the human hand, eye, ear, and tongue could touch, see, hear and taste that which transcends the world. And this changes the study of philosophy for the believer in the Incarnation. No longer anxiously striving for wisdom, with terror that the skeptics may be right and truth beyond our reach, the Christian believer struggles for wisdom with hope and with the knowledge that the Truth wants to be known and will work with her in her pursuit of wisdom.

In conclusion, believers in the Incarnation were ridiculed in the ancient world. They declared, contrary to the ontology of the day, that Being itself could enter this world, enter a human body several rungs down the great chain of being. They declared, contrary to the axiology of the day, that the Highest Thing could reside in a fleshy baby body, born from a bloody womb. They declared, contrary to the epistemology of the day, that Truth wasn't found by human reason alone logically arguing toward its goal, but instead that wisdom was given by a God who cared to help those who seek wisdom find it. Christmas was scoffed at. It was absurd and even blasphemous to think that Truth would condescend to dwell with us here, to think that Truth was interested in those whose reason was so limited they could never know anything clearly. And yet, believers in Christmas saw a new philosophy and a new hope for the seeker of Truth born in that tiny baby in the manger. And they proclaimed this new philosophy with great joy.

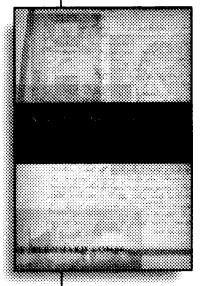
Augustine concludes for us: "So Brothers and Sisters, let us keep this day as a festival; not like the unbelievers because of that sun up there in the sky, but because of the one who made that sun. That which was the Word, you see, became flesh, in order to be able for our sakes to be under the sun."[15]

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[14] *The Works of St. Augustine,* Sermon 185.3.

[15] *The Works of St. Augustine,* Sermon 190.1.

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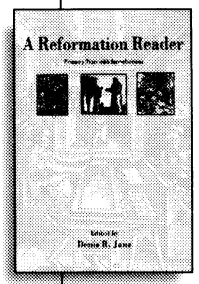
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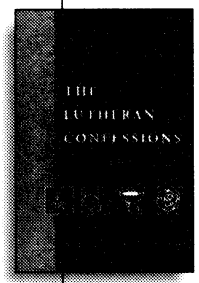
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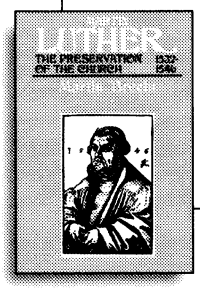


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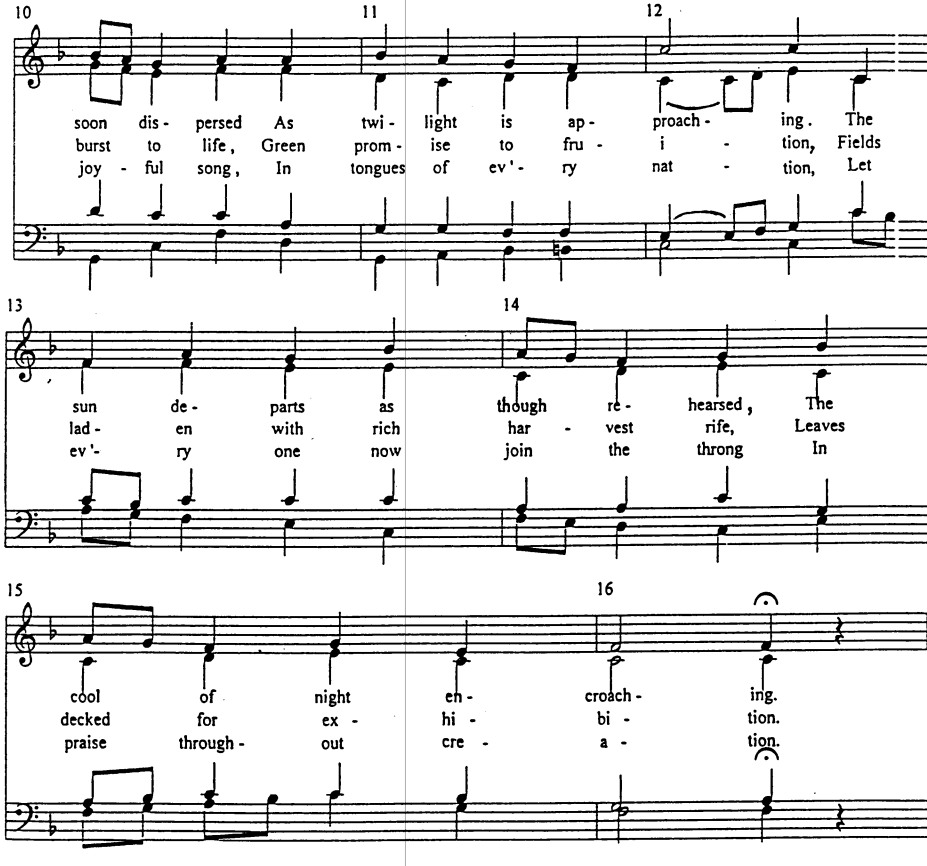
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All Nature's Praise Is Manifold

O Lord, how manifold are your works !
In wisdom you have made them all . Psalm 104 : 24

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"All Nature's Praise is Manifold": A Hymn and Commentary

Howard S. Olson
Sun City Center, Florida

Creation itself, in all its aspects, declares the glory of God. The astral bodies which the psalmist beheld with only the naked eye numbered about 6,000. Today the Hubble Space Telescope reveals the immeasurable immensity of the starry heavens, 250 times greater than what could previously be observed through ground telescopes, and has revealed galaxies colliding at a distance of 63 million light years from Earth. Joseph Sittler writes almost mystically about our existence on Earth "as a small part of a single system of systems within systems that spin out into dreamlike magnitudes."

Whether one views creation's magnitude through a telescope or its intricacy through a microscope, one is overwhelmed by the seeming infinity of the universe without and the universe within. The Genesis imagery of the Creator resting on the "last day" of this immense handiwork was intended only to show the holistic perfection of it all. Now, however, we have discovered that the creative process is constantly continuing. (From the analysis of supernovas it appears that our universe may be 15 billion years old. The expansion of the universe is presumed to be due to antigravitational force. As early as 1922 Einstein had postulated the likelihood of the existence of just such a gravity-defying energy. More astounding still is a revelation that on December 15, 1997, the Keck Observatory in Hawaii reported a cosmic blast from a hypernova which had been observed the previous day by an Italian scientific satellite.)

Stanza 1 of the hymn speaks of the variety of nature without mentioning the world's 30 million distinct species. One might be tempted to think that this myriad diversity would result in chaotic confusion. On the contrary, each element in creation is uniquely patterned consistent with its particular taxonomy and cadenced to its peculiar meter. The lunar month has its constant rhythm of 29 days, 12 hours, and 44 minutes, and the earth its 24-hour rotation, creating an alternation between night and day, darkness and luminescence, coolness and warmth, repose and vivacity, ebb and flow. Nature's variety is not without its whimsy, either: birds that swim, fish that fly, insects that eat flowers and flowers that eat insects, parrots that imitate human speech and people that imitate parrots, not to mention feet that smell and noses that run.

Stanza 2 extols God for the predictable particularity of the tandemed seasons. Each season is arrayed in fashion fit for its time. Winter comes wrapped in a spotless blanket, glistening as no bleacher could whiten. This robe is formed from millions of snowflakes each with its uncloned crystalline complexity. As Shelley reminds us, "If winter comes can spring be far behind?" The warming rays of springtime create a tantalizing striptease as winter sheds its garb for another twelve months. This vernal season fecund with promise has been energized by the restorative dormancy that preceded it. Summer extends the daylight hours as drab fields become emerald gardens with new growth, dancing to the sun's invitation, from seed to blade, from blade to stalk, from stalk to mature head. Harvest approaches signaling that summer is past. The surrounding forests are ablaze with blinding brilliance, and their rainbow of leaves departs too soon. The trees become barren, standing like sentinels in the cold wind; the skies turn ominously dark, and the annual cycle is complete.

These first two stanzas tell how all creation extols the Maker, as we read in Ezek 17:24, "all the trees of the field shall know that I am the LORD," and in 1 Chron 16:31–33, "Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice, and let them say among the nations, 'The LORD is king!' Let the sea roar, and all that fills it; let the field exult, and everything in it. Then shall the trees of the forest sing for joy before the LORD," and in Ps 19:1, "The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims God's handiwork."

Stanza 3 invites everyone to praise the Lord for the spendthrift grace poured out on us. If God is to be praised by the surrounding creation, then how can we who have been formed in God's image keep from singing? At best our songs of praise are halting and inadequate, but we look forward with keen anticipation to that "great getting' up mornin'" when "a vast multitude which no one can count from every nation and from all tribes and peoples and languages will sing, 'Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever.'"

The SATB setting of this hymn was produced by Richard G. Steinbrueck. For about twenty years he was a choir director and organist in a number of Lutheran churches in New York and Florida. His chief mentors were Theodore Beck and Jan Bender, musicians prominent in the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod during the 1960s and 70s. Although Steinbrueck is no longer professionally engaged in music, his talent in this field remains undiminished. In arranging this hymn he chose a style reminiscent of Bach motets, and in this case he designed a lot of action for the outer voices. Being a bass himself it was natural for him to create a vigorous bass part, making it a delightful experience to sing and to hear.

A Book Worth Discussing: *Jesus and the Victory of God* by N. Thomas Wright

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Jesus and the Victory of God. By N. Thomas Wright. Christian Origins and the Question of God, vol. 2. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996. xxi and 741 pages. Cloth, $65.00; paper, $39.00.

"The Jesus Question" is clearly on the front burner. Biblical scholars, parish pastors, church members, and the unchurched public have been engaged in a decade-long debate about who Jesus really was, what he actually said and did, and how he can best be understood today. British scholar and cathedral dean N. T. Wright has joined the conversation with a well-argued case that pictures Jesus as a Jewish prophet operating in an eschatological mold. "Prophet" is a model that has not received significant attention recently. "Spirit-person," "magician," "sage," "revolutionary," "rabbi," "Cynic philosopher," and "Galilean peasant" have received popular attention and in some cases notoriety, but "prophet" has not been a serious contender. Furthermore, much recent Jesus research has tended to downplay the importance of apocalyptic influences and to minimize the amount of data that historians are willing to consider reliable. So when Wright argues first that "the gospels do in fact tell us far more about Jesus than such scholarship [has] dreamed of" (p. 662), and second that "the best model for understanding [Jesus'] praxis is that of a prophet; more specifically, that of a prophet bearing an urgent eschatological, and indeed, apocalyptic, message for Israel" (p. 150), one can expect his views to provoke lively reflection and reaction.

Wright is undertaking a massive task. He anticipates putting it all together in five lengthy volumes. The introduction to the series was published in 1992 as *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press). *Jesus and the Victory of God* is the second piece. Future works will focus on Paul, on the Gospels, and then on a comprehensive conclusion. The present volume not only establishes the case for Wright's Jesus-as-prophet hypothesis but also carries on a running dialogue—sometimes it's more like a quarrel—with many of the participants in the current quest for the historical Jesus, especially the members of the California-based Jesus Seminar. Those who admire the work of these scholars will find this annoying; those who are upset by their conclusions will likely welcome Wright's more traditional results.

"Critical realism" and the role of stories

Before considering Wright's picture of Jesus in greater detail, one should come to terms with three preliminary concerns. First is his basic theory of knowledge, which he calls "critical realism." According to this approach, which is spelled out in the earlier volume, the only way to access the history of Jesus and the early Christians is via the worldview which is revealed in their stories. Thus history, according to Wright, is not merely an "objective" chronicling of bare facts, nor is it a purely "subjective" interpretation of the past. Rather, it is a meaningful narrating of human events that also accounts for their aims, intentions, and motivations. "Worldviews" are thus the basic stuff of human existence, and one must take account not only of the worldview of the historical people being studied but also of the worldview of the historians doing the studying! Furthermore, worldviews (a) account for the shape of the stories which people tell, (b) help them answer the basic questions of life: who are we? what is wrong? what is the solution?, (c) come to expression in cultural symbols and traditions, and (d) provide a praxis, a way of being and acting in the world.

The time of Jesus, positioned near the end of the era subsequently known as Second Temple Judaism, witnessed a growing diversity of opinions about how the Jewish national story would be lived out. Such disparate groups as Zealots, Pharisees, Essenes, and Sadducees—to say nothing of the ordinary people of the land, or the Jews living in the Diaspora—attest to significant differences. Yet all held to a remarkably similar worldview, maintains Wright. They thought of themselves as the descendants of Israel, chosen by God to be God's special people. Although their ancestors had returned to their homeland centuries before, they continued to think of themselves as living "in exile," under foreign domination and awaiting redemption and rescue by their God. So their present stance focused on remaining loyal to the signs of the covenant so that they could share in the future salvation and vindication. The various Jewish factions may have differed on the details of how their future rescue would be effected and on what they should do precisely to remain faithful in the present, but their core story was essentially uniform: they were an elect nation, living in a time of crisis, awaiting a future deliverance. Furthermore, as will be seen later, Wright argues that the story of Jesus can only be understood as a retelling and revising of this basic worldview.

Testing a credible hypothesis

Second is Wright's historical methodology. He advances what he considers a truly "scientific" approach that involves testing reasonable hypotheses. It is not enough, he maintains, to assemble facts and data and then to piece them together in a running account. Rather, one has to advance a significant hypothesis which must then be verified by the evidence, an hypothesis which will combine the data in a comprehensive narrative that not only retells the facts but also gives an interpretation and explanation of the evidence. A good hypothesis must not only include all the relevant data in a comprehensive overall picture, it must also help explain other related issues. Wright clearly believes that his picture of Jesus as a particular version of an apocalyptic prophet lives up to these expectations. But more about that later.

Note at this point how Wright's approach appears to differ from that of the

Jesus Seminar. The seminar has taken pains to examine as much data as can reasonably be admitted, to determine which items from the biblical and extrabiblical traditions can fairly be counted with high probability as authentic evidence of the words and deeds of the historical Jesus. They use criteria such as these: How frequently does an item appear in the various sources, whether in the Synoptics and/or in Q and/or in John and/or in Paul and/or in other sources? The more frequently it appears, the more likely it is authentic. Or, according to the principle of dissimilarity, is a piece of evidence *unlike* what one would expect either from Jesus' Jewish environment or from the early Christian milieu? If it would not have been "invented" in Christian circles or merely taken over from Jewish tradition, it is more likely to be authentic. After sifting the evidence, the members of the Jesus Seminar construct a larger picture out of the pieces that have a high probability of being authentic.

Wright takes a different approach. He *starts* by drawing a bigger picture—the hypothesis that Jesus was a prophet—and then tests the individual pieces of the synoptic tradition against that picture. More precisely, he asks whether the obvious and simple pattern of Jesus' actions and speeches reveals his habitual and characteristic praxis (d, above), and therefore the stories and symbols and questions (a, c, b, above) which could hypothetically account for Jesus' basic beliefs and aims and intentions. If so—and at this point Wright concludes that the picture of Jesus as an apocalyptic prophet is the most obvious hypothesis—then he uses the resulting picture to reevaluate the original evidence found in the biblical traditions of Jesus' words and deeds. Thus Wright maintains that his hypothesis is vindicated "by showing how its essentially simple line works out in detail, and by showing, conversely, how the manifold details fit within it" (p. 133).

In evaluating the individual pieces of the tradition Wright does not favor highly the "criterion of dissimilarity" used by the Jesus Seminar. Rather, he employs what he calls a "criterion of double similarity." In his own words, "when something can be seen to be credible (though perhaps deeply subversive) within first-century Judaism, *and* credible as the implied starting point (though not the exact replica) of something in later Christianity, there is a strong possibility of our being in touch with the genuine history of Jesus" (p. 132).

The *real* third quest

The third preliminary concern is Wright's self-identified place in the history of New Testament research. Most analysts think of the nineteenth-century biographies of Jesus as the "old quest" for the historical Jesus. This period ended with Albert Schweitzer (who concluded that Jesus was not the progenitor of modern liberal ideas but an apocalyptic prophet who mistakenly thought the world would end within a generation) and with Wilhelm Wrede (who concluded that the gospels were not reliable historical guides but rather biased theological tracts). So historical Jesus research remained dormant between the world wars. It was not until after the time of Rudolf Bultmann (who opined that the actual history of Jesus was not important for authentic genuine faith in Jesus) that the so-called "new quest" began. This second quest, associated with names like Ernst Käsemann and Günther Bornkamm, concluded that the biblical evidence reveals much about the early church but comparatively little about the historical Jesus. According to most analyses, a "third quest" began in the 1970s with the advent of redaction-critical studies, sociological

investigations of Jewish and Christian origins, and a more rigorous literary criticism of the biblical narratives. This third quest continues today and includes the work of pace-setting American scholars, some of whom are associated with the Jesus Seminar.

Wright maintains, however, that this analysis is inaccurate. The current questers, he argues, are not offering anything new. They are merely continuing the work and repeating the mistakes of the second questers. That is, they are still following Wrede's lead in that they consistently doubt the reliability of the New Testament evidence. Therefore they must resort to extraneous evidence, such as the putative Q source or the sayings of the Gospel of Thomas, to promote pictures of Jesus as a Jewish sage or Cynic philosopher and the like. Wright believes that only he and his ideological colleagues truly deserve to comprise a genuine third quest, because only they give full credence to Jesus' Jewishness, only they place maximum reliance on the New Testament texts, and only they use the properly "scientific" historiography outlined above. Wright claims his third quest continues along Schweitzer's path in that both of them are serious about the Jewish context of Jesus' ministry. But whereas Schweitzer thought Jesus had mistakenly predicted the end of the world, Wright thinks Jesus correctly anticipated the destruction of Jerusalem.

Jesus as an eschatological prophet

This may be Wright's chief contribution to the current quest for the historical Jesus (however it is defined): he argues that Jesus can best be seen as acting out the role of a prophet, that he was convinced his Jewish nation was unfaithful to its calling to live as God's people, and that he predicted that God would act *within history* to turn things around.

As Wright surveys the evidence, he assembles a conventional list of Jesus' customary activities and pronouncements: Jesus grew up in Galilee and emerged as a public figure around 28 C.E. in the context of John the Baptist's prophetic work. He engaged in an itinerant ministry in which he called people to repentance, announced the arrival of the reign of Israel's God using provocative parables in particular, enacted the effects of God's reign by effecting remarkable cures and exorcisms, spent time in prayer, established a loosely knit community of followers which included twelve close companions, ignored traditional ties of family and custom, practiced a shared table fellowship with a socioculturally diverse group of people often in a celebrative atmosphere, and consequently offended respectable members of society by doing all this. Near the end of his career he journeyed to Jerusalem where his activities took an ominous turn. He dramatically repudiated the temple and thereby incurred the opposition of the Jewish priestly establishment, was handed over to the Roman authorities and executed as an insurrectionist. But his followers subsequently claimed that he had been raised from the dead.

The model that most conveniently accounts for this data, says Wright, is an apocalyptic prophet. Jesus clearly plays the role familiar within the story of Israel. Like many of the ancient prophets, Jesus' pronouncements had an eschatological, even apocalyptic, dimension to them, that is, they anticipate that God would break into Israel's history and vindicate his people soon. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Jesus was not predicting that the enemies of the nation would be overthrown, the temple renewed, and Judah liberated. Unlike many modern interpreters, he was not predicting

the end of the world. Wright insists that "those among Jesus' Jewish contemporaries who were looking for a great event to happen were *not* expecting the end of the space-time universe" (p. 207). Rather, the "eschatological" event Jesus anticipated was the elimination of the temple and its upper-class, Roman-sympathizing clergy and retainers.

Thus, for example, Jesus' call to repentance meant that Judeans should abandon Zealot-like efforts to oust the Romans by force. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus is not about the afterlife as much as it is about welcoming socially disreputable beggars into God's kingdom and excluding wealthy citizens. Attaining "holiness" does not involve going to the temple, offering sacrifices, or observing sabbath regulations and kosher food laws. By healing demoniacs, lepers, bleeding women, and the like, Jesus was circumventing the need for temple-related cleanliness as well as including marginal, suspect types within his vision for a renewed Israel. In sum, Wright maintains that Jesus' words and actions, especially his parables and miracles, add up to a subversive prophetic ministry, a ministry that inevitably led to opposition.

If such was his praxis, argues Wright, that must have been Jesus' intention all along. He accepted not only the role of a prophet but also the fate of a prophet. In other words, he anticipated that his subversive retelling of Israel's story would create conflict and that he would be killed for his efforts. But he also anticipated that the destruction of the temple within a generation would ultimately vindicate his ministry and confirm his messianic status.

Three items interweave at this point in Wright's reconstruction. First is the symbolic repudiation of the temple when Jesus drove out the traders and money-changers. Second is his Last Supper revision of the Passover seder in which he identified God's liberating action in the body-and-blood terms of his own impending death. Third is his prediction that Caiaphas would see him exalted as the "son of man" by *going into* the heavens on clouds (not *coming back* to earth!), vindicated after suffering. Taken together these three items demonstrate to Wright's satisfaction that Jesus understood himself to be not only *a* prophet but *the* prophet whose vocation was to embody the return of God. In sum, "Jesus therefore took up his own cross," for he " believed he was the focal point of the Israel that would return, at last, from exile," and "he believed he was to be the means, in his life and particularly his death, of the radical defeat of evil" (pp. 610–11).

Evaluation and response

Wright's case is compelling and deserves a careful hearing. But one gets the impression that he has overstated it and forced the evidence to fit his preconceived pattern. For example, is Jesus' comment about faith casting a mountain into the sea really a prediction of the destruction of the temple mount? Is the parable of the sower really an apocalyptic retelling of Israel's history? Is the story of the so-called prodigal son really about Israel's return from exile? Does the exorcism of the Gerasene demoniac really support the notion that Rome is not the real enemy?

As Wright sees it, synoptic and Johannine materials, Q sayings, and the special Matthean and Lucan stuff all seem to fit his model of Jesus as an apocalyptic prophet. He seldom questions whether any particular saying or story might not be historically accurate, and he avoids analyzing significant variants between parallel accounts. If Jesus was an itinerant prophet, he argues, he would have repeated the same or similar

teachings on numerous occasions; in a world of what Wright calls "informal but controlled oral tradition," that accounts for differing versions of the same sayings. It may account for differences in an *Aramaic* collection of Jesus' sayings, but it does not account for passages in a *Greek* gospel that use the same vocabulary but disagree at key points.

Although Wright's stated agenda is to consider both the actions and the teachings of Jesus to reconstruct his habitual praxis and therefore his motives and intentions, as a matter of fact the bulk of the analysis is spent on Jesus' words. Greater attention to specific healings and to other significant actions such as the calling of disciples, the blessing of children, and the dialogues with family and opponents is necessary for a complete picture of Jesus. Furthermore, one wonders whether Wright's thinly veiled antipathy toward the scholars in the Jesus Seminar is fully justified; too frequently his dismissal of the American school is based simply on the fact that his conclusions differ from theirs rather than on substantial discussion of specific texts.

Wright's two concluding chapters are the least satisfying. In the penultimate section he tries to read Jesus' inner sense of vocation. "I propose, *as a matter of history*," he says, "that Jesus of Nazareth was conscious of a vocation: a vocation, given him by the one he knew as 'father,' to enact in himself what, in Israel's scriptures, God had promised to accomplish all by himself" (p. 653, emphasis added). His evidence, however, simply will not stretch that far. He seems to have crossed the line between historical reconstruction and homiletical exposition.

In the concluding chapter Wright deals all too briefly with the resurrection, recognizing that this issue "raises questions which can only be dealt with in another book." He is content to assert that the only reason Jesus would have been remembered by his followers as anything but a failed messiah is the fact that they were convinced he was raised from the dead. "The resurrection, however we understand it, was the only reason they came up with for supposing that Jesus stood for anything other than a dream that might have come true but didn't" (p. 659). In this case, Wright leaves readers wishing for more.

On balance, however, Wright has done the world of Jesus research a positive service by insisting on the thoroughgoing Jewish environment of the New Testament, requiring that Jesus must be understood squarely within the matrix of the religious-cultural-political-sociological systems at work in the Galilee and Judea of his day. However the third quest ultimately works out its picture of Jesus, it will not be able to ignore the possibility that he was by his own intention a prophet. But the last word on this has not yet been written.

Book Reviews

Against the Wind: Memories of a Radical Christian. By Dorothee Soelle. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999. Translated by Barbara and Martin Rumscheidt. xii and 171 pages. Paper. $16.00.

This theological autobiography by Dorothee Soelle witnesses to a life lived "between the times." Since the Second World War, Western Christendom has begun to crumble. While the fragments of an ancient form of church remain, a new form of a church emerges from the ruins. Soelle titles her book *Against the Wind*. Time may well demonstrate that her life has instead moved forward with the wind of Pentecost.

The book consists of thirty-three short chapters. Along the way one reads many interesting comments about well-known figures in theology (Rudolf Bultmann, Friedrich Gogarten, Beverly Harrison, Leonardo Boff) and influential theological movements (post-Auschwitz theology, political theology, liberation theology, feminist theology). But what is most impressive about the book is not its commentary about persons and movements. Rather, here is testimony to a life that has sought to remain faithful to the discipleship of Jesus through stormy times. The book asks of the reader: How are you responding to Jesus' call to discipleship in the circumstances which daily confront you?

Soelle reflects on her experiences during and after the Nazi era. Born in 1929, she describes her limited understanding of the events that unfolded around her during her childhood. Significant adults chose not to know, or even voiced support for, Hitler's' policies. Always with an eye on Auschwitz, Soelle commits herself as a theologian to oppose every form of oppression. She makes a helpful distinction between "collective guilt" and "collective shame." The latter Soelle endorses as a needed interpretation of the proper German response to the Holocaust, while the former has led to widespread confusion.

There are many fascinating stops along this tour of Soelle's life: her own school years, years teaching at a girls' school in the 1950s, "Political Evensong" in the Cologne in the 1960s opposition to the war in Vietnam, professorship at Union Seminary in New York, solidarity with the oppressed in Latin America. While the heritage of Christendom has largely meant the church's support for those in power, Soelle hangs on to the narrow thread of tradition that has in every generation struggled for liberation. The image of the one crucified for the cause of God's reign provides inspiration.

The reader notes an increasing engagement with mortality as Soelle has aged and dear friends (especially Heinrich Boll) and family members have died. She commends the path of resistance as the most faithful contribution to the future of life on earth under God's care. The book is enhanced by a "Tribute" by Robert McAfee Brown, a "Foreword" by Daniel Berrigan, a "Chronology" of Dorothy Soelle's life, and a bibliography of her books in English. The translation by Barbara and Martin Rumscheidt is clear and lively.

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Bethlehem 2000: Past and Present. By Mitri Raheb and Fred Strickert. Photographs by Garo Nalbandian. Heidelberg, Germany: Palmyra, 1998. 157 pages. Cloth. $34.95. Available in the U.S.A. from Interlink Publishing, 46 Crosby Street, Northampton, MA 01060.

Mitri Raheb, the Palestinian pastor of the Lutheran Church in Bethlehem, and Fred Strickert, American professor at Lutheran Wartburg College in Iowa, have collaborated on what is clearly a labor of love: a textual and photographic history of Bethlehem that describes The Church of the Nativity, the Christian groups in the city, the city and its area in geographic terms, the historic monasteries near the city, Christian-

Muslim relations, the city's economy and culture in the present, and the political situation since 1995. The popularly written text is informative and the color photographs by the leading Palestinian photographer in Jerusalem spectacular.

The authors hope that this volume will both prepare people to visit Bethlehem in 2000 and interest them in the life and culture of its people. A careful reading will certainly awaken sympathy for Palestinian Christians as they live in Israel. It is a beautiful book typographically and pictorially that would make a marvelous Christmas present for the home or a valued addition to a parish library.

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Pastoral Care of Gays, Lesbians, and Their Families. By David K. Switzer. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999. ix and 156 pages. Paper. $17.00.

The church gropes for answers to the divisive questions surrounding homosexuality. If there is any consensus position, it is that gays, lesbians, and their families need and deserve pastoral care. Nevertheless, most homosexual persons continue to experience alienation and condemnation from representatives of the church. In this book, David K. Switzer provides thoughtful guidance about extending appropriate and effective pastoral care to gays, lesbians, and their families. In a climate where discussion of issues surrounding homosexuality often leads to polarization, this is a book worthy of reflection and discussion not only by pastors but by members of congregations seeking to build a climate of compassion for all God's sons and daughters.

Switzer shares his own journey and experiences in pastoral care with gays and lesbians leading to his writing of this book. One major theme is learning to overcome one's fears surrounding the issue of homosexuality. When we learn to honor the personhood of gays and lesbians, we are ready to offer pastoral concern grounded in the love of Jesus as we would to any other person entrusted to our care.

Informative chapters are devoted to the topics "What Is Homosexuality and How Does It Come About?" and "What the Bible Says About Homosexuality." Surveying recent literature, Switzer favors interpretations of the cause of homosexuality that see it as an orientation about which one has no choice. He sees the most frequently quoted biblical texts referring to sexual acts within an ancient context (homosexuality as on orientation was not yet understood). Perhaps the most important teaching of the Bible relevant to this theme is that of God's compassion.

The most poignant chapters are entitled "Pastoral Care and Counseling of Gays and Lesbians" and "Pastoral Care and Counseling of Families of Gays and Lesbians." Switzer examines themes such as the threat of suicide by teens struggling with their sexual identity, "coming out," "changing" one's sexual orientation, ministry to those with AIDS and their families, and blessing of gay relationships. Switzer's views are always balanced, offering constructive guidance even to those who might be in disagreement about the correctness of accepting homosexuality. The book concentrates on pastoral care issues and does not explore theological issues at depth. The book concludes with a challenging chapter by John Thornburg on how congregations can become "caring community" for gay men and lesbians. Thornburg develops the theme of "radical hospitality."

This is a book I wish had been available to my family, pastors, and congregation as we struggled to understand what it meant that my brother was gay. Too often not only gay and lesbian persons but also their families live in confusion and shame about the homosexual orientation of their loved one. If a new climate is to emerge in our church beyond the stereotypes of the past, it will occur not only by our taking seriously the experiences of gay and lesbian persons but also those of their families. Too many families continue to suffer in silence, afraid of rejection if anyone knew the truth about their loved one. Switzer's book can assist congregations and pastors to learn new wisdom in pastoral care with homosexual persons and to lift the veil of secrecy that prevents families like ours from telling the truth about who we are.

Craig L. Nessan

Ritual Practices to Gain Power: Angels, Incantations, and Revelations in Early Jewish Mysticism. By Rebecca Macy Lesses. Harvard Theological Studies 44. Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1998. xiv and 429 pages. Paper. $27.95.

This book is a slightly revised 1995 Harvard dissertation which interprets the Hekhalot, or early Jewish mystical literature, in terms of ritual practices involving the use of divine or angelic names in order to gain power of various kinds. Lesses follows Morton Smith in viewing these texts as not merely theoretical or imaginative but as containing instruction for adjuring angels to descend from heaven to teach wisdom. The adjurations in this literature are situated in a larger complex of ritual practices that were widespread in the Greco-Roman world of late antiquity. While this is an interesting and compelling thesis, the highly technical nature of the exegetical argumentation will make it of primary interest to specialists in this area of study.

Ray Pickett
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Reading Romans: A Literary and Theological Commentary. By Luke Timothy Johnson. New York: Crossroad, 1997. xii and 224 pages. Paper. $24.95.

This is the sixth volume in Crossroad's series "Reading the New Testament." The intent of the series is to present "cutting-edge research" (p. ix) in a popular form accessible to the nonprofessional. The content is of high, scholarly level and will be useful to anyone interested in Paul's letter to the Romans. Johnson is a well-known scholar. He may be best known for his critical response to the Jesus Seminar, *The Real Jesus: The Misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus.*

Johnson is a Roman Catholic. Charles Talbert, general editor of the series, urged Johnson to consider a tome on this classic Protestant text. The result is very useful. Johnson does not often note a confessional difference, but the seasoned reader will recognize any number of interpretations at variance with accepted Protestant exegesis.

As for the letter of Romans itself, Johnson believes it was written out of Paul's own concerns, particularly his desire to gain financial backing for the mission to Spain (pp. 6–7). To be sure, it has been used as a theological treatise, but that is a misreading of Paul. For example, his *epithymia* of chapter 7 is not the same as Augustine's *concupiscentia*; nor does Luther's *sola fide* match Paul's understanding of law and righteousness (p. 9). Actually, Paul's purpose in writing his letters is primarily to create "communities of character" (p. 9).

Johnson reads the critical 1:16–17 as the thesis of the letter. The expected *soteria* of v. 16 is neither personal nor otherworldly but essentially "belonging to God's people" (p. 26). Paul speaks of that "belonging" as the state of *dikaiosyne*, justice or fairness (p. 27), a state made possible by the fidelity of Jesus. In another famous crux, chapter 7, Johnson does not assume that the conflictive situation there describes the *simul justis et peccator* condition of the Christian (p. 97). Rather, using a personal analogy, Paul describes what the law can do, and has done, to weakened flesh—a conflictive human condition that never goes away. By means of life in the Spirit, that is, the power of the risen Lord among his followers, flesh weakened by the law is overridden (p. 117).

This is a thoughtful, worthy commentary which can be strongly commended to the readers of *Currents.*

Graydon F. Snyder
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Building King's Beloved Community: Foundations for Pastoral Care and Counseling with the Oppressed. By Donald M. Chinula. Cleveland, OH: United Church Press, 1997. 128 pages. Paper. $12.95.

Donald M. Chinula has written a creative and daring book. He has taken the words and thoughts of Martin Luther King, Jr., a pastor and civil rights leader, and identified psychological insights that can be drawn from them. Chinula acknowledges that King was not a "profession-

ally trained psychologist" but argues that King "had keen psychological insights concerning the psychological problems of identity, self-esteem, and powerlessness experienced by the oppressed." Drawing from the actual writings, speeches, and sermons of King, Chinula demonstrates that within King's thought there exists psychological insights about identity formation, the maintenance of self-esteem, and overcoming a sense of powerlessness. These insights, Chinula argues, offer valuable perspectives for providers of pastoral care to oppressed persons.

In the course of the book Chinula gives detailed and helpful definitions for the terms and ideas he is using. His discussion of the anatomy and patterns of oppression and their impact on identity formation is most helpful. Chinula does a masterful job of translating King's social theory into psychological theory, using the thought of other psychologists to support his identification and interpretation of King's psychological insights. While there is a primary focus on the psychological insights that King brings to bear on pastoral care with the oppressed, Chinula also draws upon King's theological and anthropological insights.

In the conclusion Chinula draws the various insights together into a practically oriented, community-based model of pastoral care. This model of caregiving with the oppressed has two aspects: ecological and public policy. The ecological dimension examines the whole context within which the care takes place. This includes the various levels of social status, environmental concerns, the "sum total of external conditions and circumstances affecting the existence and functioning of life." The public policy dimension encourages caregivers to not be preoccupied on changing individual behavior but on systems analysis "and the designing of intervention modalities based on that analysis."

The majority of Chinula's work with King's constructive thought as psychological insight is accurate. There are a few places, though, where his own thought is less than convincing. Chinula stresses that King's psychological insights stand over against the psychological perspectives of some psychologists that reflect a more individualistic orientation. He identifies Robert Kegan as one of the psychologists with a largely intrapsychic perspective. In contrast he identifies James Fowler as a more ecologically and community-oriented human developmentalist. Given Kegan's interest in ecologies of care and the alternating developmental processes of separation and incorporation, the description of Kegan as individualistically oriented is not altogether accurate.

On page 51 Chinula writes:

> King conjectures that unless African Americans gain power to change the oppressive social arrangements, their self-esteem will remain captive to economic and political currents, and that any improvement will be illusory. In this estimation, he cannot be more correct. The "Black is Beautiful" movement of the 1960s which evaporated as the economic and political climate worsened in the 1970s and 1980s, bears witness to King's insight.

The pitting of cultural affirmation over against economic and political empowerment by Chinula is not helpful. For freedom and liberation, African Americans need economic and political empowerment as well as cultural affirmation. Positive identity formation and self-esteem require both. Chinula provides a couple of examples of pastoral care ministry that employ the concepts and arguments in the book. A few more examples related to the practice of ministry as opposed to additional statistics substantiating the need for such interventions would have been more helpful.

The above-noted criticisms notwithstanding, I recommend this book highly to anyone providing pastoral care to poor and oppressed people.

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1100 East 55th Street, Chicago, IL 60615
(773) 256-0753

The Gospel and Letters of John. By R. Alan Culpepper. Interpreting Biblical Texts. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998. 327 pages. Paper. $19.95.

This volume is unusual in covering both the Gospel of John and the three Johannine letters as reflecting a single "school" in early Christian history—a rare treatment in commentaries. After a brief introduction to the school, Culpepper discusses their composition, community of origin, the literary character of the Gospel, and the theology of the corpus. Three chapters then guide the reader through a reading of John, a fourth through the three letters. The final chapter, "Responding to the Johannine Writings," guides the modern reader in reflecting on how one might react to three modes of reading John: the theological interpretation of the second–century Gnostics, the historical challenge raised by nineteenth–century study of the historical Jesus (by no means restricted to that time), and the ethical issues raised especially in post-1950 ethnic interpretations (anti-Judaism, exclusivism, and the poor).

The book is a model of biblical interpretation for nonspecialists by an authority in the field. Culpepper knows Johannine literature and Johannine scholarship in depth, as the notes and bibliography on pp. 306ff. make clear. The text frequently has boxed paragraphs giving literary, historical, or other information significant for interpretation, e.g. "Sources Postulated by Rudolf Bultmann," "Journey Cycles in the Gospel of John," "Jewish Festivals in John 5–12," and "Functions of the Paraclete." They are well done, apposite, and aid the reader immensely.

The series editors state two purposes for each volume: to address the critical issues that recent scholarship raises for the interpretation of each book, and to make clear how individual passages relate to the text as a whole. Culpepper succeeds admirably in meeting both goals. Given book prices today, this one is a steal. Read it before you preach in the next Easter season and your Johannine proclamation will be much enhanced. This is a different—and highly useful—commentary.

Edgar Krentz

Martin Luther: Exploring His Life and Times, 1483–1546. By Helmar Junghans. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998. CD-ROM. $39.00.

What a delightful experience it was to "read" this book! Just as Martin Luther's Reformation could have happened only because of the media revolution caused by Gutenberg's invention of movable type, so Fortress Press and Haenssler-Verlag, Germany, have collaborated with IBM and mib to draw on today's media revolution to bring us this life of Martin Luther. Could this be the form in which books will appear regularly in the future?

Martin Luther: Exploring His Life and Times, 1483–1546 is a CD-ROM. To read it you need a computer with CD-ROM capability, either Windows 3.1/ Windows 95 or higher, or Macintosh 7.5 or higher, both with a minimum of 8 MB RAM. Once the CD-ROM is accessed, the computer screen lights up with a challenge of almost unlimited opportunity.

There is the text of the book authored by Helmar Junghans, Lutheran pastor and Luther scholar, who is University Professor for Church History in the Theological Faculty at the University of Leipzig in Germany. In eight chapters Junghans tells the story of Luther's life. You "read" the book by scrolling the text down the computer screen. If you prefer, you can print the text chapter by chapter, making it a little more possible to read without eye strain.

But the material offered on the CD-ROM includes so much more than the text of the book. For each of the eight chapters there is a "film" or animated version of the text. In a delightfully creative way the substance of the chapter is told in a shortened form. For me the "film" helped to nail down the facts detailed in the chapter.

In addition, there was a special "theme" section for each of the eight chapters, highlighting something significant in the chapter itself. For example, for the first chapter, on Luther's childhood and education, the special theme was "toys." The screen showed toys and games and songs that were in use at the time of Luther's childhood. "Purgatory" was the theme for the chapter dealing with indulgences, the papal bull, and the imperial ban. An animated map pictured

the possible routes which medieval piety envisioned were open to the human soul at the time of death; souls moved on the screen from earth either directly to heaven or hell or for interim stays in limbo or purgatory.

The chapter texts, the animated films, and the themes for each chapter are visualized and made accessible on a start-up screen, a large circle that fills the computer screen. At the center of the circle is Luther's seal. Around the rim of the circle in clockwise order are the eight chapters of the book. Moving in closer to the seal but associated with the chapter texts are the eight animated films. Closest to the seal but nonetheless related to text and film are the themes. By clicking onto the title of text, film, or theme, you can bring whatever you want to the screen.

There is a large amount of additional material: information, texts, photographs, pictures, and other resources. The Biography icon makes available pictures and thumbnail sketches of all the major players in Luther's life; the Legacy icon provides descriptions of the major events in Luther's life: the Places icon shows maps of the cities in Luther's life and pictures of their historic sites. While looking around in the Glossary icon material, I learned that the illness which almost took Luther's life not long after his marriage and that continued to trouble him long after (described in the Junghans book) was identified a decade ago as Menier's disease, hemorrhaging of the heart or brain, so named because it was first analyzed by a nineteenth-century French physician, Prosper Menier. The material in the categories represented by the icons come in large part from Luther-Hall in Wittenberg, the largest museum in the world devoted to the history of the Reformation.

The book by Junghans is relatively short. It is eminently readable, telling the story of Luther's life in simple, declarative sentences that for the most part are in the historical present. Junghans presents the main features of Luther's life without resorting to ponderous detail. The book would be an excellent resource for introducing Lutherans to the man celebrated in our church's name. In reading the book I was struck again by how much courage it must have taken for Luther and his followers to stand up against institutional church and Holy Roman Empire. What was it that identified people as part of Luther's reform movement? According to Junghans, the key was that they gathered to hear God's Word preached and to receive the Lord's Supper in both bread and wine.

I had fun finding and learning from the material on this CD-ROM. I look forward to more "books" like this one.

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Teaching Christianity: De Doctrina Christiana. By Augustine of Hippo, with Introduction, Translation, and Notes by Edmund Hill, O.P. The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, Part I, Vol. 11. Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1996. 259 pages. Cloth, $29.95; paper, $19.95.

Saint Augustine, Bishop of Hippo in the Roman province of Africa, was the most influential Latin theologian in the first millennium of the Christian church—and his influence extends to the present day. The *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (p. 109) says that his "abiding importance rests on his penetrating understanding of Christian truth." Lutherans recall that Luther was an Augustinian, profoundly influenced by this doctor of the church. The new 43-volume translation of his works will make his entire corpus available in English for the first time.

Edmund Hill's translation of *De Doctrina Christiana* (*On Christian Doctrine*) is excellent; it accurately reproduces the sense in clear, literate English and provides aids for understanding Augustine's meaning. The extensive introduction translates Mario Naldini's survey of the structure and content of the work, Luigi Alici's discussion of Augustine's understanding of language and signs, Antonio Quacquarelli on Augustine's discussion of rhetorical styles, and Prosper Grech's analysis of Augustine's hermeneutical principles. All are valuable.

The translation itself includes extensive interpretive notes to explicate difficult passages, identify citations and allusions, provide the Latin

text or a literalistic translation of some key phrases, etc. An index of Scripture passages and of subjects completes the work.

Augustine's book is practical instruction for priests in his diocese on how to explain the Christian faith, interpret the Scriptures, and proclaim their message (he formulates ten guidelines for homilists). While the primary source of his thought is the Bible, he adapts material from ancient logic and rhetorical theory for his purpose. He was not the first to write principles of biblical interpretation in the Western church (Tychonius claims that honor), but his text was highly influential in the later church. Augustine's work clearly reflects his cultural milieu and his fifth century intellectual environment; but a reading of his words still has more than historical interest and repays reading yet today.

Edgar Krentz

The Complete Text of the Earliest New Testament Manuscripts. Edited by Philip W. Comfort and David P. Barrett. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999. 652 pages. Cloth. $49.99.

Comfort and Barrett offer fresh transcriptions of sixty manuscripts presumed to antedate 300 C.E. Each entry includes an introduction and bibliography, followed by an exact transcription, with notes indicating ancient corrections. The editors utilize the conventional sigla, except, alas, those dots that indicate uncertain letters.

Most who engage in any textual criticism whatsoever rely upon the notes in a printed critical apparatus. This book allows one to scrutinize particular readings in their original format, observing such factors as the length and content of lines—factors important for the determination of sight errors. Examination of context enables critics to appreciate the proclivities of particular copyists and editors. *The Complete Text* is a valuable tool for those who wish to practice serious textual criticism but are not paleographers. The introductions and bibliographies make important data readily accessible to the nonspecialist.

Any who peruse this volume will benefit from an encounter with some texts that early Christians actually read or heard, as opposed to the eclectic reconstructions of modern scholarship that underlie current translations. The most controversial element is the editors' inclination to locate many manuscripts within the first one hundred and fifty years of church history. Their motivation is evidently apologetic, and their proposals cannot be likely in more than a few cases, not only because of the weight of the paleographical tradition but also because the result would be a relative dearth of manuscripts from the third century, when burgeoning growth demanded more Christian books.

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Gospel Truth? New Light on Jesus and the Gospels. By Graham Stanton. Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1995. viii and 215 pages. Cloth. $25.00.

Sensationalism characterizes many stories about Jesus research in the public press, whether claims are made from the historical right or left. On the one hand the Jesus Seminar's votes about the historicity of Jesus's words in the Gospels, Morton Smith's claim to find a "Secret Gospel of Mark," Barbara Thiering's claim that Jesus was the "wicked priest" of the Dead Sea Scrolls and married Mary Magdalene, the interpretation of Jesus as a Cynic-style wandering preacher, or the elevation of Gnostic gospels or "Q" to primary historical status represent the historical left in Jesus research. On the other hand, Carsten Thiede claims that $\mathfrak{P}^{64}$ (he does not mention $\mathfrak{P}^{67}$, fragments from the same papyrus codex), three papyrus fragments of the Gospel of Matthew, dates from about 70 C.E., while José O'Callaghan claims that 7Q5, a minuscule Greek fragment from Qumran, is part of Mark's Gospel. These radical accounts of the "historical Jesus" from left and right make "front-page" stories in the public press, without more sober accounts ever getting attention.

Graham Stanton, professor of New Testament at London University, gives us a helpful book that applies critical historical methods to these sensational proposals. In the first eight

chapters he discusses the radical manuscript proposals in the context of Greek paleography and the science of New Testament textual criticism. His discussion of the passing on of Jesus traditions before the Gospels were written leads to an evaluation of Q Gnostic gospels, and recent Gospel criticism. Chapters 9 to 16 give Stanton's interpretation of the historical Jesus; he evaluates archaeological data, evidence from outside the Gospels and the New Testament for the life and teaching of Jesus, and the literary genre of the Gospels. Four chapters summarize what Stanton holds that we can know, as historians, about the life and teaching of Jesus. The final chapter presents Stanton's conclusions.

He writes clearly. The book belongs in parish libraries, since it will help lay readers understand the issues discussed, the scholarly procedures used, and the conclusions Stanton reaches. Footnotes and an annotated bibliography, both printed at the end of the volume, enable interested readers to pursue subjects further. I thoroughly enjoyed reading this book, learned from it, and commend it to people whose curiosity has been awakened by the public press.

There is a printing error: Plate 14, which shows the Library of Celsus in Ephesus, is reversed. The Mithridates-Mazaeus Gate should be on the right side of the photograph, i.e. to the north. And I am not certain just what illustrative function the plate has in relation to the discussion of the library on p. 136. It would have made greater sense to picture the reconstructed interior and talk about how the physical arrangement also reflected the classification process in a Hellenistic-Roman library.

Edgar Krentz

Rekindling the Word. In Search of Gospel Truth. By Carsten Peter Thiede. Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1995. xii and 204 pages. Paper. $20.00.

On Christmas Eve in 1994 *The Times* of London announced that Carsten Thiede, a German research scholar, dated a papyrus preserved at Magdalen College in Oxford (three fragments of Matthew numbered $\mathfrak{P}^{64}$) in the first century, much earlier than anyone else, and close to the Gospel's time of composition. That story, followed by a report in *The New York Times* (January 21, 1995) and a major article in *Time* magazine, led to widespread interest and controversy. Thiede also argued that the fragment came from a codex, not a scroll, thus pushing the origin of the codex (as opposed to the scroll) back to the first century. He also accepted the identification of a fragment from Qumran cave 7 (7Q5) as a text from the Gospel of Mark, first proposed by José O'Callagan. If the dating is correct, we then have a gospel fragment dating from before 70 C.E.

He also published articles arguing for a reevaluation of the dating of the synoptic Gospels, for a more secure method in the dating of manuscripts, and on the significance of Qumran for the reconstruction of early Christian history. In them he discusses two other fragmentary manuscripts, $\mathfrak{P}^{73}$ and 7Q19, providing the *editio princeps* of the first and identifying the latter as an unknown fragment of an early Christian text.

Trinity Press International serves scholarship well by publishing nineteen of these articles in *Rekindling the Word* (most originally published in French and German). At almost the same time Trinity Press published Graham Stanton's *Gospel Truth? New Light on Jesus and the Gospels,* which examines the claims raised by many non-mainstream scholars, including Thiede's. These articles demonstrate a conservative historical and theological bent. Were his dating correct, these papyrus fragments would involve a redating of early Christianity.

There are some shortcomings in this publication. There are no photographic plates of the papyri discussed, no bibliography, no index. In short, the volume does not give the data needed to evaluate the claims. I urge interested readers with a historical bent to obtain both Thiede's and Stanton's and compare them. In my opinion Stanton disproves the claims of Thiede. The two together make an interesting read and enable the pastor to respond to some of the inflammatory stories in the public press with some authority.

Edgar Krentz

A New Vision for Israel: The Teachings of Jesus in National Context. By Scot McKnight. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1999. iv and 263 pages. Paper. $21.00.

Who was the historical Jesus? Many different proposals have emerged in recent years, now that New Testament scholars have newfound confidence that it is possible to answer the question. *A New Vision for Israel* is one in a series of books on "Studying the Historical Jesus" being edited by Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans. It proposes that Jesus was a prophet with a vision for a renewed Israel, grounded in God's covenant with Israel, to be achieved through a national movement of repentance, without which there would be a disastrous judgment on Jerusalem at the hand of Israel's enemies.

The author is Scot McKnight, Karl A. Olsson Professor of Religious Studies, North Park University, Chicago. He makes the case that Jesus' teachings, far from being new, were thoroughly consonant with the teachings of Israel. McKnight presents those teachings under three major themes: God, the kingdom of God, and kingdom ethics. He introduces each theme with a presentation of significant scholarly and theological views concerning each and then presents his own understanding. He says that for Jesus God was both inflexibly holy and relationally loving; very helpful is his discussion of Jesus' reference to God as Abba. The kingdom for Jesus was both present now, evident in his acts, and yet to come, though imminent through either renewal or destruction.

McKnight insists that Jesus' teachings cannot be properly understood unless related to his death. He writes, "Jesus not only saw his death as the inevitable result of his mission to Israel, he chose to die and gave himself for his nation in that last week as part of his plea that the nation repent. In so offering himself, Jesus must have believed that God would vindicate his work. His death, then, was a national sacrifice, offered to God on Israel's behalf, the death of one for the many" (Mark 10:45).

Was Jesus wrong? McKnight argues that like any prophet Jesus could not see beyond the end he was announcing. For him that was either the renewal of Israel or the destruction of Jerusalem. Given the choice, doesn't the destruction of Jerusalem require the conclusion that the event was God's pronouncement of doom on Israel as a nation? Is that what—and is that all—the historical Jesus has to teach us? Was there resurrection for Jesus? All McKnight says is that Jesus saw "rejection and vindication in the categories of his own death and resurrection." But was he vindicated? Only in the ultimate destruction of Jerusalem? I find that McKnight's narrow limiting of Jesus to the role of visionary national prophet does not do justice to the universal present in the particularity of Jesus' teaching. Jesus' disciples and those who provided the sources that ultimately were used to produce the New Testament clearly gave him a much more comprehensive role.

John H. Tietjen

Ethics of Biblical Interpretation: A Reevaluation. By Daniel Patte. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1995. xi and 145 pages. Paper. $16.99.

This is a courageous book, awesome in its honesty, blunt in its self-examination. Challenged by feminist, Hispanic, Afro-American and international students to justify his interpretations, Patte reexamined his own presuppositions, procedures, and biases to conclude that his Euro-masculine background led to oppressive exegesis. This book describes his efforts to overcome his own history. He solves his dilemma by concluding that one must give equal interpretive validity to all of these variant modes of interpretation. To do anything less is to exercise unethical, exegetical authoritarianism. In short, Western critical exegesis—whether historical-critical, structural, or literary-critical—must give equal weight to other exegetical approaches.

A courageous book, indeed, and one in which Patte has solved to his own satisfaction a dilemma that all professional interpreters of the Bible face today. But certain problems come with his solution. One is, how does one falsify a bad interpretation in each of these methods? Are critical evaluative principles universal in evaluating exegetical results or particular to each

of these variant approaches? A second problem is that in some sense meaning arises out of interaction between text and reader; but may an interpreter (or a translator, for that matter) assume such primacy over a text as to negate, change, or deny the existence of something in the text? All this is to say that Patte raises important questions, provides the answers to which he has come, but he does not completely persuade this reader. It is a book over which to ponder and arrive at one's own solutions—whether one is pastor or professor or committed reader of the biblical text.

Edgar Krentz

Premarital Guidance. By Charles W. Taylor. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999. vii and 115 pages. Paper. $16.00.

In an age of divorce, how can we help couples experience the blessings of marriage? Charles W. Taylor answers, "By directive, premarital guidance (as opposed to premarital counseling)." In his book he lays before the pastor a very thorough road map. "Unlike some other methods of premarital counseling, premarital guidance affirms pastors' multiple roles as preacher and teacher, worship leader, evangelist, administrator, spiritual guide and facilitator of ministries" (rather than problem solver and counselor, p. 99).

Taylor's pedagogy is most helpful in chapter 2. For those who have never assisted a couple in marriage preparation, this chapter—through its appendixes, notes and references—is most helpful. Chapter 2 focuses on meeting the couple and establishing a contract with them for the next six to eight sessions. Every session is spelled out in dogmatic thoroughness. With the practicality of verbatims, he applies his craft to every step of the journey. The reader will not forget the importance of "blessing, leaving and cleaving" (chapter 4) or his use of what he calls "elicitive teaching" in chapters 5 and 6.

There were times in my reading when I felt that the only use of this text would be in a classroom. However, Taylor's insights can be useful also outside the classroom. For Lutheran clergy, his language might seem somewhat foreign. But the theological and practical insights which he places before the reader are sheer delight (for example, the need for every congregation to have a Wedding Policy. His concrete outline on pp. 90–91 is most helpful).

The goal of the editor, I believe, is achieved by Taylor: "that *Premarital Guidance* will challenge you, the reader, to look more closely at the task of marital preparation, and that your ministry will enhance the life journey of each newly joined couple in your congregation."

George H. Bauman
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Dubuque, Iowa

Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments. Edited by Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids. Downers Grove, IL, and Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1998. xxx and 1289 pages. Cloth. $39.99.

The more than 230 articles cover all the New Testament books outside of the Gospels and the Pauline Letters and the literature and life of the church down to about 150 C.E. (Thus the early apologists are excluded.) In addition to articles on biblical books and the Apostolic Fathers there are articles on major figures (Abraham, James, Moses, etc.), places (e.g. Samaria), theological motifs and movements (Gnosticism, mortality and immortality, house, spiritual house, church), literary topics (hymns, Jesus tradition, liturgical elements), and social issues (hospitality, slave, slavery, household, family).

All articles focus on the period from 70 to 150 C.E. and the literature written in that period. Each article is signed; the 120 authors, who come from a variety of Christian traditions, are informed, theologically and historically conservative, but not obscurantist evangelical scholars. Thus James Dunn in the article "Pauline Legacy and School" treats Colossians, Ephesians, the Pastorals, Hebrews, 1 Peter, James, Mark, Acts, 1 Clement, and Ignatius as continuators of Pauline theology. The articles have extensive bibliographies that draw primarily on English language scholarship. (I did miss an article on the Lord's Prayer in this period.)

This volume completes a trilogy of valuable reference works on the New Testament.

1992 saw the appearance of the *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels,* and 1993 that of the *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* from the same publishers. The publishers state that "Readers will enjoy a deeper and expanded understanding of how orthodox Christianity continued and developed in the years just following the New Testament era" (dust jacket text). It is a just evaluation of the work, a valuable resource for the period.

Edgar Krentz

Briefly Noted

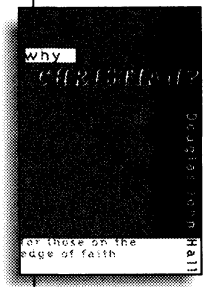
InterVarsity Press has reprinted three helpful books on the Gospels, originally published by Paternoster Press in England: **Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher,** by R. T. France ($22.99), **Luke: Historian and Theologian,** by I. Howard Marshall ($19.99), and **John: Evangelist and Interpreter,** by Stephen S. Smalley ($19.99). The first two are unaltered reprints, while Smalley revised his John volume to take account of the recent reassessment of the relation of the Johannine tradition to that of the other evangelists and to present the recent literary approaches to the Fourth Gospel. Each volume evaluates modern scholarly literature while giving a coherent account of the Gospel's theology. They are useful works to consult when preaching on the lectionary texts of the three-year cycle: trustworthy guides, edifying insights, and preachable theology. *Edgar Krentz*

New Testament scholars are more and more using archaeological data in interpretation. Since relatively few have been active field archaeologists, they should welcome William H. C. Frend's magisterial **The Archaeology of Early Christianity: A History** (Fortress, $39). Its 412 pages, closely printed and extensively documented with illustrations, maps, footnotes, and bibliography trace from the Renaissance to 1990. It is not an easy read, but a rewarding one. Frend traverses the entire Mediterranean world, shows how methods developed, notes the major sites, and clarifies the nature of archaeological research. The major drawback is its almost total lack of plans of major sites—and few will have available the library resources to track them down in journals and excavation reports. But the work fills a large hole in the literature. Historians of the early church must pay attention to it, while armchair archaeologists will enjoy it. *EK*

Daniel J. Harrington's **How to Read the Gospels: Answers to Common Questions** (New City Press, $6.95) is a sensitive "beginners' study guide." It includes brief discussions of the historical Jesus, each Gospel, issues in interpretation, guides for individual or community use, and a helpful bibliography for further reading. Informed, informative, edifying, and clear. It is a good addition to a parish education program and parish library. *EK*

Jacob Jervell's **The Theology of the Acts of the Apostles** is part of the New Testament Theology series (Cambridge, cloth, $34.95; paper, $12.95). He argues that Luke, Paul's companion, wrote Acts to prevent Christian Jews from relapsing into Judaism—though he notes other interpretations of Luke's purpose and audience in his opening chapter. Jervell interprets all Lukan theological motifs from this starting point—God and his people, Jesus as Messiah, the "church as Israel in the final act of its history" as people of the Spirit, the law and the Scriptures, the "twelve" as the future regents of Israel, Paul as teacher of Israel, salvation, life in the Roman Empire, and eschatology. In this he repeats and extends what he said earlier in his *Luke and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1972). Three brief chapters on Acts' unique voice in the New Testament, its value in reconstructing early Christian history, and its significance today conclude the book. A good functional bibliography is included. Jervell argues his case consistently in a manner to unify Luke's theology. While I do not find his central conviction persuasive, his book is gracefully presented and worth the read. *EK*

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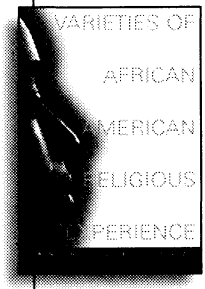
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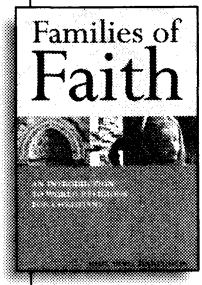


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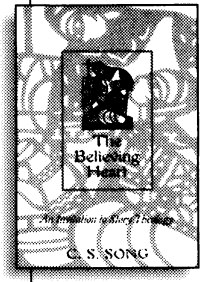
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Louis H. Feldman and Meyer Reinhold give classroom teachers and other interested readers a highly useful anthology of ancient texts in translation in **Jewish Life and Thought among Greeks and Romans: Primary Readings** (Fortress, $48). The ten sections contain 611 passages in translation. This rich repast cites early Greek writers who mention Jews, describe Jews in Hellenistic Egypt and elsewhere in the diaspora, give favorable views of Jews by governments and intellectuals, describe gentile conversions to Judaism, quote Gentile sympathizers ("God-fearers"), describe the life of Palestinian Jews, detail Jewish revolts against Rome, and cite texts critical of or hostile toward Jews. The editors draw on Greek and Latin literature, inscriptions, legal texts, coinage, papyri, the NT, Jewish texts (Dead Sea Scrolls, Apocrypha, the rabbinical corpus). They give helpful aid to the reader: maps, descriptions of the sources, extensive bibliography, introductions to each section and to the individual texts, a glossary of recurring unusual or technical terms, and suggestions of topics for further study. An extensive index helps the reader to find material on specific topics. But the collection is so fascinating, the introductions so useful, that many will find this a text that invites extensive reading. A good book on a significant topic, clear to the neophyte, rich enough to attract the knowledgeable reader. *EK*

Social-Science Commentary on the Gospel of John by Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh (Fortress, $19) follows the pattern of their *Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels* (Fortress, 1989). They provide commentary on the Gospel, section by section, calling attention to aspects of Palestinian life, social structure, and culture (a pre-industrial peasant society) that differ markedly from our own, indicating how they affect the understanding of the text. They give insight into ancient views of honor and shame, sin and sickness, the social status of the shepherd, etc. They also call attention to recurrent motifs in the Gospel and to significant Old Testament passages that influence Johannine thought. The two volumes together offer a rich repast and deserve constant consultation by everyone who preaches on the lectionary. Written in clear English and provided with useful illustrations, it is a valuable resource that will enrich every reader's understanding. I recommend it highly. *EK*

The paperback reprint of John Binns' *Ascetics and Ambassadors of Christ* (Oxford University Press, $30) is a welcome interpretation of early Palestinian monasticism. Binns discusses the literary sources (especially Cyril of Scythopolis (Beth Shean), the culture of Syrian monasticism, the rebirth of Jerusalem as a Christian city (strongly influenced by a series of wealthy women), the desert monasteries and life in them in great detail, and the significant city Scythopolis. In the last three chapters he treats themes that characterize Palestinian monasticism: origins (related to Egypt—Euthemius, Sabas), leadership (titles include lawgiver, patron, archimandrite, ambassador!), development of their Chalcedonian commitment, followers of Origen's theology, the role of the miraculous (nature miracles, clairvoyance, healings), and their self-understanding as "friends of God," expressed in *parresia* and prayer. Eastern monasticism, differing in many ways from Latin, seems strange to us. Binns' work will aid anyone to a growing appreciation. Supplement it with Joseph Patrich, *Sabas, Leader of Palestinian Monasticism* (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 1995) and you will be introduced well to the fascinating world of Eastern Monasticism. *EK*

Richard S. Ascough, in **What Are They Saying About the Formation of Pauline Churches?** (Paulist Press, $9.95), offers a clear, trustworthy guide through the forest of modern proposals of Greco-Roman models for understanding Paul's churches. An introduction surveys the field in general and evaluates the (extended) family as model. Then he devotes a chapter each to four options: the synagogue, the philosophical school, mystery religions, and voluntary associations. Each exhibits a possible pattern of organization and community life for churches in the Mediterranean world. Ascough finds that the Pauline church owes something to each model, but no one model accounts fully for the social or religious aspect of the Pauline church. *EK*

Preaching Helps

Ash Wednesday—Good Friday
Series A

A Season of Non-Market Values

John Rollefson previously contributed materials for the opening of the Pentecost Season in the April 1998 issue. In the present issue he brings the Pentecostal Spirit to the texts of the Lenten Season for the year 2000. Along the way he quotes Cornel West who, speaking at Ann Arbor, said we need to plant "centers of non-market values" in the midst of our educational institutions and then nurture them so that they flourish as "fiduciary communities." John explores those images in his work on the texts for the Third Sunday in Lent. I think those two phrases of Cornel West could well serve as intriguing paraphrases of what Mark's Gospel as a whole is all about.

When Peter rebuked Jesus (!) for talking about going to the cross (Mark 8:32), Jesus returned the compliment by rebuking Peter, calling him "Satan," and saying that Peter's mind was set not on the things of God but only on ordinary human things (8:33). Later that same set of choices reappears. The Jerusalem authorities ask Jesus for his credentials: "By what authority are you doing these things?" That's asking, "By what right are you speaking and acting as you do?" Jesus answers their question with a question: "Was the baptism of John from heaven, or was it merely earthy?" (11:27–33).

Jesus was not acting like the Messiah that Peter and the others desired. James and John wanted to be members of Jesus' cabinet of advisors, high public officials, when Jesus finally established his empire. "We want to sit on your right hand and your left hand in your glory kingdom," they said (10:37). Like Peter's imagination, their heads were jam-packed with ordinary "market values." But Jesus' heart was set on "non-market values," and he tried to fashion his ragtag band of disciples into a "center of non-market values." James and John, however, could not imagine that God's glorious rule would be inaugurated at the cross, where two criminals would "sit," one on Jesus' left and the other at Jesus' right hand. Nothing is more radically opposed to market values than the cross of

Jesus Christ. No season is less compatible with market values than Lent. And even more than the other Gospels, Mark's teaching is antithetical to market values.

From childhood most of us, it seems, are taught to think of God in terms of market values: God is the biggest, the strongest, the richest, the best. I can still remember how I enjoyed learning big words about God in confirmation class: God is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent. God is omni-this and omni-that, mega-this and mega-that. Luther on the other hand never tired of recalling how God became small and vulnerable for us human beings and for our salvation. God in the manger, God on the cross. No market values there. Only God at work crossing up our values and expectations.

Mark's Gospel begins and ends in ways that are perfectly compatible with Mark's program, but the settings seem odd and astonishing. Years ago Ernst Lohmeyer (1936) and R. H. Lightfoot (1938), followed by Willi Marxsen (1969), pondered the geography of Mark's Gospel and made us think a second and a third time about the meaning of "Galilee" (in the beginning of Mark), "Jerusalem" (at the end), and "the Way" (which connects the beginning and the end). Somewhat more recently Elizabeth Struthers Malbon has applied insights of literary criticism and anthropology to a long list of locales of action in Mark. In her book, *Narrative Space and Mythic Meaning in Mark*, Malbon examines Mark's use of topographical or natural space (heaven and earth, mountains, the shore and the sea, the desert and inhabited places, and the way), geopolitical space (the Jewish homeland and foreign lands, Galilee and Judea, places near and within Jerusalem), and architectural space (synagogue and temple, house and palace, buildings and tombs).

Along the way she throws some fresh light on the beginning and end of Mark. Mark begins in the wilderness and ends in a tomb. These are not very promising places. What will bloom in the desert? Who would look for new life in a tomb? Good readers have always paid close attention to the settings of narratives as well as to the characters and their actions in a story. And good writers have always lavished special care on beginnings and endings. Is it a mere accident that Mark begins and ends as it does and where it does? Seems unlikely. The whole narrative of Mark is unlikely and full of wonder, awesome and uncanny, provocative and unsettling. God takes what is frightening or despised—wilderness or tomb for example—and bends them to spiritual and loving use. God and Jesus in Mark's Gospel seem to delight in valuing what human beings do not value. Small in the world? Great in the eyes of God!

By starting with John and his message in the wilderness and ending with that strange "young man" and his message in the tomb, Mark tips us off that his is no

ordinary "success story." (No market values here, thank you!) Then the first words out of Jesus' mouth in Mark's Gospel may be paraphrased as follows: "The old time of emptiness and waiting is over and done: the kairos has arrived, and God's own government of the world is now dawning. Shuck off your old identities, your old values, your old selves. Grasp God's good news and hang on" (Mark 1:15).

John Rollefson cheerfully accepted the invitation to ponder aloud the texts of Lent, and I am grateful to him for his willing spirit. Having pastored congregations in Milwaukee and San Francisco, John for the last eleven years has been pastor of Lord of Light Lutheran Church at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. Not content with being a graduate of Luther College and Yale Divinity School, John earned an M.A. from the University of London and then a second M.A. from the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California. Today he is in the second year of the Center of Theological Inquiry's "Pastor as Theologian" program, and he says that program is keeping him out of trouble with lots of extra reading and some writing (in addition to writing the studies printed here). He has the pleasure of supervising a seminary intern again this year, as he has done for almost all his 25 years of ministry.

Thanks to John, and blessed preaching and teaching to all of you who have committed yourselves to the task of planting the cross in the midst of women and men who desire to live by transcendent values in communities of faith.

Yours,

Robert H. Smith
Editor of Preaching Helps
Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary
2770 Marin Avenue
Berkeley, California 94708

Ash Wednesday
March 8, 2000

Psalm 51:1–17
Joel 2:1–2, 12–17 *or* Isaiah 58:1–12
2 Corinthians 5:20b–6:10
Matthew 6:1–6, 16–21

"Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love.... Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me." (Ps 51:1a, 10)

First Reading

Ash Wednesday marks the church's stepping off onto its forty-day trek into the wilderness of our present-day world as God's time of preparing us for the paschal mysteries of Holy Week and Easter that are our destination and destiny. It's a kind of "boot camp" experience that is not a regimen of spiritual self-improvement but God's way of trying and testing and disciplining us for the kind of discipleship to which we're called in the real world of our everyday lives. Throughout our trek to the cross we'll be reminded of God's promises (covenants) that called us into being in the first place, promises to which God has remained faithful through history even and especially in the face of our chronic infidelity. During Lent we will find ourselves to be a storied people, a people graced by God's unrelenting promises that permeate Scripture's story of how the Word of God-in-Israel finds its denouement in the Good News of Jesus Christ, the Word incarnate in a particular first-century Galilean Jew.

There is an abundance of riches in the appointed texts for the day including two options for the reading from Hebrew Scripture. The cultic prophet Joel sounds an apposite apocalyptic note as he warns of the impending day of the Lord. "Blow the trumpet in Zion," is his liturgical rubric calling the people to repentance: "Return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning, rend[ing] your hearts and not your clothing (Joel 2:12–13a). "Return" is for the prophets covenantal language, reminding the people of their promise-making "God who is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing" (v. 13b).

Hesed, steadfast love, is the bottom line of the covenant as it is the fundamental attitude of God toward Israel and indeed all of humanity. The New Testament will struggle to adequately comprehend this Hebrew attribute of God in Greek as *charis* or "grace" (see Scott Hoezee, *The Riddle of Grace* [Grand Rapids, 1996], 15–21).

The Isaiah passage, dating probably from the time of return from Babylonian exile, is also concerned with cultic restoration and begins with a liturgical-sounding rubric: "Shout out, do not hold back! Lift up your voice like a trumpet! (Isa 58:1). And yet a less apocalyptic and more plaintive note is sounded characteristic of the closing chapters of Isaiah (see especially Isa 65:1–7) in which Israel's seeming religiosity serves only as a superficial smokescreen to conceal her lack of fidelity to the covenant: "Day after day they seek me and delight to know my ways, as if they were a nation that practiced righteousness and did not forsake the ordinance of their God; they ask of me righteous judgments, they delight to draw near to God" (v. 2).

Cultic fasting, the prophet concludes, is only a self-serving cover for unethical behavior, a public religious posturing cynically employed to mask our selfish interests: "Look, you serve your own interest on your fast day, and oppress all your workers" (v. 3b). In words that continue to sound the tocsin of return to covenantal righteousness

and cultic purity that produce socially just behaviors, the prophet concludes: "Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?" (v. 6)

The Gospel reading, drawn from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, omits most of Jesus' teaching on prayer, including the Lord's Prayer, in order to focus attention on what Jesus calls "practicing your piety before others to be seen by them." "Hypocritical" (literally, "playacting") religion is the object of Jesus' scorn throughout this section, pious playacting that is focused on an outcome of "wages" or as translated in the NRSV "reward." A remarkable seven times the word "reward" appears in this passage, amply revealing that a market economy approach to religion is no merely contemporary American invention. Indeed, Jesus assures his hearers (three times) that "the Father who sees in secret will reward you," but Jesus' clear implication is that this is "reward" of quite a different kind.

The passage concludes with Jesus' pithy parabolic saying in which he exchanges his repeated image of "reward" for another shockingly down-to-earth image of "treasure" (*thesaurus* in Greek) which he repeats three times in three short verses. "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth," he advises, "but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven." He ends with this epigrammatic punch line that never fails to prick the balloon of our would-be non-materialistic, "spiritualized" piety: "For where your treasure is there your heart will be also" (Matt 6:21). We pious folks always assume it has to be the other way around: "Where your heart is there will be your treasure also." But for Jesus, the incarnate Word of God, our true piety can never be disembodied. Like Isaiah and Joel, covenantal religion that clings to the promises of God must be at bottom visible to be real, must be embodied to be true, must be behavioral to be authentically spiritual.

Pastoral Reflections

Ash Wednesday is a day that on its surface seems riddled with obvious, almost humorous, contradictions. We gather to hear Jesus tell us, "When you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting." What do we do but gather to publicly begin the season of Lent by streaming forward to receive the ashen smudge of the cross upon our foreheads and then proudly bear it out into public? What's more, we hear intoned over us the droning promise not of the Good News of God's covenant fulfilled in Jesus Christ but the sobering reminder of our mortality: "Remember you are dust and to dust you shall return." No wonder one of my well-meaning ecumenical colleagues a few years back wanted to alter the words to include, "Repent and believe the gospel"—intending, I suppose, to inject some light and life (and maybe a bit of moral activism) into the unrelieved grimness of the traditional words from Genesis.

And yet the irony of the occasion serves well to remind us not only of our mortality but of what alone is able to relieve our angst in the face of death: the death—and resurrection—of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We've come to observe Ash Wednesday in our campus-based congregation by joining our partner congregations in an ecumenical Service of Holy Communion and the Imposition of Ashes that helps remind us all that it is the church, one, holy, catholic, and apostolic, that enters upon these forty days in which our piety is disciplined and readied for the paschal mysteries. Our texts help prepare us to take ourselves and our pieties less seriously in order to become more attentive to God's promises and the

Spirit's movement within and among us bringing us to repentance and renewal as God's pilgrim people. We've become accustomed to gathering as an ecumenical community in a liturgy that calls us from our different traditions to the simple cadences of the music of Taize and its carefully chosen texts (many in Latin) that recall us to the catholicity of Lent. At the same time the service speaks with evangelical boldness to our calling to an ever reforming and renewing piety that is deeply rooted in community and gives promise of fruits far more plentiful than the individualized spiritualities of our day—or any day.

Rather than choosing between the two rich Hebrew Scripture texts, my preference is to use both, perhaps employing a trumpet (or *shofar*), using the Joel passage as a call to worship and Isaiah as a closing reminder of the peculiar "fast" to which Christians are called during Lent. Alternatively, the words of our second lesson from 2 Corinthians serve well as a liturgical reminder of God's call to return to the covenant. Paul's way of putting it is: "We entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God." We could do worse than leave the sanctuary with Paul's echo of Isaiah's call to salvation and the ever present "now" of God's promise dinning in our ears: "For God says, 'At an acceptable time I have listened to you, and on a day of salvation I have helped you.' See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation!" (2 Cor 6:2)

First Sunday in Lent
March 12, 2000

Psalm 25:1–10
Genesis 9:8–17
1 Peter 3:18–22
Mark 1:9–15

"Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in the way . . . all the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and decrees." (Ps 25:8, 10)

First Reading

"The way" or "the paths of the LORD" referred to by the psalmist are the promises of God to which the psalmist also refers as God's "covenant" and "decrees." Promise issues in response and creates response-ability on the part of the people of the covenant, even, as we see in today's reading from Genesis, before the covenant has taken the form of Torah and the decrees handed down to Moses at Sinai.

Seven times the word "covenant" (*berit* in Hebrew) is found in this passage from Genesis, a word first introduced in 6:18 where God, after instructing Noah to build an ark, declares: "I will establish my covenant with you. . . ." As the Lutheran Old Testament scholar (and long time mentor to our campus ministry here in Ann Arbor) Professor George Mendenhall pointed out forty-five years ago in his influential *Law and Covenant in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (Pittsburgh, 1955), Hebrew Scripture's understanding of covenant needs to be seen in the context of the political treaties made between leaders of unequal power in the ancient Near East. Mendenhall's concise definition of covenant is: "a solemn promise made binding by an oath, which may either be a verbal formula or a symbolic action."

He goes on: "Such an action or formula is recognized by both parties as the formal act which binds the actor to his promise" ("Covenant" in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1962], 714). See also, however, Samuel Terrien's insistence that covenant be seen in its rich allusiveness to marriage which is widely attested in Hebrew Scripture (*Till The Heart Sings: A Biblical Theology of Manhood and Womanhood* [Philadelphia, 1985], 52 ff.). Promise lies, therefore, at the heart of the idea of covenant in Scripture, and God is always the initiator and the giver-of-one's-word in the successive covenants we'll encounter in our readings throughout this Lenten season. The important point here at the outset is that we recognize that Israel's God is an inveterate promise-maker and promise-keeper in the face of Israel's acts of infidelity and failure to trust God's promises.

In the wake of the flood through which God destroyed all of life because of the Earth's corruption and violence, except for Noah and those of his family sheltered in the ark from whom a fresh start was to be made, God says to Noah: "As for me, I am establishing with you and your descendents after you, and with every living creature that is with you. . . . I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood" (Gen 9:9–11). As we will again encounter in the story of Israel's wilderness wanderings in Lent 4, so here God raises up a sign of the divine covenant, transforming a symbol of fear and violence (the bow, as in bow and arrow) into the promise of salvation and security.

Today's second reading is a peculiar passage excerpted from 1 Peter which includes the perplexing reference to Christ "who went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison." Its inclusion is due to the ensuing reference to the "days of Noah," "the building of the ark" and the "eight persons saved through water." I guess I'd never bothered to count, but the reference is a useful one that recalls the days of "typological" exegesis, for the author goes on to draw a New Testament analogy to "baptism, which this prefigured [which] now saves you— . . . through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. . . ." For Lutherans this will stir a recollection of Luther's "flood prayer" in the baptismal liturgy: "By the waters of the flood you condemned the wicked and saved those whom you had chosen, Noah and his family" (*LBW*, p. 122). This issues in the irresistible invitation to connect with the covenantal character of baptism which is the form that God's promise takes in the lives of Christians. Noah's covenant is our covenant in Christ through baptism.

The reading from the opening chapter of Mark's Gospel which, remember, begins with Jesus' baptism in the Jordan by John, describes in the plainest terms of any of the Synoptics Jesus' forty-day sojourn in the wilderness into which the Spirit is described as having "driven" Jesus. This compelling language offers the opportunity to reflect on God's own role in Jesus' temptation and the role of trial and testing throughout God's covenantal history with Israel—and in our lives today. If you're up to it, take a look at Genesis 22 and the horrible story of the sacrifice of Isaac in light of God's intention to put Abraham to the "test." (See Jon Levenson's masterly *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993] and R. W. L. Moberly's forthcoming book). Job is another famous case study in God's testing the faithful. Don't miss the opportunity to connect this story of Jesus' 40 days in the wilderness to Israel's 40 year wandering and the church's 40 days of Lent. I'm not much for numerology in itself, but such resonances invite the use of Scrip-

ture to interpret Scripture. Scholars today like to call this "intertextuality," and we'll encounter much more of it as we approach Jesus' passion story.

Pastoral Reflections

While I am no great fan of "thematic" preaching as it often is a temptation to deviate from the churchly discipline of the lectionary, our appointed Hebrew Scriptures for Lent this year present the opportunity for a series of sermons in which "covenant" reappears as a connecting thread of Israel's story both explicitly and implicitly. Next week we will move on to the Abrahamic covenant, next the Mosaic, then the wilderness wanderings of Israel, and then Jeremiah's declaration of the "new" covenant, all culminating in the passion story itself which includes, of course, Jesus' invocation of the "blood of the covenant which is poured out for many" during the last Passover meal he shares with his disciples on the night of his betrayal (Mark 14:24).

Resources on covenant are, of course, numerous, but for starters look at Robert Davidson's *The Old Testament* (London, 1964), 40 ff., and Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1997), 164 ff. As we grow into full communion with our Reformed and Presbyterian partners, we have opportunity to benefit from their history of covenantal or what they sometimes have called "federal" theology. See Charles S. McCoy, *When Gods Change* (Nashville, 1980), 169ff. for a brief introduction. In Lutheran circles Robert Jenson's *Story and Promise* (Ramsey, NJ, 1989; Philadelphia, 1973) still stands for me as a convincing and accessible articulation of covenant as promise as the central understanding of the Bible's promise-making God. One would do well to make Jenson's little book the subject of a Lenten adult class. Alternatively, Daniel Erlander's *Manna and Mercy* (Mercer Island, WA, 1992) is a lively and popular resource aptly, if not briefly, subtitled "A Brief History of God's Unfolding Promise to Mend the Entire Universe." Illustrated with engaging graphics of his own invention, Erlander's book is useful for confirmation or Lenten catechumenate classes.

Today's Gospel story of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness is an occasion to probe pastorally the sensitive arena of God's "testing" experienced in the crucible of life. The genius of Erlander's *Manna and Mercy* is his thematic use of Israel's forty-year desert wandering as "wilderness school," a kind of boot camp intended by God to prepare Israel for the promised land, a disciplining that is focused on God's forming and shaping a people around the gift of covenant and the responsibilities created by its promises. For some time now reflection on "practices" has become a focus of concern among Christian ethicists, but in a book like *Practicing Our Faith*, edited by Dorothy Bass (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997), the conversation has moved out into study circles throughout the church among people interested in moving beyond support-group and therapeutic self-help mentalities to grappling with how to incorporate Christian practices and disciplines into everyday life both individually and communally.

Second Sunday in Lent
March 19, 2000

Psalm 22:23–31
Genesis 17:1-7, 15–16
Romans 4:13–25
Mark 8:31–38

"Posterity will serve [God]; future generations will be told about the Lord, and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn." (Ps 22:30–31a)

First Reading

Thus concludes the "righteous sufferer" psalm that we'll hear chanted in its entirety at the conclusion of the Maundy Thursday liturgy during the stripping of the altar and which we'll hear again on Good Friday. Mark's passion story (like Matthew's) will itself find its climax in Jesus' cry, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" which are the very opening words of this psalm of lament. Here, the conclusion of the psalm reminds us that even the faithful's experience of God-abandonment is comprehended within the covenant's assurance of God's steadfast and long-suffering love.

Today's reading from Genesis is one of several accounts of God's deepening and successive promises made to Abram (the first is in Genesis 12:1–3, but see also 15:1–6 and 22:15–18) who is here also given a new name, Abraham. The meaning of the name Abram ("exalted ancestor") now becomes Abraham ("ancestor of a multitude") in keeping with the references to "multitude" in this giving of the covenant. The word "covenant" appears four times in this abridged passage, which omits reference to circumcision—the sign God makes Abraham and his male descendents to bear as a token of the covenant.

The reading from Romans contains Paul's extended commentary on Abraham as the exemplary one who by faith in God's promise was made righteous apart from the law. The law was given only subsequent to Moses, and circumcision, as we've just heard from the abridged part of our reading, was instituted only subsequent to the promise made to Abraham in Genesis 15 (and reiterated in today's reading from the Priestly account in chapter 17). For Paul, as we see in vv. 20–23, the key verse is Gen 15:6, "And he (Abram) believed the LORD; and the LORD reckoned it to him as righteousness." Clinging in trust to God's promises, of course, would become for Martin Luther the definition of faith in light of the new covenant of grace revealed in Jesus Christ.

Today's Mark text narrates Jesus' passion prediction, which he couches in third-person "Son of Man" language, his preferred way of referring to himself in Mark. Jesus' prophecy is denied by Peter, who rebukes Jesus and is in turn rebuked by Jesus in the harsh words, "Get behind me Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

Then follow Jesus' words regarding the cost of discipleship: "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me"—words that Dietrich Bonhoeffer tersely paraphrased as "When Christ calls a person, he calls him to come and die" (*The Cost of Discipleship* [New York: Simon and Schuster, 1949], 99). This issues in what I often think of as the theme song of Jesus' ministry, so often do we hear it from his lips: "For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake and the sake of the gospel will save it."

Pastoral Reflections

The *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* approved by both official Roman Catholic and Lutheran authorities on the highest international level is a momentous statement, and in some places (like Germany) a controversial one. It articulates a substantial consensus regarding the central doctrinal issue that has divided our communions for nearly half a millennium. Lent might be an appropriate time to find a way for small groups of folks from local Lutheran and Catholic parishes to meet together for prayer and Bible study, perhaps in a midweek Lenten devotional and fellowship setting, as an expression of the "covenants" that many of our ELCA synods now share with their Roman Catholic diocesan counterparts around the U.S. A useful pedagogical tool I've sometimes used in cracking open the doctrine of justification is to invite a close reading of two short stories by Russian authors, Anton Chekhov's "The Beggar" and Leo Tolstoy's "The Death of Ivan Illych." These stories nicely illustrate quite different emphases comprehended within the doctrine of justification, which we tend to label "Catholic" and "Lutheran." You figure out which is which!

Paul's phrase in v. 18 of Romans 4 describing Abram's faith as a matter of "hoping against hope" has long captured my fancy as a memorable way of describing the Christian understanding of trust that clings tightly to God's promises in the most difficult of circumstances. "Hopefully" has become one of the most commonly abused words in idiomatic American English, a word, I often think, that becomes an adverbial happy face that helps mask our constitutional lack of commitment. Paul's "hope against hope," what I sometimes translate as "hope beyond hope" or "hope beyond all hopefullys," is the opposite of that brand of wishful thinking that Feuerbach and Freud long ago unmasked as religious illusion. "Hope against hope" is that God-given *fiducia* by which God wins our trust and we in turn entrust ourselves to God's care and keeping. (For a wonderful illustration of this process of God's winning our trust see Donald Baillie's *Theology of the Sacraments* [New York, 1957], 53–54).

This is the faith, trust in his Abba God, that Jesus so clearly embodied, that issues in his call to discipleship as salvation by "letting go," by losing one's life for Jesus' sake and the sake of the Good News. This, of course, runs counter to most religion being marketed today with its appeals to self-fulfillment, to success, and to auto-salvation. "What will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life?" Jesus asks, an irony of translation that speaks directly to our contemporary fixation with the bottom line and its market values. Flannery O'Connor once put it well, paraphrasing Jesus in John's Gospel, when she quipped: "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you odd." Lent might well be the time when the church needs to celebrate and fine-tune its oddity vis à vis the world.

Third Sunday in Lent
March 26, 2000

Psalm 19
Exodus 20:1–17
1 Corinthians 1:18–25
John 2:13–22

"The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the decrees of the LORD are sure, making wise the simple. . . . More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey, and the drippings of the honeycomb." (Ps 19:7, 10)

First Reading

The church's Lenten trek through the history of our Hebrew forbears in the faith now arrives at Sinai where we hear the Exodus account of Yahweh's giving of the law through Moses. The Mosaic covenant, so called, becomes the heart of Torah, or Israel's religious constitution as God's people. The exclusivity of God's claim on Israel, "you shall have no other gods before me," is clearly rooted in God's prevenient liberating act on behalf of Israel: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." And so God's covenant is rooted in God's self-revelation as a "jealous" God who is at the same time a God of "steadfast love." Then follow the Ten Commandments.

The second lesson consists of Paul's paean to the "foolishness of the cross," a kind of countercultural wisdom song. Nine times the Greek word for wisdom, *sophia*, is invoked in these seven verses, words written to a small Greek-speaking congregation located in a commercial and cultural crossroads where the love of wisdom (*philosophia*) could be expected to be almost as great a passion as the love of money. But wisdom was not only a Hellenistic theme that Paul turned to his own uses to create a hearing for the gospel. It was also an authentic strain within Hebrew Scripture as found in such writings as Job, Ecclesiastes, and Proverbs, and which Jesus himself would allude to in his life and ministry and which he, as a spinner of parables and pithy sayings, himself embodied in his own teaching style. Yet here Paul clearly intends to portray the gospel as a kind of "anti-wisdom," as a counterintuitive Good News of "Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Greeks."

Those who created our lectionary decided that we should hear St. John's account of Jesus' so-called "cleansing of the temple," which occurs near the beginning of the Gospel, rather than St. Mark's (11:15–19). This gives us opportunity to hear the Johannine Jesus' cryptic prediction of his resurrection, which is couched in terms of the temple, which would be destroyed and raised up "in three days." "Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" (*emporium* in Greek) is Jesus' stated objection.

Pastoral Reflections

Some time ago at our campus' annual M. L. King, Jr., Day, Cornel West in his keynote address called for what he termed "centers of non-market values" and "fiduciary communities" to be nurtured within or at least on the fringes of our secular institutions of higher education. We in campus ministry see this as a way of describing our reason for being, and the church generally can rally to West's call as a way of disciplining our own self-understanding in an age that seems both market-driven and market-obsessed. Especially the contemporary church with its well-meaning commitment to outreach and growth is susceptible to adopting marketing strategies and consumer-oriented tactics that are inspired by the conventional "wisdom" of the market economy. When churches reportedly es-

chew displaying the cross as a central symbol of our Christian identity, Paul's recall of the church to a theology of the cross seems right on target. (See Gerhard Forde's *On Being a Theologian of the Cross* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998] and Douglas John Hall's *Lighten Our Darkness* [Philadelphia, 1976] for explications of Luther's concern to distinguish between a culturally appealing theology of glory and an authentically evangelical theology of the cross). "Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" is less a thunderbolt on church bake sales and bingo than it is an indictment of our contemporary consumer-driven cultus that claims the name "church."

All this, of course, could be told in light of Exodus 20, in which the Ten Commandments well up out of the exclusivity of God's covenant claim on this recently liberated clan of ex-slaves now enrolled in God's wilderness school, from which no one will graduate into the promised land for forty years. "You shall have no other gods before me," Luther taught us to realize, is not only the first but in a sense the only commandment, since the temptation to let our hearts cling to lesser gods is the mark of our fallen humanity, especially lesser gods with greater religious appeal as the ensuing story of the golden calf will prove (Exodus 32).

Recent political efforts to legislate the Ten Commandments and post them within our schools and courtrooms not only provide a case study in church-state relations in the U.S. but invite reflection on the civic use of the law, what Luther once called "the *Sachsenspiegel* of the Jews." The disciplining of our life as Christians within our broader civic responsibilities and mutual accountabilities as Americans is an appropriate concern for Lent that may prevent this season from becoming too inner-directed. The ELCA's recently adopted social statement on the economy, "Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All," would be a fitting text for our moral deliberation as a community of faith during Lent.

Fourth Sunday in Lent
April 2, 2000

Psalm 107:1–3, 17–22
Numbers 21:4–9
Ephesians 2:1–10
John 3:14–21

"Some were sick through their sinful ways, and because of their iniquities endured affliction; they loathed any kind of food, and they drew near to the gates of death. Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress; and delivered them from their destruction." (Ps 107:17–20)

First Reading

Here we find John 3:16, what Luther once called "the gospel in miniature," not only within its larger context in John's third chapter but also against the backdrop of the Hebrew Scripture story of an event within the time of the wilderness wanderings that John sees as prefiguring Jesus' being "lifted up" on the cross.

The story is a curious one introduced by yet another occasion of the Israelites grumbling about the primitive conditions of their wilderness sojourn and especially the "miserable food." The complex question they ask is akin to the proverbial "when did you stop beating your spouse?" "Why," they ask, "have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness?" Yahweh's no-nonsense answer is to send snakes—poisonous serpents—that bit the complaining people, which I suppose at least helped get their minds off the poor food. But also many who

were bitten died, which led the people to come to Moses pleading, "We have sinned by speaking against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD to take the serpents from us" (v. 7). So Moses prayed for the people, to which God responded with the curious command: "Make a poisonous serpent, and set it on a pole; and everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live." Moses did as he was told and, indeed, it was so, a kind of reversal of the golden calf episode: an image becomes the source of healing rather than the object of idolatry.

This story smacks of what some might call "sympathetic magic." But for John it provides a prefigurement of how the cross of Christ (think "crucifix" here with the dying Jesus still affixed) provides the miraculous antidote (salvation = healing in Greek) to humankind's persisting mortal disease called sin which has afflicted us since that first biblical snake story in Genesis 3. Just as God's healing/salvation is made available only through trusting God's word that the repellant snake on the pole is to be the instrument of healing (itself, of course, an emblem of the very thing that had bitten them) so also the form of the Crucified One (equally abhorrent as a reminder of both our human cruelty and our own mortality) becomes by God's promise the instrument of healing/salvation through faith.

Pastoral Reflections

Our passage from the (deutero)Pauline writer's letter to the influential church at Ephesus probes even more deeply into the workings of God's intention to save in language strikingly parallel to John 3:16: "But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which [God] loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ" (Eph 2:4–5a).

In case we didn't get it, the author adds for emphasis, "by grace you have been saved," and then, a verse later, goes on to reiterate, in words dear to Lutheran ears, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God" (v. 8). Even, in Johannine terms, our lifting our eyes of belief to the cross, even our clinging to the promises of God's word in Pauline terms, is not our doing but is the "gift of God"—"not the result of works, so that no one may boast."

This covenant of grace culminates in the affirmation: "For we are what [God] has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life" (v. 10). Good works, whether repentance, faith, or love of neighbor, are here to be understood not as our human contribution to or act of cooperation with our salvation but always and only as that "way of life," of responsive and responsible living, made possible by God's gracious initiative in making us heirs in Christ Jesus to all the covenant promises.

Fifth Sunday in Lent
April 9, 2000

Psalm 51:1–12 *or* Psalm 119:9–16
Jeremiah 31:31–34
Hebrews 5:5–10
John 12:20–33

"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me." (Ps 51:10)

First Reading

The psalmist's plea for a new heart is recast by the reluctant prophet Jeremiah into the forth-telling of a day when the covenant of old (described as God's marriage with unfaithful Israel) will give way to "a new covenant . . . not like the covenant I made with their ancestors." This covenant (the word is used four times), the LORD says, will be one in which Torah is put "within them" and will be "written on their hearts" rather than on tablets of stone as at Sinai. The promise at the heart of the covenant, however, remains unchanged: "I will be their God, and they shall be my people." God's declarative purpose will be accomplished!

Today's reading from John 12 depicts Jesus immediately following his triumphal entry into the city to the accompaniment of the hosannas of the crowd and the waving of palm branches. Here he is found prophesying his own death using the typically Johannine figurative language of his being "lifted up from the earth," an act which "will draw all people to myself." The earlier verses of this passage from John bear curious resemblance to the Synoptics. For example, Jesus' reverie, "Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—'Father, save me from this hour?' No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour," sounds remarkably similar to the synoptic account of Jesus' prayer to his Abba in the Garden of Gethsemane. Then too his remark, "Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit," echoes several of Jesus' synoptic parables that employ his favorite image of the seed. So too the punch line, "Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life" is very close to Jesus' characteristic synoptic refrain, "For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it" (Mark 8:35). For all of John's special theological spin on the Jesus story as we approach the extended passion narrative, a convergence with the synoptic passion accounts seems evident.

Pastoral Reflections

Our appointed texts invite reflection upon God's ever-deepening covenant relationship with Israel culminating in Jeremiah's prophecy of a new covenant. Christians can't help but "overhear" the prophet's word from God as a promise that will find its fulfillment in Jesus. According to the Hebrews passage, Jesus the "Son of God" is also to be understood as a kind of God-appointed eternal high priest. Unlike a priest who officiates "at the altar of sacrifice," however, in words that again are reminiscent of the synoptic account of Jesus in Gethsemane, Hebrews reminds us how "In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplication, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission" (Heb 5:7). In effect, Jesus the priest becomes the sacrificial offering (overtones of the sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22 are strong!) and thereby "he having been made perfect became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him."

Both John and Hebrews provide clues

as to how Jesus contemplated the end that he sensed lay ahead of him in Jerusalem. Hebrews goes so far as to claim that "he learned obedience through what he suffered" and thereby "having been made perfect"—or might we translate it "completed"?—he became the source of eternal salvation. . . ."

In the summer of 1999 I had the good fortune to see the off-Broadway production of the recent Pulitzer prize-winning play by Margaret Edson entitled *Wit*. The story is a simply told tale of the dying and death of Vivian Bearing, Ph.D. Dr. Bearing is a professor of seventeenth-century English poetry specializing in the Holy Sonnets of John Donne. An irascible and very-much-to-herself kind of person, Vivian's courageous but lonely struggle to beat back the cancer that threatens her life with a radical course of chemotherapy is punctuated with references to Donne's poetry and especially his "Tenth Sonnet" which begins with the memorable line, "Death be not proud" and ends "And death shall be no more; death thou shalt die."

Near the end of the play her sole visitor arrives just as Vivian is about to lapse into her final coma. She is an elderly lady who turns out to be Vivian's esteemed and tough former graduate school mentor, the one who had hooked her on Donne's poetry as her life's work. She asks Vivian: "Shall I recite to you? Would you like that? I'll recite something by Donne." To which Vivian moans, "Noooooooo," (and the audience giggles, having endured plenty of Donne quotes by now). And so the ancient professor reaches into her bag and pulls from it a children's book she is taking to her great-grandchild. Entitled *The Runaway Bunny*, the professor reads to her former student the simple but moving tale of a mother bunny's obstinate refusal to allow her baby bunny in all his willfulness to succeed in running away from home. "If you become a bird and fly away from me," says the mother bunny, "I will be a tree that you can come home to." "Shucks," says the little bunny, "I might just as well stay where I am and be your little bunny." And so he did. "Have a carrot," said the mother bunny, and so the simple tale ends. The children's story, better than any of Donne's metaphysical poems, is transparent to the good news that Vivian needs to hear of God's unrelenting grace and steadfast love that refuses to take "No" as our final answer.

Having finished the story, the ancient professor crawls down out of the hospital bed where she's been cradling her dying student in her arm, puts on her shoes, leans over and kisses Vivian, whispering, "It's time to go." And now finally quoting Donne, she leaves her parting blessing, "And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest." It's a mesmerizing moment on the precipice of death, not unlike Jesus' time in the Garden or during his presentiments of his rendezvous with destiny on the cross. Vivian's full-of-herself life is here at the end finally perfected—made complete and whole—on her deathbed, having learned obedience through her suffering. Connecting Jesus' impending passion and death with the little deaths we suffer and the final death we anticipate here in the midst of life is the Lenten journey. Don't quail from the opportunity to help your congregation to remember they too are dust and to dust they shall return.

Sunday of the Passion
Palm Sunday
April 16, 2000

Psalm 118:1–2, 19–29
or Psalm 31:9–16
Isaiah 50:4–9a
Philippians 2:5–11
Mark 11:1–11 (Processional Gospel)
Mark 14:1–15:47 (Passion of Our Lord according to St. Mark)

"The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes." (Ps 118:22–23)

First Reading

Today the church enters upon a week we call "holy." It is a week that, from today's perspective, does not culminate in Easter (the first day of next week) but in the sad silence of the stone-cold tomb in which Jesus' body was laid at the end of today's Gospel reading. I'm one who appreciates the dual nature of the juxtaposition of Palm and Passion Sunday in a combined liturgical setting. The reading of the Processional Gospel and the entrance rite into the sanctuary accompanied by palms and hosannas provide the church with the body language we need to actually experience an "entry" onto the events of Jesus' Passion that we will remember in a variety of liturgies throughout the week. The congregational reading of the entire Passion, which has become commonplace for many of us, I like to think of as our communal dress rehearsal for the parts we will play in the Passion story that becomes our script for the ensuing week. Accompanying that script on this day our habit has become that of using the haunting "My Song is Love Unknown" (*LBW* #94) sung to the lovely Welsh melody "Rhosymedre" (my grandfather, after all, was Hugh Griffith) as the hymn of the day, singing stanzas before and after the reading of the Passion and using stanza 7 as the closing, post-communion hymn:

Here might I stay and sing—
no story so divine!
Never was love, dear King,
never was grief like thine.
This is my friend, in whose sweet praise
I all my days could gladly spend!

You might encourage your organist to learn Vaughan Williams' lyrical "Prelude on Rhosymedre" for your offertory or postlude.

Pastoral Reflections

We preachers probably have long since learned to bite our tongues on Passion/Palm Sunday, preaching a highly abbreviated sermon on Philippians 2 or the Palm Sunday Gospel, e.g., that focuses attention on the mock heroic, ironic elements of Jesus' "triumphal" entry into Jerusalem and the church's entry upon Holy Week. The very length of the entire Passion reading dictates the necessity of a short sermon or what I've sometimes called simply "The Proclamation" to set it apart.

Last year, however, due to a study group of which I was a part that looked in depth at St. Matthew's Passion narrative, I had become aware of aspects of the story to which I wanted my congregation to pay special attention while hearing the story for themselves. The appointed passage from Isaiah 50, one of the so-called Suffering Servant songs, seemed to invite a special effort at hearing or listening for the Word: "The Lord has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word. Morning by morning the Lord God wakens—wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught. The Lord God has opened

my ear" (Isa 50:4–5a). With this Word as pretext I decided that instead of a short sermon preached in the usual place following the reading of the Passion Gospel I would briefly do a "Prelude" to the Passion reading. My intent was that of helping the folks of my congregation to listen for the Word within the story with ears specially attuned to notice some aspects of the story they might not otherwise recognize. (For example, the growing silence of Jesus as the story progresses climaxes in his cry of dereliction even as the strains of the Old Testament's Suffering Servant songs and righteous sufferer psalms, especially Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22, fill in as a kind of *basso continuo* Word of God, compensating for Jesus' own near silence.) This was not a sermon *per se* but something akin to a pre-concert lecture by a musicologist designed to enhance the concert-goer's experience in hearing the musical offering. Or, since the congregation is itself a part of the performance in the reading of the Passion story, it might be better seen as the conductor's attempt to prepare the choir to sing with increased understanding and appreciation the choral piece they're about to perform. This isn't, of course, a recommendation for all times and places, but I do think that the effort worked in helping us all to listen for the Word in the Passion story with greater acuity. It is a Word, after all, that Isaiah promised would "sustain the weary," perhaps even turn-of-the-millennium-weary Christians, about to embark on yet another Holy Week with Jesus and his company.

Maundy Thursday
April 20, 2000

Psalm 116:1–2, 12–19
and Psalm 22 (Stripping of the Altar)
Exodus 12:1–14
1 Corinthians 11:23–26
John 13:1–17, 31b–35

"I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord. . . . I will offer to you a thanksgiving sacrifice and call on the name of the Lord." (Ps 116:13, 17)

First Reading

Tonight, like last Sunday, is at least a bifocal occasion, so far as our appointed texts and our various liturgical traditions suggest. The "Maundy" of Holy Thursday derives from John's story of Jesus' pre-Passover supper with his disciples when he gave them the new commandment (*mandatum* in Latin, from which "maundy" derives via Old French and Middle English) to "love one another" just as "I have loved you." To embody his meaning Jesus preceded his verbal commandment with the shocking example of his proceeding to wash all of his disciples' feet to at least Peter's spoken consternation. My *Oxford English Dictionary* under the heading "maundy" quotes an item from the *Diary of Samuel Pepys* dated April 4, 1667: "My wife . . . had been to-day at White Hall to the Maunday . . . but the King did not wash the poor people's feet himself, but the Bishop of London did it for him." There is still some noticeable discomfort with the once-a-year ritual of foot washing as it occurs in our Lutheran churches, but its practice over the last couple of decades seems well on the way to institutionalization.

But tonight's primary commemoration is of Jesus' last supper (held during Passover in the synoptic accounts) with his disciples

"on the night when he was betrayed." Paul, who otherwise evidences little interest in Jesus' own words or teaching bothers in his first letter to the Corinthian church to hand on to them what he claimed to have "received from the Lord," the ensuing words sounding remarkably similar to the Synoptics both in the rhythm of the action described and in their meaning. This, then, is the day of the Christian year when we celebrate Jesus' "institution" of the sacrament of what the church came to call among other names "the Lord's Supper." But, as our Hebrew Scripture is there to remind us, this is a supper set in the strong and rich matrix of the Passover Seder which Israel was enjoined to celebrate both as a "day of remembrance" of God's deliverance from Egyptian bondage and as a "festival to the Lord."

Pastoral Reflections

The theme of covenant, which has re-encountered us throughout our forty-day Lenten pilgrimage through our texts from Hebrew Scripture tonight, comes to a focus in Paul's words to the Corinthians. Here we find him retelling the story of Jesus' last Passover meal with his disciples (see Mark 14:24 for the parallel synoptic account, which we heard read on Passion/Palm Sunday). The explicit reference is in verse 25 where Paul recounts the tradition of Jesus' words, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood." Here is the fulfillment from a Christian perspective of Jeremiah's prophesy of a "new covenant," a fulfillment enacted in a meal—the Christian Pasch—and yet a meal that anticipates what we know is to occur the next day in the Place of the Skull outside the city walls.

An underappreciated dimension of this "new covenant in my blood" anticipated and inaugurated by Jesus in this last supper preceding his death has to do with the meaning of the Greek word *diatheke* used to translate the Hebrew word covenant, *berit*. Martin Luther made much of the connotation of *diatheke* as "last will and testament," and in fact *testamentum* was the Latin word used to translate the Greek *diatheke*—hence the earlier use of "testament" for "covenant" in the eucharistic liturgy of the Lutheran Church in the U.S. as found in the *Service and Book and Hymnal*. For Luther, based especially on his reading of Heb 9:16–17 (e.g., "Where a will [*diatheke*] is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established. For a will [*diatheke*] takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive"), Christ's atonement is to be understood in this sense of Jesus' last will and testament (God's promised inheritance) which is made ours only at Jesus' death. For Luther this sense of promised inheritance actuated only by death was the primary understanding of "covenant" as God's promise through Israel culminating in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

One last observation. Paul's concluding words need to sound forth in the church of our day, riven as so many of our congregations seem to be by "worship wars" wherein evangelism and worship are pitted against one another for primacy and are sometimes confused in the minds of the faithful. Paul simply says: "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (v. 26). The point here is that Paul declares that the simple *doing* of the supper, sharing the bread and cup as Christ's sacramental body and blood as a foretaste of our promised inheritance in the new covenant/testament, *is itself* proclamation of the good news of Jesus' death—and, of course, his resurrection. Worship centered in Word and Sacrament is itself kerygmatic and evangelical. In my experience, congregations that are clearly Word and Sacrament centered are not conflicted by contending musical styles in worship, are usually open to inclusive language concerns,

and welcome various liturgies set within the accepted ecumenical *ordo*. They also tend to be hospitable and accessible to visitors and committed to evangelical outreach.

Good Friday
April 21, 2000

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

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Ps 22:1a)

First Reading

No day is as central to our Christian self-understanding as Good Friday. At the same time, no day is marked by such divergent liturgical observances, many of which attract minimal attendance on the part of the faith community. From various kinds of tenebrae to three-hour "Seven Last Words" services, from ecumenical Taize gatherings to Stations of the Cross carried through the streets of our cities, to services of the Bidding Prayer and Adoration of the Cross, Christians express their faith in the face of the death of Jesus with great variety.

Central to this day, however, are the texts. We should read them and allow ample opportunity to reflect upon them and respond to them in prayer and song. A memorable service in our congregation some years ago employed the use of a *shakuhachi*—a traditional Japanese bamboo flute—whose eerie, lugubrious sound punctuated our times of silence and reflection between the readings as we contemplated the death of Jesus. The question that cuts us to the quick today is articulated by Jesus himself in his heart-rending cry of dereliction which in Mark's and Matthew's accounts of the Passion is his only word from the cross: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" To hear these words again, as last night during the stripping of the altar, is to be reminded that Jesus is quoting the opening words of a psalm of the righteous sufferer, a psalm that, as we heard several weeks ago, ends on a note of affirmation and deliverance.

The words of the Suffering Servant song of Isaiah 52 and 53 certainly deserve prominence in today's service since they represent so clearly the chief resource on which the earliest followers of Jesus relied to understand their Master's death in the context of their own Scriptures and the covenant promises which they claimed as their own. Robert Jenson has described the church's use of Psalm 22 and Isaiah 52–53 as "the sheer dramatic integration of Jesus' death into the Old Testament's narrative of God's history with his people as this was seen from the viewpoint of the Resurrection." What these intertextual citations, allusions, and resonances enforce, Jenson concludes, is that to understand Jesus' death on the cross we must take it as "the denouement of Israel's Scripture" (*Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1, *The Triune God* [New York: 1997], 184–85). In this sense, the "new covenant in my blood" announced by Jesus around table with his disciples incorporates all the previous covenant promises of God made of old that we have been considering throughout Lent.

Pastoral Reflections

To preach on Good Friday is a daunting task, and yet with the rich resources of the Word before us and the liturgical matrix of the church's Triduum to provide a fittingly dramatic setting, it is a day ripe for proclamation. It is a day particularly for Lutherans to articulate our hallmark theology of the cross, an emphasis as needful as ever in our day

when various spiritualities beckon us to become devotees of the glory theologies marketed so widely throughout our land. The irreverent but hilariously on-target song that closes Monty Python's film *Life of Brian*, in which a crowd of men impaled on crosses soft-shoe their way through an upbeat ditty entitled "Look on the Bright Side," is a particularly deft lampooning of the positive thinking school of theology of glory that remains so popular. It is, of course, the reality of Easter that allows the church to celebrate this day as "Good" Friday. And yet care needs be taken that Easter, when we expect our churches to be filled, not become the easily anticipated antidote to today's contemplation of our "sacred head, now wounded . . . with thorns thine only crown." To leave the sanctuary in silence and darkness is certainly an appropriate close to this most solemn of the church's days.

An Afterword on the Easter Vigil

While I haven't been asked to comment on the readings for the Vigil of Easter because this officially is the first liturgy of Easter, as the concluding service of the Three Days it is nonetheless appropriate to make some brief reference. Since the introduction of the *Lutheran Book of Worship* more than twenty years ago, my impression is that the recovery of the Easter Vigil has grown in Lutheran circles both in the number of people attending and the number of congregations adding the Vigil to their Holy Week schedule of services. The simple drama and movement of the Vigil has come for an increasing number to mark the fitting climax of their Lenten pilgrimage and a memorable transition to the joy and festivity of Easter and the season following. Especially compelling are the Easter Proclamation, which is chanted following the lighting of the new paschal candle and prior to the series of substantial readings (as many as twelve) then heard from Hebrew Scripture. These are stories from our family album of faith, so to speak, that illustrate God's fidelity to the promises made to our ancestors, the covenant of old made new in the paschal mystery of the death—and now, finally, the resurrection—of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Then follows the celebration of the Sacraments, first Baptism (or, lacking the presence of a catechumen or child to be washed, the Affirmation of Baptism). Next comes the proclamation of the Word and celebration of the Eucharist, which, in my experience, is a heartfelt experience of true thanksgiving for God's vindication of Jesus. In this setting the dramatic logic of the Word and Sacraments as the heart of liturgical expression of Christian faith is experienced afresh and the transition from Lent to Easter is deeply felt. Preaching certainly is appropriate to the Vigil liturgy, but care should be taken that it is both liturgically contextual and strongly kerygmatic, proclaiming God's vindication of Jesus' death through the resurrection. A favorite baptismal/Easter hymn exults:

We know that Christ is raised
and dies no more.
Embraced by death, he broke its fearful hold,
And our despair he turned to blazing joy.
Hallelujah! (*LBW* #189, stanza 1)

This is worship at its best as we demonstrate the courage to celebrate a theology of the cross because it is a theology grounded in the unrestrained joy of resurrection from the dead. And so the church exults:

We share by water in his saving death.
Reborn, we share with him an Easter life,
As living members of our Savior Christ.
Hallelujah! (stanza 2)

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