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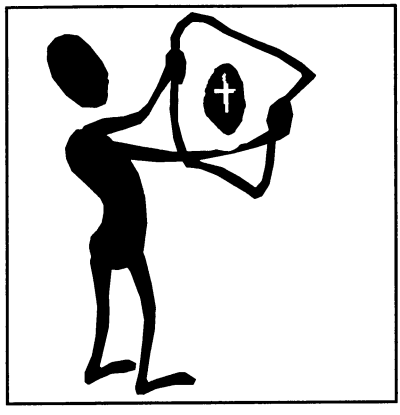
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Who Are We? The Hein-Fry Lectures for 1998

It was Arthur Carl Piepkorn, almost forty years ago, who helped me discover who I am. As I struggled to understand the doctrine of creation and the theory of evolution, he asked me to recite Luther's explanation of the First Article. "I believe that God made me...." What is the truth about me, the fact that I was born to George and Pauline Klein in Memorial Hospital in Springfield in 1936, or that I am God's creature? Both are true, of course, but there is little doubt in my mind which is the more important truth, and Professor Piepkorn's mentoring me into how to understand—and reconcile—competing truths is only one of many reasons why I treasure his memory.

Jean Bethke Elshtain was one of two Hein-Fry lecturers at the ELCA seminaries in 1998; the other was Martha Ellen Stortz, whose essays were published in the February issue of *Currents* this year. Professor Elshtain is the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Professor of Social and Political Ethics at the University of Chicago. As you will soon see, she is also a Lutheran.

Her first essay explores how far we have fallen and notes that our tradition teaches us that we cannot transcend that which we are. Her guides in this exploration of our fallenness are Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Karol Wojtyla, better known as John Paul II. Bonhoeffer observed that being free means being free for the other and that our creatureliness consists in the dependence that is the ground of our freedom. The fall is the destruction of creation by the creature and, as a result, humans can achieve nothing by their own efforts. Our hope must be marked by the sign of the cross lest we fall into the arrogant presumption that we are meritorious. Relinquishment and redemption are twins, not opposites. For Bonhoeffer the Garden of Eden foreshadows his theologia crucis. John Paul points to the ontological equality and essential relationality of male and female because of Gen 1:27. We are torn creatures, but not utterly debased. What we fall into is history. There is continuity between the hereditary state of human sin and our original innocence. The original unity of man and woman is the heart and soul of the anthropological matter. This communion of persons is the authentic reflection of the imago Dei. Our reasoning capacity is deeply flawed. Original sin has not ruined us, but we certainly cannot, through our own effort, reconstitute ourselves as whole. Neither Bonhoeffer's more mordant reading of our condition, not John Paul's more optimistic account presents us in any way as self-sovereign.

Professor Bethge Elshtain's second lecture focuses on the prideful self, which forgets that we have fallen. Radical acts of self-overcoming deny our status as creatures and trumpet instead a notion of our untrammeled self-sovereignty. The best evidence for this is the economy where everything has a price and is commodifiable. A world in which everything is up for sale requires that we violate the second of the two great commandments routinely: We cannot love our neighbor if we are trying to make a killing. We have a culture tilted against concrete, hands-on time spent with children. What we measure as economic growth since 1960 has simply been the transfer of remaining household tasks to external entities. A world in which everything is marketized makes it more difficult for people to remember what the work of love is all about. Prideful or totally preoccupied selves cannot make any space for others. An economy that turns on winners and losers is one that refuses to recognize and to accept humanity in all its variety, including those who cannot engage in what we call productive work.

The third essay focuses on another way in which we forget our fallenness: sloth. By sloth the author refers to our acquiescence in the conventions of our day, with abortion and the death penalty serving as test cases. Many in our society believe that parents are incapable of the hard work of care and love when it comes to a child with special needs. Or men show excessive individualism when they say to a woman carrying their child and considering an abortion: "It's your choice, dear; it's entirely up to you." Sloth acquiesces to shallow viewpoints and shallow arguments. The most striking and radical excision of the integrity and right of natural life is "arbitrary killing." John Paul opposes the death penalty because it destroys human life and because it promotes and deepens the lex talionis as the way of human political life. Bonhoeffer notes that the state has only penultimate, not ultimate power. State idolatry threatens to take the place of faith. For whom do we build? On whose behalf do we dream? If we are wrapped up in our own quest for self-possession, perfection, and control, if we are immersed in the fixed immanence of our culture, we cannot even ask such questions much less answer them.

Who are we? Whose are we? Where have we come from? Where are we going? How do we face and criticize the fallenness of our culture? How far has it seduced us? How closely do the old deadly sins of pride and sloth cling to us? Bonhoeffer gets us out from under the burden of these questions.

What a strange tree of life, this tree on which God himself must suffer and die—The tree of life, the Cross of Christ, the middle of the fallen and preserved world of God, for us that is the end of the story of paradise.

This is most certainly true!

Ralph W. Klein
Editor

Who Are We?

Jean Bethke Elshtain
Laura Spelman Rockefeller Professor
of Social and Political Ethics
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If evil appears in the form of light, beneficence, loyalty and renewal, if it conforms with historical necessity and social justice, this, if it is understood straightforwardly, is a clear additional proof of its abysmal wickedness. But the moral theorist is blinded by it. With the concepts he already has in mind he is unable to grasp what is real and still less able to come seriously to grips with that of which the essence and power are entirely unknown to him.

—Dietrich Bonhoeffer

In the terrible days of his confinement in Tegel, a Gestapo prison, and before his martyrdom, Dietrich Bonhoeffer commenced on an activity that surprised his dear and good friend, Eberhard Bethge: he began to write poetry—this in addition to his letters to family and friends, his theological arguments, and even a foray or two into fiction. One poem is entitled "Who Am I?" "They tell me," pens Bonhoeffer, that "I would bear the days of my misfortune equably, smiling, proudly, like one accustomed to win." But am I really all that? What I "know of myself," he continues, is that I am "restless and longing and sick, like a bird in a cage, struggling for breath, as though hands were compressing my throat, yearning for colours, for flowers, for the voices of birds, thirsting for words of kindness, for neighbourliness . . . powerlessly trembling for friends at an infinite distance, weary and empty at praying, at thinking, at making, faint, and ready to say farewell to it all." So who am I? And he answers in a way that seems entirely foreign to the vast majority of late-twentieth-century Americans. For he declares: "Whoever I am, thou knowest, O God, I am thine."

I am *thine*. I am not my own. We no longer believe any such thing. Indeed, such a pronouncement—I am not sovereign in my own domain; I am a creature; I am not simply the sum total of my choices; I am tempest-tossed; I am not in full control; I am unsure of what I will do on the 'morrow—these sorts of pronouncements make us candidates for assertiveness training and other interventions and ministrations designed to bolster an obviously weak, even sick "self-image." For we have no other way to think of humility than as perverse self-abnegation.

Who, then, are we, us prideful late-twentieth-century creatures? Lord knows, we no longer think of ourselves as *belonging* to anyone or anything. We do not belong: we own; we possess. And that, to

say the least, is not the same thing. We plunge into self-aggrandizement convinced that the dazzling success of our projects will prove definitely who we are. But this fails to satisfy. Our triumphs ring hollow. Our victories so often turn to ashes in our mouths. But, never mind. Tomorrow we will run faster, climb higher, and one fine morning.... Who are we? We are creatures who have forgotten what it means to be faithful to something other than ourselves.

I will offer three exercises in interpretive faithfulness. I propose to tap the wellsprings of the Christian tradition, or features of that tradition that I know best, primarily, though not exclusively, through several of its most extraordinary exemplars. What does the Christian tradition offer? How does this tradition connect to the lives we are now living? For a living faith exudes performative consequences; it instructs us on how to live; it enlivens the very sinew of our being. There is a word to describe what I am to be about: *ressource-ment*—tapping the great, replenishing sources, the ever-fresh waters of a living tradition. This is not a return in the sense of an originary quest. We cannot get behind the back of history. We cannot go back to a reproduce a pristine moment.

Despite my disclaimer, there *are* those who insist that any attempt to root ourselves in a tradition precisely in order to release the vibrancy of that tradition is a forlorn exercise in nostalgia. Some speak scathingly of timorous souls given to "declinism" rather than to a robust embrace of contemporary culture in all its dizzying multiform complexity. But this is often jejune, a way to evade rather than to confront the perplexities of the present and that past yet present to it. No complex tradition is ever exhausted. By contrast, many trumpeted yet simplistic practices and slogans and reassurances of the current moment are exhausted—or so I shall argue—and thus those who adhere to these practices and the ideologies that animate them are ill equipped to help us hack our way through the dense thicket of our time. And I use the ungainly word "hack" advisedly. There is never a clear, smooth superhighway laid out before us. To be sure, we may convince ourselves of such—as, for example, the techno-boosters of the present moment who promise perfect gleaming futures once we have cleared up various glitches, including the imperfection coded into the stuff we call human—but they are wrong. Perhaps we are in the midst of the situation Dietrich Bonhoeffer described as a moment in which would-be angels of light cannot see the flaws in their own culture's projects, even to the point of collusion with the forces of darkness.

But let us not move to such a mordant conclusion too quickly. For Christians are enjoined to live in hope. I see these exercises as a moment of critical hopefulness made possible by faithfulness. Hopefulness truly helps to open the windows—and we have a word for that, too, *aggiornamento*—to the fresh breezes that might bestir us yet. For we are created to "serve God wittily, in the tangle of our minds," as Thomas More declares in Robert Bolt's play, "A Man for All Seasons." To serve God wittily, not glumly. Replenishment and renewal. It is not true, as is sometimes claimed, that our ethics are behind-times and have failed to "catch up" with the radical transformations of the present. No, rather, the problem is: we are not using the ethics that we have, especially we communities of belief that embody a tradition the culture long ago abandoned. Let us think again, then, what it means to be taught that we must lose ourselves for the Lord's sake. What self is to be lost? And what do we thereby gain?

1. How Far Have We Fallen?

As we reach the end of this bloodiest of centuries, we find ourselves taking stock. Where have we been? Where are we going? What are our prospects? Who are we? Human beings have long been preoccupied with these questions. In the dark 1982 film, "Bladerunner," loosely based on science fiction writer Phillip K. Dick's book, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, a bladerunner—a man given a license to hunt down and kill advanced androids called replicants—comes up against the most advanced replicant model. This particular model is extraordinarily precise, very intelligent, very powerful, and capable of great violence. The only way to distinguish a replicant from a human is to put the replicant through a series of tests that monitor pupil dilation as the respondent answers queries like: "You are walking along on a hot day. The sun is beating down. You see a turtle lying upside down, unable to turn over. What do you do?"

A human being will register something on the empathy scale—discernible through pupil change—to such a query, but the replicant, being deficient in this quality, will not. For replicants are manufactured, not begotten. They have an "incept date" rather than a birth day. They have not gone through a process of education of the moral faculties. As well, they are programmed to die—or to wear out—on another date determined by their manufacturer. They have no families, but their manufacturer has implanted memories. So they believe they have families and childhoods like other human beings. But this, too, proves to be false. When the replicants finally realize this, they come to hate their manufacturer. Replicants also know they are being hunted. They live in perpetual fear. The dilemma is that by being implanted with a past, however fraudulent, the replicants have come closer and closer to us—or at least to what we once believed we were until we decided that we might actually be history-less. But I jump ahead of my story.

The bladerunner, Deckard, is assigned to hunt down and kill a renegade band of replicants who have escaped from interplanetary servitude. He does so systematically and bloodily, one by one. Rachel, an advanced replicant who never left the office of her manufacturer and works there as an assistant in a dying and decaying earth—who is not, therefore, a member of the replicant rebel band—seems way too close to us for comfort. But she, too, is in the danger zone as Deckard can kill any and all replicants, whether they are marauding or not. Learning from Deckard that her implanted memories are false, she weeps. What is this? Replicants are not supposed to have feelings. Has she somehow transcended replicant-being to join human-being? Deckard, recognizing at one point that he cannot kill her because she has helped to save him when one of the horrifically violent renegade replicants was preparing to gouge his eyes out, grows troubled. What about Rachel? Rachel weeping. Weeping, not for her children, but for her own non-childhood, her non-human being.

There is a final encounter with the head of the outlaw replicant band, Roy. He is dying, or, in replicant-being, wearing out. His expiration day is upon him. He

howls at the universe and at his manufacturer, howls as he feels himself inexorably, inevitably running down. He pierces a palm with a nail, a kind of crucifixion, because the pain helps him to feel life until the very end. In the terrible struggle with Deckard, Roy gets the better of Deckard, who clings to the ledge of a building and, as he loses his grip and will surely plunge to an awful death, Roy, the replicant with no feeling, reaches out from his great if waning strength and pulls Deckard to the safety of the building top on which their deadly *pas de deux* now reaches its denouement in the year of our Lord, 2019. Roy tells Deckard his story: about what it is like to be a slave and to live in fear. About all the sights he has seen, moments that will "be lost in time like tears in the rain. Time to die." He expires, and a white dove he has captured is released and flutters into the besmirched, acid-rain filled sky.

A soul freed? We do not know. Deckard offers up a commentary. He tries to understand why this violent, non-feeling entity has spared him. "Maybe he loved life more in these last moments, anybody's life, my life." And he concludes: "All he wanted is what we all want. Where do I come from? Where am I going? How long have I got?" Transformed through this experience, Deckard abandons his terrible profession and flees with Rachel. The film ends with this voice-over: "I didn't know how long we'd have together. Who does?"

Few of us can live with such uncertainty. But all of us must. Or at least we used to believe that we must. But increasingly we want guarantees, even warrantees, on life itself. We resist—indeed resent—the notion that we are up against any limit, beginning with our natures.

The Christian tradition teaches us that we cannot transcend that which we are. But, with Roy the replicant, we want to know and we want to escape our condition. Where did I come from? Where am I going? Peering into the future inevitably folds back to become a concern with the past, indeed with our origins. We know we cannot recapture that origin. But we also know that our evaluation of what is possible and desirable for human beings turns on a set of assumptions about who and what we are as creatures. Many contenders have offered accounts of our origins. We have Darwinian and paleontological offerings called scientific. Political theory presents states of nature, some more horrific than others (Hobbes springs readily to mind) whose only cure is a social contract. Jews and Christians share an account—the Genesis story—but how are we to interpret that account at present, to distill its meaning and its hold on us at this late date? This is by no means simple. We can, of course, simply abandon the creation story as so much archaic nonsense. But that is to abandon the ground of our own tradition and to deny that it yet offers us anything.

So let us look again. As an exercise in the theological, political, and ethical imagination, I am going to work through two competing interpretations that suggest rather different orientations to human nature and human possibility. The thinkers involved are two of the great Christian teachers of this century, both philosophical theologians, who emphasize or stress contrasting features of the narrative each shares. The names of these thinkers will be familiar to everyone: Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Karol Wojtyla, Pope John Paul II. I have consciously selected two men who enacted the Christian life and witness in the most dangerous and deadly of circumstances—fighting totalitarianism. Given my own interest in political life and thought, this is reason enough. But there is more that should be noted.



Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Karol Wojtyla/John Paul II are forbiddenly complex writers who never shirk at the most difficult questions. I realize that, at first glance, pairing up Bonhoeffer and Pope John Paul II in a consideration of the Fall—the theme of this chapter—may seem to invite a foreordained conclusion that falls rather predictably along Lutheran/Catholic lines. But anyone familiar with the thought of these two extraordinary figures will discern immediately that things will by no means turn out to be that simple. My first task will be to offer up an expository version of Bonhoeffer's and John Paul's accounts of Creation and Fall with textual commentary as I go. I will conclude with some direct points of comparison and contrast that will help to launch us into the subsequent discussions of what it means to forget that we are fallen.

What a treat it is to read Bonhoeffer and John Paul! This reading implicates us in the full weight of twentieth-century Western philosophy. Bonhoeffer worked his way through Nietzsche and Heidegger as well as the history of theology, primarily though not exclusively German. He was, as well, a generous and audacious reader of German literature—novels, poetry, drama. Readers of *Letters and Papers from Prison* will recognize this characterization immediately, of course, given the sprinkling of requests for texts to be sent him peppered throughout his letters to his family. His account of Creation and Fall is primarily an exegetical biblical study, and the references are tightly internal to the text. John Paul's catechesis on Genesis, by contrast, affords a glimpse into his complex encounter with philosophy generally, twentieth-century thought in particular. He references Levy-Bruhl, Eliade, Tillich, Ricoeur, Levinas, Freud, Jung, dozens of Hebrew exegetical works, semioticians and etymologists, books in analytic philosophy and anthropology as well as classic Latin poets, Plato, Kant, Scheler, and on and on. This in addition to the usual suspects—Augustine and Aquinas first and foremost.[1] We are not dealing with heremetically sealed off, pious thinkers. These men were, and one still is, in the arena, actively embracing or challenging that whole complex of features and factors we call modernity.

Let's begin with Bonhoeffer, who is committed to the view that human beings are in rebellion against God. And who is this God? He is "wholly Creator, completely the Lord, and his creature remains totally the submissive, obedient creature, praising and worshipping him as the Lord. He—God—is never the creation. He is always the Creator. He is not the substance

[1] Those curious about John Paul's reading habits and impatient with slogging through his philosophical works, homilies, catechetical texts, and encyclicals might just consult *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* for bibliographic hints. Although not referenced in his account of the Fall, John Paul has worked through the entire corpus of works by Marx and, one has the impression, most of the major secondary work on Marx and Marxism.

of nature; there is no continuum that binds or unites him with his work. There is only his Word."[2] God speaks and is "never in the world in any way except in his absolute transcendence of it": this, for Bonhoeffer, is the God of Genesis 1. The pre-creation of man portion of Genesis is a story, first, of remoteness. Eternal, unchangeable laws come into being. This world is fixed—consider mathematical symbols that are identical even today in every culture and constitute perhaps the only transparent universal 'language.'

But then something new occurs. The Creator wills that creation "should affirm and continue his work, he wills that created things should live and create further life" (p. 33). Vegetation springs up; the seas swarm; trees bear fruit; birds fly above the earth; creeping things begin their migration across the face of the earth. This is presented by Bonhoeffer as a kind of magical moment. Then we get to man. God creates man in his own image: male and female created he them (Gen 1:27). Bonhoeffer doesn't make too much of the "them" at this point—the plural that suggests a simultaneity in creation of male/female that the textually later but chronologically earlier Yahwist account (Gen 2:24) undermines with its fashioning of Eve from Adam's rib. For Bonhoeffer, the plural in Hebrew is a way of "showing the significance and sublimity of the Creator's action." Man (and Bonhoeffer's language does not limit his exposition to the male) is the "new, free, undetermined work of God" (p. 36).

A great divide separates us from this point of origin. We cannot leap back "into the world of lost beginning. It is hopeless to want to know for ourselves what man was originally, to identify here man's ideal with the creational reality of God, not to understand that we can know about the man of the beginning only if we start from Christ" (p. 37). This new being, this free man, is not free as such. "Freedom is not a quality of man, nor is it an ability . . . freedom is not a quality which can be revealed—it is not a possession, a presence, and object, nor is it a form of existence—but a relationship and nothing else. In truth, freedom is a relationship between two persons. Being free means 'being free for the other,' because the other has bound me to him. In relationship with the other am I free. No substantial or individualistic concept of freedom can conceive of freedom" (p. 37). Here Bonhoeffer strikes one of his key themes, namely, that the individual exists only for 'the other.' Insofar as the person is a concrete 'I,' the other must be a concrete 'Thou.'

This relationship in freedom is something hard won after the fall, as we shall learn. But at the moment of "created he them," man is dependent on another, and it is "in this dependence on the other that his creatureliness consists" (p. 38). Man and woman are for Bonhoeffer "man in duality" given dominion from God over God's creation. Man belongs to the world completely in and through the relational recognition that gives him dominion over that which nourishes and sustains him. In his freedom he is bound. Bonhoeffer doesn't make much of the male/female aspect of "them" save to speak of dependence on God and on the rest of creation even as man in his "duality" is *primus inter pares* among created being. Consider the themes thus far: freedom is a relationship, and our creatureliness consists in the dependence that is the ground of our freedom.[3]

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[2] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall* (New York: Collier Books, 1959), 22.

[3] Cf. Martin Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," in *Martin Luther's Basic Theologi-*

Moving to the second account of human creation in Gen 2:24, Bonhoeffer notes that "everything takes place in a very earthly way. The language is extremely childlike, and shocking for those to want to 'understand,' to know anything."[4] We moderns are likely to find the anthropomorphisms intolerable: forming and shaping clay, breathing life into dust, and the like. Darwin and Feuerbach "could not speak any more strongly. Man's origin is in a piece of earth" (p. 46). We do not *have* a body. We simply *are* body and soul, ensouled bodies.[5] "Man in the beginning is really his body." And this human existence binds the creature to "mother earth." Man—and apparently Bonhoeffer construes man as singular, not plural at this point—is "naked and unashamed." He "speaks and walks with God."[6] These are "ancient, magical" yet powerful pictures. But something stands in the middle of the garden—the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Adam doesn't know what death is; what good and evil are; he doesn't know a limit, living, as he does, in unbroken obedience. His creatureliness marks a limit, but he doesn't yet know this. God, to be sure, tries to convey it by forbidding eating of the tree. But Adam, in freedom, does not acknowledge that the limit lies at the heart—the middle—of existence, not on the extreme; not at some periphery. "Adam knows neither what is good nor what is evil; in the most particular sense he lives beyond good and evil, beyond *tob* and *ra* (p. 53).

I cannot here resist a sidebar comment, one that could be the subject of a lecture in and of itself, namely, that by locating "beyond good and evil" in a pre-lapsarian realm that we can neither recapture nor reclaim, Bonhoeffer is surely taking a sturdy swipe at Nietzsche. To seek to move beyond good and evil once the point of origin is lost is to stake out far too much territory for oneself—for the creature—and against the Creator. For *tob* and *ra* "are the categories for the deepest division of human life in every aspect."[7] Man as *sicut Deus* through the fall cannot recreate himself as man before the fall. For he now *knows* good and evil, and he cannot pretend that he is unaware of this knowledge. Even with the "utmost endeavor of our imagination and all the other powers of our souls," human beings "are simply not in a position to remove ourselves to this paradise 'beyond good and evil'" (p. 57).

Back to the main story. Adam is alone.[8] Adam finds no real companion among the animals. He loves them as brothers, but they are "strange." Eve, there when Adam awakens from his deep sleep, is unique. He feels gratitude. He is "connected in a

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cal Writings, ed. Timothy F. Lull (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989): "We conclude, therefore, that a Christian lives not in himself, but in Christ and in his neighbor. Otherwise he is not a Christian" (623).

[4] Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 46.

[5] This becomes critical later as we consider just how Gnostic is the current moment. Our bodies are nuisances and inconveniences, if not outright sources of pollution. We like to think we are souls—intelligences—who just happen to have bodies.

[6] Bonhoeffer, 49.

[7] Bonhoeffer, 54.

[8] Bonhoeffer makes an interesting move here by comparing Adam in his aloneness to Christ who was also alone. But then, so are we all, he concludes, each in our own way. Christ is alone "because he loves the other person, because he is the way by which mankind has returned to its Creator. We are alone because we have pushed the other person from us, because we hated him. Adam was alone in hope, Christ was alone in the fullness of deity, and we are alone in evil, in hopeless" (59). Denial of relationality and dependence is a terrible aloneness: we have pushed the other person from us.

completely new way to this Eve, who derives her existence from him" (p. 60). They are two, yet one; one, yet two. This other person "derives from" yet "limits" Adam in the form of a "bodily representation" as the "limit placed upon me by God." It is unclear at this juncture from what point of view Bonhoeffer is speaking. Can Adam recognize Eve as presenting a "limit" when he doesn't yet have knowledge of good and evil? Man remains naked and unashamed. This surely means that the limit Bonhoeffer here adumbrates is "objective," an evaluation deriving from the account itself rather than from what was epistemologically available to Adam at that juncture. In other words, the word "objective," that which is simply given, part of the order of things, doesn't require a moment of recognition. Bonhoeffer is here outside the account, so to speak, noting an objective limit yet to be recognized by Adam.

If man hates his limit, it destroys community; if he only "wants to possess or deny the other person without limit," he has placed himself in a Hegelian master/slave dialectic rather than in a different sort of narrative wherein the loving recognition of the other cannot be used to underwrite a struggle unto death.[9] The other person is a helper, and the grace of this helper helps us to bear our limit and to live before God.[10] If we deny the other person, what we should have "received humbly now becomes the occasion for glorification and revolt."[11] Sexuality, becoming one flesh, is our realization of belonging to another. We are not yet ashamed, for shame exists "as a result of the knowledge of the division of man, of the division of the world in general. . . . Shame is the expression of the fact that we no longer accept the other person as the Gift of God" (p. 63). So: knowledge, death, sexuality, these three "primaeval words of life" come into existence in a world of division. To pretend at that juncture—at our juncture—that we are prelapsarians is, for Bonhoeffer, arrogant madness.

> We do not *have* a body. We simply *are* body and soul, ensouled bodies.

For when we fell, it was a long, hard fall indeed. Woman became a seducer. The serpent, one of God's creatures, became an instrument of evil. But the Bible isn't concerned to cast aspersions, Bonhoeffer argues. We cannot reproduce the moment. We can, however, say that God's truth points to a limit, and the serpent's to limitlessness—that we might have knowledge as unto God's—and that both of these enter into the post-fall *imago Dei*, or our understanding of what it means to be created in God's image. *Imago Dei*—"the creature living in the unity of obedience; *sicut deus*—the creature living out of the division of good and evil" (p. 71). It is not until the Incarnation that the image of God

[9] This loving recognition is not compatible, as I have indicated, with a master/slave narrative. But it can comport with relationships of sovereign/subject or ruler/ruled—not my main concern at this juncture.

[10] Cf. Luther, "Freedom of a Christian," where he argues that "from faith thus flow forth love and joy in the Lord, and from love a joyful, willing, and free mind that serves one's neighbor willingly and takes no account of gratitude or ingratitude, of praise or blame, of gain or loss . . . love . . . makes us free, joyful . . . servants of our neighbors, and yet lords of all" (619).

[11] Bonhoeffer, 61.

It is not until the Incarnation that the image of God is fully restored, according to Bonhoeffer.

is fully restored, according to Bonhoeffer. (Not until *agnus Dei*—the One who was sacrificed.)

The fall "really makes a creator, the *sicut deus* man, out of the creature, the *imago dei* man" (p. 73). Eve falls first as the weaker. But the culmination is the fall of Adam; indeed, "Eve only falls totally when Adam falls, for the two are one. Adam falls because of Eve, Eve falls because of Adam, the two are one. In their guilt too they are two and yet one. They fall together as one and each one carries all the guilt alone. Male and female he created them—and man fell away from him—male and female" (p. 75). Interestingly, Bonhoeffer returns to the textually first but chronologically later, or Priestly, account of creation at this juncture in the form of a partial indictment. Created he them, and *they* are responsible for the fall; they are together in guilt. And this defection is dire, described by Bonhoeffer as a "continual falling, a plunging into bottomless depths, a being relinquished, a withdrawal even farther and deeper. And in all this it is not simply a moral lapse but the destruction of creation by the creature" (p. 76). Bonhoeffer tells us that he is not very interested in *why* evil exists: that is not, for him, a "theological question, for it assumes that it is possible to go beyond the existence forced upon us by sinners." No, the theological question does not arise here but only with "the real overcoming of evil on the Cross; it asks for forgiveness of guilt, for the reconciliation of the fallen world" (p. 76).

Post-fall we are in a world of troubles. Man and woman are divided. Sexuality transgresses limits in "avid passion of man for the other person. . . . Sexuality is the passionate hatred of every limit, it is arbitrariness to the highest degree, it is self-will, it is avid, impotent will for unity in the divided world. . . . Sexuality desires the destruction of the other person as creature . . . . Man without a limit, hating, avidly passionate, does not show himself in his nakedness" (p. 84). Covering himself assures that the world is rent and torn into *tob* and *ra*. Henceforth man lives in a "peculiar dialectic," hating the limit; as one divided. And shame, or covering and concealment, and the vocation of the "restrained community of marriage in the Church" alone structure restraint. Man's creatureliness is now corrupted. No wonder man is ashamed. The tree of knowledge brought upon Adam and Eve "shame and passion." Shame requires that we wear a mask. But from beneath "the mask there is the longing for the restoration of the lost unity." This forces its way towards fulfillment in the partnership of two human beings in marriage; shame, at that point, reveals its "deepest secrecy," the yearning for a world without the need for shame."[12]

Eve, fallen, is nonetheless "the mother of all living," or is called such by Adam from a stance of "wild exultation, defiance, insolence, and victory." Eve is our first and sullied beginning. Mary, "the innocent, unknowing mother of God—this is the sec-

[12] These passages are drawn from Bonhoeffer's *Ethics* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), p. 25.

ond beginning" (p. 87). The earth awaits Mary's motherhood and Christ's Incarnation. It all gets worse before anything better is intimated. Cain and murder are yet to come. But Christ on the cross is the "end of the story of Cain," and the Cross on Golgotha offers us a "strange paradise... this blood, this broken body! What a strange tree of life, this tree on which God himself must suffer and die—The tree of life, the Cross of Christ, the middle of the fallen and preserved world of God, for us that is the end of the story of paradise" (pp. 93–94). Humans can achieve nothing by their own efforts. The Cross and God's free gift of grace alone redeem us: here Bonhoeffer calls to mind Luther's "On the Bondage of the Will," perhaps the most bleak of Luther's assessments of our fallen condition. Only this abyss, this utter forlornness, helps us to recognize by contrast the unwarranted bounty of God's free gift of grace. Our hope and yearning must be marked by the sign of the cross lest we fall into the arrogant presumption that we are meritorious. With Luther, it is the whole person who falls and the whole person who must be redeemed. In Luther's words: "If we believe that Christ has redeemed men by his blood, we are bound to confess that the whole man was lost; otherwise, we should make Christ either superfluous or the redeemer of only the lowest part of man, which would be blasphemy and sacrilege."[13] If the Bonhoeffer/Luther account offers a low anthropology—do not expect too much from creatures who have fallen so far—there is joyous anticipation in the high Christology. Relinquishment and redemption are twins, not opposites.

It is John Paul II's turn to lead us into and out of the Garden. The gravamen of John Paul's narrative is very different from that of Bonhoeffer's. Bonhoeffer, remember, is at pains to occlude the point of origin or, perhaps better put, to teach us that that point forever eludes us and is not, in any case, interesting theologically. The fall inaugurates the story that really interests Bonhoeffer. John Paul, however, is far more engaged with "from the beginning," with the sorts of creatures we were and have remained given that beginning. He knows, of course, we cannot penetrate to the beginning in a historical sense, but he argues that we can offer intimations in an anthropological sense. Thus, in Jesus' exchange with the Pharisees in Matt 19:3ff., Jesus recalls the ancient truth: "Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female?"[14] John Paul segues from this moment to the "beginning" Jesus has in mind, namely, Gen 1:27, "In the beginning the Creator made them male and female." The original passage read textually is that God created "them" in his image.

What sorts of creatures were these? First and foremost, they were creatures created for communion, to be in "communio." But there is that second account of creation, from Gen 2:24, an account that, according to John Paul, "forms a conceptual and stylistic unity with the description of original innocence, man's happiness, and also his first fall." Then John Paul kicks into superscript in the text with these

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[13] *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, ed. Timothy F. Lull (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989). "On the Bondage of the Will" appears on pp. 173–226 (in excerpt), and the quoted matter is from p. 224.

[14] The discussion that follows is drawn from John Paul II, *Original Unity of Man and Woman*. Catechesis on the Book of Genesis (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1981.) All references unless otherwise noted are from this collected series of General Audience presentations by the Holy Father in his weekly audiences from September 5, 1979, to April 2, 1980.

words: "*From the point of view of biblical criticism*, it is necessary to mention immediately that *the first account of man's creation is chronologically later* than the second. The origin of this latter is much more remote. This more ancient text is defined as 'Yahwist' because the term 'Yahweh' is used to denominate God" (p. 21). By comparison with this second but earlier account, the first and chronologically later "is much more mature both as regards the image of God, and as regards the formulation of the essential truths about man. This account derives from the priestly and 'elohist' tradition, from 'Elohim,' the term used in that account for God" (p. 22). Very interesting, some might murmur, but what's the import of this? John Paul gets straight to the point. The textually earlier but chronologically later account is clear that man is "male and female"—always was; always will be. The ontological equality and essential relationality of male and female is given—as a corporeal reality. This is the "essential truth"—male and female created he them. This account, according to John Paul, is "free from any trace whatsoever of subjectivism. It contains only the objective facts and defines the objective reality, both when it speaks of man's creation, male and female, in the image of God, and when it adds a little later the words of the first blessing: 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth; subdue it and have dominion over it' (Gen 1:28)" (p. 23).

This leads John Paul directly into the heart of his theology of the body. He turns next to the "subjective definition of man" he finds embedded in the second account (Gen 2:24). John Paul makes much of these two distinct accounts; Bonhoeffer blurs them and discusses them interchangeably at points. But John Paul clearly wants to put the heavy theological, philosophical, and anthropological weight on Gen 1:27—"created he them." So how does he deal with 2:24? He speaks rather like a cultural and philosophical anthropologist. "The second chapter of Genesis constitutes, in a certain manner, the most ancient description and record of man's self-knowledge" (p. 28). The narrative is archaic, manifesting a primitive mythical character. Its various elements have become clearer to us given the work of contemporary philosophical anthropology. Thus, it "could be said that Genesis 2 presents the creation of man especially in its subjective aspect" (p. 28). The pope brings a bit of his etymological armature to bear at this point, telling us that the Bible calls Man '*adam*,' but very briefly. For from the moment of the creation of the first woman the language for man shifts to *ish* in relation to woman (*ishshah*).

So we find two human persons as *ish* and *ishshah* in the Garden. And there is that mysterious tree. This tree of the knowledge of good and evil "is the line of demarcation between the two original situations of which the Book of Genesis speaks." Here, too, there is a significant difference from Bonhoeffer, who locates the tree not at any boundary or liminal divide but at the very center. Bonhoeffer's Garden of Eden foreshadows his *theologia crucis*, so to speak. John Paul's Adam is innocent in a not terribly interesting way, a kind of naif. Indeed, the *first* situation is one of original innocence—innocent because "man (male and female) is, as it were, outside the sphere of knowledge of good and evil. . . ." But the *second* situation is fast upon us in which man (male and female), "after having disobeyed the Creator's command . . . finds himself, in a certain way, within the sphere of the knowledge of good and evil. This second situation determines the state of human sinfulness, in contrast to the state of primitive innocence" (p. 30). John Paul

concludes that the Yahwist text shows that there are "two original situations," and "systematic theology" must "discern in these two antithetical situations two different states of human nature: the state of integral nature and the state of fallen nature." After the fall, we can no longer "read" correctly, so to speak, for a rupture has been effected between reality and our capacity to know that reality through the use of signs. We can only read signs correctly *if* we understand the realities to which these signs refer. But our ability to do this is deeply disturbed post-fall. So fully integral nature must elude us.

But we live in expectation.

All of this is of fundamental significance "for the theology of the body." There are normative conclusions "which have an essential significance not only for ethics, but especially for the theology of man and for the theology of the body. . . ." This theology of the body is constituted on the basis of the Word of God: hence the importance of the Genesis accounts (p. 31). We fall, yes, but it is remarkable in what measured tones—in terms not so much of calamity as of rue and regret—John Paul addresses the fall. He sees the fall not so much as a horrific debacle, a shift to man as avid, a destroyer; instead, he represents it as a kind of brokenness, a rending of the seamless garment. Man breaks the original covenant with God in his and her heart. This serves to delimit two "diametrically opposed situations and states: that of original innocence and that of original sin. . . ." What we fall *into* is history. With Paul Ricoeur, John Paul suggests that the ontological and the historical here part company. When Christ refers to the beginning in Matt 19:3, he helps us "*to find in man an essential continuity and a link* between these two different states or dimensions of the human being." We are torn creatures but not utterly debased. And it is "impossible to understand the state of 'historical' (John Paul puts this in quotes) sinfulness, without referring or appealing . . . to the state of original 'prehistoric' and fundamental innocence." For John Paul there is something like a fading from the fullness of the *imago Dei* available to male/female once the historic threshold is crossed. Human rootedness in "revealed theological prehistory" is such that at every point our historical sinfulness can only be explained with reference to original innocence. "If this sin signifies, in every historical man, a state of lost grace, then it also contains a reference to that grace, which was precisely the grace of original innocence" (p. 37). One might say that an ontological trace remains grazing the brow and palpating the heart however gently of historically sinful man—male and female. The fall is a boundary experience that does not permit us direct contact with what lies on the other side but does point us to it and draws us as close to it as possible—given certain forms of recognition and belief.

What is human existence in history, after the fall, or perhaps the slide into sin (with an act of disobedience) for John Paul? After breaking the original covenant with the Creator, the promise of redemption is proffered early on, in the "so-called Protogospel in Genesis 3:15," and from that moment the creature *begins to live in the theological perspective* of the redemption," a redemption in which the human being participates as a historical being. Our participation is double: as part of the history of human sinfulness and as a part of the history of salvation. We are both subjects and co-creators of that history (p. 38). From the perspective of "the redemption of the body" continuity is guaranteed "between the hereditary state of man's sin and his original innocence, although this innocence was,

historically, lost by him irremediably" (p. 39).

Matters grow ever more complex as John Paul proceeds. We sense that he has rather different fish to fry from Bonhoeffer's. Concerned less with the depths of our sinfulness than Bonhoeffer (or, for that matter, Luther), John Paul lifts up God's desire that we move out of solitude and into communion. "It is not good that man should be alone." Before God, created "man finds himself . . . in search of his own entity: it could be said: in search of the definition of himself. A contemporary would say: in search of his own 'identity.'" Man alone cannot find himself. And this man, John Paul insists, is "solitary without reference to sex." The Genesis account makes this clear, he insists. Solitariness is our human condition as human beings alone. Our self-awareness is at once an achievement and a gift. We are able to discern between "good and evil, between life and death" (p. 51). A central problem of anthropology—consciousness of the body—is here touched upon. Self-awareness becomes a requirement, so to speak, once the historic divide between solitude and innocence, recognition of the other and brokenness, is affected.

The heart and soul of the anthropological matter for John Paul is the original unity of man and woman. Male and female are two ways of "being a body" (p. 62). John Paul makes a very interesting move in his discussion of Adam's deep sleep that occasions fashioning Eve from his rib. Because, for John Paul, we already *are* male and female before Adam's deep sleep, what are we to make of Adam's recognition of Eve upon awakening? For John Paul, this does not signify that an entity that was not there before suddenly appears before Adam but, rather, that Adam falls into the sleep akin to non-being and awakens to recognition of the double unity of male and female, a recognition all of us must make. "The rib" John Paul treats as an "archaic, metaphorical and figurative way" of expressing the thought of homogeneity of somatic structure: bone of my bones; flesh of my flesh. "Somatic homogeneity, in spite of the difference in constitution bound up with the sexual difference, is so evident that the man (male), on waking up from the genetic sleep, expresses it at once" (p. 66). The Hebrew term '*adam*' captures this "collective concept of the human species" in the way many modern Indo-European languages do not, claims John Paul.

The significance of all this lies in the fact that it is the *communion* of persons (*communio personarum*) that is the authentic reflection of the *imago Dei*—not man alone. Communion expresses more than help or a helper; it names the existence of the person *for* another; of the gift of the self to an other. It is a special reciprocity; it affords intimations of an inscrutable divine communion. "Man [male and female] becomes the image of God not so much in the moment of solitude as in the moment of communion" (pp. 63–64). This second narrative, then, serves as a preparation for "understanding . . . the Trinitarian concept of the 'image of God'. . . ." We have arrived at the core of anthropological reality, the name of which is "body," the human body. This body "right from the beginning" is bound up in the image of God (p. 75). What are we to make of such primordial human experiences as shame? The human, having fallen into history, cannot consciously perceive his or her lost ontological 'self,' but, in a certain sense, our self-awareness "presupposes" that beginning (p. 86). Originally, we were not ashamed. This shameless or shame-free experience of the body is now lost to us. All of human history is colored by such "fundamental experiences

. . . as the experience of shame" (p. 88). Shame is a new situation. We failed the test connected with the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Shame is a marker, a boundary experience. This cuts much deeper than the sense of sight—first "seeing," then feeling shame. It is an experience of anxiety regarding one's second self (male or female) unknown in the state of original innocence, also, remember, the state of nonrecognition. Shame is deeply "rooted . . . in mutual relations," and it expresses "the essential rules for the 'communion of persons' in history" (p. 93). We lost the capacity for full communication; to be fully in communion as body-subjects. We communicate and we see (through a glass darkly, one might interject, though John Paul does not) and what we see is not just an "exterior" perception but an "interior dimension of participation in the vision of the Creator" (p. 99). Still, it is only through reciprocity—through processes of mutual recognition—that we come to know the meaning of our own bodies. It is only through the gift of the self that we come to understand communion. John Paul calls this "the hermeneutics of the gift."

The remainder of John Paul's account is devoted to the way the body-subject is a gift given by a loving Creator to a creature who can, in turn, make a gift of himself or herself to others. We make ourselves a gift in the freedom of love "from the beginning." In this beginning there is "the freedom of the gift in the human body. It means that this body possesses a full 'nuptial' meaning." Men and women's mutual experience of the body involves a real communion of persons. Each, in giving, is enriched. Each grows "by virtue of the interior disposition to the exchange of the gift and to the extent to which it means with the same and even deeper acceptance and welcome, as the fruit of a more and more intense awareness of the gift itself" (p. 164).

How is any or all of this possible post-fall and in history? It is something that must be reconstructed "with great effort, the meaning of the disinterested mutual gift." John Paul has no doubt that this is in fact possible. To the skeptic, he says,

> It is the *communion* of persons that is the authentic reflection of the *imago Dei.*

"following the trail of the 'historical *a posteriori*'—and above all, following the trail of human hearts—we can reproduce and, as it were, reconstruct that mutual exchange of the gift of the person, which was described in the ancient text, so rich and deep, of the Book of Genesis" (p. 132). We all bear within ourselves the trace of our beginning. We cannot know it, not fully, but we can, "with great effort," in history, reconstruct it in a real if imperfect way.

It is now the moment to draw these two accounts together in order to draw out points of difference and of commonality.

1. Bonhoeffer and John Paul are working with rather different images of God. Bonhoeffer's is very much the post-Occam God as site of sovereign will, a remote Creator who comes close to us only through the Incarnation and the Cross. God Incarnate, the second person of the Trinity, is the heart of the matter. For John Paul, God

isn't so much the site of will as a representation of the fullness of understanding, reason, the plenitude of power and Being itself. Does this mean human beings within Bonhoeffer's treatment need the Cross more than John Paul's body-subjects do? This would be unnecessarily provocative as John Paul, too, emphasizes Jesus as the very heart of what we mean by 'the gift,' the way in which God's transcendent divinity breaks into immanence without losing the grandeur of the transcendent. For Bonhoeffer, as for Luther, we throw ourselves upon the cross. For John Paul, we live in expectation of Christ. "If it is true that man of himself, despite his good will, cannot achieve salvation, the one who seriously and alertly faces his human experience finally discovers within himself the 'urgent need for an encounter' which is marvelously satisfied by Christ."[15] The most important point for our subsequent discussion is that neither Bonhoeffer's more mordant reading of our condition, nor John Paul's more optimistic account, presents us as in any way self-sovereign. Although our reasoning capacity is more intact, for John Paul, it is deeply flawed and imperfect. Original sin hasn't completely "ruined us," as Luther, in his most dire musings, alleges, but we certainly cannot, through our own effort, reconstitute ourselves as whole.

2. John Paul places greater emphasis on "created he them" than does Bonhoeffer. This is central to John Paul's integral anthropology. There is more fleshing-out of an explicit anthropology in John Paul's discussion. And the creature who emerges is credited with greater powers of discernment than Bonhoeffer affords his early creatures. John Paul's humans are always "man alone" as a double; for Bonhoeffer, Adam is really alone before the creation of Eve in Genesis 2. Does anything important turn on this? Certainly there is a different placing of accent. As well, John Paul's anthropology puts far more pressure on any and all comparisons between men and women that treat differences as invidious or as the occasion for unjustifiable discrimination. John Paul never speaks of Eve as a seducer, for example.

3. The divide that separates humans pre-and post-lapsarian is greater for Bonhoeffer than for John Paul. As well, Bonhoeffer places greater stress on our disobedience and our sinfulness, our avid destructiveness. For John Paul the fall seems not so much a plunging over a cliff as a slide into the Slough of Despond. We are stuck, but the divide isn't as great. This is linked to where each places the tree of the knowledge of good and evil: for Bonhoeffer at the very center; for John Paul at a liminal boundary, an edge.

4. Communion and being "in communio" is given greater weight in John Paul's treatment than in Bonhoeffer's, particularly in the notion of the nuptial gift relationship. We are yearning creatures who bear the trace of our lost communion. The gift of each to the other in marriage bears witness to this. For Bonhoeffer, marriage is required by the sin that is sexuality after the fall. John Paul goes much further in redeeming sexual relationships. This also has a bearing in their respective accounts of shame—for Bonhoeffer as a limit that marks our sinfulness; for John Paul as a call to self-consciousness.

5. Each weighs in powerfully against any and all individualistic construals of human life and freedom. Each utterly opposes any notion of a sovereign, wholly autonomous self. Bonhoeffer would join John Paul in being appalled at contempo-

[15] Pope John Paul II, *Daily Meditations* (Sherbrooke, Quebec: Editions Paulines, 1984), 9.

rary radical appeals to autarchy, self-sufficiency, and self-possession. They join hands in a countercultural struggle against the idols of the present moment.

6. Finally, there is Eve and there is Mary. Bonhoeffer harshly criticizes Adam's presumption in naming Eve the mother of all. Eve is fallen, and it is not until the pure Mary, whose Motherhood is innocent and unknowing, that our human inheritance is reconciled and redeemed, for her maternity prefigures the Cross. John Paul treats Eve differently. He puts Eve and Mary on a continuum rather than driving a wedge between them, describing Mary as "the second Eve." For the first woman, after all, acknowledges that she has "gotten a man with the help of the Lord" (Gen 4:1). This shows that Eve is fully aware "of the mystery of creation, which is renewed in human generation. She is also fully aware of the creative participation that God has in human generation."[16] And these first parents "transmit to all human parents—even after sin, together with the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil and almost at the threshold of all 'historical' experiences—the fundamental truth about the birth of man in the image of God, according to natural laws."[17] There is, in John Paul's story, an image of continuity and unity that Bonhoeffer ruptures.

But each stresses the centrality of our need to be at God's disposal; each celebrates the gift of life and of grace; each insists that we are human insofar as we are in relationship and for the other. This means that each is somewhat opaque to us in late modernity, for we no longer understand the meaning of the donative gift, of putting ourselves at the disposal of another. For the gift economy that Bonhoeffer and John Paul embrace, each in his own way, has long since been replaced by a consumer economy that sees us as most human when we are most fully in possession of our self and anything else we can lay our hands on. Perhaps we have fallen further than Bonhoeffer believed we could—although probably not, considering the time and place in which he wrote—but certainly further than John Paul believes we should, given the high hopes he holds forth for love and for reason. That is why, on a highly speculative note, I believe John Paul is, if anything, far more brokenhearted about human sinfulness than was Bonhoeffer, who believed that the beasts were always straining at their leashes, rattling their chains, and awaiting release upon a complacent and uncomprehending and perhaps even occasionally joyous world. And we are the beasts.

Unfortunately, there are only too many "signs of the times," as John Paul II calls them, that would seem to bear Bonhoeffer out. I will turn next to what it means to forget that we are fallen by examining our many appeals to, and projects of, self-aggrandizement. As I do so, I will weave back and forth between the presuppositions that undergird Bonhoeffer's and John Paul's accounts. For they are part of our shared Christian tradition. And, if my own formation was in and through that great document, Luther's *Small Catechism*, much of my adult thinking has been shaped by a reading of Catholic social thought. It is unsurprising, therefore, that I have begun with great teachers of these mutually enriching strands in our tradition.

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[16] John Paul II, Catechesis on the Book of Genesis, 157–58.

[17] John Paul II, Catechesis, 158.

2. Forgetting that We are Fallen: The Prideful Self

What can we expect from fallen creatures? For one thing, pridefulness and a forgetfulness that one is both creature and creator. Pride is scarcely thought of as a sin any longer; indeed, if anything, it is a call to arms. Self-overcoming is just another name for how we propose to do things as a people, in this culture, at this time. Have we all, then, become Nietzscheans? We would be shocked to hear it. But consider this passage from *Beyond Good and Evil*, #259: "Life is essentially appropriation, injury, overpowering of what is alien, weak, suppression, hardness, imposition of one's own forms . . . exploitation." This is what life *essentially is*; not what a disordered life is, so claims Nietzsche. I believe that we, as a culture, tacitly accept this. The proof is in the pudding and lies in the fact that we find it so difficult to tame those radical acts of self-overcoming that deny our status as creatures and trumpet instead a notion of our untrammeled self-sovereignty. I have addressed this theme before, in a book called *Augustine and the Limits of Politics*.[1] Permit me to rehearse just a bit of what I have argued previously as a way to frame the discussion to follow, keeping ready at hand the views of our fallen condition unpacked in the previous chapter.

Bear in mind that my argument is not against the appropriate use of our freedom or our canny intelligence. As God's creatures, part of our birthright is "an element of independence and self-development," in Dietrich Bonhoeffer's words, a domain of action appropriate to the "relative freedom of natural life." But, Bonhoeffer also adds, within this freedom "there are . . . differences between the true and the mistaken use of freedom, and there is therefore the difference between the natural and the unnatural."[2] The natural is that form of life "directed towards justification, redemption and renewal through Christ."[3] Precisely because enactments driven by what Christians call pride, or a perversion and distortion of life, are always presented in the guise of freedom, it is vital to catalog the many ways in which pride distorts our appreciation of freedom.

Let us turn briefly to Augustine, who alerts us to false pride of the sort that "lurks even in good deeds to their undoing."[4] False pride turns on the presumption that we are the sole and only ground of our own being. We deny our birth from the body of a woman. We deny our dependence on her and others to nurture and tend to us. We deny our continuing dependence on friends

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[1] Elshtain, *Augustine and the Limits of Politics* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1996).

[2] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), 144.

[3] Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 145.

[4] The discussion of Augustine that follows is drawn from my *Augustine and the Limits of Politics*, chapter 3, "Against the Pridefulness of Philosophy." All internal quotes from Augustine are footnoted in that work.

and family to sustain us. Pridefulness denies our multiple and manifold dependencies and would have us believe that human beings can be masters of their fates. Those who refuse to recognize the many ways that they are dependent upon others are themselves often overtaken by an urgent need to dominate, to "secure the dependence of others," according to Peter Brown, discussing Augustine. We seek to become our own point of origin. We fancy ourselves as the "Selfsame," Augustine's term, but Selfsameness is beyond the capacity of those like ourselves caught in mutability and temporality. Forgetting our natures as begotten and mortal, we easily become proud and self-absorbed. We may even be driven to become avid and destroyers, as Bonhoeffer claims. For if we are independent in all things, there is no need for us to humble ourselves. In a world framed by false pride, we are neither Bonhoeffer's torn creatures who must throw ourselves upon the cross, nor are we the wistful yearners for a more integral self depicted by John Paul II. Instead, we normalize our audacity and call it good.

Acts of freedom, undertaken from faith and in love, are acts that recognize a limit. Acts of perverted freedom, undertaken from self-overcoming willfulness, recognize no limit. This latter leads to what Bonhoeffer called the "aberration and the mechanization of life. Here the individual is understood only in terms of his utilizable value for the whole, and the community is understood only in terms of its utilizable value for some higher institution or organization or idea. The collectivity is the god to whom individual and social life are sacrificed in the process of their total mechanization."[5] And life which posits itself as an absolute becomes its own destroyer. Such vitalism—again, according to Bonhoeffer, "cannot but end in nihilism . . . a misconceived absolutization of an insight which is in itself correct, namely, that life is not only a means to an end but is also an end in itself."[6]

How, as a culture, do we deny this and not only fall into but also, as I have suggested, normalize the sin of pride? We do this, as I have already suggested, by refusing to recognize any intrinsic limits to our own projects. I am going to take up one area in which this is so, that called economic.[7]

Consider, first, our extraordinary national preoccupation with money. Money promises self-sufficiency: nothing can "touch us," as the saying goes, if we have enough. Or more than enough. For you can never have enough, as there are no measures for when an appropriate cutoff point has been reached. Why is that? Because, in part, you can never be too independent in all things, therefore not reliant intrinsically, by contrast to contingently, on the love and affection of others. Money is also convenient. Lightweight. Portable, *eminently* portable. Liquid capital, we like to say. Money can be transferred quickly and quietly and without the fuss of actually having to deal with a fellow human being in a palpable, tactile way. We can use money to make more money—fast—by manipulating symbols and sending those symbols 'round the world in milliseconds. The world was cumbersome indeed before money, especially paper money, got invented. Our forebears engaged in the tedious business of trekking cross-country, getting into unreliable boats, hauling goods or heavy ingots hither and yon only, perhaps, to find themselves face-to-face with people they found

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[5] Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 149.

[6] Bonhoeffer, 149.

[7] This seems especially important at a moment in our national life when our collective well-being is measured by how the Dow Jones has done on any particular day.

both hostile and incomprehensible. That was very risky. What we risk with money is, well, money. But, we are assured, fortunes are as quickly made as they are lost in the new global market. Without money we couldn't get what we want, as Marx, in one of his more lucid moments, pointed out. He argued that one attraction of the rather disembodied world of capital is that it enables an ugly man to buy a beautiful woman; that, in a sense, money is the great beautifier, the ultimate aphrodisiac. Money seems to have cleansing properties—it puts a sheen on things. Money could get you from steerage to first class on the Titanic. Well, we know how that story ended.

Is our own love affair with money, fueled by a prideful quest for self-sufficiency, doomed to end as badly as the voyage of that great ship? Apocalyptic predictions are not my stock-in-trade, although warnings can and should be issued, remembering Bonhoeffer's haunting words: What is to come? It is yet possible—it is always in principle possible—for us to remember that we are creatures and finite but, for all that, that our dignity is God-given and not for sale. That means we must steadfastly and resolutely combat the insistence that everything has a price and is commodifiable. But how do we do that, given that such a refusal is a harder and harder sell (if you will forgive me) in a culture in which images of luxuriant, unencumbered self-sufficiency are part of the very air we breathe?[8]

Nothing is holy, sacred, or off-limits in a world in which everything is for sale. It used to be that some things, whole areas of life, were *not* up for grabs as part of the world of buying and selling. No more. We find respectable and no doubt decent people in business, law, and the academy arguing for a free market in nearly everything, even babies. Not a "black market," mind you: that signifies shame. And we have nothing to be ashamed of. So it is an open market we seek as yet another sign of our newfound liberation from ancient prejudices. Families, religious faith, the law, bodies and body parts: all are redescribed in econometric terms.[9]

Of course, we are all caught up in this world. The form this pridefulness takes is a sin of the masses, not a phantasm reserved to elites, whether economists or lawyers or media moguls or other acolytes of late modernity. The thing we want to do is to win. Winning is easier if no real human being crosses your path or if the human being who does has been transmogrified, through the alchemy of money, into a thing-like entity rather than a flesh and blood person, an ensouled body. There is, of course, extraordinary energy and vibrancy in the world of capitalism and money. And God certainly wants us to work. But, as Marx noted, the world capitalism brought into being was one in which all that was seemingly solid melted into air. Indeed, the notion of *any* solidity to the world is up for grabs at the moment. Is there nothing money can't buy or transform or negotiate? It seems not.

Certain core distinctions marked by Augustine—*frui* and *uti*—are occluded. *Frui* means to enjoy and to cling with love to something for its own sake; *uti*, by contrast, is a form of use, employing something in order to obtain that which we love, *provided* it is worthy of love. Christians are not forbidden from using or making use of something for the sake of something else that is worthy of love. Rather, a Christian

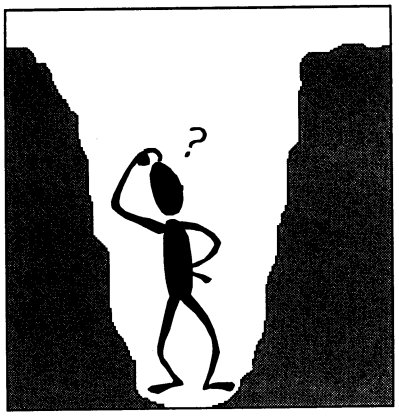
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[8] See the wonderful discussion on finitude and anxiety in Robin Lovin, *Reinhold Niebuhr and Christian Realism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.)

[9] The University of Chicago Economics Department has a lot to answer for!

approach to an economy affords criteria that enable human beings to evaluate *good* from *ill* use, including the good or ill use of persons. When everything has a price and nothing any longer a dignity, the distinctions Augustine offered have collapsed. We have simply abrogated what D. Stephen Long calls the "first task of any Christian reflection on the economy," namely, "not to speculate whether Christianity sides with capitalism or socialism but to seek to interpret our 'economic activity,' that is, our producing, buying, selling, and consuming, within the larger narrative of God's economy. The first question Christian theologians should ask is, Given God's economy toward us, how does our inevitable participation in the material goods of this world reflect that economy? God's economy does not imply a blueprint for how Christians should organize the world economically. It does not give us any specific public policy easily translatable into terms either Capitol Hill or Wall Street will find useful. This is not surprising because God's economy is ultimately *not about the profitability of things but about their proper enjoyment.*"[10]

But this "proper enjoyment" is abandoned as a guide when we marketize everything; when, in other words, we no longer have a way to distinguish good from ill use, nor to discern what it means for something to be loved and enjoyed for its own sake alone. In his recent book, *Everything for Sale: The Virtues and Limits of Markets*, social and economic analyst Robert Kuttner references a paper that aims to "dispatch the issue of slavery by branding it economically inefficient," and that is the gravest indictment to be brought against the institution.[11] It works like this: slavery was inefficient not only for the slaves but also for observers of slavery who suffered from "uncompensated third party effects"—that means they felt bad knowing that other



human beings were enslaved; their capacity for empathy was still intact. So this bad feeling is reckoned as a cost—an "externality"—and slavery is criticized with a poof ball rather than being indicted with a moral mallet. A resounding critique of slavery, clearly, requires going outside econometrism-as-ideology. But this many econometricians by definition are loathe to do. So, for example, if you want to talk about public goods and political life in a world in which everything is up for sale, you embrace something called "public choice theory." That means you behave the way you behave in the market as *everyone* in this world is driven by the same urgent need for self-sufficiency; everyone always maximizes his or her own self-interest narrowly construed.

The implications for politics are similarly troubling, for it follows that persons

[10] D. Stephen Long, "Charity and Justice: Christian Economy and the Just Ordering of the Commandments," *Communio* (Spring, 1998), 26.

[11] All quotes are drawn from Kuttner, *Everything for Sale: The Virtues and Limits of Markets* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997.)

Too few are ready to challenge an increasingly closed way of thinking devoted to maximizing all our utilities.

and groups get involved in politics only to win benefits for themselves at the expense of others. We all know that there is some truth in this. Hopefully, however, in light of the fact that we haven't altogether abandoned a tradition that teaches us other truths about human beings, we lament this moment of truth and say something like: "Yes, there is 'way too much narrow self-interest. But, surely, there are more capacious, fairer dreams of politics."

Dreams—aye, there's the rub. Some years back at a university where I was then teaching, an eager young job candidate came through. He was a political scientist deeply immersed in the public choice model. Everything was a preference and could be described in the language of maximizing utilities. There was simply no other way to talk about politics. Everything was about winning at some one else's expense. There was simply no other way to talk about politics. Mantra-like, this went on for an hour. When he had finished, I asked: "Curious thing. When Martin Luther King delivered his great speech, he cried: 'I have a dream,' not 'I have a preference.' How do you explain this? Is there a difference?" Silence, then a bit of throat-clearing. Later, I was told by a colleague that my question had been rude. Since when is it rude to challenge a theory that has become self-enclosed and self-replicating, akin to a totalizing ideology?

Of course, caveats are needed. There are many intelligent public choice theorists who understand this. But too few are ready to challenge an increasingly closed way of thinking devoted to maximizing all our utilities. Public life turns into a project of "adjusting preferences" at the margins, and the language of "justice, virtue, charity, ethics, public-mindedness" falls by the wayside in favor of relentless commodification. In fact, we have reached the point where the sweep and scope of commodification—what's for sale?—divides what might be called social Burkeans from econometric libertarians, although all get called "conservative" for reasons I, for one, do not fully understand. Where does the Christian tradition place us in relation to all of this? Because we are called to relationality and to recognition of interdependencies, we hold that self-interest must be tempered by other, more social concerns. But this recognition is under tremendous pressure to succumb to a surround that places all of us inside a whirligig of relentlessly generated "wants" that translate rapidly into "needs." We are soon caught in a vicious circle. We pursue more material satisfaction because we need (read: want) more. But the more we want, the more we "maximize preferences," and the harder we have to work or pay others to do work for us, the less time we have for children, for spouses, for friends, for church, for civic life, for solitude and reflection. Our sociability suffers as a result, as does our capacity for solitude (by contrast to isolation). We can't stand being alone, but we have no time for others. Strange indeed. It seems entirely too possible that the glimpse John Paul affords us of the integral nature that eludes us may be eclipsed and that Luther's (and Bonhoeffer's) mordant view

that reason retains *no* essential integrity after the fall comes into view as only too true. But if this latter is true, where do we derive any sturdy understanding, by contrast to what is natural, meet, and right and what is indecent, distorted, sinful?[12]

I will not answer directly. Let us proceed in the hope that, as we keep going, "light may dawn gradually over the whole," in the words of Wittgenstein. For this is where we have arrived as a culture in light of our relentless marketization of life. At present, we trust neither government nor one another. Surely one reason trust is so low among us is that commitments are so casually breached when everything is up for sale, tentative, or contractually approached. Writes Kuttner: "The person who volunteers time, who helps a stranger, who agrees to work for a modest wage out of commitment to the public good, who desists from littering even when no one is looking, who forgoes an opportunity to free ride, begins to feel like a sucker."[13]

Here is one final example from what seems to warrant the label "the dismal science" for economics, namely, a method devised for "costing-out" the value of a human being's life. You require two scales, one called DFE (Discounted Future Earnings) and the other WTP (Willingness to Pay.) The former scale "values a person's life by projecting the value of lifetime earnings lost because of premature death or disabling injury, and then discounts into present dollars to adjust for future inflation." The second metaphor literalizes those surveys in which people conjure abstractly with what they think life and health are worth. Put these together and you have a value you can assign to a life.

Problematic? More than that, surely, for those of us working from within the resources afforded by our alternative tradition. For one recognizes the pernicious potential implications of such a scale. It might be, for example, that a person with handicaps whose DFE is next to nil is costing society, and his or her death would yield a "net benefit." Many—perhaps most, though I am not at all sure about that considering the popular support for Dr. Kevorkian— would resist this conclusion.[14] But on what grounds? For grounds you have to go out-side market values narrowly construed. One might turn, then, to Scripture and to the great interpreters of Scripture and to a community that keeps alive a biblical tradition. But, if you are a utility-maximizer of the totalistic sort, you are not going to do this. And we are all called to be utility-maximizers nowadays and to forget or to deny or to distort the Christian tradition in

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[12] I have not yet worked out whether Bonhoeffer's view of reason and its fundamental corruption softens at all and whether his unfinished *Ethics* bespeaks a rather higher view of human possibility than does Creation and Fall. Another time.

[13] Certainly we have not plummeted to the depths entirely. Even game theory experiments launched in the expectation that each individual would free ride and "hope that somebody else will worry about the general welfare" show that large numbers of folks retain a residual bad conscience about a world that legitimates winning without limit and would, for example, "contribute a share of windfall winnings to the public good," this quite in opposition to the predictions and expectations of the dominant theory. Kuttner insists, and I believe he is right, that the market is dependent in ways its celebrants cannot acknowledge on what he calls "extra-market values" like trust and decent self-limits. But these are fragile things, these "extra-market" norms, and they cede territory every day.

[14] And in light of the fact that his mendacious lawyer did garner the Democratic nomination for Governor of Wisconsin, although he lost resoundingly. A tribute to the good sense of the voters, yes, but a disquieting straw in the wind nonetheless.

order to make it fit with the preference of market theory.

Think of the violence this does to our understanding, beginning with anthropological presuppositions, whether Bonhoefferian and "more" Lutheran or John Paulian and "more" Catholic. For we are in agreement that human life is God-given and not up for pricing and marketizing; that we are called to relationality and communion; that we are enjoined to be good stewards of a good creation; and that our awareness of our finitude, our creatureliness, and our fallibility forestalls any quest for self-sufficiency, including the Holy Grail of a "perfect market." For the market, like all human institutions, is distorted by sin. To pretend that it is not is to compound one sin with another: pridefulness. What is at stake is our capacity to recognize and to enact appropriate projects consistent with our natures, fallen though they may be. Here the relational dimension of Christian understanding cannot be too heavily accented. Let us return to Augustine. Once again, I shall crib from my book, *Augustine and the Limits of Politics*.

Augustine reasons thus: *God did not begin with the human species as a collective but with singularity.* With other creatures, whether those of solitary habit "who walk alone and love solitude," or those who are "gregarious, preferring to live in flocks and herds," he "commanded many to come into existence at once."[15] But not so the human person. Here God created "one individual; but that did not mean that he was to remain alone, bereft of human society. God's intention was that in this way the unity of human society and the bonds of human sympathy be more emphatically brought home to man, if men were bound together not merely by likeness in nature but also by the feeling of kinship." What is important about the singular human starting point? Augustine explains in Book XIV of *The City of God.* He reiterates God's purpose—that "the human race should not merely be united in a society by natural likeness but should also be bound together by the 'bond of peace.'" Spread out upon the face of the earth, living under many customs, and distinguished by a "complex variety of languages, arms, and dress," all participate in that fellowship we call human society; all are marked by the point of origin from one. One of the first laws that emerged was the law of marriage, a tie that binds and that, in turn, makes possible wider affections: the filaments of affection must not stop at the portal to the *domus.*

Indeed, we learn about neighborliness and reciprocity from this first beginning, for this is how we all began following the creation of the first human being. "The aim was that one man should not combine many relationships in this one self, but that those connections should be separated and spread among individuals, and that in this way they should help to bind social life more effectively by involving in their plurality a plurality of persons. 'Father' and 'father-in-law,' for instance, are names denoting two different relationships. Thus affection stretches over a greater number when each person has one man for father and another for father-in-law." Augustine goes on to discourse about mothers-in-law and sisters-in-law and cousins and grandchildren and the spouses of all of these, and pretty soon you have a substantial social network.

The social tie is "not confined to a small group" but extends "more widely to a large number with multiplying links of kinship." With this extension in kinship comes

[15] The interested reader should consult *Augustine and the Limits of Politics* for all precise quotes from Augustinian texts. The pages from which I here draw are 101–103.

prohibitions. Marriage between cousins is one Augustine cites. And he explains: "Yet no one doubts that the modern prohibition of marriage between cousins is an advance in civilized standards. And this not only because of the point I have already made, namely, that the ties of kinship are thereby multiplied, in that one person cannot stand in a double relationship, when this can be divided between two persons, and so the scope of kinship may be enlarged. There is another reason. There is in human conscience a certain mysterious and inherent sense of decency, this is natural and also admirable, which ensures that if kinship gives a woman a claim to honour and respect, she is shielded from the lust . . . which, as we know, brings blushes even to the chastity of marriage."

Any society that loses something of this sense of decency, of delicate yet sturdy relationality, is a society in very big trouble indeed, Augustine would argue. The importance of plurality, of the many emerging from a unique one, cannot be underestimated in Augustine's work. *From one* creates a fragile but real ontology of relative peacefulness. Bonds of affection tie human beings one to the other; bonds that were not severed altogether with the fall and that we yearn for in our post-lapsarian state.

Here John Paul's image of the fall into history, which carries with it an anthropological yearning for greater wholeness and relationality, is apt—and very far removed from the autarchic and selfish presuppositions of a world in which all relations can be priced. These latter presuppositions violate a fundamental norm of a specifically Christian understanding of membership in the human community. Writes Peter Burnell: "The characteristics of citizenship either specified or implied by Augustine to be good are its provision of the maximum range of relationships, that it is both large and subordinative, its basis in agreement as to what is loved, the decisive importance of the intensity with which that love is exercised, the origin of its cohesion in the justice of that love, the ultimately religious nature of that justice, its connection with the Divine Incarnation, its vital interest in exercising correct human understanding, and the basis of its hierarchy in a selfless concern of citizens for each other."[16] We are so far removed from this Augustinian understanding that our eyes may fill with tears as we gaze across the vast distance that separates a world in which everything is up for sale from the one Augustine here so lovingly depicts.

> The relational dimension of Christian understanding cannot be too heavily accented.

For a world in which everything is up for sale—in actual fact, not just in theory—would be one in which we would violate the second of the two great commandments routinely: one cannot love one's neighbor if

[16] Peter Burnell, "Augustine and the Eternal Civility of Human Beings" (unpublished manuscript, 1998), 20.

[17] I would submit that it requires that we violate the first great commandment as well. For the market, in a world in which everything is for sale, is godlike, the source of value. We cannot love the Lord our God with all our strength and might and from the depth and fullness of our being if we are worshipping at another altar.

one is trying to "make a killing," as we gently put it, at his or her expense.[17] But I think that something even more disconcerting is going on. I submit that, in falling into pride and forgetfulness, we are in danger of losing what it truly means to love one another, not excluding our own children.

I propose that we take a good, hard look at how we love our children.

Surely not! I hear the murmurs of exasperation now. We are appalled by any such suggestion. No decent human being, no decent family, no decent society forgets what it means to love a child. In fact, we Americans *adore* our children. We dote on them. We buy them things. We drive ourselves to the brink of exhaustion to provide for them. We cheer them on, urge them to achieve, push them into precocious situations, pat ourselves on the back that they seem "grown up" at such tenderer and tenderer ages. "Children are so much more sophisticated now than they used to be," we hear. How, then, can we possibly have forgotten what is involved in loving a child? Our children are indulged beyond measure.

Of course, if we are honest, we admit that tens of thousands of American children walk on mean streets, attend schools that often resemble detention centers, get pregnant at early ages and without benefit of wedlock, and kill one another and themselves in unprecedented numbers. The teen suicide rate has tripled since 1960. Our teen pregnancy rate, though declining in the past few years, remains the highest in the Western world, nearly double that of our nearest competitor. We know that there is overwhelming empirical support for the popularly held view that where families and neighborhoods are intact, drug, alcohol abuse, violence, teenage child bearing, and suicide among the young diminish. Because our basic sociality is under siege, families and neighborhoods are less and less likely to be intact. Unsurprisingly, all forms of socially and self-destructive behavior among our young people are either at unacceptably high levels or are on the rise. So all is not well.

Most people will grant this point. Yes, there are terrible problems. But we comfort ourselves that they have to do with the "structural" features of our situation, including poverty and despair. When it is pointed out that the problems noted above occur in affluent neighborhoods, too, we fall silent. Surely these are exceptions. And, besides, this has nothing to do with whether we love our children. It has to do with the fact that we cannot protect our children from an excessively violent, materialistic, individualistic, and all-too-violent culture. Parental love isn't at issue. If love could save our kids, all would be saved. Or nearly all. Right?

It is not clear to me that we should comfort ourselves in this way. Pridefulness enjoins this deflection from self-examination. Recognition of our fallenness, however, doesn't give us this out. I propose that we take a good, hard look at how we love our children. But before I turn to this theme, let me be clear that I recognize the terrible binds in which American parents too often find themselves, in part because the world of work—and the money culture—has usurped so many other areas of life. Many aspects of our lives are effectively beyond our control. Consider the fact that more

than 7 million Americans hold two or more jobs, up some 65 percent from 1980. The average worker spends 163 hours a year more working than in 1980—that's a whole month stolen from family, church, and community. Some 71 percent of school-age children have no parent at home full time compared with 43 percent in 1970, yet only 13 percent of mothers with preschool-age children say they want to work full time. As well, our tax code is biased against parents. Between 1969 and 1983, average tax liability for singles and childless couples showed no significant increase. But the tax rate rose 43 percent for married couples with two children. So we have a culture tilted against concrete, hands-on time spent with children.[18] That having been said, let's look at the many ways we find to rationalize this situation and not to consider what we might do, even with all the pressures here noted.

Some years ago the notion of "quality time" gained credence. Designed to arrest surgings of guilt and misgiving because we were spending less and less time with our children and increasingly giving our children over to others to care for, many helpful analysts, agents of the *Zeitgeist* in this matter, hit upon a handy idea: quality time. Not that old-fashioned sort of time with its complex, natural rhythms that flowed and bumped along as hours unfolded, in which the task at hand might be work or play, baking cookies or learning how to ride a bike, taking a bath or taking a "time out," watching Mom or Dad in the kitchen, Mom or Dad gardening, reading books, doing homework, doing nothing but doing it in one another's company. No, quality time was that little window of opportunity that emerged between, say, 7:00 and 8:30 p.m., after a rushed dinner and before being sent to bed.

Why the rush? The answer is obvious. Because every adult in the home and the neighborhood was now in the paid labor force, children either shifted for themselves—and the hours of danger for all the troubles I noted above are unsupervised after-school hours—or awaited a harried parent at day care, or "after care." Mom or Dad raced home; raced through supper; and were then enjoined to engage in that magical moment—quality time. Somehow the snatches of quality time here and there made up for all the time apart, all the absences, all the harried, angry bits and pieces that made up the ever more typical day of ever more typical American parents. As economist Allan Carlson has pointed out, modern capitalism and modern states have a "vested interest" in family disaggregation. He writes: "Family bonds interfere with the efficient allocation of human labor, and household production limits the sway of a money-based economy."[19] In fact, much of "what we measure as economic growth since 1960 has simply been the transfer of remaining household tasks uncounted in monetary terms—home cooking, child care, elder care—to external entities such as Burger King, corporate day-care centers, and state-funded nursing homes."[20] This is called progress. Quality time is part and parcel of this monetizing of everyday life. Time is parceled out into measurable, hence, more "efficient" chunks. And, as I've already indicated, we comfort ourselves that our children are really the winners. They

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[18] These dire findings derive from Cornel West and Sylvia Ann Hewlett, *The War Against Parents* (New York: Chapters Pub. Ltd., 1998). See also Reed Abelson, "Part-Time Work for Some Adds Up to Full-Time Job," *The New York Times* (November 2, 1998), A1, A16.

[19] Allan Carlson, "Toward a Family-Centered Economy," *New Oxford Review* (December, 1997), 29.

[20] Carlson, 29.

are not. Children have been the big losers along with average American families.

What corporations have done by tapping into the "vast pool of married women for labor" is to drive down "the average industrial wage." So work becomes more and more a necessity. But this work barely keeps people's heads above water. Women predominate in low-pay, service sector jobs. One low-pay job is child care. To be sure, there are many wonderful day care centers staffed by loving people. Such centers are predominantly church-based. And I have no interest in criticizing either day-care workers or overworked parents. But I do want to raise questions about our priorities and the many ways we, being all too human, fool ourselves into thinking all is well or even better when clearly all is not. Surely, however, decent and equitable relations between men and women need not entail a form of culturally sanctioned neglect or abandonment, literal or emotional, of children!

I have no doubt shocked if not angered many readers. So let me spell out what I have in mind. Love is tough-minded, hard work. Loving children, as caring mothers and fathers throughout the years have recognized, is about profound *attention*. Attention requires *being there*. You must be cued in to the nuances of the child's needs as these change, sometimes from day to day in the case of babies and toddlers. When our granddaughter, now a precocious 5-year-old, was fourteen months old, I journeyed to Colorado, where her family then resided, to care for her for a week as her mom—our daughter, Heidi, an artist—took a course in fiber sculpting. I arrived eager to spend time with this lovely, intelligent little girl. When I presented myself for Care Duty, my daughter handed me several sheets entitled: JOANN AT 14 MONTHS—GUIDELINES FOR CARETAKERS. Just reading these guidelines exhausted me and it hit me—I was reminded: this is what it means to love a child. And this is the difference between loving attention and that indulgent, permissive attitude we often mistake for such. The point is not to "cater" to the child but to tend to the irreducible specificity of this one being, this child of God. We all need such attention paid and, if we have received it, we are enjoined to return it in full measure, not as tit-for-tat but, as Luther argues, from the abundance of overflowing faith.

Here are Heidi's guidelines. These demonstrate why quality time is a hoax. Children need real time. That our society at *this* time draws nearly every adult out of home and community and into what is, for the vast majority, an often stressful world of work absent much in the way of ensured benefits, is an indictment of our society—not of the men and women trying to do their best to remain sane and decent within it.[21] What I am arguing is that a world in which everything is marketized makes it more difficult for people to remember what the work of love is all about. Here, then, are Heidi's guidelines (edited and shortened):

"*Diapers.* Change almost every hour to hour and a half. Diaper covers in top basket behind counter door at changing station. Just dump soiled diapers in diaper bucket after rinsing in toilet. Let JoAnn flush the toilet.

"*Food.* Any food that is cut up small enough that she will eat. NOTHING WITH NUTS. No peanut butter, etc. CUPS of milk and water and juice—use bottle at nap and sleep time and in car.

"*Nap.* Is erratic. Try to follow routine that she is used to and it is OKAY for her to cry a bit.

"*Crying.* JoAnn has very loud "cry

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[21] I am not, by the way, assuming that everyone wants to be either sane or decent.

outs" that last about a minute in between light sleep and heavy sleep. DO NOT RUSH TO CHECK ON HER WHEN SHE DOES THIS. Wait a minute, see if it is just that one yell. If she cries and continues for five minutes during her nap, then see nap time (below) on what to do next.

"*General Schedule.* JoAnn wakes around 7 a.m. Change diaper, hold her, read books. (She wakes up slowly.) Then she likes to play for a little while. She will eat breakfast around 8–8:30 a.m. She does not eat much for breakfast. Examples of breakfast food: bananas, 1/2 bagel with cream cheese, Cheerios and milk, grits, cream of wheat, fruit, scrambled egg, piece of thin toast spread with cream cheese. ALWAYS give her prune juice in the transparent red cup. (That way you can see how much she has left to drink as she should drink all of this. If she doesn't drink in one sitting, have her finish it at another time.)

"*Milk.* Give her a CUP of milk during the day. Refill this cup as the day goes on.

"*START YOUR DAY.* Go on a trip, go on an errand, visit one of the places below, outside is always a delight, reading, play.

"*Lunch.* Around 11 a.m. Fix a plate with a veggie, fruit, string cheese, cottage cheese, mashed potato, turkey dog from freezer (defrost in microwave for 2 minutes and cut into tiny bits, always cut lengthwise in quarters), potatoes if some in fridge from cooking, yogurt, bread, crackers. She will do a pretty good job of feeding herself but might need help scooping up the food with her spoon. Bibs and rags are far left drawer in kitchen, 2nd one down.

"*Nap time.* Is very erratic. If you were in town during morning or visiting someone and you traveled home around 11, then she probably fell asleep for a little while in the car. Then she most likely will not have another nap. Sometimes at 12:00 noon I put on the lullaby tape as she drinks her bottle.

> Loving children, as caring mothers and fathers know, is about profound *attention.*

Sometimes she still wants me to read until 12:30 and then she goes into her crib while she is wide awake, or she may fall asleep. If she cries check on her in 5 minutes. Do not pick her up. Tell her, "It's nap time and you need to go to sleep. I will be in the next room. You can go to sleep by yourself," and leave—quickly. She will probably still cry. Do not check on her (unless worried for her safety) for another 20 minutes; then do the same routine. She will usually just talk and play with her 4 toys in her crib and have "quiet time" for awhile. She will nap anywhere from 20 minutes to 2 hours. A key to whether she is really sleepy or not is if she starts getting VERY careless, reckless, and clumsy. Then try to get her down for a nap or quiet time.

"*Your day is still going.* Try to sneak in 20 minutes of reading sometime."

Then followed more details, interspersed with the staccato repetition, a kind of caregivers' mantra: "Your day is still going." Bath and bedtime details included the following:

"7:45 p.m. bath time for 20–30 minutes. Put her in plastic diaper, t-shirt and pajamas. She gets uncovered almost every night so do put on a t-shirt under pajamas. Quiet time, lullaby tape, singing songs, a warm bottle. Never give her more than 2 bottles at this time of evening. Do not let her

get down from your lap and start to play. Hold her until 8:30. Put her in crib whether asleep or not. She will cry for a few minutes, then go to sleep. If she has not had any nap or only a 20-minute nap she often falls asleep by 8 p.m. Move the above routine back by 1/2 hour."

Then followed a list of THINGS TO DO WITH JOANN—early childhood center, playgrounds, an animal farm and the like. We say the devil is in the details. So is love. Love is not a sentiment: it is a craft. I submit that we are forgetting this craft of love. We are too consumed with ourselves. Economic life in a distorted sense is driving us. In our frenzied lives, we cannot spend the time and attention required. Love is the heart of formation, of what it means to induct children into a way of life; to help them to understand what a decent, loving life is all about. But we know—on this score there can simply be no doubt—that our children are less and less formed in this attentive, painstaking, loving way and more and more given over to "structures" and cultural forces.[22]

We want to believe we are doing the right thing. We give our children so many choices nowadays, we exclaim. But a 2-year-old doesn't need five dozen options. He or she needs trust and love and the confidence that we are competent to do God's work on earth by holding and nurturing those born of our own acts of co-creation. This is the product of that attunement to the nitty-gritty details, to time in all its complexity, for it takes time to learn what children need, time to tend to the tasks. We all need this sort of loving attention paid. The dignity of the human person lies in the fact that we are beings to whom a certain loving attention is owed. During that week in Colorado, JoAnn Paulette Welch's grandmother was reminded of this truth and brought up yet again to a recognition of the reality of the present moment, one in which we have so little time for those we love, beginning with our children.

How can this possibly be? How could we let this happen? For God—our God—so loved the world he gave his only begotten Son. So that we might have life and have it more abundantly. So that, from our fallenness, love might afford us a glimpse of the lushness and fullness of a community of reconciliation. We forgot—and it was no innocent forgetting. Prideful or totally preoccupied selves cannot make any space for others. A culture that generates forms of preoccupation of the sort that narrow the circles of human sociality is a culture that should be subjected to sustained critique if one is working with a different understanding of an economy.

To treat this issue fully, it would be necessary to go on at this juncture to evaluate various Protestant and Catholic responses to economic life and pressures. This I cannot do in any great detail here. But a few comments are in order. Surely Bonhoeffer would ask us to think of orders of creation and whether some fundamental violation occurs when one area of life gobbles up so much that rightfully belongs to other aspects and dimensions of human existence. He would acknowledge the dire circumstances in which people find themselves and remind us of the demands of necessity. At the same time, and in light of the central importance of friendship and family to

[22] Let me be clear: this is not a brief against any form of play-care or day-care. But it is an attempt to set as a norm for all forms of care the loving, concrete attention paid by loving parents to this child. As our notion of what care involves deteriorates, we seem more prepared than ever before just to hand children over, keep our fingers crossed, and soothe our consciences with "quality time" talk and the like.

Bonhoeffer, any single-minded pursuit of economic gain, whether out of insecurity or avarice, would confirm for him just how fallen is our condition and reaffirm for him just how central to a decent ordering of human existence is "Christ the Center" and a "Life Together" as part of a community of believers.

John Paul, heir to the complex tradition of Catholic Social Thought, has made clear his views on economic life in a number of important and powerful encyclicals: *Laborem Exercens, Centesimus Annus, Sollicitudo Rei Socialis.* Having written rather extensively on Catholic social thought, I will refer the reader to other essays.[23] But this much needs to be said: the solidarity of persons and the theme of subsidiarity are the cornerstones of an alternative to a disordered economic life, including a distortion of work life. Perhaps Catholic thinking in this area is more richly developed than in the Lutheran tradition because the lingering intimations of integral nature generate a robust sociopolitical analogue: the notion of the common good. As the Synod of Bishops' "Working Paper" on America proclaims: "The Christian reality is complex because the ethic of justice and the requirement of fraternal solidarity must both be met. The Christian faith calls for a Christian social ethic, which the church's social doctrine proposes in a systematic way as directives for Christ's disciples in their personal, family, cultural and social life. . . . The social doctrine formulates the basic principles for viewing real situations and the criteria of moral judgment for evaluating the social conflict between the human reality and the Christian ideal as well as the rules capable of guiding the concrete actions of individuals and communities for the promotion of the common good and the overcoming of moral disorder and social injustice."[24]

Finally, an economy that turns, at times brutally so, on winners and losers is one that refuses to recognize and to accept humanity in all its variety, including the many gifts each of us has to offer, not excepting those who cannot engage in what we call "productive" work. When everything is for sale, fundamental acts of recognition, of the sort John Paul II locates as central in the formation of our understanding of persons (beginning with the "recognition" of Eve after Adam's deep sleep), are effectively occluded or far more difficult to sustain.

If pridefulness squeezes out the space for others, hence for an appropriate self-regard consistent with our recognition of others and the loving attention that should be paid to them, slothfulness is equally troubling. Sloth and pride would seem to be opposites: the one conjures up the notion of an ambitious, striving, bustling self, recklessly knocking over any barriers to self-promotion. Sloth, on the other hand, suggests indolence and an incapacity to act. Yet, as I shall argue, these two come together. Slothfulness is yet another way the fallen self refuses to pay proper attention and, in so doing, abandons the Christian freedom that is truly ours. Slothfulness, Luther assures us, is "one of the fruits of original sin." For "we are born with it by nature and it clings to us."[25]

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[23] The best place to begin is with the encyclicals themselves, of course. Commentary on Catholic Social Thought is enormous. One of my own essays is "Individual Rights and Social Obligation" which already appears in German and is forthcoming in *Common Knowledge.*

[24] "Special Synod for America: The Working Paper," *Origins* 27:3 (Sept 11, 1997), 217.

[25] Martin Luther, "Selected Psalms II," *Luther's Works* 13 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), 174.

3. Forgetting that We are Fallen: The Slothful Self

The sin is sloth. We don't think of sloth much anymore. The term "slothful" is rarely deployed, perhaps because it has such an archaic sound. "Lazy," yes, but even that has fallen into desuetude. We are more likely to psychologize our characterizations and to label someone with insufficient get-up-and-go, or one plagued by a kind of torpor where his or her own life is concerned, as plagued by low self-esteem. "Lazy" implies a value judgment, and we are enjoined not to make such judgments any longer.

Luther, as I noted earlier, describes sloth as one of the fruits of original sin. It is part of our fallen heritage, and "it clings to us." But what exactly clings, and why is sloth a problem? The dictionary defines sloth as disinclination to action or indolence. A slothful person is one who is sluggish. How can this possibly characterize anyone or anything in a cultural moment I have already characterized as frenzied, one in which we seem closer with each passing day and moment to Hobbes's reductive characterization of human beings as so much matter in constant motion? Have I not already offered up a series of pointed criticisms against excessive activity of the sort signified by the triumph of contemporary *homo economicus*? Yes, but that's part of the story of sloth. I take sloth to mean not simply inactivity but acquiescence in the conventions of our day; a refusal to take up the burden of self-criticism; a falling into the *Zeitgeist* unthinkingly and, in so doing, forgetting that we are made to "serve God wittily, in the tangle of our minds." The upshot is that we lose the critical recognition that those called by the name "Christian" are poised between two poles: *contra mundum* and *amor mundi*. That is part of what it means to be "salt and light" to the world.

What is at stake in each case—whether pridefulness or slothfulness—is a negation of appropriate humility; a denial of relationality and community; a quest for self-sufficiency that, in the case of sloth, involves too thoroughgoing an absorption in the views and evaluations of others.[1] This wants explaining. To paraphrase the song of a few years back, we are "looking for love"—including self-affirmation—all too often in all the wrong places. There are ways in which a destructive loss of self shakes hands with the culturally sanctioned project I have already explored, self-triumphalism.

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[2] Some interesting observations have emerged concerning the wildly disproportionate number of women dispatched by Dr. Kevorkian. Many of these women, it seems, were suffering from depression as much as anything else. All of them were so transfixed by the view that women are to minister to others but not to be ministered to themselves that they saw it as an act of salutary love to kill themselves with Kevorkian's help. At least some critics have reasoned so. Surely sloth—acquiescing in the view that women must always be so attuned to the view of others that they do not assert themselves—is implicated in this terrible phenomenon.

Let us turn, then, to an examination of slothfulness as it seeps into the pores, sinews, and tissues of the ways in which we think about and treat the body in late modernity. The overarching and framing thematic is a flight from finitude that may at first blush seem but one additional moment of prideful triumphalism but, upon closer examination, can be construed as implicating us in distorted and distorting forms of self-excision. What I refer to short-handedly with the term 'self-excision' is a type of self-abnegation that occludes recognition of the complexities and joys of embodiment—the givens, if you will, of finitude and created being itself. One spin-off is widespread acquiescence in, even hearty approval of, destruction of the bodies of others as part of our culture's panoply of invented rights and punishments. To be more specific, the culturally and legally sanctioned projects I have in mind implicate us in direct or indirect self-loss through those state-sponsored and sanctioned acts of radical excision we know as abortion and the death penalty.

What is the nature of Christian freedom? We are both creatures and creators. As creatures we are dependent. It follows that our creaturely freedom consists in our recognition that we are not abstractly free, but free only in and through relationship. A limit lies at the very heart of our existence in freedom. One is bound, at this point, to recall Luther's most famous words—after "Here I stand"—from his great essay, "The Freedom of a Christian." Luther writes: "To make the way smoother for the unlearned—for only them do I serve—I shall set down the following two propositions concerning the freedom and the bondage of the spirit: 1. A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. 2. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all."[2] Christian freedom turns on recognition of the limits to freedom.

Bonhoeffer, you will recall, frets that man *sicut deus*, as creator, transmogrifies into a destroyer as he and she misuse freedom. At the same time, our freedom is a constitutive part of our natures. So: how do we understand this freedom? Robin Lovin helps us to appreciate a specifically Christian freedom, one that is not opposed to the natural order but acts in faithfulness to it.[3] We begin by taking human beings as they are, not as those fanciful entities sometimes conjured up by philosophers in what they themselves call "science fiction" examples. To be sure, the freedom of a real, not a fanciful, human being means, among other things, that one can "project oneself imaginatively into a situation in which the constraints of present experience no longer hold."[4] One can strive to imagine states of perfection or near-perfection. At the same time, actual freedom is always situated; it is not an abstract position located nowhere in particular. Freedom is concrete, not free-floating. Freedom is a "basic human good. Life without freedom is not something we would choose, no matter how comfortable the material circumstances might be."[5] Our

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[2] From Martin Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings,* ed. Timothy F. Lull (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 596.

[3] This is not the time and the place to unpack ethical naturalism and moral realism. Suffice it to say that I am committed to the view that there is a 'there there,' that there are truths to be discerned about the world and that the world isn't just so much putty in our conceptually deft hands. The world exists independent of our minds, but our minds possess the wonderful capacity to apprehend the world, up to a point given the fallibility of reason.

[4] Robin Lovin, *Reinhold Niebuhr and Christian Realism* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 123.

[5] Lovin, 126.

reasoning capacity is part and parcel of our freedom. But that reasoning isn't a separate faculty cut off from our embodied selves; instead it is profoundly constituted by our embodied histories and memories.

Christian freedom, in Lovin's words, consists in our ability to "avoid excessive identification with the surrounding culture, since that tends both to lower . . . moral expectations and to deprive [persons] of the witness to alternative possibilities."[6] If the horizon lowers excessively and all is collapsed into immanence, the possibility that we might exercise our capacity for freedom is correlatively negated. So the denial of freedom consists, in part, in a refusal to accept the freedom that is the human inheritance of finite, limited creatures "whose capacities for change are also limited, and who can only bring about new situations that are also themselves particular, local, and contingent."[7] To presume more is problematic, launching us into a pridefulness that may itself be the fruit of sloth given our cultural matrix; to presume less is to engage in a denial of finitude that helps to underwrite forms of un-freedom, often, of course, in the name of great ideals, like choice or justice. So our freedom is, at one and the same time, both real and limited.

With this as backdrop, let us examine current projects of self-overcoming that constitute examples of denial of finitude as a form of slothfulness, indolence where cultural demands and trumpeted enthusiasms are concerned. These projects are tricky to get at critically because they present themselves to us in the dominant language of our culture—choice, consent, control—and because they promise an escape from the human condition into a realm of near mastery. We are readily beguiled with the promise of a new self. In so doing, we may deny or harm the only self we've got. Consider, then, that we are in the throes of a structure of biological obsession that undermines recognition of both the fullness and limitations of embodiment.[8] We are bombarded daily with the promise that nearly every human ailment or condition can be overcome if we just have will and skill enough. (Money helps, too.) As we seek cures for the human condition, the desperate edge of that seeking bespeaks a conviction that our imperfect embodiment *is* the problem that must be overcome. For example: a premise—and promise—driving the Human Genome Project, the massive effort underway to map the genetic code of the entire human race, is that we might one day intervene decisively in order to guarantee better if not perfect human products. In the genome-enthusiast camp, they are already talking about Designer Genes—that is genes, not jeans. Do you want a blue-eyed, blond-haired, strapping youth with athletic tendencies, perfect teeth, and a 75-year warrantee min.? I exaggerate, but not by much.

In the 1997 film "Gattaca," not a very good film but an instructive one, the pro-

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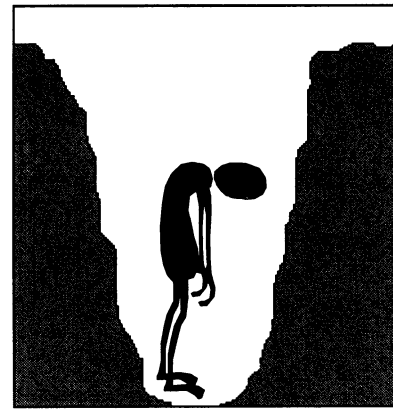
[6] Lovin, 94.

[7] Lovin, 130.

[8] This, too, is more complex than simply acquiescence. For example, where the matter or abortion—taken up below—is concerned, there is enormous popular support for some forms of restriction and restraint on the practice. The elite culture (the media, those with incomes over $50,000 per year, lawyers) long ago fell into lock-step with an absolute abortion 'right,' including partial birth abortion, a practice the American Medical Association itself has declared not to be a legitimate medical procedure. So on the level of opinion all is not homogeneous. But this opinion rarely translates into action of any sort. Thus, the atrophy of civic habits of the past four decades or so goes hand-in-hand with the triumph of projects that constitute flights from finitude.

tagonist is born the "old-fashioned way" (a "faith-birth") to his parents who had made love and taken their chances with what sort of offspring might eventuate. In this terrible new world, when a child is born an immediate genetic profile is done. Our protagonist, Vincent, is a beautiful but, it turns out, genetically hapless child (on the standards of the barren world that is to be his lot). He enters life not amidst awe and hopefulness but misery and worry. His mother clutches the tiny newborn to her breast as his genetic quotient is coldly read off by the expert. "Cells tell all," the prophets of *genoism* intone. Because of his genetic flaws, for his was an unregulated birth, young Vincent isn't covered by insurance; he doesn't get to go to school past a certain age; and he is doomed to menial service. He is a de-*gene*rate. Or, as the scanners immediately pronounce it, an "Invalid."

Vincent contrives a way to fake out the system as he yearns to go on a one-year manned mission to some truly far-out planet. Only "Valids"—genetically correct human beings—are eligible for such elite tasks. So Vincent pays off a "Valid" for the Valid's urine, blood, saliva, and fingerprints and begins his arduous, elaborate ruse. For this is a world in which any bodily scraping—a single eyelash, a single bit of skin sloughing—might betray you. Why would a Valid sell his bodily fluids and properties? Because this Valid is now "useless," a cripple, having been paralyzed in a car accident. Indeed, his life is so useless on society's standards (which he, in turn, has thoroughly internalized) that, at the film's conclusion, and after having stored sufficient urine and blood that Vincent can fool the system for years to come, the crippled Valid manages to ease himself into a blazing furnace—to incinerate himself—life not being worth living any longer, not for one who cannot use his legs.



As for Vincent, and despite some very tense moments, life is as good as it is ever going to get by film's end: he has made love to Uma Thurman and he has faked his way (with the connivance of a sympathetic security officer) onto the mission to the really far-out planet of which he has dreamt since childhood, despite his genetically flawed condition. This is a bleak film. The only resistance Vincent can come up with is faking it. He has no language of protest and ethical distance available to him. This is just the world as he and others know it and presumably will always know it. Uma Thurman's intimacy with an Invalid is as close to resistance as she can get.[9]

We aren't in the "Gattaca" nightmare yet. But are we drawing uncomfortably close? There are many who believe so, including the mother of a Down syndrome child who wrote me after she had read one of my columns about genetic engineering in *The New Republic*. I had mused, in that piece, on what our quest for bodily perfection might mean over the long run for the

[9] A bit reminiscent of Julia, young female sexual revolutionary, in Huxley's *Brave New World*.

The heart of the matter lies in a loss of appreciation of the nature of human embodiment.

developmentally different. My interlocutor, whose child died, tragically, of a critical illness in his third year, wrote that she and her husband were enormously grateful to have had "the joyous privilege of parenting a child with Down syndrome.... [Tommy's] birth truly transformed our lives in ways that we will cherish forever. But how could we have known in advance that we indeed possessed the fortitude to parent a child with special needs? And who would have told us of the rich rewards?"

She continued: "The function of prenatal tests, despite protestations to the contrary, is to provide parents the information necessary to assure that all pregnancies brought to term are 'normal.' I worry not only about the encouragement given to eliminating a 'whole category of persons' (the point you make), but also about the prospects for respect and treatment of children who come to be brain-damaged either through unexpected birth traumas or later accidents. And what about the pressures to which parents like myself will be subject? How could you 'choose' to burden society in this way?"

She's right. In the name of expanding choice, we are excising our definition of humanity. And we are convincing people—and this is where slothfulness comes in—that they *are incapable* of the hard work of care and love when it comes to a child with "special needs." The needs of all children are special and particular, of course. The category of "special need" sprang up at one point in our recent past with concern and compassion in mind. But we have now decided, as a culture, that ordinary folks no longer possess competence in this area, thereby truncating the arena of our own free responsibility and falling into expert-sanctioned sloth. Thus, the present abortion "right," this freedom we have embraced, often embodies a great burden for women who are told that they *alone* have the power to choose whether or not to have a child and that they *alone* are expected to bear the consequences if they do not choose to do so.

According to the Supreme Court, in Roe v. Wade, the relevant "decision-makers" where abortion is concerned in the first trimester are *the woman alone* or "her responsible physician." Notice the denial of relationality in the official reasoning, a denial that makes it more difficult to take notice of the occlusion of relationality and community that often brings a woman to the abortion clinic in the first place. What we should notice, and lament as a tragedy or a difficult situation, instead becomes an exemplary freedom. Sloth enters in the rapidity with which many men simply absconded in light of Roe v. Wade—It's your choice, dear, it's entirely up to you. Sloth enters in our acquiescence in the sanctioned conviction that free-standingness means the right to deny the body of another *in situ*. Sloth enters when the *only* form Christian protest takes is to counter the abortion right with fetal rights. What about the *responsibility* of the Christian community to reach out to pregnant women in need of practical, hands-on assistance, the concrete form that stewardship in this area should take? We need more support in this society for mothers, fathers, and families. Instead, what we

seem to get is an ever more rigid bifurcation of our discourse into a *pas de deux* between distorted views of freedom.

The heart of the matter lies in a loss of appreciation of the nature of human embodiment. The body we currently inhabit becomes the imperfect body, the one subject to chance and the vagaries of life, including illness and aging. This body has become our foe. The new body to come—extolled in manifestos, promised by enthusiasts, embraced by many ordinary citizens—is to be our gleaming fabrication. For soon, surely, we will have found a way around the fact that what our poor foremothers and forefathers, living in a less "enlightened" era than our own, took for granted—that the body must weaken and falter and one day pass from life to death. The future perfect body will not be permitted to falter. The body may grow older in a strictly chronological sense, but why should we? So we devise multiple strategies to fend off aging. And we represent aging bodies as those of teenagers with gleaming gray hair. These strategies and concerns speak to our repudiation of finitude and to our longing for full self-possession. Rather than approaching matters of life, death, and health with humility, knowing that we cannot cure the human condition, we seek cures in the assumption that the more we control the better.

Notice the similarity between this project and that which drives the marketization of everyday life discussed in the previous chapter, namely, that there is nothing that is good in itself, including embodied existence. Good is reduced to a strictly conse-quentialist set of criteria that is up for measurement and comparison and to be adjudicated in functionalistic terms. Thus, it becomes quite easy to be rather casual about devising and implementing strategies aimed at selective weeding out or destruction of the bodies of those considered imperfect or abnormal. And if we are even the least bit queasy about this sort of thing, that can be attributed to the lingering, residual effects of irrational or superstitious attitudes surrounding the human body, many sustained by religion. Should a concerned person raise the alarm and ask, for example, whether, if we continue down this road, at one point in the not-too-distant future old age might itself be considered anomalous when measured against blooming youth? (Or, should I say, those among the elderly who are no longer teenagers with grey hair, hence a drag on society.) Will the unproductive elderly at that point be *encouraged*, in the interest of an overall social benefit, to permit themselves to be euthenized because they are extra mouths to feed and a nuisance to just about everybody?

It is important to stress just how widely accepted the technocratic view is and how, slothfully, we are acquiescing in its premises. In a review in the *Times Literary Supplement* of four new books on the genetic revolution, the reviewer opined matter-of-factly that "we must inevitably start to choose our descendants." He added that we do this now in "permitting or preventing the birth of our own children according to their medical prognosis, thus selecting the lives to come." So long as society doesn't cramp our freedom of action, we will stay on the road of progress and exercise sovereign choice over birth by consigning to death those with a less than stellar potential for a life not "marred by an excess of pain or disability."[10]

The New York Times alerted us to this fact in an essay by its science editor, Gina Kolata, "On Cloning Humans, 'Never' Turns

[10] But who defines excess? This is a squishy soft criterion that comes into play at present for such 'abnormalities' as cleft palate.

Swiftly into 'Why Not.'"[11] Kolata points out that, in the immediate aftermath of Dolly, the cloned sheep who stared out at us fetchingly from the covers of so many newspapers and magazines, there was much consternation and negative rumbling.[12] (I recall very well, for I was one of the rumblers.)

But opposition dissipated quickly, she continues, with fertility centers already conducting "experiments with human eggs that lay the groundwork for cloning. Moreover, the Federal Government is supporting new research on the cloning of monkeys, encouraging scientists to perfect techniques that could easily be transferred to humans." A Presidential ethics commission may have recommended a "limited ban on cloning humans," but, after all, "it is an American tradition to allow people the freedom to reproduce in any way they like." Really? Since when? In any way they like? There is no way, currently, to counter such subjectivist construals, it seems. So opposition to "any way one likes" disappears like the morning's dew at first sun.[13]

The tenor has changed, according to *The New York Times*. The writer describes a "slow acceptance" of the idea of cloning in the scientific community—an acceptance that took all of six months to go from horror or queasiness to acquiescence or hearty approval. Besides, the article concludes, "some experts said the real question was not whether cloning is ethical but whether it is legal." And one doctor is quoted, at article's end, in these ominous words: "'The fact is that, in America, cloning may be bad, but telling people how they should reproduce is worse.... In the end... America is not ruled by ethics. It is ruled by law.'" Law and ethics are presumed separated by a chasm, a claim falsified by the dominant Western tradition of natural law. But the implication of this view is that no mere ethical norm or standard or commitment or insight can be brought to bear, whether to criticize or to checkmate, statutory laws, should they be unjust or unwise. Were this day to actually arrive, it would mean that we had given up on critical politico-ethical projects, thereby diminishing our domain of free responsibility. One might call this slothful triumphalism, although this definitely sounds weird. But consider that it would mean we were not merely slothful, but militantly so. Thus, we would have paved additional miles on the fast track toward eradication of any real integrity to the category of 'the human,' and we displace altogether any notion of 'the natural.' Law, separated definitively from ethics, would trump all.[14]

Professor Laurence Tribe of the Harvard Law School hastens to reassure us on this score. He argues thus: If we ban cloning of humans, we diminish choice, and we do so illegitimately by appealing to divine

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[11] *The New York Times* (December 2, 1997), 1, continued on A17.

[12] This foreboding also comes through in Bryan Appleyard, *Brave New Worlds: Staying Human in the Genetic Future* (New York: Viking, 1998).

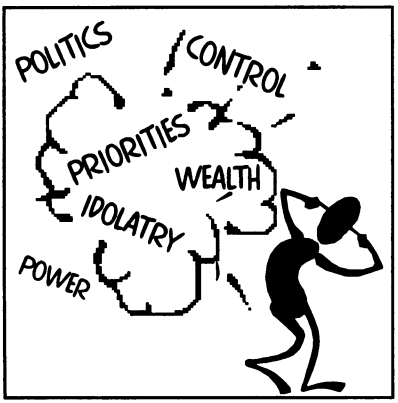
[13] I cannot here deal with the commercialization of genetics, but the huge amounts of profit to be made drives much of the scientific and technological work, alas. See, for example, Lisa Belkin, "Splice Einstein and Sammy Glick. Add a Little Magellan," *New York Times Magazine* (August 23, 1998), 26–31.

[14] Think, by the way, of what this would have done to Martin Luther King's protest: simply stopped it dead in its tracks. For the law of the Jim Crow South was the law of segregation. And no ethical argument can challenge the law. End of story. A comeback would be that you need to make a legal argument to change the law. But King's call for legal change was an ethical call. The reductive argument that law and ethics must never touch is a crude form of legal positivism, or command-obedience legal theory. What is right doesn't enter into the picture at all.

commandment or inspiration. This means we will automatically "criminalize" a method for "creating human babies." This blights human freedom and portends a "grave" evil, that of creating a "caste system" of the cloned. How so? Because if we ban cloning, we will make clones "a marginalized caste," so it follows that the "social costs of prohibition" are too high.[15]

It is hard to imagine a more perverse—I use the word advisedly—argument. All the heavy artillery—choice, freedom, marginalization, forbid—comes into play. The children of light favor this new freedom. Those who consider themselves under irrational divine sanction promote the "evil" of diminished choice and would "marginalize" clones. *They*, therefore, are the unjust, cruel children of darkness. They must be stopped before they negate an entirely abstract, hypothetical, invented freedom anyone has yet to exercise! So we are enjoined to acquiesce in a new and entirely abstract freedom and take several additional, huge strides in the direction of exploding even the merest intimation of our God-given embodiment and our call to be fruitful as God has enjoined. We relinquish the authentic freedom and responsibility that is ours in favor of an entirely abstract, ideological claim that feeds and fuels narcissistic imaginings of radical sameness. For one can see in cloning-enthusiasm a real fear of the different and unpredictable; a yearning for a world of guaranteed self-replication.

Many are those, from technology and commerce, who have rushed in to seize the title of voluptuaries of this as-yet-unexercised freedom, our opposition having vanished after six arduous months of trying to hold the line. Perhaps you recall Chicago physicist Richard Seed—an admitted entrepreneur who, nevertheless, illustrates currents at work amongst soberer sorts—who, in January, 1998, announced that he



planned to clone a human being sometime over the next year and a half. Seed claimed that God supported his endeavor because God wants us to be just like him and God gave us the power to clone. One wonders where Seed learned his theology. The Christian tradition teaches us that we are called to be co-creators, to participate in creation rather than to dominate and attain mastery over it. To seek to be identical to God is idolatry; it is perhaps the *point d'appui* of the sin of pride. For a culture to acquiesce in the march of such pridefulness is a saddening display of the sin of sloth.

Seed has also speculated about introducing immortality into human life, so we could all live forever "like God." But God doesn't "live" forever. God has no beginning or end. Seed is guilty of what Vaclav Havel calls "arrogant anthropocentrism" of the sort that has ravaged this century. Seed seems unaware of this. And, even scarier, people seem to be playing along, if not with Seed's self-promoting agenda, then in "getting with the program," as we are wont to say.

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[15] Laurence H. Tribe, "Second Thoughts on Cloning," *The New York Times* (December 5, 1997), A23.

We are so easily dazzled. If we *can* do it, we *must* do it. Better, it seems, to turn our children into objects and products. Better to risk the threat of a damaging biogenetic uniformity, since much of the basic genetic information that goes into the creation of a child from two parents emerges as a result of sexual reproduction, something not replicable by definition when you pick one parent to clone. Better to embark on an experimental course that would likely result in unused products, poor misbegotten children of our distorted imaginations, that don't quite make it to the end of the conveyor belt as nobody wants them, not in our brave new world.[16]

> Once the barrier of repugnance is breached, anything is possible and most things become likely.

Do I exaggerate? It is hard to imagine how in light of the fantastic (and profit-making) proposals being proffered each and every day in the name of science, progress, technological control, being our own creators, and all the rest. In losing what Leon Kass calls "the wisdom of repugnance," we embark on a path that constitutes a violation of such a basic sort that it is hard to know just how to speak of it. But let me share a bit of Kass's argument with you before I turn to xenotransplantation as another example of the excision of the barrier of repugnance. Kass calls upon us to pay close attention to what we find "offensive," "repulsive," or "distasteful," for such reactions point to deeper realities. He writes: "in this age in which everything is held to be permissible so long as it is freely done, in which our given human nature no longer commands respect, in which our bodies are regarded as mere instruments of our autonomous rational wills, repugnance may be the only voice left that speaks up to defend the central core of our humanity. Shallow are the souls that have forgotten how to shudder."[17]

The situation in which we find ourselves is one of sloth, acquiescence in shallow viewpoints and arguments, or so I shall characterize the gravamen of Kass's argument. For he points out that the "technical, liberal, and meliorist approaches all ignore the deeper anthropological, social and, indeed, ontological meanings of bringing forth

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[16] But we have a solution to that one, too, don't we? We can be certain that the creatures nobody wants, whose lives are not "worth living," can be easily dispatched to spare their suffering. Physician-assisted suicide, the track down which we are moving, is, of course, part and parcel of the general tendencies I here discuss and criticize. Although I do not focus specifically on this matter, I recommend the following essays for the general reader: Paul R. McHugh, "The Kevorkian Epidemic," *The American Scholar* (Winter, 1997), 15–27; Leon R. Kass and Nelson Lund, "Courting Death: Assisted Suicide, Doctors, and the Law," *Commentary* (December, 1996), 17-29); the late Cardinal Bernardin's "Letter to the Supreme Court," appended to a friend-of-the-court brief filed by the Catholic Health Association in a Supreme Court case testing the appeals of two lower court decisions that struck down laws prohibiting assisted suicide in Washington and New York States; and a brief by the U.S. Catholic Conference, "Assisted Suicide Issue Moves to Supreme Court," *Origins* 26:26 (December 12, 1996), 421–30.)

[17] Leon R. Kass, "The Wisdom of Repugnance," *The New Republic* (June 2, 1997, 17–26), 20.

new life. To this more fitting and profound point of view, cloning shows itself to be a major alteration, indeed, a major violation, of our given nature as embodied, gendered and engendering beings—and of the social relations built on this natural ground" (p. 20). The upshot is that we cede the ground *in advance of any argument having been made* to the Tribes of the world when, in fact, it should work the other way around. "The burden of moral argument," writes Kass, "must fall entirely on those who want to declare the widespread repugnances of humankind to be mere timidity or superstition" (p. 21). But we have become slothful about defending the insights drawn from our tradition. In upending the ways we are bound and within which we are free, we do the following things, in Kass's view: we enter a world in which unethical experiments "upon the resulting child-to-be" are conducted; we deprive a cloned entity of a "distinctive identity not only because he will be in genotype and appearance to another human being, but, in this case, because he may also be twin to the person who is his 'father' or 'mother'—if one can still call them that"; we deliberately plan situations that we *know*—the empirical evidence is incontrovertible—are not optimal arenas for the rearing of children, namely, family fragments that deny relationality or shrink it; and we "enshrine and aggravate a profound and mischievous misunderstanding of the meaning of having children and of the parent-child relationship.... The child is given a genotype that has already lived.... Cloning is inherently despotic, for it seeks to make one's children ... after one's own image... and their future according to one's will" (pp. 22–24).

Once the barrier of repugnance is breached, anything is possible and most things become likely. Consider xenotransplantation—the transplanting of animal organs into humans—and the panoply of new experiments that accompany this particular practice. There is a hitch because, thus far, such transplantation has turned out badly as the human organism resists the pig or baboon organ. So another idea is now at work, or several. One is to perfect cloning human-like entities—human bodies without brains —to serve as raw material for organ supplies as, not having brains, they wouldn't be human. This means we could kill them, or sustain them somehow, until we need their body parts. That not yet being perfected, there are experimenters and gene-companies busy "humanizing" pigs and "pigifying" humans. This is where repugnance—a kind of aesthetic sensibility bearing ethical portents—enters. Most of us are automatically repulsed at the notion of creatures whose integrity has been radically defiled, for example, science fiction images of pig bodies with human heads attached or other bereft and forlorn creatures, like the poor, wounded, angry entities resulting from experiments on *The Island of Dr. Moreau.*

But the forces of anti-repugnance are at work, and this is how it—or they—work. Because no cross-species transplantation has been successful in the long term—and success is measured by the extent to which a patient has become a cellular and genetic mix of human and animal—a condition a pioneer of xenotransplantation at the University of Pittsburgh calls "post-transplantation chimerism"—moves are afoot to make such chimerism more likely. This has led to transgenesis—manipulating animals to accept genes from other species. So transgenic pigs are being raised. These are pigs that have been induced to accept human genes by injecting the female pigs' eggs with human genetic material and reimplanting them in the pig who then gives birth to little pigs that are transgenic. These piglets are killed, and their organs are used for trans-

plantation. The hope is that we will get more and more chimerism over time.

Who is asking the important questions about these developments? As one critic has put it: What does it mean if "I" consist of many human and many baboon cells? If I am a mixture of different creatures, how does it affect my sense of my created integrity? (Not to mention the integrity of other creatures who cannot, by definition, put this question to themselves but can, for all that, be assaulted in their creaturely integrity.) Chimerism and transgenesis proponents—and it is a transgression of genesis that we are talking about—have no answer other than buoyant promises of living longer and maybe even forever if we get this thing perfected. Where are the limits here?

Consider the origin of the term "chimera," for the antique mythic tradition also carries warnings about breaching the barrier of repugnance. In the story of Bellerophon and his fight with the Minotaur, Bellerophon, a grandson of Sisyphus and a greater tamer of horses, together with Pegasus, fights and kills the Chimera, a fearful creature that doesn't know what it is, being a horrible combination of lion, serpent, and goat, spitting fire from all three of its heads. Chimera is beastly because he, she, it, is a disgusting admixture of forms that do not cohere into a compelling aesthetic or ethical representation: thus all that Chimera—a perfect transgenic exemplar if ever there was one—can do is to lay waste. In destroying Chimera, Bellerophon and Pegasus bring peace and safety to the people of Lycia.[18]

The warning signs are out. They are been there since the very inception of the Western tradition, including its pre-Christian antique form. Christians and Jews have a very specific tradition beginning with the story of a good creation by a good God. But that no longer suffices for us late moderns. We would become as gods, breach the barrier of repugnance, and, knowing not shame, create, unmindful of what is being destroyed. The great warnings no longer compute.[19]

Let us return to where we began, with the question: how far have we fallen? A burden borne by human beings after the fall lies in discerning what is natural. Can 'the natural' any longer serve as a standard? The great moral teachers, until relatively recently, believed so. But we are not concerned with moral teachers in general; rather, we are engaged in what the present past of our own tradition offers. It is worth reminding ourselves at this juncture of the irreducible fact of our embodiment in the Christian understanding of our natures. We are corporeal beings. We were created as such. According to John Paul, this account—the ontological equality of male and female as corporeal beings—is "free from any trace whatsoever of subjectivism. It contains only the objective facts and defines the objective reality, both when it speaks of man's creation, male and female, in the image of God, and when it adds a little later the words of the first blessing: 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth; subdue it and have dominion over it' (Gen 1:28)."[20]

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[18] There is more to the story. Eventually Bellerophon inherits the kingdom. But his pride goeth before his fall. He begins to proclaim that he is equal to Zeus. He urges Pegasus ever higher and even tries to enter Olympus. But he has flown too far. Pegasus unseats him and he plummets to earth, falling into thorns in an obscure country, compelled to wander the earth as an unknown beggar until he dies. Pegasus goes on to become the carrier of thunderbolts for Zeus. The tale is one of idealistic rapture that, if it goes too far and tries to fly, must inevitably end in a life spent in brambles and in penury.

[19] See Roger Shattuck's wonderful discussion of Faust and Frankenstein in his *Forbidden Knowledge* (New York: Harcourt Brace, Harvest Book), 1996.

The Genesis account looks forward to the encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* but is long presaged in Karol Wojtyla's pre-papal writings. For example, in a series of spiritual exercises presented to Pope Paul VI, the papal household, and the cardinals and bishops of the Roman Curia during a Lenten Retreat in March 1976, Karol Cardinal Wojtyla argued that "one cannot understand either Sartre or Marx without having first read and pondered very deeply the first three chapters of Genesis. These are the key to understanding the world of today, both its roots and its extremely radical—and therefore dramatic—affirmations and denials."[21] "From the beginning," in John Paul's account, is a guard against radical subjectivism, and subjectivism, remember, is "fundamentally different from subjectivity," as Wojtyla wrote in a 1960 essay on love. "Subjectivity is in the nature of love, which involves human beings, man and woman. Subjectivism, on the other hand, is a distortion of the true nature of love, a hypertrophy of the subjective element such that the objective value of love is partially or wholly swallowed up and lost in it."[22]

This subjectivism grounds what Colin E. Gunton has called "the rootless will" of late modernity that begins with an aggressive denial "of the possibility of objective meaning and truth."[23] We lose argumentation—what's to argue about if there is no truth to be found?—and "the demonstration" replaces the *disputatio*. The upshot, ironically, is "an overvaluation of the success of the scientific method and an undervaluation, if not complete relativization, of the methods of the humanities" (p. 103). By contrast, an authentic appreciation of plurality "in the sense of a diversity of voices contending for truth" is evidence "against, not for, the postmodernist denial of objective meaning and truth" (p. 105). For the "only *logos* underlying the postmodernist world is that of a dissipated and fragmented cultural pluralism," a world quite different from a robustly contesting plurality of voices. Gunton reiterates that the doctrine of creation is the very heart of the matter (p. 107), and not only because it teaches about the origin of things, about beginnings, but "as an articulation of the way things are by virtue of the relation they have with their creator" (p. 124). Denying that relationship, we fall into subjectivism, into a world of rootless wills.

> It is worth reminding ourselves at this juncture [that] we are corporeal beings. We were created as such.

Bonhoeffer would agree. Too little has been made of Bonhoeffer's discussion of "The Natural" in his *Ethics* and of his conviction that this concept, having fallen "into discredit in Protestant ethics," had become the preserve almost exclusively of Catholic thought. Bonhoeffer aimed to resurrect

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[20] John Paul II, *Original Unity of Man and Woman*. Catechesis on the Book of Genesis (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1981), 23.

[21] Karol Wojtyla, *Sign of Contradiction* (New York: Seabury, 1979), 24.

[22] Karol Wojtyla, *Love and Responsibility* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1991), 153.

[23] Colin E. Gunton, *The One, The Three and the Many. God, Creation and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 102.

"the natural" and, in so doing, he draws closer to the position unpacked by John Paul II in his catechesis on Genesis. Bonhoeffer claims that fallen creation still has access to the natural, but only "on the basis of the gospel."[24] For the "natural is that which, after the Fall, is directed towards the coming of Christ." In his move to redeem the concept of the natural, Bonhoeffer argues that we enjoy a "relative freedom" in natural life. But there are "true and . . . mistaken" uses of this freedom," and these mark "the difference between the natural and the unnatural." He throws down the gauntlet. "Destruction of the natural means destruction of life. . . . The unnatural is the enemy of life."

It is unnatural to approach life from a false "vitalism" or excessive idealism or, contrastingly, from an equally false "mechanization" and lassitude that shows "despair towards natural life," expressing as it does "a certain hostility to life, tiredness of life and incapacity for life." Our right to bodily life is a natural, not an invented, right and the basis of all other rights, given that Christians repudiate the view that the body is simply a prison for the immortal soul. Harming the body harms the self at its depth. "Bodilyness and human life belong inseparably together," in Bonhoeffer's words. Our bodies are ends in themselves, and this has "very far-reaching consequences for the Christian appraisal of all the problems that have to do with the life of the body, housing, food, clothing, recreation, play and sex." We can use our bodies and the bodies of others well or ill.

The most striking and radical excision of the integrity and right of natural life is "arbitrary killing," the deliberate destruction of "innocent life." Bonhoeffer notes abortion, killing defenseless prisoners or wounded men, destroying lives we do not find worth living—a clear reference to Nazi euthanasia and genocidal policies toward the ill, the infirm, all persons with handicaps. "The right to live is a matter of the essence" and not of any socially imposed or constructed values. Even "the most wretched life" is "worth living before God." Other violations of the liberty of the body include physical torture, arbitrary seizure and enslavement (American slavery is here referenced) and deportations, separation of persons from home and family—the full panoply of horrors the twentieth century has dished up in superabundance. The fragment by Bonhoeffer on the natural is unfinished—as is the entirety of his *Ethics*—but I want now to move to another of our sins of sloth that I find consistent with his argument, namely, the death penalty.

Oliver O'Donovan has recently offered up a strenuous defense of the death penalty, mounting an argument against John Paul's virtual excision of the death penalty in the encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*.[25] For John Paul, "The horizon of death extends over the whole perspective of human life on earth. . . . Awareness of the meaning of the body and awareness of its generative meaning come into contact, in man, with awareness of death, the inevitable horizon of which they bear within them, so to speak."[26] The very structure of human identity embodies both the mystery of creation and the mystery of redemption: this is the fullness

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[24] This discussion in Bonhoeffer's *Ethics* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995) appears on pp. 142–85, and all quoted matter is drawn from those pages inclusively.

[25] Oliver O'Donovan, "The Death Penalty in Evangelium Vitae," in *Ecumenical Ventures in Ethics: Protestants Engage Pope John Paul II's Moral Encyclicals*, ed. Reinhard Hütter and Theodor Dieter, 216–36 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1997).

[26] John Paul I, 165, 167 (from *Evangelium Vitae* as printed in *Origins*.)

of an adequate theological anthropology. Because John Paul so dignifies the body—as the gift of God and the gift of the self to another—he moves the way he does to interdict the death penalty because he wants to underscore what a punitive measure of excruciating proportions it is for an earthly power to efface a living representative of the *imago Dei*.

For John Paul, the primary form of social disorganization to which societies are currently subject is in the area of the spirit. In this way, the well-ordered commercial republics of the West, including our own, are morally disordered places. Thus, when John Paul eclipses the space for the death penalty, he is not, as O'Donovan claims, universalizing from the relative civic peace of 'first world' countries and thereby creating a supererogatory legal requirement for those not blessed by such high levels of civic order. No, in fact, John Paul would surely say to O'Donovan and all who defend the death penalty on the grounds that it "has played a significant role in containing forces of lawlessness and upholding public order" in less organized societies than our own, that this claim is subject to empirical adjudication. And what the evidence shows is just how pervasive is a resort to summary execution and death by those with the power to undertake such actions and to cloak these actions in a patina of concern for law-abidingness. The apartheid regime did this sort of thing all the time when it was itself a giant lawlessness, an organized injustice.

Real Hobbesian states of nature are rare, and where they exist the matter at issue isn't the death penalty at all but harsh necessity attendant upon civil war: there is plenty of murder, plenty of death, and execution aplenty. But this must be distinguished from the death penalty, which presupposes an established system of civil and criminal justice. So the pressure John Paul is putting on regimes is precisely on those that already have established systems of civil and criminal law but who, slothfully, persist in *seeing* themselves through the lens of Hobbesian insecurities. As the foremost defender of a universal regime of human rights in the world today, John Paul defends, first of all, a fundamental right to bodily life. Thus, he opposes the death penalty because it destroys human life and because it promotes and deepens the *lex talionis* as the way of human political life. With Bonhoeffer, he cedes to the state only penultimate, not ultimate, power. Claims to ultimacy and to the death penalty comport with one another. Indeed, the death penalty is part of what John Paul calls a "culture of death."

Our right to bodily life is a natural, not an invented, right and the basis of all other rights.

I grew up as part of that culture of death: death for death. I pretty much took the death penalty for granted. To be sure, it was a bit hard to square with scriptural injunctions and even harder to work out in light of the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, but it seemed nevertheless the only appropriate punishment for the likes of Charles Starkweather and the killers of the Clutter family memorialized in Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*. The bloody images of these murders stalked my childhood, perhaps because the killings took place not so far from my village of Timnath, Colorado (pop. 185). Starkweather, who had shot and killed

A society that can no longer accept bodily limits, including natality and mortality, is a society flinging itself into moral despair.

more than ten people, was finally captured in Wyoming; to this day I recall the moment because the High Plains, including Colorado, were on alert worrying that Starkweather and his running companion might come our way. Surely, I figured, communities were better off rid of such folks.

But there were other images, too—not just from Scripture but from the 1958 film, "I Want to Live!" Susan Hayward played a prostitute who had been framed for murder and sentenced to death. With her high heels and brassy manner, she was not a good 4-H Club girl, that's for sure. But she was a mother and, unlike Starkweather, she had not actually killed anybody. The state of California put her through slow torture, one day scheduling her execution, the next day postponing it. I was haunted by the stark black-and-white image of her as she was being led into a gas chamber. But I reconciled these conflicting images by thinking that killing the framed prositute was a misapplication of the death penalty, while frying Starkweather was an appropriate punishment.

Then, when I was 18, I read Albert Camus's "Reflections on the Guillotine," and I've never felt the same—at least not on this issue. Despite many subsequent provocations, I remain convinced by Camus, later by Bonhoeffer and John Paul, that the state cannot be the divine taker and giver of life as part of its penal powers. The state can claim for itself only a relative value, only penultimate power. According to Camus, this does not eliminate a community's right to self-defense. But where the matter at hand is crime and punishment, there are other ways to protect the community from murderous miscreants. Instead, what Camus means is that the state must not be an absolute value; it cannot arrogate to itself the power to kill definitively. Camus is not moved by flabby sentiment. He develops the pro-death penalty side and moves with surgical precision to defeat each argument on its own terms.

Deterrence? There is no evidence that the death penalty ever made a single murderer recoil; in fact, the prospect of death may exercise a tremendous fascination on the criminal mind. An edifying example of community justice? If so, why then do we hide executions from the public? Let's be clear about what is happening, Camus argues. Let us not, from slothfulness, refuse to look the thing in the face. Executions are a matter of cold premeditation. The state "kills to support a hypothesis": X number of murderers will be deterred by committing one real "administrative murder." Unlike Starkweather's bloody spree, the state's killing is meticulously planned. The condemned person is led to an antiseptic chamber, where he is strapped down and injected with sodium pentothal or electrocuted with 2,000 volts. Because the task is so grotesque, because we feel repugnance and shame, no one person is assigned culpability. Instead, the tasks are gingerly parceled out: one fastens arms, another legs, and so on. Camus insists, by contrast, that we make a wager on life, not death. Not from

sentiment, but in the name of "logic and realism." Camus knows—he wrote a thesis on Augustine, after all—that human beings are not by nature saintly. But the evil that men do should not be compounded by administrative revenge. "Compassion," he writes, "does not exclude punishment, but it suspends the final condemnation. Compassion loathes the definitive, irreparable measure that does an injustice to mankind as a whole because of failing to take into account the wretchedness of the common condition."

Then Camus makes a move that draws him, Bonhoeffer, and John Paul together. State idolatry in our time has rushed in to take the place of faith. This explains why so many "humanists" have supported public executions—children of the Enlightenment leading the way to the "bloodstained gallows." Having killed the king, and indirectly God, man deifies himself and makes his own ends absolute. But we should be wary of our own designs—the sin of pride—and this wariness should also forestall the slide into the Slough of Sloth. "We know enough to say that this or that major criminal deserves hard labor for life. But we don't know enough to decree that he should be shorn of his future—in other words, of the chance we all have of making amends." The chance we all have of making amends. Christians, those who extol a doctrine of creation by a good God, are under some constraint to agree. But, motivated primarily, I believe, by fear and constrained by sloth, we do not.[27] I submit that we fear our bodies, we fear their vulnerabilities, and that the cultural project of fleeing finitude not only shakes hands with a technocratic agenda, like cloning, but with a penal agenda, like doling out death. We seek perfection in one realm; definitive excision in the other. These cultural urgencies should haunt us, because a society that can no longer accept bodily limits, including natality and mortality, is a society flinging itself into moral despair, not sturdy enlightenment.

Surely those who embrace a doctrine of Creation should extol the goodness and integrity of all bodies. For, as *The Book of Common Prayer* tells us, all the works of the Lord glorify, praise, and exalt the Lord. Listen to these magnificent words: hear them afresh; renew yourself in their restorative waters.

Glorify the Lord, you angels
and all powers of the Lord,
O heavens and all waters
above the heavens.
Sun and moon and stars of the sky,
glorify the Lord,
praise him and highly exalt him for ever.

Glorify the Lord, every shower of rain
and fall of dew,
all winds and fire and heat.
Winter and summer, glorify the Lord,
praise him and highly exalt him for ever.

Glorify the Lord, O chill and cold,
drops of dew and flakes of snow.
Frost and cold, ice and sleet,
glorify the Lord,
praise him and highly exalt him for ever.

Glorify the Lord, O nights and days,
O shining light and enfolding dark.
Storm clouds and thunderbolts,
glorify the Lord,
praise him and highly exalt him for ever.

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[27] I am not, of course, making the arrogant claim that those who support the death penalty are somehow not real Christians. My argument is that Christianity pushes away from the death penalty and that Christians are required to proffer reasons, especially when they favor the death penalty rather than the other way around.

It is an incarnational awareness that we are in danger of losing or that we, perhaps, have lost. We lose our amazement at life itself, at the glory of the natural. Sloth has clung to us and we cannot exalt the Lord any longer; instead, we worship at the altar of our own projects. If you haven't already, read P. D. James's novel, *The Children of Men* (reprinted by Warner Books in 1994). The novel is set in Britain in the year 2021. No children have been born—none at all—on planet Earth since the year 1995. In that year, for reasons no one understands, all males became infertile. The world is dying. People are despondent, chagrined, violent. "Western science had been our god," writes the protagonist, Theodore Faron, an Oxford historian and cousin to the dictator of Great Britain. He "shares the disillusionment" of one whose god has died. Now overtaken by a "universal negativism," the human race lurches toward its certain demise. Because there will be no future, "all the pleasures of the mind and senses sometimes seem . . . no more than pathetic and crumbling defences shored up against our ruins." Children's playgrounds are dismantled. People disown commitments and responsibilities for one another save for whatever serves some immediate purpose: what is chosen by contrast to what is given.

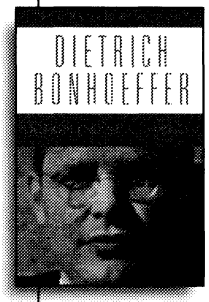
People thought they had eliminated evil, Faron notes, and all the churches in the 1990s "moved from the theology of sin and redemption" to a "sentimental humanism." In the name of compassion, the elderly, no longer needed or wanted, are conducted to a state-sponsored ceremony of group suicide called the Quietus. Faron concludes that we are "diminished," we humans, if we live without knowledge of the past and without hope of the future. For in a world in which birth has ceased and death is managed and staged, "the very words 'justice,' 'compassion,' 'society,' 'struggle,' 'evil,' would be unheard echoes on an empty air." To be sure, we can "experience nothing but the present moment," but our understanding of that moment is profoundly shaped and given meaning by our "ability to reach back through the centuries for the reassurance of our ancestry." This rich ancestry loses its meaning, in turn, "without the hope of posterity . . . without the assurance that we being dead yet live." For whom do we build? In whose behalf do we dream? If we are wrapped up in our own quest for self-possession, perfection, and control, if we are immersed in the fixed immanence of our culture, we cannot even ask such questions much less answer them.



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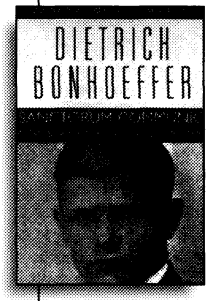


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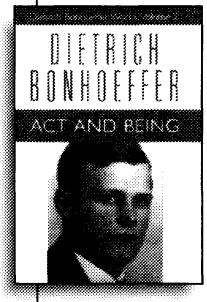
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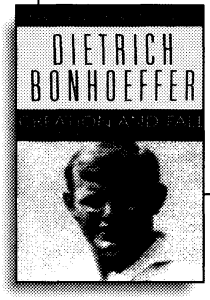
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Book Reviews

The Many Faces of the Christ: The Christologies of the New Testament and Beyond. By Ben Witherington III. New York: Crossroad, 1998. vii and 264 pages. Paper. $19.95.

Were you convinced by the argument that the "messianic secret" in Mark means that Jesus did not understand himself to be the Messiah but that the early church made that claim about him? Are you of the opinion that the really high Christologies developed only after the New Testament era, culminating in the formulations of Nicaea and Chalcedon? Think again. That is what you will do if you confront the evidence amassed by Ben Witherington in *The Many Faces of the Christ.*

Witherington is Professor of New Testament at Asbury Theological Seminary in Lexington, Kentucky, and author of fourteen books. His latest publication compares and contrasts the various Christologies in the New Testament. In separate chapters he discusses the Christologies present in the writings of Paul, the synoptic Gospels and Acts, the Johannine literature, and the General Epistles. He is especially helpful in pointing out the significance for Christology of the phrase "Son of Man" and of the Old Testament and intertestamental concept of Wisdom.

Challenging and compelling are three earlier chapters in which Witherington deals with Jewish Messianism at the time of Jesus, Jesus' understanding of his identity, and the hymnic prayers and confessions in the New Testament that predate the New Testament writings. Witherington concludes that Jesus himself in his teaching and his deeds, not an expectant Jewish Messianism, was the source for the affirmations which the New Testament community made about him. He presents evidence that Jesus spoke of himself as Son of Man, probably also as Son of God, alluded to himself as Christ and even possibly as Lord, and directly called himself God's Wisdom, all evidence of a messianic self-understanding. According to Witherington, the hymns, prayers, and christological reflections incorporated into the New Testament are some of the earliest christological reflections and some of the highest.

A number of conclusions emerge from Witherington's material. There is a great deal of very high Christology, including calling Christ *theos*, in the various strands of the New Testament. There is no such thing as a development from a low to a high Christology; high christological notions are implied in material that goes back to Jesus himself. The various Christologies in the New Testament cannot always be harmonized. Not all forms of Christology in the New Testament proved equally serviceable or lasting. Not all Christologies that developed after the New Testament can be said to be legitimate development of notions in the New Testament.

John H. Tietjen
Trinity Lutheran Church
Fort Worth, Texas

Jesus as a Figure in History: How Modern Historians View the Man from Galilee. By Mark Allan Powell. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998. 248 pages. Paper. $22.95.

The continuing fascination of both press and people with modern historical Jesus research, thanks to the Jesus Seminar, makes Powell's survey a welcome arrival on one's desktop. His book is a reliable guide through the bewildering diversity and complexity of modern research on the historical Jesus.

Powell focuses on recent research, providing only minimal information about the first quest (Reimarus and the lives of Jesus), the new quest initiated by Ernst Käsemann and a brief description of the loss of Jesus leading to the "third quest." After a description of sources and historian's criteria, he maps the terrain by giving brief descriptions of the interpretations of Richard Horsley (Jesus as social prophet), Geza Ver-

mes (Jesus, charismatic Jew), Morton Smith (Jesus the magician), Ben Witherington III (Jesus, Jewish sage), and F. Gerald Downing (Jesus, Cynic philosopher) to illustrate the broad range of current views.

He next devotes a chapter each to The Jesus Seminar, John Dominic Crossan, Marcus Borg, E. P. Sanders, John P. Meier, and N. Thomas Wright. (He does not give extended attention either to Robert Funk's radical proposal for revision of the classical creeds, to Luke Timothy Johnson's angry attack on the whole quest, or to the critical articles by, for example, Hans Dieter Betz or Birger Pearson.) Each chapter is a meticulous presentation of the author's position, followed by a critique noting positive contributions and problems arising from it. His final chapter, "The Quest Continues: Issues and Concerns," presents the ongoing issues that confront the researcher, the paradigms used to interpret Jesus, and the possible social and religious contexts within which scholars seek to understand Jesus as an historical figure. He makes clear that no consensus has emerged about either methods or results. While this may be frustrating to those seeking historical security, it is an accurate presentation of the situation that prevails.

Powell writes clearly, presents useful references in his extensive notes for those who wish to pursue the issues further, and ends by saying that "Something else seems certain. It may be comforting to some, frustrating to others, but it seems certain. Whatever the historical scholars decide about Jesus, Christians are not going to quit confessing creeds concerning him or offering prayers to him" (p. 183).

Edgar Krentz

The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide. By Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998. xxix and 642 pages. Cloth, $65.00; paper, $38.00.

What can one more book on the historical Jesus add that has not already been said? This comprehensive guide does not offer new hypotheses but brings together a splendid summary of the history of the research, the various methodologies and perspectives of a whole range of scholars. The book is arranged topically in sixteen sections and four parts. Each section begins with a brief bibliography, followed by an introduction to the problem, treatment of various aspects of the question, and solutions offered by various scholars. Each concludes with a summary, hermeneutical reflections, and "Tasks" that are meant to check the reader's comprehension. The solutions are given at the end of the volume.

The introductory chapter, "The Quest of the Historical Jesus," sets out five phases and their major proponents. Part 1, "The Sources and their Evaluation," has three chapters: "Christian Sources about Jesus," "The Non-Christian Sources about Jesus," "The Evaluation of the Sources: Historical Scepticism and the Study of Jesus." Part 2, "The Framework of the History of Jesus," includes "The Historical and Religious Framework of the Life of Jesus," "The Chronological Framework of the Life of Jesus," and "The Geographical and Social Framework of the Life of Jesus." Part 3, "The Activity and Preaching of Jesus," contains "Jesus as a Charismatic: Jesus and His Social Relationships," "Jesus as Prophet: Jesus' Eschatology," "Jesus as Healer: The Miracles of Jesus," "Jesus as Poet: the Parables of Jesus," and "Jesus as Teacher: The Ethics of Jesus." The final part, "Passion and Easter," comprises "Jesus as the Founder of a Cult: The Last Supper and the Primitive Christian Eucharist," "Jesus as Martyr: The Passion of Jesus," "The Risen Jesus: Easter and Its Interpretations," and "The Historical Jesus and the Beginnings of Christology." The volume concludes with "Retrospect: A Short Life of Jesus" and two indexes: one of biblical references and one of names and subjects.

This book is a superb resource for pastors, teachers, and students. It sorts through the vast literature on the historical Jesus, presenting it in a comprehensible and balanced way, aided by numerous tables, comparisons, and sketches. This reviewer particularly appreciated representation of feminist interpretations concerning the role of Jesus' women followers and the repeated challenges in the book to anti-Jewish interpretations of Jesus.

Barbara E. Reid
Catholic Theological Union
Chicago, Illinois

The Christ and the Spirit. Vol. 1. Christology. By James D. G. Dunn. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998. 439 pages. Paper. $35.00.

The Christ and the Spirit. Vol. 2. Pneumatology. By James D. G. Dunn. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998. 357 pages. Paper. $35.00.

These two volumes are collections of previously written essays by Dunn generally revolving around the themes of Christology and pneumatology. The essays span Dunn's thirty-year career, and they all appear in the form in which they were originally published. One finds in these essays the main themes and arguments that are familiar in Dunn's major works on the Spirit, Christology, and Paul.

With regard to Christology, Dunn has used the Adam typology to explicate Christ's role as representative human being, and he has shown how the notion of incarnation is best understood in terms of wisdom. These are, in his estimation, two sides of the same christological coin which features in dialectical relation both the humanity and divinity of Christ. In the articles on pneumatology, Dunn consistently underlines the importance of the Spirit as an experience in early Christianity.

The merit of Dunn's contribution to Christology is that he has identified conceptual categories which illuminate particular New Testament texts. In a sense, that may also be the weakness of his work. It seldom leaves the realm of the conceptual. In one essay he replies to a criticism that he "radically divorces early Christianity from its environment" by defending his attempt to understand Christology in terms of its "Jewish background." Although Dunn is mystified by this criticism, I find myself resonant with it precisely because Dunn hardly ever considers the force of christological statements within the syncretistic social context. The importance of Hellenistic Judaism as the matrix of early Christianity is beyond dispute, but what significance did certain christological convictions have on the relationship of early Christian communities to other Jewish and gentile groups, not to mention the empire? These are not questions Dunn explores.

The volume on pneumatology is focused on the ways in which the language of Spirit thematizes early Christian experience. The seriousness with which he takes the importance of the Spirit in the New Testament and in early Christianity is to be commended. It has been a neglected topic. The problem is that Dunn has no heuristic models that explain phenomenologically what the New Testament witness concerning Spirit describes. His rendering of what Spirit connotes in the New Testament could be greatly enhanced by a consideration of the various depictions of being inspired and possessed by the Spirit in other religious traditions in antiquity.

There are many insightful observations in these volumes. However, most of them could also be found in Dunn's major writings. There is considerable overlap in many of the essays. Perhaps the real value of a collection such as this is that it chronicles Dunn's own scholarship. It also makes more accessible early articles which are in more obscure journals and monographs.

Ray Pickettt
Lutheran Seminary in the Southwest
Austin, Texas

The Parables of Jesus: Recovering the Art of Listening. By Richard Q. Ford. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997. viii and 184 pages. Paper. $18.00.

This is a very interesting, even fascinating, book—although at the same time frustrating to a certain extent. Ford discusses only seven of the parables in the New Testament, parables which in scholarly agreement can be attributed to Jesus himself. For Ford, each of these narratives presents two persons or groups of persons in conflict, one side stronger, the other side weaker. What distinguishes the book from other books on the parables is the fact that Ford is a psychotherapist and uses the insights from the therapist/client relationship to illuminate the parables. This throws a completely new light on the stories but also causes the reader to wonder whether it does not sometimes go too far afield from the New Testament situation and read more into the stories than is actually there. Ford is well ac-

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quainted with the social circumstances of the life of Jesus; he also refers frequently to such interpreters as Crossan and Breech and others. But his approach from psychotherapy is unique and therefore new and challenging. This makes it possible to underscore the ambiguities and misunderstandings that often exist in the interchange between the two sides. However, it also means that it is just about impossible to see the superior part in the dialogue as a picture of God because Ford points out frequently the negative characteristics of the antagonists. The owner of the vineyard is seen as an exploiter, the father of the prodigal son as a weakling who does not resist his immature son. Strangely, he places the parable of the unjust judge and the parable of the wicked tenants in parallel.

Of course, other interpreters also have emphasized the injustice of the judge (the parable is even called that), but in Ford's analysis there is almost no way in which the judge can be a representation of God. Ford sees such a large difference between the judge and the widow that misperceptions just have to take place. Both the judge and the widow look at each other and at themselves quite differently. Luke 18:6–8 are omitted as later explanations.

In such an analysis, one may ask why Jesus told these parables; they don't seem to have a point. But the last chapter is entitled "How are these stories told and heard?" One of his answers is that Jesus told these parables to evoke in the hearer both how things are and how God yearns for them to be. This yearning is called "the kingdom of God." The listener is to discern how things are to be. The listeners should enter the story "by actively supposing how those who may be oppressors might somehow include the oppressed, and how those who may be oppressed might somehow include the oppressor." For Ford, these parables have nothing to do with an inbreaking of an external corrective but have everything to do with the chronic misunderstandings of everyday life. The listener has to bring about the change. Like the therapist, the parables are nonpressuring and yet evocative.

Thus we have here a new and unique reading of the parables which sees them mainly as events on the human level, challenging the listener to provide corrections to the misconceptions and social injustices that exist in the world. An appendix relates the story of the two sons and the father (=the prodigal son) to the book of Genesis. There are notes, a bibliography, and an index.

Wilhelm C. Linss
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

God, Creation, and Contemporary Physics. By Mark William Worthing. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996. Paper. $20.00.

One of the most fascinating fields in all of human knowledge is that of contemporary physics. The theories of physicists take us from the very origin of the universe to its possible futures, from the farthest reaches of an expanding universe to the particles of an atom. Mark Worthing offers a reliable and challenging guide to the world of modern physics. He offers much detail about scientific theories to address themes of interest to theologians: Does God exist? Did God create the universe out of nothing? Is God still active in the universe? Can God survive the consummation of the universe? Successive chapters of the book are devoted to an investigation of these questions.

Much of the book is devoted to summaries of the positions of modern physicists. Thus one reads about Max Planck on quantum mechanics, Frank Tipler on the anthropic principle, and Stephen Hawking on the "no-boundary condition" of the universe, for example. Worthing's accounts of these and other views are clear and comprehensive. In fact, the material covered is so thorough that the book sometimes borders on encyclopedic. Yet in every chapter the discussion returns to ask about the viability of theological assertions based on the conclusions of the physicists. Some positions are clearly more compatible with theology than others. Worthing consistently provides reliable commentary on the implications of the various theories for constructive theology. For those who wonder, according to the author, God remains the best ultimate explanation for physical reality.

This is a book that contributes to advanced study at the interface between science and religion. The bibliography and footnotes provide a

rich resource for in-depth exploration. The significance of the volume has been recognized by its winning a Templeton award for books in this field. I highly recommend it to those seeking a challenging exploration of the possibility of believing in God and God's creation in a universe more filled with wonder than scarcely any of us has yet begun to imagine.

Craig L. Nessan
Wartburg Theological Seminary

A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians. By Ernest Best. The International Critical Commentary. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998. xxix and 686 pages. Cloth. $69.95.

Essays on Ephesians. By Ernest Best. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997. xv and 220 pages. Cloth. $43.95.

Let us say it at once: this is now the premier English commentary on Ephesians in print. Best has mined the exegetical literature from Origen to 1994, weighted it on his impressive scholarly scales, and produced a magisterial work in the traditional International Critical Commentary format. That means that he considers carefully text-critical, lexical, syntactical, and literary features of the text in careful detail. He provides an original translation for each section, and massive bibliographic references—which he has actually read in the writing of the commentary. And the volume of essays published alongside provides detailed investigation of topics less fully discussed in the commentary, for example, the use of cradle and liturgical material (here Best is a minimalist, not regarding 1:3–14, 1:20–23, 2:4–10, 2:14–18, 2:19–22 as traditional material; 4:4–6, however, does use pre-formed tradition, and 5:14 is an express citation of such material [*Essays*, pp. 51–68]).

In his 94-page introduction Best argues both against Pauline authorship and, against the stream, that the author of Ephesians did not have Colossians before him but that both come from a Pauline school centered in the province of Asia (perhaps in Ephesus). Along the way there is detailed analysis of the author's linguistic peculiarities, his thought and his literary style. Anyone who purchases this commentary should read the introduction in full before shelving the work. The discussion of the "Background," pp. 83–93, examines the possibilities at length; there are linguistic ties to Gnosticism, Stoicism, etc. But Best does not give greater precision to what appears to be a form of syncretism.

Best includes six detached notes on (1) The Heavenlies; (2) In Christ; (3) The Powers; (4) The Body of Christ; (5) Israel and the Church; (6) The *Haustafel*. Each is a carefully written examination of the topic. Add to that two appended essays: The Church (pp. 622–41) and Moral Teaching (pp. 642–59). The introduction, notes, and essays provide, when taken together, a theology of Ephesians.

This commentary enhances this distinguished series. It is my first choice on Ephesians. I wish I had written it. The *Essays* have an extended treatment of the text-critical problem in Eph 1:1, essays on ministry according to Ephesians, an examination of Eph 2:11–22 as a resource for a Christian view of Judaism, and an extended study of the Ephesian *Haustafel*. These can be read as stand-alone items; read them together with the commentary and you will be enriched both historically and theologically.

Edgar Krentz

When the Powers Fall: Reconciliation in the Healing of Nations. By Walter Wink. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998. 88 pages. Paper. $12.00.

No one has done more to revive interest in the meaning of the New Testament notion of "principalities and powers" than Walter Wink. His trilogy on this theme is a major North American contribution to the linking of the Bible to contemporary politics. In this brief text (88 pages including notes and extensive bibliography) Wink applies his biblical analysis to the current dilemma of attaining justice and reconciliation within nations recovering from the devastating effects of political oppression. In earlier writings, Wink already demonstrated keen interest in the overcoming of apartheid in South Africa. Now he directs attention to the question of how to reestablish a climate in which nations can

rebuild after suffering years of acute repression and persecution.

Is it sufficient merely for leaders of the oppressive regime to "apologize" for their wrongdoing? What is the place for forgiveness on the scale of political crimes as power shifts to those who were previously the object of imprisonment, torture, and death? Wink founds his argument on the anti-domination teaching of Jesus about the reign of God. God's reign "is the transformation of the Domination System into a nonviolent, humane, ecologically sustainable, livable environment fashioned to enable people to grow and grow well" (p. 10).

While forgiveness is an important value in recovering from situations of abuse, finally forgiveness must be in service to genuine reconciliation. Reconciliation is always a process that includes the repentance of those who have offended. In order to assist the healing of the victims of previous violence and to establish the foundation for a new beginning, some process for truth telling needs to be implemented. Wink illustrates how such a process may proceed with references to Namibia, Haiti, Uruguay, Guatemala, El Salvador, Brazil, Argentina, Chile, and South Africa among other examples. Just recounting this list of nations serves as a shocking reminder of the extent of political oppression and violence in the 20th century.

Wink offers these guidelines for an authentic reconciliation process: the truth must be told and told completely, the truth telling needs to be sanctioned by an official body (if not by the new government, then by the churches), at least the most notorious leaders from the regime of oppression should be prosecuted (and if this is not viable, they should at minimum be exposed), and amnesty should not be offered until the truth has been told and some of the guilty have been prosecuted. Recent efforts at apologies by nations may be an indicator of new humility but cannot be a substitute for the foregoing measures.

The goal of democracy is, according to Wink, the institutionalization of nonviolence. On the way to this ideal, the churches have as their "ongoing prophetic and pastoral task to lift up Jesus' vision of the reign of God in human societies, and to bend our societies toward that vision to the limit of our ability" (p. 66). Given the desperate need to attain reconciliation facing so many nations within the present political landscape, Wink holds up a formidable challenge to the church in broadening its mission focus.

Craig L. Nessan

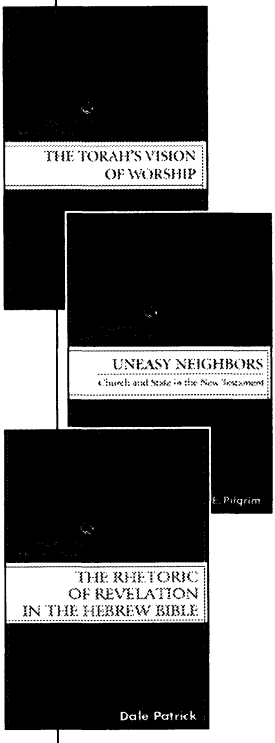
Briefly Noted

In **Paul's Prison Letters** (New City Press, $9.95) Daniel J. Harrington presents a "spiritual commentary" on Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. These simple, brief interpretations could be helpful for leaders of adult forums in parishes. I commend them to you. *ERK*

Books for parish libraries are often hard to find. That makes the *Atlas of the Bible and Christianity*, edited by Tim Dowley (Baker, $29.99) especially welcome. Fifty-eight maps cover Palestine and the Old Testament, nine the exile and intertestamental periods, twenty-two the New Testament. Forty-three cover church history from 100 C.E. to the end of the middle ages, while the final thirty-three cover the modern church after 1500 C.E. The maps are clear. Some are unusual and valuable, e.g. maps on the growth and spread of Islam, Orthodox Missions, centers of education from the middle ages to 1700 in Europe. The Reformation era gets short shrift, one map illustrating religious affiliation about 1560. On balance, however, this is a very useful work deserving wide use. Put it in your church library—and the pastor will probably consult it, too. One minor glitch: in a map about the voyages of discovery, Montreal is located at Milwaukee. *ERK*

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Y2K and Other Bugs

He's an American preacher who has set up shop in Israel, and he backs his move with a very simple argument. "If your mother was flying in for a visit, you would go out to the airport to meet her, wouldn't you?" Well, yeah! "So," he says, "Why wouldn't you want to be on the Mount of Olives to meet the Lord Jesus when he returns to earth?"

He is only one of many believers flocking to the Holy Land in these waning days of 1999, hoping to be there when Jesus descends. Donna and I led groups of students to the Holy Land in January of 1998 and 1999, but we have decided to skip January of 2000. I don't worry about the Y2K Bug, but I do worry about overflow crowds on the Mount of Olives, in Bethlehem and Nazareth and in the Old City of Jerusalem. Perhaps millennial excitement will have died down by the end of the year 2000. Or am I being too optimistic?

When is he coming? Where will he come? And what are the signs of his coming? Jesus' first words in the Gospel of Mark contain two indicatives and two imperatives: "The time of waiting is over, and God's reign is at hand. Turn yourself and your community around, and trust in the impossibly good news!" (Mark 1:15) As Mark's Gospel continues, we realize that Jesus is not just another prophet pointing to the coming reign of God. He is rather, as John the Baptist said, "the strong man," no Devil's advocate but the Devil's adversary, the one through whom God's reign, God's governing, will break into our old world.

Many, including his own closest disciples, could not break the old habit of thinking that God's rule must come through the same kind of power that has always destroyed one kingdom and lifted up another. The Gospel of Mark is a hard book, hard on the disciples, hard on readers, because it proclaims the coming of the rule of God through the service, through the love, through the cross of Jesus. His stubborn passion and compassion undercut the collective self-interest and greed at the heart of ancient and modern states. His calm pilgrim's progress along the path from

Galilee to Jerusalem contrasts sharply with our agitated quest for more of everything. His contest in the wilderness at the beginning and his prayer in Gethsemane at the end rebuke our reliance on military and economic power as an adequate defense against personal, national, and cosmic foes.

Mark does not tell us that we will meet the Christ and see the triumph of God's reign if we take up our stand on the Mount of Olives on January 1, 2000. Mark says that God's reign is breaking in whenever and wherever Christ's followers take up their cross, perform acts of healing, mediate peace to the warring and the troubled, stand in solidarity with sufferers, feed the 4,000 and the 5,000 or whatever size the crowds of hungry may be, cast out the demons that bind people in cruel slaveries, forgive people crushed by guilt and shame, reconcile the shunned and the abandoned, open eyes to the glory of God's quiet but invincible agape.

That's what it means when the mysterious young man at the end of Mark's Gospel promises that all disciples of Jesus "will see him" as they "go to Galilee" (Mark 16:7). The crucified and resurrected Jesus is going before them and is calling them, once again, to follow. In following Jesus on his servant's path, they and we will see him time and again.

I think it was Martin Dibelius who long ago described Mark's Gospel as "a book of secret epiphanies." Mark himself would say that the life of discipleship is a life of secret epiphanies, a life of unexpected encounters with God and with the Christ of God, a life of sudden revelations of the wonder of God and the power of God. The readings of Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany do not command us to travel across the water to the Mount of Olives overlooking the Valley of Jehoshaphat and the city of Jerusalem. The readings do not promise the demise of planet earth on or about January 1 of the year 2000. The readings do reveal how God comes among us strangely powerless and yet fully able to cast down and to raise up, to cast out and to cure, to rebuke and to renew. In Mark's Gospel as in life (or in life as in Mark's story?), the masterful are often confounded, the true believers are frequently confused, and the least among us somehow manage to comprehend it all and show that they do by the care and compassion of their lives.

Y2K Bug? I worry more about getting bugs out of my eyes and ears. William Blake writes that some people, eyeing a sunrise, see "a round disc of fire, something like a gold coin." Isn't that what he also sees? "O no, no," he wrote, "I see an innumerable company of the heavenly host crying, 'Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty.'" I wish I could see like that!

We have two Chicago area pastors to help us see God's secret epiphanies in the texts before us these days, as we cross over from 1999 to the year 2000. They are Pastor Mary Anderson of St. Paul's Lutheran Church of Evanston, Illinois, and

Pastor Rick Ramirez of Ashburn Evangelical Lutheran Church on Chicago's southwest side.

Mary Anderson has been pastor of St. Paul's since 1992, is active in the Metro Chicago Synod (serving on its Synod Council and Executive Committee and various task forces), is co-president of the Evanston Township High School PTA, serves on the board of the Evanston Neighborhood Conference, and is a leader in the Evanston Ecumenical Action Council. I first got to know Mary when I read articles she published in *The Christian Century*. Since then I understand that she has also offered reflections on texts for the Easter Season (1999) for LSTC on its web page. I am delighted that she accepted my invitation to share her reflections on Advent and Christmas with the readers of Preaching Helps.

Mary offers the following introduction to her materials to her fellow preachers: "Uniquely, this Advent and Christmas season will greet the turn of a year, a decade, a century, and a millennium! We are privileged and burdened to be preachers at such a moment in history. Many cultural, religious, social, and technological pressures will come to bear. We cannot even guess what they might be. Our listeners will turn their ears to us these seasons to address all that they are feeling and experiencing. Millennium bugs of all sorts will no doubt flood the media and us. As preachers we will be challenged to weave the text of the week within the context of the week. Here you have some reflections on the seasons and the scriptures to support the preaching task. My hope is that these homiletical offerings will provide some leaven for your sermons. These offerings are written to inspire your own inspirational preaching in the places you live and minister. May you, herein, discover a word, a meaning, an argument, that assists you in the precious task of speaking God's Word to the nations." She signs herself, "Your preaching partner."

Rick Ramirez has been at Ashburn Lutheran since graduating from Christ Seminary-Seminex nineteen years ago. His ministry includes working with a K-8 day school and with two community organizations on the southwest side. In preparing the offerings for Epiphany, Rick acknowledges the collegial support of the staff and members of Ashburn. He singles out the names of Jim Christian, Chris Eldredge, Chris Repp, and especially Vernon Tetlinger for their help in this project.

Rick offered a further comment to me concerning his work on these texts. He notes that a heart attack and consequent bypass surgery were very significant events in his life, leading him to much theological reflection as well as to deep gratitude. So his work on biblical texts took place in the context of a community of co-workers and with a strong sense both of our mortality and of the wonder of God's gift of life.

I am grateful for the lives and gifts of Mary and Rick and their colleagues, and I trust that their labors, performed on our behalf far in advance of the arrival of the

Year 2000, will be useful to many of you readers, as you prepare to locate the real bugs at the turning of the year, as you share with your hearers the real wonders of the gifts of life and breath, and as you ponder together the surpassing glory of God's gift of days and millennia.

Yours,

Robert H. Smith
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First Sunday in Advent
November 28, 1999

Isaiah 64:1–9
Psalm 80:1–7, 16–18
1 Corinthians 1:3–9
Mark 13:24–37

One of the things I know I do on a regular basis in my preaching is to make some comment on the changing seasons in the church year. The different seasons like Easter, Pentecost, Lent, and Epiphany help to move us through the stories of Jesus' life and through the stories of our faith. Each one has its theme, its color, its songs, and its special scriptural texts. Each one has certain traditions and rituals connected with it that are much older than any of us.

Today is the first Sunday of the new church year, and the first day in the season of Advent. The color is blue, the traditions are many, the theme that runs throughout these four weeks is "waiting" or "waiting and hoping." Most folks would probably say that what we wait for is Christmas, that we use this time to prepare for baby Jesus. That's certainly part of the answer, but our church year is about more than playacting. The seasons of the year mark more than time; they make commentary on the seasons of our personal lives and the life of our community.

Advent isn't so much waiting for Christmas as it is simply about waiting: waiting for God to act, wondering if God will act, hoping that God will act. Condensed into four weeks of hope and expectation we reflect on the thousands of years our ancestors in the faith waited for the Messiah. We hear of a history of hoping. But most of all, Advent is about our waiting. In the stories and lessons of this season, we are taught how to wait and why we should wait and on whom we should wait. There are times of waiting, for sure. Advent speaks to us of the times when we wait for God. The times we wait for healing, the times we wait for conflict to be resolved, for abuse to end, for prayer to be answered, for understanding, for things to be better, for hopes and dreams to be a reality. Because we have waited and do wait for so many things, and because the waiting can sometimes span several generations, the season of Advent, full of great expectations, begins to teach us about the waiting.

Our text book for most of our lessons this season will be the Old Testament book of Isaiah. This collection of sermons and prophecies that span many years tells us much about a people who had long waits, a people who knew the thrill of victory and the

agony of defeat. We hear of a people with great faith and great big questions.

The people of God had waited several generations to be set free from their time of exile in Babylon. The preachers had told them to keep the faith, to keep believing, to hold on to hope, because one day they would be going home. It was a long wait, one many faithful did not live to see, but eventually they were allowed to return home to Jerusalem. As they marched across the desert to the homeland many had only heard about, they must have preached to each other the prophet's words that were not in vain: "Comfort, comfort my people, says your God, speak tenderly to Jerusalem and cry to her that her warfare is ended." Promises were fulfilled, hopes were realized, expectations met in full. But they were a tiny group going home, and when they got there they came home to a wasteland, not a promised land. Home wasn't what they had heard from their grandparents. Life was hard, it was disappointing, disillusionment was quick on their heels and a sense of hopelessness not very far behind.

The words of Isaiah 63 and 64 are spoken in these times to these people who were ready to give up hope in the face of unfulfilled expectations. Why did the promised land and the chosen people seem to be God-forsaken? They cried out to God, "O that you would tear open the heavens and come down to us." What a dangerous time this was for them. As a community they were losing their sense of identity and pride. Traditions and customs were abandoned. Hopeless communities cease to exist. They were tired of waiting.

We know tired. We know waiting.

And so to us as to them, Isaiah comes this day preaching about waiting and the hopelessness of waiting. Because the people of Israel believed so strongly from of old that God was in charge, it was God they blamed for their situation. "We look for light," they said, "but behold only darkness. And for brightness, but we walk in gloom. . . . We look for justice, but there is none; for salvation, but it is far from us" (Isa 59:9, 11). What's wrong with God, they asked, that's causing everything to be wrong with us?

Isaiah, the preacher, tells them plainly, "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; or God's ear dull, that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hid God's face from you . . ." (59:1-2). The prophet's point is that the glorious promises of God are not delayed because of God's inabilities, but by our resistance.

And so why do we wait so many lifetimes for justice and truth, for peace and dignity? Modern-day prophet and professor Christine Smith said once in a challenging sermon: "We hear Jesus' words, 'the poor you will always have with you,' and we think that somehow poverty is all right and natural. But if we listen and read carefully we realize that what is really being said is, 'The poor you will always have with you, (comma) because you do not obey my commandments.'"

Why do we wait on the things we long for? Why the wait for peace, for justice, for global harmony, for just institutions, why, why, why, O Lord? Because you do not obey my commandments! Prophets ancient and modern say the same thing. The word always comes to us at the top of this season of waiting that part of the reason for the delay is our own procrastination in getting behind God's agenda for this world. When even the people of God are not clearly and unanimously on God's side, there's going to be a delay. That's why we have to get busy with the things God would have us do.

In these times of unfulfilled expectations and dimly burning wicks of hope, the

prophets also assure us that while all of us are vulnerable, none of us is alone. Just because we wait does not mean we wait alone. We wait for God and we wait for each other to finally be our neighbor, to finally love us. And so in Advent we speak again about the wait and how we are to best spend our time in the wait. The language of Advent always encourages us to not waste our time in this season, to not miss any opportunities, to seize the day and to be watchful. We who wait for many things wonder, though, where to start and what it all means in some practical ways for our life together.

While we wait, there is much to do, is the Advent message. Such as? we might ask. Isaiah says that in the midst of the wait, you must teach the children. At the end of Isaiah 59, "'My spirit which is upon you, and my word which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, or out of the mouth of your children, or out of the mouth of your children's children,' says the Lord."

Many times in history, the people of Israel were hanging on by their fingernails to life and to faithfulness. Many times the remnant was close to the edge of total hopelessness. But our ancestors in the faith continued to believe, although sometimes dimly, that God's day would come. They kept hope alive by telling the story to their children and their grandchildren. They told of the mighty acts of God, not just as stories of the past, but as stories you could build a future on. The children were told of God as a real and a relevant presence. And so maybe the parents and grandparents never personally saw the promised land, but the community was still there to cross over because of their faithful story-telling and teaching. If we lose our hope, if we lose our nerve, if we stop telling the story, there will be no one ready to greet the Lord. Each generation has its own challenges, it own issues and concerns, but the story of God and the promises of God must be woven through each one.

Those of us who are wiser than despair must speak to those who have more doubt than faith, more cynicism than joy. This teaching is a community project, not just the job of parents and preachers. None of us is an innocent bystander in this Advent. We all have to get busy: talking, doing, teaching, leading, persuading. We must wrestle with our own angels and our own demons. And so, it begins again. MA

Second Sunday in Advent
December 5, 1999

Isaiah 40:1–11
Psalm 85:1–2, 8–13
2 Peter 3:8–15a
Mark 1:1–8

Terrible things happened. Terrible things happened between Chapter 39 of Isaiah and Chapter 40 of Isaiah. You wouldn't know just from reading your Bible cold what all had happened between the end of one prophetic sermon and the beginning of another. At the end of Chapter 39 we have the conclusion of the prophecy of the one we know as Isaiah of Jerusalem. King Hezekiah is ruling over little Judah, who is fighting for her life as empires much bigger than she is seek to invade.

After the end of chapter 39, when Hezekiah is told by Isaiah that he will know peace and security the rest of his days, much happens—and much of what happens is terrible. Between chapters 39 and 40 several more kings come and go—some incredibly wicked, some remarkably faithful. As we know from the history of the people recorded in 2 Kings, the kingdom of Judah was overcome by her enemies. The final enemy was King Nebuchadnezzar of the great and powerful Baby-

lonian Empire. He was a real terror. The ingenuities of his torture chamber have remained in history's memory. At the beginning of the end for Judah, King Zedekiah was on the throne. According to 2 Kings 25, Jerusalem was besieged by Babylon for two years until there was no food left in the land. King Zedekiah tried to escape, but he was captured on the plains of Jericho. Zedekiah was taken before Nebuchadnezzar. His sons were murdered before his eyes and then his own eyes were put out. The ingenuity of it all was that the last thing the king saw in this life was the death of his children. The historians go on to tell about the terrible happenings during this year of 586 B.C.E. When the king of Judah was carted to Babylon, when all the able-bodied Israelites were marched to Babylon in chains, when the temple of God was utterly destroyed and all its gold and silver loaded into wagons as presents for the soldiers' families back in Babylon, across the desert they went to their exile.

Chapter 40 that we hear this day comes from the voice of a new prophet in a new generation. We call this prophet "Isaiah" also because his sermons have been attached to those of Isaiah of Jerusalem many years before. But it is a very new voice we hear saying, "Comfort, comfort my people." This prophet, this preacher, stood up to preach to the exiles in Babylon who had been there for at least fifty years now. They are a new generation of exiles. Many of them don't remember even coming to this place. They have only the stories of their parents and grandparents. Their physical life is not really so terrible, but their spiritual life is starting to fall into ruins rivaling the ruins of the temple back in Jerusalem.

Terrible things had happened, and by this time it seemed that the most terrible of all was the silence of God. They had been waiting a long time for God to act and there was no action. They were at the point of still believing there was a God, but they were becoming convinced as the days rolled into years that God no longer believed in them and perhaps had given them up for dead. For the younger Babylon-born generation, this was becoming home, and the gods of Babylon seemed like perfectly good ones to worship; besides, all of their friends were doing it. The religion of Grandma and Grandpa began to seem more like wishful thinking than any kind of reality. Perhaps their God was dead. It would certainly explain the silence, the absence, the waiting. In the thinking of the younger generation, the terrible past wasn't really so terrible.

There was once recorded an interview with a then 102-year-old Civil War widow who shared the wisdom she had gained during her years. A part of her acquired understanding of the world came in the realization of how often the terrible becomes routine. She said, "You hear folks wonder how the Nazis could have done it. I believe that part of the answer is that they made extermination to be a 9-to-5 activity—you know, salaries and lunch breaks; the staff came and did their job and then went home, ate supper, slept, woke up, came back and did their job. That's partly how you get anything done, especially a chore that's dreadful. Honey," she said," we got to be real careful what we get used to!"

Some fifty years after King Zedekiah went sightless into Babylon, the people were getting used to being away from home. In fact, they were starting to think of themselves more as tourists than exiles. It doesn't sound so bad. They were getting used to being without the living God, and besides, you could buy a handful of idol gods to worship in the marketplace pretty cheap. As the wise woman said, "Honey, we got to be real careful what we get used to."

Now finally comes the prophet of Isaiah 40 preaching a new word in this new situa-

tion, in this new time. Many terrible things have happened, and the wait for God to do something about it has been longer than anyone would have predicted. But now in these latter days, the preacher stands in the pulpit and says, "'Comfort, O comfort my people,' says your God. 'Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and preach to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid.... Get you up to a high mountain, herald of good tidings.'" Finally, some good news. It's time to go home. Even better than that is the good news that God hasn't forgotten them, but remembers them; doesn't despise them, but loves them.

The season of Advent represents for us the times in life when we wait, when we wait for God to act, when we wait for our neighbors to love us as they love themselves. Sometimes the wait is long as it was for the exiles. When terrible things happen around us and to us, we wait for the good news. We wait to see how God will work it all out.

We wait on these mysterious "acts of God" that we are most always baffled to explain. It was hard for the older generation in Babylon to explain to the younger generation why or how God would act. They just knew it was true. They had long waits as a part of their faith history, and they weren't afraid of them. They had mystery as a part of their very souls and they weren't compelled to explain it to anyone's satisfaction.

Many terrible things happened between chapter 39 and chapter 40 of Isaiah. Terrible things still happen. Out of the terrible we wait for the advent of good tidings. Of course, we know that trying to juggle good news and bad news simultaneously is religion's biggest problem. Why did Zedekiah have to be carted off to Babylon weeping bloody tears for his children in the first place? Why do evil things happen? The Christian Science church solves the problem by saying that evil does not exist except as an illusion. Buddhism solves it in terms of reincarnation, whereby it would say Zedekiah was reaping the consequences of evil deeds committed in another life.

Christianity, on the other hand, as Frederick Buechner points out, ultimately offers no theoretical solution at all. It merely points to the cross and says that, practically speaking, there is no evil so dark and so obscene—not even this—but that God can turn it to good.

For enlightened minds that always want the facts, the answers, the solutions, this may not be comforting, nor may it seem like good news. Isaiah, the prophet among the exiles, didn't give an explanation of where God had been or why they had been in exile so long. He gave no explanation, just an announcement that the living God was coming to save, coming among them. As people of faith, our prayer is always for God's presence, not God's explanations. The good tidings come in the announcement that God is with us and that this holy presence which was capable of overwhelming the terrible deeds of the Nebuchadnezzars, Herods, and Hitlers of millenniums past can do the same for terrorists yet to be. This is God's world, lest we forget, lest we doubt. MA

Third Sunday in Advent
December 12, 1999

Isaiah 61:1–4, 8–11
Psalm 126 *or* Luke 1:47–55
1 Thessalonians 5:16–24
John 1:6–8,19–28

It always behooves the preacher to prepare for worship and preaching at least a season at a time. If the preacher has not read ahead, he or she may be surprised to find back-to-back gospel texts featuring John the Baptist. Regular worshipers come to expect an early Advent appearance of that wild man of the New Testament, and there can be some lusty singing of "On Jordan's Banks, the Baptist's Cry;" but two weeks of John is probably locusts and honey overload! Exegetical study of the gospel texts can help us tease out John's place as baptizer and preparer of the way. John is a uniquely Advent character. He never made the leap into mainstream secular Christmas doings. There are no John the Baptist cookies, no tree ornaments in his likeness, no carols or rituals inspired by his ministry. Like most prophets, ancient and modern, he's a weirdo.

Choosing either Advent 2 or 3 to speak the Baptist's message will probably be enough, but his coming on the scene should not be ignored, for his powerful presence bears a powerful message. One of my favorite preachers once described John as the "Doberman pinscher of the gospel." On our merry way to Bethlehem each December, John jumps in the road ranting and raving in his demand for repentance. People wondered who he was—a prophet, Elijah, the Messiah? He denied it all, though I have often described him as Elijah-like, returning not in a fiery chariot, but a fiery personality. John sounds desperate in his passion. He is so urgent in his baptizing. All he will say about himself is that he is the preparer of the way. Like a frantic construction worker given short notice that a smooth highway must be built within the week for some life or death purpose, so John works to prepare the way for the one who is coming. He is all Advent.

John's presence on the seasonal scene reminds us that the waiting we do is not idle time. It is a time to prepare for the sake of our very souls. With John's sermons we are reminded of the oft-forgotten close connection between Advent and Lenten themes. John calls us to repent à la Ash Wednesday. We must transform our lives and return to the Lord before God rends the heavens and comes down!

John is here to make a straight highway for our God—and he begins by straightening *us* out. Probably the most difficult part of road constructing is the first part, moving obstacles out of the way in order to lay a smooth road. Workers often blast through mountain rock and move tons of dirt in order to create the ribbons of highway on which we glide so easily from sea to shining sea.

John was looking to remove obstacles from the path of God's arrival into our hearts. Repentance was the simple call from Jordan's banks. Usually when we think of repentance or transforming our lives we think somewhat narrowly about our ethical behavior. We repent of our badness and doing bad things. Shame on us, we promise not to do it again! Oh, that it was that easy to do! If it was, we wouldn't need God to come and save us, we could do it ourselves.

If Jesus came to bring hope to the world and be hope for the world, then it seems the obstacle on the highway in need of removal is the opposite of hope, namely our despair. To make room in our hearts for hope, don't we need to clear out the clutter of despair? An old spiritual sings, "I'm gonna lay down my burden, down by the riverside." At the

baptismal river we leave our troubles and our worrying about our troubles on the shore. John's strong sermon was "good news" because he was calling the people to lay down their burden of despair and rejoice in the imminent coming of God.

As we prepare to step onto the road of a new century, a new millennium, do we find this road paved with hope or with despair? Many psychologists, sociologists, and other culture watchers are warning us about the waves of despair that lead to the bad behaviors in need of repenting and transforming. Wild man John storms in our churches today. We can smell the locusts and honey on his breath as he screams his sermon at us while riveted next to the baptismal font. He won't let us get away with being unprepared. When Hope arrives, he insists we be ready. Let the water of baptism wash away your despair and fear, he urges. Come lay down your burdens down by this riverside. MA

Fourth Sunday in Advent
December 19, 1999

2 Samuel 7:1–11, 16
Luke 1:47–55
or Psalm 89:1–4, 19–26
Romans 16:25–27
Luke 1:26–38

How many times during this season of preparation, this holiday time, do we hear folks around us say, "This is what the season is all about!" Maybe we say it ourselves. Maybe we say it with a misting of tears in our eyes, as we look over our family gathered together around the table with a little snow falling past the window. Maybe it's said at the end of a well-sung Christmas concert. Maybe we feel it when the stockings are hung by the chimney with care. But as a servant of the Word and an observer of people, it strikes me that the most frequent use of this statement occurs around anything that connects Christmas and children. Some folks even say, "Christmas *is* for children." I take that to mean Christmas is no more than fairy-tale wonderment which can be chuckled at by adults, but is most deeply appreciated by little children. For sure, December is chock full of lots of kid fun: cartoon specials, Frosty the Snowman, Santa and jingle bells, gifts, and candy treats. Of course, even when we say, "Let's not lose the *real* meaning of Christmas," that just points us to the manger where we find—a child! But just because Christmas is about the *coming* of a child does not make it childish.

It seems that before we even come to telling the official Christmas story later this week, we have today stubbed our toe on this little hidden rock of faith concealed in a rather familiar piece of the story. The angel Gabriel comes to Mary telling her of God's plan which includes her participation, a plan that is out of sync with her own plans, a plan that seems humanly impossible. Mary asks some questions, has some points that need clarification, is a bit perplexed, is a lot in shock. Before the multitude of angels announced the birth of Jesus (the reason for the season), this one angel tells a lone woman what all of this is going to do, going to prove, going to mean. Here's the point of it all, the angelic voice proclaims: "Nothing will be impossible with God." This statement of faith hasn't found its way to the holiday message of our greeting cards, but it was the greeting Mary received—it's what the season is all about: "Nothing will be impossible with God."

One of the reasons I loved my parents as a little child was that nothing seemed impossible for them. They seemed to know everything. They were able to solve every problem, cure every illness. Anything that I

needed or needed to know, they were able to provide.

Of course, a part of growing up was slowly realizing that they didn't have all the answers to the world's problems or to mine. Believing your parents can do anything *is* one of the fairy tales that fades with age.

Throughout the millennia, the believer's relationship with God has often been described as a parent-child relationship. The Lord's Prayer begins, "Our *Father* who art in heaven." Some believers also use the image of God as Mother, or Grandfather, but the relationship is the same. We are like the 3-year-old walking through life in the wake of her parents, needing them for everything, trusting them to provide it. Children, of course, have little problem believing that with God nothing is impossible, because they live it in their own little lives every single day.

But little innocent children grow up, and their parents become more and more human. During the teenage years, in fact, there's a total reversal. Parents who once knew everything suddenly are the dumbest people on earth. How far the mighty have fallen!

I'm afraid when I hear the statement, "Christmas is for children." If the message of the season is this incredible statement by Gabriel to Mary: "For nothing will be impossible with God," and if we have come to believe that it is operative only in the world of children, that it is childish and we have grown up, grown beyond it—then what is Christmas for us? Do we believe that the message of the angels was childish story? Do we no longer believe that with God nothing is impossible?

What would life be like if we really believed that nothing is impossible for God?

In the Book of Daniel, a writing designed to boost the faith and courage of a people being oppressed and tortured by foreign powers, there is the well-known story of the three young men who are threatened with death in the fiery furnace if they don't bow down and worship the foreign idols put before them. They refuse to do so, and the mighty King Nebuchadnezzar, who believes he holds their lives in his hands, asks them what god will save them. They answer: "It may be that our God will come and save us from your hand, but know this, even if it seems that God is going to let us be burned up, we will still believe!"

They believed that with God nothing is impossible. They believed in hope even when hope seemed nowhere to be found. Some think this is childish. Some think this is good baby's milk but not enough nourishment to feed an adult who is working and surviving in the world, who must rely on more than clever bedtime stories to get by in life.

But the message of this season is clear: "Nothing is impossible with God." The angels of Christmas tell us there are no God-forsaken people or places. Emmanuel is here—God with us, with us all the time. There are really only two ways of hearing these glad tidings: as quaint fairy tale or as the Truth. In this coming Christmastide, the story is put before us again, and we must choose whether to receive it as fact or fiction. "For nothing will be impossible with God," the angel said. We can only assume that includes turning our impossible hearts as well. MA

Christmas Eve
December 24, 1999

Isaiah 9:2–7
Psalm 96
Titus 2:11–14
Luke 2:1–14 [15–20]

The ancient proclamation, the only sermon in need of preaching on Christmas, is a simple sentence: "Christ is born today!" It sounds better, though, in its original Latin: "*Hodie [hoe-dee-ay] Christus natus est.*" The key word in that sermon is the word "*Hodie*—Today."

The "today" part was crucial to gospel writer Luke's telling of the Christmas story. As much as we romanticize the Christmas miracle as being a story out of time and space, as something other, old Luke will have no part of that. In fact, he goes overboard to nail the story to a very particular "*hodie*" so we will understand that this is no timeless fairy tale, but a piece of history. He frames the miracle in the scope of history. It was at the time when Caesar Augustus commanded a census, when Quirinius was governor in Syria-Palestine, and Herod was Rome's puppet-king over Judea. Luke nails the coming of the Word to a particular "*hodie*" in order to say, "When the Word of God came, it *really* came. It came all the way down into this world; it came into our world, the world of political, economic, and religious power, the world of the Caesars."

"*Hodie, Christus natus est*" was Luke's sermon, and it must be every preacher's sermon. Christmas is always in the present tense—*hodie*—today, Christ is born—not thousands of years ago but today, among us. Our celebration this day isn't a memorial to a miracle but is happening among us even now. *Hodie* is the word we need to hear.

Most Sunday School teachers of young children consistently report a single nagging question their little students ask. After learning the stories of faith—Moses and the burning bush, Noah and the Ark, Daniel and the Lions' Den, the birth and resurrection of Jesus, Paul on the Damascus Road—they often stump their teacher with the big "*hodie*" question: Why doesn't God do things like that *today*? Where is the "*hodie*" of God's power and might? My hunch is that children seldom receive a satisfactory answer to that question and so they stop asking it. By the time we're adults we're embarrassed to ask it, thinking it will make us look stupid or faithless or both. But all of us have our "*hodie*" questions, which is why the Christmas sermon, "*Hodie, Christus natus est,*" is so vital.

We believe not only that Jesus was born in Bethlehem with Mary's sweat and Joseph's tears when Quirinius was Governor of Syria and Herod was a name to be feared; but we believe Jesus is born today in our hearts, in our community, that Jesus comes "*hodie*" into our history, our politics, our social structures, our homes, our congregations.

Christ is born today in our smelly stables, in our culture crippled by incivility, in our world still hoping for peace and justice, in a modern civilization that no longer needs Christianity or religion to remind it of itself—Christ is born "*hodie.*" *Hodie* is Christ born into loving families this night, into happy homes and hearts. "*Hodie, Christus natus est*" into homeless shelters and war-torn patches of our world. Christ is born today in the nursing homes where Alzheimer patients giggle unknowingly and where those mentally alert to know their misery often ask their pastor to pray with them, as the bread and wine is shared, that this would, please, God, be their last Christmas.

Our children ask, and the child in us asks secretly, "Why doesn't God come to us today like in the days of old? Where are the

miracles, the wonders, the things to write home about?"

On the Fourth Sunday of Advent we pondered the discipleship of Mary who modeled for us pure faithfulness. Her greatness, her fame, comes not because she was chosen to be the mother of Jesus but because she *believed* in the God of her ancestors. She believed that God had once acted in history bringing her people through the wilderness to the promised land, bringing the exiles home, acting in the lives of the great Abraham and Sarah, King David, and the prophets. So many incredible acts of power and love were there in the history of God's people. So many mighty acts did Mary learn about as a little child. She knew God's track record with her people and she believed that "*hodie*," God would act again.

Our children misunderstand our reason for teaching them the stories of the faith. They think we tell the old, old story to impress them with all the great things God has done in the past and all the great people God did these things to and with and through in the past.

But we tell the stories, like the Christmas story, to train ourselves in God's ways, to learn the many and various ways that God interacts with us in preparation for God coming among us "*hodie*." We train ourselves about yesterday so we'll be prepared for *hodie!* All the stories of the faith aren't just ancient stories, they're also modern stories. When Sunday School children ask, "Where's the *hodie?*" we must be right there with a *hodie* story. We must be ready as disciples to tell how Jesus, born in Bethlehem long ago, was conceived in our hearts and how he's born among us today. We must be prepared to tell the story in first person.

"Where are the angels, Pastor, like the ones at Christmas?" the children ask. "Oh," I say, "they're all around, still bringing us messages from God." The last one I saw personally was at the end of last September. It was a sad time in my neighborhood because little Amanda across the street had died unexpectedly in her sleep at age 2-1/2.

After her funeral we family, friends, and neighbors drove out to All Saints' Cemetery, where she was to be buried in the section for little children. As the procession of cars turned the corner toward the entrance, there hung over the graves of children a single thin cloud in an otherwise clear blue sky. The cloud was a perfect picture of an angel hovering, waiting. It was the profile of a Christmas angel like so many I've seen on Christmas cards. Our many cars came to a stop by the edge of the cemetery and everyone jumped out and shouted to one another, "Did you see the angel?" It hovered still while we carried her body to the grave singing, "Jesus, Remember Me When You Come into Your Kingdom." *Hodie*, Jesus, remember her. Shortly thereafter the cloud thinned to nothing recognizable, but we understood its message of peace and comfort, the message of Christmas angels singing Glory to God, there will be peace.

"Hodie, Christus natus est." Know your *"hodie"* stories as well as you know your ancient stories. Be willing to tell them as proclamations of the gospel we share. If Christ is not born today, Christ is not born at all. We celebrate his Nativity this night in sure and certain hope that Christ came among us and comes among us still, still bringing glorious peace—joy—*Hodie*. MA

First Sunday after Christmas December 26, 1999

Isaiah 61:10—62:3
Psalm 148
Galatians 4:4–7
Luke 2:22–40

It's the day after Christmas and it's a Sunday. Perhaps a wee bit smaller group of the faithful will gather together this day along with their tired pastor to hear once again the good news of Jesus. Many of us will awake this day to hear radio and TV reporters saying: "Now that Christmas is over. . . ." Though it's difficult for Christians to endure the culture's insistence on celebrating Christmas two months before December 25th instead of the twelve days of the season, at least the cultural muck is exhausted when the liturgical season really arrives. Our brothers and sisters in retail make the switch from pre-Christmas to post-Christmas the quickest of all. Their greetings of "Happy Holidays" are flipped to "Happy New Year" in the twinkling of an eye. Christmas stock, once so carefully priced and displayed, is now tossed onto half-price tables around the stores. Now that Christmas is over, now that the world has used it up, put it on sale, and tossed its excess out in the trash; now the Christian celebration can really begin.

Now that the pressure of culture and family has subsided in our lives, now that we've enjoyed the festivities, it's time *now* in early Christmastide for Christians to ask some serious questions and to think some deeper thoughts about what it means to say "Christ the Savior is born."

We have celebrated, but do we understand? Celebration and understanding don't always go hand in hand. Now that we have celebrated the story, can we join together to try to understand the story a little better?

The version of the story we have heard the most and know the best is from the Gospel of Luke. Chapter 2 begins with the well-worn words: "In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled. This was the first enrollment when Quirinius was governor of Syria. . . ." Luke's chief interest in his birth story is to sketch the birth of Jesus against the background of Roman imperial policy.

Luke introduces Jesus' birth with the Emperor Augustus' proclamation of a world-wide census. Augustus casts a wide shadow across this narrative. Augustus defeated Mark Anthony and Cleopatra in 31 B.C.E. ushering in an era of peace after a long period of civil war. This era of peace was celebrated throughout the Roman Empire. In 27 B.C.E. the Roman Senate urged him to head the State and voted him the title "Augustus" meaning "One who is worthy of great honor." Monuments celebrating his birthday describe his birth as the "beginning of good news" for all people. Sound familiar? Caesar Augustus was further described as a "Savior for us and our descendants, who will make wars to cease and order all things well." Sound even more familiar?

The parallels between Augustus and Jesus go on and on. Luke is making a political statement as much as a theological one, but because we have forgotten the politics, we often miss the punch line. We celebrate, but we don't understand.

We don't understand how, line for line, symbol for symbol, sign for sign, Luke is sketching the story of Jesus against the political background. In this time and in this place where the Roman Empire occupied the land of Israel and tried to occupy its spirit, the imperial propaganda declared that Augustus was the Savior of the people who would bring prosperity to all. But Luke tells a new story, a new political and religious

story of one who has come among us bringing a different kind of peace. There is a different kind of power among us, Luke preaches. Against the background of these once famous characters of Caesar Augustus and Quirinius, the Governor, Luke tells of unknown characters named Mary and Joseph, Simeon and Anna, who were in but not of the Empire.

I suppose Luke would toss his head back with laughter to realize that, 2,000 years later, we have to be reminded who Augustus was in the middle of our celebration of the life and times of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus. Not many know that Augustus' real name was Octavian and that he was the adopted son of Julius Caesar. Wouldn't Luke clap his hands at how the mighty have been toppled from their thrones!

Luke contrasts not only the status of Augustus with that of the new Messiah, but also the peace they bring. In Judaism and in early Christianity "peace," *shalom*, meant wholeness, the completeness that comes when your life corresponds to the will of God. This peace gives glory to God and heals the division between the highest and the lowest. The peace of Baby Jesus is not a peace built on the backs of the poor and slaves as it was in Caesar's kingdom, but a peace that declares freedom to the poor, the slave, the outcast—the peace Simeon recognized.

The Christmas story we have celebrated is a political story. In fact it is a story of political revolution. In Advent we sang Mary's song, the Magnificat. Here Luke records for us her song of political and religious revolution in which she declares:

My soul magnifies the Lord . . .
who has shown strength with his arm,
scattered the proud in the imagination
of their hearts,
put down the mighty from their thrones. . . .

God has done it, Mary. You trembled at the name of Augustus, and today we don't even know who he is! God has done it, Mary, and God can do it again!

Luke, with great intention, sketched the story of Jesus against the political scene of the day. As we take this story into our lives and living, we must do the same. What does the claim that God has come into our world and claimed it mean up against the politics and economy of our world, our church, our family?

Katie Hafner in a magazine article on "The Wealth and Avarice of the CyberRich" examines the charitable giving of the new millionaires who have become rich in the computer business compared to those in previous generations who got rich on oil and automobiles. How do Hewlett and Packard and Gates compare with Carnegie and Rockefeller? Apparently not nearly as well. While there are some exceptions, many of the modern wealthy are too afraid or self-centered, or both, to care for others. Scott McNealy of Sun Microsystems when asked about his personal giving said: "If you want to redistribute wealth, you liberals, why don't you go out and earn it and give it away." Bill Gates, the world's wealthiest private individual, has done some charitable giving but basically feels that if you stay on task and make money today, there will be time in the future to be a good citizen.

How does the politics of Baby Jesus change our assumptions about who has power and to whom the power is shifting? God has toppled the mighty from their thrones, and God can do it again!

If in this Christmas story we hear as good news the proclamation that the God we worship is a busy, restlessly revolutionary God, then and only then will we have a larger vision. If we do not understand the Christmas story this way, then our vision will

shrink to the confines of what we can do all on our own.

We have celebrated the Christmas story, but do we understand it? How do we sketch it against the backdrop of our own lives? Some of us only want to use the story as a reason to celebrate, but it's a story about our very lives. The grown-up Jesus would later say of himself, "The peace I give to you is unlike the peace the world promises." The world promises a lot to some, at least. Caesar Augustus thought he held the whole world in his hands. Today he is buried in a list of historical names and dates that many consider to be boring and irrelevant for their lives. Luke declares that it will always be so with human power and human institutions. They are like grass—here today, gone tomorrow.

To live according to the Christmas story is to say: I am powerless over my life and yet I am unafraid. I am unafraid because I know that God once came to live as I live. I am unafraid because, though poor and powerless and persecuted, Baby Jesus on the cross stared down the powers of this world and won. I am unafraid with Christmas in my heart because his victory over the powers that be is my victory, too. Glory be to our God who shines in the highest and lives in the lowliest! MA

(A hymn to follow such preaching could be "Lord Christ, When First You Came to Earth," *Lutheran Book of Worship* #421.)

Second Sunday after Christmas
January 2, 2000

Jeremiah 31:7–14 *or* Sirach 24:1–12
Psalm 147:13–21 (12–20 NRSV)
or Wisdom of Solomon 10:15–21
Ephesians 1:3–14
John 1:[1–9] 10–18

If you are reading this reflection, the world did not end with the turn of the calendar and you, dear friend, still have a sermon to preach. Unless you have a New Year's Day service, this will be your first sermon of the year 2000. The preacher will be mightily challenged to weigh current events and emotions with ancient scripture and promise. Today with the reading from John we move from Christmas story to christological song. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." Yes, indeed! Though much will remain the same in our world, the turn of the calendar this year is so remarkable that people can't help but see themselves and the world differently. It truly is a new year, but even more it is a new *time*. On such momentous occasions, a word must be spoken. Let that word be the Word of God.

While the church goes on celebrating the birth of Christ, the culture is obsessed with the new year. By and large, the church has liturgically and ritually ignored the new year. Some congregations do have a eucharistic celebration, and many religious communities will host city-wide or regional community services to mark this unusual new year. But for the most part, New Year's Eve and Day are festivals presided over by the media and champagne distributors. A popular ritual among them is to take a look over the past year. We look over the news stories of the year, the deaths of famous people, the achievements of society and its failings much

as we fondly flip the pages of a family photo album. It's fun and often emotionally presented. This year the focus will not be on reviewing 1999 as much as it will be a review of the twentieth century. This is our century, the century of our parents and grandparents. There are a lot of photos in this album. My hunch is that the past century will be reviewed and fondled endlessly. However, with regard to the millennia, I think attention will be given less to the millennium behind and more to the one ahead. What will life be like? Where are we headed? What are our hopes and dreams for this new dawn? How can we make our dreams come true? Probably by this date, we will be ready to put the old photo album aside and start a crisp new one that will begin with the incredible date: January 1, **2000**. . . .

Now enters the preacher.

Interestingly, but not too surprisingly, the prayers and themes of the Morning Prayer service speak to this occasion. A liturgy written to greet the new day articulates well our longings and hopes as we greet this new time. Hear these prayers:

O Lord, almighty and everlasting God, you have brought us in safety to this new day [year/century/millennium]; preserve us with your mighty power, that we may not fall into sin, nor be overcome in adversity, and in all we do, direct us to the fulfilling of your purpose. . . .

Lord God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us. . . .

The news media will overwhelm us with their historical reviews. They will focus on personalities, major events, trends, and demographics in the last century and will speculate about the same for the new century to come. People of faith, however, ask different questions about the past and the future. As we have been tutored by our most ancient parents in the faith, when we look at the world around us, the comings and goings of many people, the rise and fall of societies and kingdoms, we are counseled to ask: What is God doing in these activities? and Have we been faithful to God's call? For the Christian, faithfulness is crucial. Have we honored God with our lives and our living? How can we be faithful disciples in this new time that is set before us like a clean slate?

John's hymn beautifully sings of the riches we carry into this new time: "From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace." We have life instead of death, light instead of darkness, speech instead of silence, hope instead of despair, joy instead of sorrow, company instead of isolation, peace instead of fear. These are God's Christmas gifts to us.

We don't really know much about this new time we're stepping into with all seriousness this week. Various "experts" will make their predictions, their educated guesses. They will do the math, plot the graphs, take a census. It will all be interesting, but we are wise enough now to take it with a little salt. The only one who can speak any absolute truth about the future is the preacher among us. We hold the hands and hearts of our people, recalling God's faithful promises to secure the future, to turn evil finally to good, to order our days and our deeds in peace. As we truthfully acknowledge, we go out along paths untrodden, we travel roads unknown. Yet we step out unafraid because we absolutely believe God's hand is leading us and God's love is supporting us from this remarkable time forth and forevermore. Amen. MA

The Epiphany of Our Lord

This year's Epiphany season is longer than usual. Instead of barely being able to catch one's breath between the seasons of Christmas and Lent, we get to stretch out a bit and take a longer look at Jesus as he is baptized, calls disciples, teaches in the synagogue, cures the sick and the demon-possessed, preaches, forgives, and spends time with some really low characters.

This Epiphany is an opportunity to concentrate on Mark's way of telling the Good News, because once Pentecost begins, the sequential readings will be interrupted by vacations—including the preacher's—and things won't settle down until September. RLR

The Baptism of Our Lord First Sunday after the Epiphany January 9, 2000

Genesis 1:1–5
Psalm 29
Acts 19:1–7
Mark 1:4–11

I'm not sure why it's not in the NRSV text, but I miss Mark's characteristic *euthus*. Back when I was in seminary school (to quote the noted American theo-mythologist James Morrison), one of the first things that whetted my appetite for Markan studies was Fred Danker making such a big deal of the many "immediatelys" that propel the first part of the story. We do have the phrase, "the heavens torn apart," which is faithful to the Greek *schizomenous* (as in "schism") and more graphic than the "opened" of Matthew and Luke. And there is a "just as he was coming up," but it sure doesn't have the same punch as "immediately."

John the Baptist seems to have fallen on hard times in the modern Christian imagination. Can this possibly be the prophet who drew to himself "the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem"? We trot John out for a few Sundays (Advent, Epiphany [Proper 10]), but there is something worth digging around for here. Connections with the stern Old Testament prophets (Elijah in particular), the 'waiting' theme of Advent, and the provocative statement about baptism "with the Holy Spirit" all offer the preacher an angle from which to come at the Good News of Jesus' identity. The Genesis lesson offers the "compare and contrast" of the first creation with the new creation that is underway with the coming of Jesus. And all three lessons feature the Spirit or Wind of God (*ruach/pneuma*).

There may be something to be said about "pre-Christian" practices and attitudes (if one can avoid both the 'noble' and 'benighted' savage stereotypes). Who knows, you may have in your congregation some ethical, humane pagans who haven't gotten past the notion of Christianity as rule-bound or superstition-bound!

Pastoral Reflection

It is quick, isn't it? Mark's rapid-fire delivery that tells us *what we need to know*, but without the engaging stories of Matthew and Luke, or the extended theological ruminations of John. Instead, we are given John the Baptist, and before we've really settled in with him, Jesus appears. All we know is that he's from Nazareth in Galilee. And before we've had a chance to get too restive, Mark gives us the Word: "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

It's as if Mark *knows* that his story is more than a little strange, especially the way

it ends. So he makes sure we have every opportunity to see Jesus for who he is. It's possible that we could be so dazzled by John the Baptist's Elijah-redux that we would miss Jesus. That's why as much space is taken by John in telling us he's *not* the one as is taken to tell us that he's still pretty important.

It has often been noted that we cannot really have Jesus without John the Baptist. That is to say, repentance is the doorway to the Christ. John Pilch in some notes in his book on *The Cultural World of Jesus* calls attention to the phrase "Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee" (Mark 1:9). Jesus left Nazareth behind just as decisively as he would call Peter and Andrew and James and John to leave behind their businesses and their families (1:16–20). Jesus left house and home, but out in the wilderness God found him and called him "Beloved Son" (1:11). Jesus entered into a new relationship with God and then summoned the four and then the rest of the twelve and then all the rest of us to leave behind and to be found anew.

Second Sunday after the Epiphany January 16, 2000

1 Samuel 3:1–10 [11–20]
Psalm 139:1–5, 12–17 (1–6, 13–18 NRSV)
1 Corinthians 6:12–20
John 1:43–51

So, now that you've got the people all ready for an extended ride on the Markan Express, what happens? Slam on the brakes, dig out whatever you've got by Raymond Brown (of blessed memory), and hunker down for a week with the Fourth Gospel.

This text from John concerns itself with the identity of Jesus, as last week's Markan text did. But it's a very different telling of the tale. As most commentators agree, John's account of the calling of disciples is very difficult to harmonize with that of the Synoptics. Better to focus on John apart from the other evangelists.

Philip is mentioned in the other Gospels, but only as a name in the list of the Twelve. Here he identifies Jesus as the one foretold by scripture and as "the son of Joseph." Philip's friend Nathanael ("God has given") is not listed among the disciples other than in John. Some exegetes take this to mean that Nathanael is a symbolic figure, representing what an Israelite should be (in opposition to those who rejected Jesus).

There's probably an allusion to Jacob (in whom there was plenty of guile) and to John the Baptist's purpose (1:31, "that [Jesus] might be revealed to Israel"). Nathanael is impressed by Jesus' mysterious knowledge of him. In an exchange similar to the one with "doubting" Thomas in John 20, Jesus tweaks Nathanael's faith by a small show of power. The Jacob connection is made stronger with Jesus' promise that Nathanael "will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man." Jacob's "ladder," a means for communication between heaven and earth, is now presented as being Jesus himself.

Pastoral Reflection

"Follow me." "Come and see." One could spend several seasons exploring "the call" and "witness." And it turns out that the other lessons are eager to assist us.

The call of Samuel has its humorous side, what with the comings and goings of the youngster who has not yet learned to distinguish between his teacher's voice and that of God (which sounds like a good graduation sermon if you can pick your own text come May or June).

But it gets deathly serious (and of course

that part is marked "optional," just like the hard parts of the psalms) soon enough. The merciless condemnation of Eli's house sets my ears a-tingle. I wonder what it will do for those of our hearers? There's also Eli's acceptance of God's punishment for his house; what can we make of that? It certainly doesn't look like cheap grace. Perhaps we should be talking about the consequences of sin.

Or how about "As Samuel grew up, the Lord was with him and *let none of his words fall to the ground*" (3:19)? Now, there's a phrase! How often our words—the words of preachers, and of husbands and wives, mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters—"fall to the ground."

The second lesson reminds us that witness is a full-body thing (even the parts we sometimes forget are God's creation too). We may not have many parishioners literally consorting with prostitutes, at least of the sexual kind. But do you remember Lenny Bruce's bit about the screenwriter with horn-rims and a goatee who insisted that he was a prostitute? Maybe not; it was the late 50s or early 60s. But there are all kinds of ways to misuse our bodies. Just ask me about my heart attack and bypass surgery! RLR

Third Sunday after the Epiphany January 23, 2000

Jonah 3:1–5, 10
Psalm 62:6–14 (5–12 NRSV)
1 Corinthians 7:29–31
Mark 1:14–20

Back to Mark. We skip the Temptation (since we've got to save it for 1 Lent), and we find Jesus calling Simon, Andrew, James, and John. But not before we get the summary of Jesus' proclamation. In my Bible this verse is marked, cross-referenced, and diagrammed. The four parts ("the time . . . the kingdom . . . repent . . . believe") could serve us well in Advent, but I will use these words to reset the Markan stage after the brief excursus in John.

The texts from Jonah and Corinthians help us to see the urgency in Jesus' speech about gospel/good news, kingdom/sovereignty, and repentance.

Pastoral Reflection

Bold responses. That's what's going on here. The disciples hear the call and respond. No looking back for them. The people of Nineveh hear the word of law (Jonah was a Lutheran preacher, wasn't he?) and respond. (It's too bad the lectionary leaves out verses 6–9; I really think we could do something with the image of both "human beings and animals . . . covered with sackcloth," fasting and crying to God.) And it seems to have worked. Not only can we talk about God's love for the "enemy," but about God's changeable mind.

And the Corinthians? Paul's not kidding around, is he? "It's time to get serious," as George Hoyer once said. It's radical, it's scary, it's uncomfortably close to fanaticism—or at least many of our hearers will think so.

A recent issue of *Biblical Archaeology Review* focused on the fishing villages of the Sea of Galilee and their harbors, offering details of the material remains of small ports and noting once again the remarkable find of a first-century fishing boat a few years ago. Doug Oakman and K. C. Hanson in their book on *Palestine in the Time of Jesus* venture beyond material remains and offer a fascinating discussion of how small companies of fishermen were themselves caught in a net of burdensome taxation. John Pilch speaks of Jesus calling the four fishermen

away from their families and the companies they had formed to become Jesus' partners in his project of "proclaiming the reign of God, the authentic patron or father of Israel."

Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany January 30, 2000

Deuteronomy 18:15–20
Psalm 111
1 Corinthians 8:1–13
Mark 1:21–28

Hey, what do you know? Another couple of "immediatelys"! Well, not in the NRSV, which substitutes tamer, more flowing phrases, but you and I know that they're there.

And why not? This is the action/adventure Gospel. The people in the synagogue are astonished/astounded (*exeplēssonto*) and amazed (*ethambēthēsan*). They are given a lot to be amazed about. Having come to their sacred space, they are confronted by a teacher whose authority is different than that of the scribes, and by an outspoken unclean spirit (who, by the way, is the first one to make a specific identification of Jesus).

In both speech and action, Jesus causes a stir. Like the inner-directed heroes of old Westerns and newer Kung-Fu movies, he seems to arrive out of nowhere (or Nazareth—same thing) and takes matters into his own hands while the local authorities stand by helplessly.

The spirit addresses him using a formulaic greeting, a kind of challenge prior to battle. But the demon's attempt at mastery by manipulation of his opponent's name fails. Jesus' authority over Satan is exercised in this exorcism of one of the Evil One's minions. And yet another answer to the question of Jesus' identity is given.

This exorcism is incredibly important in Mark's scheme of things. It is Jesus' first public act after he has announced his program (1:15) and gathered the nucleus of his new community (1:16–20). The first act of Jesus in his public ministry is to enter a synagogue and cast out a demon. Mark pictures Jesus as the world's exorcist, the one through whom God is clearing demons out of the cosmos. Jesus bursts onto the scene with incredible power, and immediately people are impressed. But the question is, will the demons be cleared away by acts of power? Or does it take something more? What does the crucifixion have to do with exorcisms?

Pastoral Reflection

Jesus as Bruce Lee? Okay, it's corny, but maybe the comparison highlights the violence in the text. Jesus is not gentle with demons. Nor, later, is he soft-spoken with the scribes and Pharisees. We don't honor Jesus by portraying him as a delicate, caricatured "sensitive, new age guy" (see Christine Lavin's song of the same name).

The kingdom has drawn near indeed. And it is *disturbing*. Accepted ways, limitations, and authorities are all called into question and put under judgment.

Is this so far from the power and judgment expressed in the Deuteronomy text? God is rightly to be feared, and God rightly passes sentence over the presumptuous, the lying, and the unfaithful prophets.

The Corinthians text continues Paul's theological-ethical discourse. He is at pains to cover all aspects of the Corinthians' question. While he doesn't go so far as to suggest that demons possess some of the Christians in Greece, he does state very clearly that one is opposing God if one causes a sister or brother to fall. My own vegan/vegetarianism aside (just one of the "lifestyle changes"

occasioned by bypass surgery), I can't imagine too many of our people eating meat offered to idols. But in what ways do we sin against the "weaker believer"? An important question in this age of confrontation and assertiveness! Taking Paul's words seriously would be shocking, but perhaps refreshing, even in the church. RLR

Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany February 6, 2000

Isaiah 40:21–31
Psalm 147:1–12, 21c (1–11, 20c NRSV)
1 Corinthians 9:16–23
Mark 1:29–39

More "immediatelys," not to mention the impressive, inclusive descriptions: "*all* who were sick or possessed," "the *whole* city," "*many* who were sick," "*many* demons," *everyone* is searching." These phrases ring even more inclusive when we remember that "many" is a Semitism for "all."

Supernatural beings recognize Jesus, but he keeps them silent. While the reader shares with the demons an insider's knowledge, the people and the disciples in Mark's story are *shown* Jesus' power but the secret is kept from them. This summary of Jesus' healing and exorcisms is expansive in scope and matter-of-fact in tone.

Mark mentions Jesus' prayers three times: here in this Sunday's text, and then in 6:46, after the feeding of the five thousand, and in 14:32–42, the prayer in Gethsemane. That Jesus prays now in *erēmos topos*, "a lonely place" (RSV), "a deserted place" (NRSV), looks back to 1:4 (John in the wilderness) and 1:12 (the Temptation) and forward to 1:45 where Jesus can't openly enter towns but must remain in "deserted places."

The fact that Jesus prays shows that he lives in a relationship of trust toward his heavenly Abba, but that stands in contrast to the popular clamor for him as miracle worker. Jesus' identity is not yet clearly seen. He goes on his way (his path) proclaiming and healing and casting out demons.

We could spend more time with Simon's mother-in-law. All that's told us is that she has a fever, Jesus takes her by the hand and lifts her up, the fever leaves her, and "she began to serve them." Service follows healing in Mark's story.

The "God's-eye view" of the Isaiah reading offers another take on the power of God. Isaiah's celebration of the Lord's majesty might be well used in connection with the slave role that St. Paul commends to the Corinthians.

Pastoral Reflection

The mighty power of God, the humility of God's messengers, and the healing that comes to humankind are all important themes to offer God's people. Isaiah proclaims that "He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless."

Who is Jesus? Mark tells us that Jesus is the one who heals and the one who prays. What could one say about the list of identified sick, hospitalized, and shut-in folk that takes up a significant part of the congregation's prayers each Sunday? Are our prayers simply a one-shot during the liturgy, or do we carry a concern for those people throughout the week? What result do we expect from our prayers? Are we as hopeful as "the whole city [which] was gathered around the door"? How do we act upon the hope we have in God's future and in light of the foretaste we already possess?

What meaning for us is there in the people of Capernaum crowding and searching while Jesus announces himself con-

strained to move on? Jesus' healing brings relief and rescue, but it also entails judgment for those who don't recognize him and for those who want him as the bearer of their agendas. Maybe we need to see Jesus *alone*, in a "lonely place," far from our demands, our expectations, and the political, sociological, and theological baggage we impose on him.

There is something beautiful, on the other hand, in the picture of Jesus and Simon's mother-in-law. Here he is engaged, directly and intimately, with human need. He touches her; her hands become tools for service. RLR

Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany February 13, 2000

2 Kings 5:1–14
Psalm 30
1 Corinthians 9:24–27
Mark 1:40–45

Two "immediatelys" (verses 42–43). It's another healing, and this time there's a textual question that raises some interesting questions.

The NRSV translation of verse 41 reads, "moved with pity, Jesus. . . ." The word is *splangchnistheis*, but in some manuscripts the word used is *orgistheis*, which means "having become angry." Some commentators explain this as a way of making sense of the *embrimēsamenos* in verse 43, which Don Juel translates as "snorting at him in indignation."

The witnesses are divided, and so one could eat one's cake and have it, too, by employing both readings. Jesus' pity of the leper doesn't make impossible his anger at the disease and its horrible effects on the man's life. What's more, Jesus' "indignation" (not merely "stern warning") links this cleansing with the exorcisms that have preceded it. Jesus here wrestles with the Prince of Demons.

The cleansing of the leper is another sign of the power of God brought near in the touch and word of Jesus. While the priests have the authority to *pronounce* the healed man clean, Jesus has both power and authority to *effect* a cure. The leper's faith, while not reported in detail, is expressed as supplication directed to Jesus as one believed to have the power (and the choice of using it) to heal.

Pastoral Reflection

Various aspects of the text cry out for comment. In addition to the anger or pity of Jesus, there's the unambiguous touch he gives the leper. Here is Jesus breaking through barriers, which, while a theme fraught with opportunities to misunderstand (or be misunderstood), provides preachers with an occasion to reflect on personal and community "boundaries" that keep us from outcasts. A good exercise before setting our illustrations in sermonic stone is to try on a few examples that are purely personal. How do we feel/think/react when *our* particular boundaries are violated (even just verbally)? What's going to get the word across without simply reinforcing the walls?

How about exploring Jesus' anger as well as his pity? What about the wrath of God? Or is that one of those boundaries preachers feel uneasy about even approaching, let alone crossing?

Who is this Jesus? Why did he want the healing to remain secret? Whatever the secret *then*, God's choice to heal and save is best served by faithful proclamation *now*. The Naaman story might be a good place to begin—pre-Christian curiosity piqued by the believer's confidence. RLR

Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany
February 20, 2000

Isaiah 43:18–25
Psalm 41
2 Corinthians 1:18–22
Mark 2:1–12

The first phase of Jesus' ministry is over. Now begins a series of actions that provoke controversy leading ultimately to the hostility of Jesus' opponents. The question of Jesus' identity escalates from "Who are you?" to "Who are you to do things reserved for God?"

While Jesus is teaching ("speaking the word"), the paralytic's friends lower him through the roof. It is their faith that moves Jesus to say, "Son, your sins are forgiven." And it is this word that so offends the scribes. While the Old Testament interrelates sickness and sin, forgiveness and healing, the Messiah was not expected to take upon himself this prerogative of God. Healing was one thing, but words of forgiveness were blasphemous in the mouth of a mere mortal.

It can be argued that here Jesus speaks as a prophet ("thus says the Lord . . .") and that the scribes reject him as arrogantly assuming the office unworthily.

But once it's done—the single act of healing and forgiveness—we're back to a Markan "immediately." Once given the word, the new man (and his friends?) move quickly and publicly, leaving the gaping crowd to their astonishment. The crowd cannot yet give a comprehensive answer to the question of Jesus' identity, nor can they see the healing-forgiveness reality for the unity that it is. But their reaction serves to underline Jesus' power and authority nonetheless.

Pastoral Reflection

Isaiah describes a very new world, one in which the natural features of the wilderness are transformed and the wild animals do obeisance to God. Maybe we've been too Disney-fed to find this as the utterly fantastic image it is, but a day or two through the Southwest in July should help one get a feel for it.

The "yes" that unifies the three lessons is an earth-shaking, soul-stirring one. Who says this "yes" to the paralytic? Someone who's not fooling around, someone who's quite sure of himself and quite sure of what's going on around him.

What is harder to address these days: a Jesus who heals by speaking a word of forgiveness, a Jesus who looks into the hearts of his opponents, or a Jesus who audaciously takes on his opponents in a most challenging way?

It's one thing to spend some time on Palestinian architecture or the concept of spiritual/physical connection (both of which illuminate the text), but it is another to place our hearers in the position of the scribes or the paralytic and ask how they respond to this Jesus. How *new* a thing can our institutions and way of living bear? How much healing do we dare ask for? If God is going to change the topography, what effect will that have on the way things are? Can people live in constantly shifting circumstances? Are people *amazed* by the church? Should they be? RLR

Eighth Sunday after the Epiphany February 27, 2000

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

Jesus' banqueting is contrasted with others' fasting which then is the occasion for the sayings about new cloth and new wine. These sayings all have to do with the radical newness of what Jesus is bringing in. In spite of that newness, we must remember that the Pharisees and John's disciples shouldn't be portrayed as caricatured "bad guys," easily disposed of by us "good guys." Where Jesus' contemporaries missed Jesus' good news was where most of us miss it: you don't have to be a "good guy" to be included in the kingdom! That is offensive to many "good" people as also to hard-driving doers of every sort.

Check out just how *outside* the tax collectors were. Read up on the technical term "sinners." Eating with such folks was strictly prohibited, so Jesus is offending in a big way. Which just goes to show you the 180° shift that Jesus has made.

There is a gentle beauty about the Hosea text. For "allure" read "woo." This passage dares to use the categories of sexuality and marriage as imagery appropriate to God's reconciling love for God's people. Note that the courtship is to take place in the wilderness. That is specific reference to the Exodus and the image of the wilderness as the honeymoon time between God and God's people. Hosea uses the language of the marriage covenant to convey a message of God's love enveloping a harlot nation, just as Jesus embraces a collaborationist and his cronies. That extraordinary work is what God is up to in these most hopeful of texts.

Pastoral Reflection
"Outcasts," "outsiders," "outlaws"—my guess is that many of our people are pretty uncomfortable with such categories (not to mention the flesh and blood folks themselves). Perhaps, lest we simply romanticize the outlaws (something our culture has always seemed to do), let's note that Jesus is in the midst of the tax collectors' banquet and that Mark writes of "many who followed him." There is an interaction here, initiated by Jesus, but not without response from Levi and his pals.

The newness of Jesus' program is not limited to his welcoming. God's reign changes a lot of assumptions, and opens a door of hope (Hos 45:15) for us all. There's good news in the changing of one's "masters" (baals) for one who offers faithful love. And there's good news in admitting one's need for a "physician."

What kind of struggle is it to leave the old behind? How radically do we wish to be reconstituted? How obviously are we "letters of recommendation" to be read by the society at large? RLR

The Transfiguration of Our Lord March 5, 2000

2 Kings 2:1–12
Psalm 50:1–6
2 Corinthians 4:3–6
Mark 9:2–9

Peter apparently thought that the Mount of Transfiguration, however we identify it geographically (Mt. Tabor? Mt. Hermon?), was the absolute end of the journey spiritually. Jesus had spoken hard words, really offen-

sive words, about the necessity of suffering. He had even said something about crosses, his and theirs (Mark 8:31–37). Jesus had roundly rebuked Peter's lack of understanding, accusing him of being on the side of Satan, of knowing nothing about God and God's way of working in the world (8:33).

Was Peter thinking to himself: "The violent storm of Caesarea Philippi has blown over. Here I am, a few days later, on this mountain with my old friends James and John, and now we are experiencing some mind-boggling vision of Jesus with his two friends Moses and Elijah. It can't get better than this. Maybe those words of Jesus about crosses and dying were some kind of hyperbole, (mere) figures of speech, but here on the mountain is what we left our nets for. We are in the presence of the greatest heroes of Israel's history, dynamic leaders possessing wonder-working powers. When they speak, the waters part, and at their command the waters return. The earth swallows their enemies, and they know how to bring fire down out of heaven. We are surely beyond parables and puzzles and all that strange talk of suffering."

Peter concludes, "Let's build three booths!" In an older commentary (4th ed. 1977) which is still one of the best on Mark, Eduard Schweizer recalls features of Israel's expectation of the transformation of all things in the end-time. The righteous would all be transfigured and would shine with celestial glory. God would dwell in a new temple in a resplendent Jerusalem (Ezekiel) or God's glory would make not only the temple superfluous but would indwell the New Jerusalem so brilliantly that neither sun nor moon would be required any longer (Revelation).

And God is never alone. At God's coming triumph, all the saints of old would be resurrected and participate joyously in God's new creation. Schweizer thinks that Mark is describing how Peter misread the signs on the mountain. Peter thought that the transfiguration of Jesus and the sudden appearance of Moses and Elijah indicated that "the eschatological rest in which God and his heavenly retinue would dwell upon the earth had already begun." The context indicates that Peter wanted this to be the real beginning of the real end. If the Gospel had ended here, early in chapter 9, that would mean having a gospel without a cross, without sacrifice, without suffering. Yes! says Peter. Let's get to the end by means of overwhelming power! That is Peter's error on every page of Mark's Gospel. And it is certainly not his alone. Nor is it an ancient error only.

The Transfiguration is not the end after all, but it is a great help to people moving toward the end. The Voice from heaven named Jesus "Son" and told Peter and the others, "Listen to him!" Listen to him and trust him and follow him all the way to the end. The way that Jesus is traveling, said that Voice, is the way of the cross, but that is exactly the way that I want him to go. His way is the way of servanthood and self-giving agape. As odd as it may seem, that way alone will lead to the transfiguration of the whole world.

It will be Good Friday when the Voice from the sky will find an earthly echo. Not Peter but a Roman centurion will look hard and listen hard as Jesus dies, and he will become the first human being to confess, "Surely this crucified man is God's Son." Surely God is turning the world over, remaking the world, transfiguring the cosmos, through the Crucified and those who follow him. RHS

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