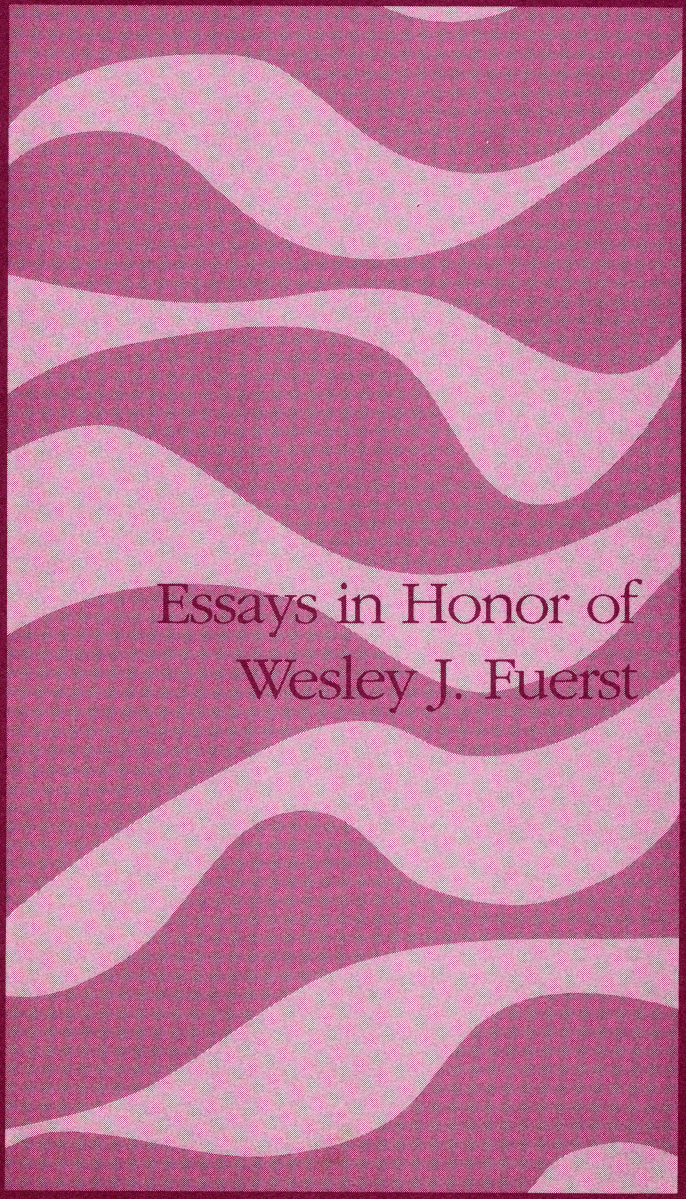
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Essays in Honor of Wesley J. Fuerst

Wesley J. Fuerst retired last spring after a long and distinguished career teaching at Lutheran seminaries—at Central Seminary in Fremont, Nebraska, on the mission field in Argentina, and finally at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. Along the way he picked up a doctorate at Princeton and served both as Dean and Director of Graduate Studies at LSTC. He is a specialist in the wisdom literature of the Old Testament, altogether appropriate for someone who is a "sage," which, as Webster tells us, means someone who is eminent in wisdom, especially wisdom gained through experience and reflection. The five colleagues who write for this issue wish to honor Wes and his contributions as scholar and teacher.

Born and raised in Nebraska, Wes is perfectly at home in Metropolitan Chicago. Yet, Wes always reminds us not to idealize the city, let alone neglect or ignore the town and country folk from whom many of our students come and to which they return as pastors and other church leaders. Not too many years ago the LSTC catalog featured a picture of Wes alongside a gigantic combine on his family's farm, showing that you cannot fully take Nebraska out of the (grown) boy. Wes gives "conservative" a good and evangelical definition. Values of family and church, of friendship and faithfulness, of hard work and sound judgment describe him and radiate from him. I don't know whether all these characteristics come from Nebraska, but they surely give Nebraska a good name.

Terence E. Fretheim concludes that the questioning of Job was appropriate, but that Job did not sufficiently recognize the complexity, ambiguity, and goodness of the creation. God's questions to Job suggest that Job does not know or act with sufficient vision regarding God's design for the creation. If all the wild animals are embraced by God's care, then so also is Job in his disconnectedness from his friends and family. God's creation is good, but it has the potential of adversely affecting human beings, quite apart from the state of their relationship to God. Job gives voice to those who have indeed experienced great suffering, but who cannot find their voices in the midst of a clamor that suggests such questions are impertinent.

Rodney R. Hutton studies the ambivalence of the phrase "from Shittim to Gilgal" in Micah 6:5. Gilgal is the place where Israel first celebrated its presence

in the land of promise, but it is also the site of the failure to consolidate the conquest, of the failure of the monarchy, and of the failure of the northern political program. Gilgal witnesses the failure of Saul and the success of David. Every word of Scripture and every encounter with God has the potential within it to confront us as both law and gospel, as both the threat because of our failure as well as the promise of God's grace, which carries us through all our deepest failure.

Ralph W. Klein compares the account of David's census in 2 Samuel 24 and 1 Chronicles 21. The two authors described a David who sinned, but who confessed that sin and threw himself on God's mercy. An account that had "worked" in 2 Samuel needed changing in 1 Chronicles—new questions had arisen and many details were not so clear on second thought. In addition, the text of 2 Samuel had changed, as scribes studied and copied the texts they held sacred. This article shows the hermeneutical significance of textual criticism in the generation after the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. In 1 Chronicles 21 it is not David's sinlessness that makes him a model, but rather the Chronicler shows that this great sinner, who trusted in the exceedingly great mercies of God, confessed his sins and followed through on divinely prescribed obligations of repentance. The Chronicler's fallen but repentant David is model for his own time—and for our time.

James Limburg pondered the relationship between Psalm 130 and 131 as he meditated on tragic deaths in the seminary community and on the legacy of Dachau. Psalm 130 begins as an individual's cry for help and ends with that individual calling the gathered community to continued hoping and trusting in the Lord. Psalm 131 offers an autobiographical account where the psalmist concedes that there are some things we cannot understand and will never understand. That's the healing mystery for children of the heavenly Mother. In the face of overwhelming and inexplicable happenings, the psalmist finds repose like a child quieted at its mother's breast. The two psalms encourage bewildered believers to let go and let God take care of them.

Jorge Pixley observes that Qoheleth's (Ecclesiastes') society had become bewitched by wealth so that it could no longer recognize wisdom when it saw it and when it needed it. Qoheleth is a skeptical realist who clings to a basic religious faith even though he is unable to affirm it with conviction, considering his negative conclusions about reality. Qoheleth is less sanguine than Jesus about the active support of God for the redemption of society, and from the point of Latin America, at the end of a century of failures, it looks like Qoheleth is nearer to the truth than Jesus. One can live in honest rejection of a world that stinks while one engages in the slow process of building alternatives for a better day.

Or in the words of our honoree: "Qoheleth relentlessly holds to his tenets, and will not permit the fine and simple enjoyments which he has laboriously defined

to be weakened by a creeping optimism or contrariwise to undermine his own hard observations. We can enjoy life; but that does not make the world less empty, the future less uncertain, or death less final. Qoheleth has a word that through the centuries has been aggravating but nevertheless profoundly compelling" (from his commentary on Ecclesiastes in the Cambridge Bible Commentary on the New English Bible, pp. 157–8).

I told you he was a sage; cornhusker, too.

Ralph W. Klein
Editor



God in the Book of Job

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This essay asks into the *kind of God* the book of Job portrays. Job begins with a question about human piety (1:9), but that is almost immediately transmuted into a question about the character of God, and this the book pursues until the very end. A straightforward reading of Job lifts up several problematic portraits of God, including:

1. God sets Job up for suffering by bragging about him to "the satan" (1:8).

2. God is manipulated (NRSV, "incited"!) by the satan (=an accusing voice in the heavenly council, not the later devil) to allow him virtually free reign in visiting Job with suffering "for no reason" (!) one more time (2:3).

3. God is confident in Job, but God does not know for sure how Job will respond under pressure. Otherwise, God could have overridden the satan's challenge on the basis of exceptional knowledge, or the satan would have so understood (1:11–12).

4. Everything that happens comes from God (monism). God gives and God takes away; good and bad come from the Lord (1:21; 2:10).

5. For Job, throughout the dialogue, God is hostile and cruel, and inaccessible.

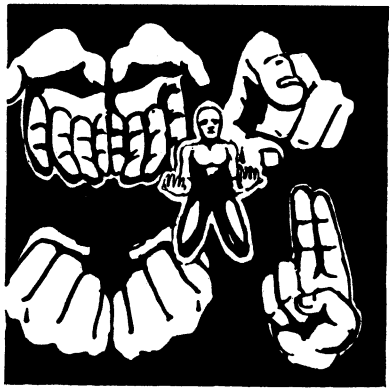
6. For Job's friends, God is a distant, aloof, heavenly accountant who only reacts within a retributory structure to which God is bound.

7. God responds to a suffering Job with two long-winded speeches (chaps. 38-41) that, rightly or wrongly, would provoke a failing grade in most pastoral counseling classes.

This portrayal of God is troublesome for many Bible readers. Can God be trusted? manipulated? Does God bet on his best horses? Does God send suffering "for no reason"? Is God insensitive to suffering people? Do God's ends justify any means? Is God responsible for everything that happens, good or evil? Does God know the future less than absolutely (whether Job can take the pressure)? I look into several of these questions; it becomes clear that a theological reading must take into account certain rhetorical strategies that have been used in this sophisticated piece of literature.

The genre and rhetorical strategy of Job

Most scholars think that the prose framework of Job is a tale or legend (the poetic body of the book is drawn into this genre in a general way). It is set in the "patriarchal" era in an unidentifiable place called Uz. Job is "once upon a time" literature (1:1). The depiction of Job may well reflect an experience of deep suffering, and Job may be a legendary pious man, but the book is neither historical literature nor (auto)biography. Neither Israel nor its story is mentioned in the book. One rhetorical strategy of Job may be to create a setting at some distance from the readers' time/place/familiar traditions.



The lament/complaint is given a prominent place in Job's speeches; readers will recognize this genre from Psalms and elsewhere. The lament serves the broader purpose of disputation, between Job and both friends and God. From another angle, the issue of suffering is considered entirely from within a theology of creation (including the *go'el*, "redeemer," theme) and eternal life is only a question (e.g., 14:14), in spite of Handel's use of 19:25–26 (a text never cited in the New Testament). As wisdom literature, the book's purpose is certainly didactic. In this vein, a basic rhetorical strategy of the book is to present a theological construct. That is, focused on the issue of suffering, Job is a "what-if" book, a "let's suppose for the sake of argument" book.

The interpretation of Job is shaped to some degree by decisions regarding genre and rhetorical strategy. Generally speaking, many interpreters highlight the didactic element and consider the book to approach suffering from various points of view. This certainly means that not every theological move in the book carries an authorial imprimatur. In fact, Job is a wonderful illustration of the hermeneutics of suspicion (of both tradition and experience) at work. Most say that Job's friends are usually wrong in their strict retributory evaluations of Job, not least because God condemns their words, while claiming that Job has spoken "of me what is right" (42:7). Yet, because Job at times agrees with the theology of the friends, this divine evaluation is complicated to assess. It is more difficult to decide whether to be suspicious of other perspectives in the book (prologue; epilogue; Job 28; Elihu; God). Generally, I agree with Habel (in Perdue and Gilpin, 33) that

> the God of the prologue is too arbitrary and selfish, intervening at will in human lives... the God of the friends is too mechanical, reacting according to a rigid code of reward and retribution... the God of Job in his anguish is too violent, harassing humans and creating anarchy... the God of the poet's commentary in Job 28 is too remote and inaccessible.

The God speeches carry the most basic (if not the only) perspective regarding God (and suffering) that is commended to readers. I look at some detail.

The prologue (1:1–2:13)

Given Job's genre, the God-satan wager should not be interpreted as if it actually happened. Yet, one could claim that this portrayal of God is sufficiently realistic so that it portrays the kind of God God actually is. Hence, some interpreters highlight the parental images in Job; God is a proud parent confident of his child's integrity (e.g., Brown, 54–58). Perhaps so. But what loving parent would put a child through such abuse "for no reason" and, after a reprieve, turn around and inflict him again even more severely (2:3)? That 2:3 reveals a divine pathos or remorse (so Brown, 56)

is not grounded in any specific textual reference (unlike the cited Gen 6:6).

Or, God is testing Job and hence this move is parallel to other divine testings. Perhaps so. But it should be recognized that this linkage to the testing tradition carries with it some uncomfortable theological assumptions. Without the heavenly dispute (v. 9: Is Job in it only for what he can get out of it? an important question in its own right) there would have been no test. Given the "wager," the test is for *God's* sake, not Job's, so that God can show the satan that he is wrong, that God's confidence in Job is well placed. At one level, this "testing" does link up with other divine testings. For example, God tests Abraham and Israel so that *God* may know what is in their heart (Gen 22:12; Deut 8:2); so, the issue of God's knowledge does ring true to these types of texts. God knows all there is to know, but there is a future that is not yet there to know (will Job's faith withstand the pressure?). Yet, "testing" does not seem adequate to describe the settling of a celestial dispute. For God to be proven right in this argument among "adults," Job is treated as a pawn and visited by suffering; the end apparently justifies the means. A lack of textual grounding also holds for the claim that Job's (and Abraham's, Gen 22:1) testing is efficacious for the subsequent community of faith (so Brown, 57–58, and similarly Clines). Such a view necessitates some historical basis for the test and, in addition, one wonders why Abraham's testing was not efficacious for Job!

Other interpreters take a different tack. The prologue is a means by which one "answer" to the problem of suffering (perhaps current among readers) is put forth: suffering is due to arbitrary heavenly decisions. The reader is invited to consider it as a serious proposal among others. For some, this "answer" is not directly disputed in the book, but is simply set alongside others for the reader to consider. Job's perspective in the dialogue is similar to this view. While disputing the friends' view that he suffers because he has sinned, Job does not dispute their view that God is the one responsible. But, this divine action is arbitrary (as in the prologue).

Still another proposal has been suggested. The prologue presents an "outrageous premise" (Newsom, 360) or a "deliberate provocation" (Habel in Perdue and Gilpin, 26). The prologue thus serves a rhetorical strategy, which could function in different, though not necessarily exclusive, ways. The prologue gets the attention of readers, who would not be familiar with this imaging of God's ways. Or, it creates theological distance from the readers' point of view. Or, it maximizes the readers' sympathies toward Job rather than God, who is finally more responsible for Job's suffering than the satan (Job's later complaints against God are on target). Or, it sets up an image of a micromanaging God which the book proceeds to subvert by providing an alternative. If the reader moves with one or more of these (or related) rhetorical strategies, then the prologue's portrayal of God should be treated just as suspiciously as, say, the theology of Job's friends. This perspective may be signaled by the disappearance of the satan figure in what follows.

Job's "confessions of faith" in 1:21 and 2:10 are often thought to stand at odds with the impatient Job of the dialogue, but the latter is anticipated in subtle ways in these two verses. They reflect Job's point of view, uttered in deep suffering. Do they also express the narrator's point of view? Probably not. Job's "confessions" claim that God is responsible for both good and evil (a monistic view, also held by Job's

friends). But, they reflect Job's falling back on a conventional piety—a common human response at such times (texts such as Deut 32:39; Isa 45:7, where the "evil" refers to judgment, are not strictly parallel). Later (42:5), Job will stand in judgment over his prior piety, declaring it hearsay. The God speeches will finally present a more nuanced understanding of divine responsibility for a world in which one may be deeply hurt.

The reader is invited to distinguish the two confessions. While the first (1:21) is conventional piety, the second (2:10) is more ambiguous. A careful comparison of 1:21 and 2:10 reveals important differences (Janzen, 51–55): 2:10 is in question form, uses the first person plural, speaks of "God" rather than Yahweh, and concludes with the minimalist "Job did not sin with his lips" (cf. 1:22; Job's concern about his sons in 1:5). Job's second response breaks away from the piety of 1:21 and moves toward the complaints of the dialogue. Job's wife's remarks (2:9) may encourage Job in this important move to lament/complaint, and hence she sets up the rest of the book.

The prologue, if read in a straightforward manner, presents an "answer" to the "why?" of Job's suffering. Though Job is never informed of the reason (he experiences both moral evil and natural evil), the reader is given access to the mind of God (!) regarding the matter. Readers now have an "explanation." This reading has spawned many attempts to "explain" instances of human suffering in comparable terms. God likes to bet on his best horses; if you're one of them, watch out! Or, more generally, God sends sufferings directly upon specific individuals. But, if our reading of the prologue is near the mark, then the "explanation" is in fact no explanation; it is simply "outrageous" or "provocative," setting up the rest of the book. Job's friends will continue in the prologue's "explaining" mode, but God's speeches will make clear, in support of Job's protest against these "explanations," that there is, for those who suffer like Job, no "answer" or "explanation." At the same time, silence is not the only other alternative.

The epilogue (42:7–17)

The place of the epilogue within the book is difficult to assess. It could present one point of view on suffering. For example, it might support Job's friends in that the righteous will receive rewards; they might have to be disciplined before they do, but it will be worth the wait. Or, it could provide a word about blessings God's people may experience on the far side of suffering (see Rom 5:3–5). A more attractive view would start from God's indictment of the friends (42:7). They thought Job was blasphemous in his God talk, and hence could only be punished further. God, by placing an imprimatur on Job's speeches and restoring his fortunes, thereby condemns their way of thinking and in a very public way affirms the truth that Job's suffering was innocent.

The God speeches and Job's responses (38:1–42:7)

God's response to Job (and, indirectly, Job's friends) is a verbal recreation of an amazingly diverse universe. The reader is taken up into a literary spacecraft, as it were, and shown a splendid creation. But is it relevant to Job in his suffering? God's speeches are often claimed to be "no answer" to the problem raised by Job. Or, in other terms, God is inept and does not even "own up" to the divine complicity in Job's suffering.

In an initial response, God's speeches are certainly no "answer" to the suffering

of Job, but that constitutes their strength. At the same time, we dare not fall into the trap of thinking that God's (our!) only options in the face of suffering are either an "answer/ explanation" or silence—sitting on the mourning bench with nothing to say. God recognizes a third option; some important things can be said at such a time. God's words prove to be appropriate and even pastorally sensitive. God was silent for a period of time (as are the friends, and admirably so, 2:11–13); but there comes a time to speak, and God does speak. Indeed, God appears and speaks, and in such a way that Job is not silenced. God may even consider Job's initial response (40:3–5) too self-effacing, and continues to speak until Job speaks in more direct, less self-negating ways.

The type of verbal journey on which God takes Job is noteworthy. God does not take Job into the temple or into the depths of his own soul, or insist on some ancient equivalent of C.P.E. God takes him to the zoo, or better, out to "where the wild things are." In the chapters that follow, Job is introduced to a remarkable range of matters having to do with zoology, meteorology, and cosmology. In these speeches you get images of boundary and law and rule; this is a well-ordered and basically coherent world. You also get images of care and nurture, especially for the animals, whose unman-aged freedom is celebrated. In addition, images of wildness and strangeness are present, including the wild seas, wild animals, wild weather (rain, hail, ice, snow, lightning), the uncertainties of the night, and Behemoth and Leviathan, the inhabitants of an ancient Jurassic Park. For all the world's order and coherence, it doesn't run like a machine; a certain randomness, ambiguity, unpredictability, and play characterize its complex life.

This world of God's good creation is

God does not take Job into the temple or into the depths of his own soul...God takes him out to "where the wild things are."

the context for interpreting the "whirlwind." This theophanic mode is traditional in that God's speaking is accompanied by meteorological phenomena (e.g., Ezek 1:4, "stormy" wind). At the same time, God's revelatory mode connects with the content of the word spoken; God appears, embraced by elements of God's creation. Job should understand the focus on creation as revealing of God's ways. In the theophany God 'wears' a creaturely form in order to be as concretely, persuasively, and intensely present to Job as possible, so that Job may discover God and God's ways embodied within the world itself.

Interpretations of the God speeches are many and various. Approaching them in terms of the God images that prevail, however, most can be placed under one of three umbrellas (perhaps not altogether fairly).

1. God is lord, warrior, judge. Job has been presumptuous to raise the questions he has. God's response is a put-down, a debasement of Job, and a display of divine power. In the face of this divine barrage, Job, in acts and words of self-negation, gives up on his quest for justice (see Crenshaw). This approach tends to understand

the speeches as designed fundamentally to make a negative point. Elements of this perspective may be present, but they stand in the service of a more positive point.

2. God is parent. It is God's relationship to Job in the midst of suffering that truly counts. Job's questions are basically appropriate but insufficiently aware of the range of God's parenting work in the larger creation (note the parental images in 38:28–29). God's response is disciplinary, but fundamentally nurturing in character and encouraging of freedom rather than interventionist and controlling. God comes to Job and is present with him in love (see Brown). This approach has many virtues but is insufficiently attentive to the creational and vocational dimensions.

3. God is creator and sage. Job's questioning was appropriate, but he did not sufficiently recognize the complexity, ambiguity, and goodness of the creation. God's questions are rhetorical and ironic (Janzen, 225–30) or "challenge questions" (Habel in Perdue and Gilpin, 33). As they reveal Job's lack of breadth and depth in wisdom and strength, they recharacterize Job's understanding of the human in the image of God. Indeed, they provide for him a new identity in God's creation and challenge him to engage more deeply in his vocation on behalf of God's creatures of great worth and value. This focus on vocation explains the lack of attention to human beings in the God speeches.

It is common to suggest that the answers to God's questions are obvious, emphasizing what Job cannot know or do. But God's point is neither to belabor the obvious nor to set Job up for failure. The point of God's questioning is not so much *what* Job *could* not know or do, but *that* he *does* not know or act with sufficient vision regarding God's "design" (38:2; 42:5) for the creation. God's words also challenge Job (Who are you? Where are you? What do you know? Are you able?) to probe more deeply than he has already, but this time with a greater appreciation for the grand design. Job is in essence called to gird up his loins and pursue the vocation stipulated in Genesis 1–2.

Job's descendants have done precisely that, challenged by the seemingly impossible questions regarding the knowing and the doing. If God were to appear in 1999 and ask these questions, a scientifically sophisticated Job could answer many of them. Job, have you walked on the floor of the ocean? Yes, parts of it. Job, have you any idea how big the world is? Yes, I've got a sense of that, but I'm learning more every day. Job, do you know where the light comes from? As a matter of fact, I do. Job, who is the mother of the ice and frost, which turn the waters to stone and freeze the face of the earth? God, I live in Minnesota; it runs something like this. Job, who is wise enough to count the clouds and tilt them over to pour out the rain? Well, we're working on that one; there are some lively possibilities. Job, do you know when the mountain goats are born? Yes. Have you watched wild deer give birth? Yes. Do you know how long they carry their young? Yes, God, I do. Job's descendants will be working on some of God's questions forever, but they have come a long way in their understanding of creation.

The interpretation of Job's response in 42:1–6 often becomes central for the way in which the book as a whole is read. Unfortunately, there is widespread disagreement on the translation of v. 6. The translation tradition of RSV/NRSV, "therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes," is misleading. The object ("myself") is not explicit in Hebrew, and the word translated "repent" (*niham*) is not the usual word for repentance of sin (*shub*); in

fact, it may never be so used (Jer 8:6 may be an exception, but see NEB). The verb *niham* normally carries the sense of reversal and often has God as the subject (e.g., Jer 18:8-10). The Tanakh gives an alternate sense, "I recant and relent, being but dust and ashes." At the least, Job withdraws his words against God's governance of the creation and recognizes that he has new insight into his place within the created order.

Conclusions

I highlight several ways in which the God speeches reveal a divine responsiveness to Job in his suffering and in the process give him a renewed vision of God:

—God takes responsibility for Job's suffering by having created a world that is not risk-free and in which people can suffer undeservedly. God no longer acts with complete freedom, but from within a committed relationship to the structures of creation, to which God will be faithful. Hence, instances of suffering are not a matter of divine arbitrariness, but of a creation wherein it rains on the just and the unjust (see below);

—The speeches link up with the creational images of the lament tradition, especially the wild animals and the raging sea (see below);

—They direct questions to the suffering one who has voiced questions, inviting him into a wider cosmic vision within which individual suffering takes place; the persistent question form constitutes an invitation to seek understanding (see below);

—They connect with the images of God that bespeak care and nurture, willing the best for every creature, no matter how unusual or untamed;

—They contribute to an orienting vision that God's creation has a basic stability and reliability for a time when everything is flying apart and the center no longer holds;

—They provide images of limit and restraint, law and boundary, at a time when the sufferer may feel overwhelmed by the suffering and its chaotic effects;

—They reveal that God's well-ordered world does not have a tight causal weave; there is room for ambiguity and randomness that may occasion suffering;

—They provide an image of the way in which God relates to the creation, not as one "who intervenes or reacts, but one who modulates and constrains" (Habel in Perdue and Gilpin, 35);

—They highlight themes of creaturely interconnectedness at a time when feelings of isolation hold sway; in effect, all these creatures provide a community that can surround the suffering one and help to absorb his sorrows;

—They enable the one who suffers to get beyond a debilitating focus on his own troubles (and, in view of chaps. 19; 29–31, his own family and neighborhood) to see a larger world in which God works in caring ways beyond his knowing;

—Embracing God's positive response to Job's words in 42:7, permission is given to voice one's deepest laments and sharpest accusations, even if they do not turn out to be strictly orthodox in their expression.

I return to three points in greater detail:

1. *Job and the lament tradition.* Job's primary mode of speech has been that of lament. Characteristic of these laments (whether in Job or Psalms) is the use of several images from the world of creation, which also populate God's words to Job. Take the wild animals. Job's laments often voice a deep sense of isolation, often imaged in terms of inhabiting desolate or dangerous places (such as the wilderness) or the animals that inhabit them. Take Ps

102:6–11, "I am like an owl of the wilderness, like a little owl in the waste places." Job's lament is comparable, "I am the brother of jackals and a companion of ostriches" (30:29). Thus God's word to him becomes: If all the wild animals of the wilderness are embraced by God's care and nurture, then so also is Job in his disconnectedness from friends and family. With this God, there are no alien creatures, no outsiders. God even visits the wilderness with rain, and you should see the flowers in the spring! Another image is threat from unruly water (e.g., Ps 69:1–3). God has created the sea, but its raging has boundaries (Job 38:8–11).

2. *Issues of God's justice and design.* From Job's perspective, the primary source of his suffering was not other-worldly (e.g., direct hits from the satan), but observable "natural evil" (fire and lightning, windstorm, disease). Some "moral evil" was experienced, but its source was external to Job himself and his social world, namely, semi-nomadic peoples (Sabeans, Chaldeans) from the wilderness areas, where the wild animals are at home. This may explain why, though Job couches the issue in terms of justice, God focuses on matters of creation: "Who is this that darkens my [creational] design?" Job's questions were not attentive to those dimensions of the created order directly related to the sources of Job's actual suffering, mostly "natural evil." That is where, given his experience, he should have probed in his questioning. Job had tended to reduce the issue to his own guilt and innocence—as had his friends—and the issue of God's justice.

Yet, the design issues that God addresses are at least indirectly concerned about matters of justice. It rains on the just and the unjust; there is no morality to the way the law of gravity functions or to the range and efficacy of storms and earthquakes and viruses. God's creation is good, but in being what it was created to be (and become), it has the potential of adversely affecting human beings, quite apart from the state of their relationship with God. God's good world is not a risk-free world; water, for example, is both gift and danger.

This creational being and becoming is well ordered, but the world does not run like a machine, with a tight causal weave; it has elements of randomness and chaos, of strangeness and wildness. Amid the order there is room for chance (see Eccl 9:11). The world has ostriches and eagles, raging seas and predictable sunrises, wild weather and stars that stay their courses. God creates space for creaturely freedom at varying levels of complexity. Given the communal character of the cosmos—its basic interrelatedness—every creature will be touched by the movement of every other. While this has negative potential, it also has its positive side, for only then is there genuine possibility for growth, creativity, novelty, surprise, and serendipity. Legal categories and justice-oriented thinking are not adequate for thinking about this complex world or its suffering.

So, Job's world is not a static world; it is a dynamic and interconnected world in the process of becoming. God has a committed relationship to that world to let it be what it was created to be (Gen 8:22). Such a commitment means divine constraint and restraint in the exercise of power in the life of the world (even regards to "moral evil" evident in the nomadic marauders). There is no explanation as to why God made the world to function in just this way. But, in these speeches, God assumes responsibility for creating a world that is not risk-free but has the potential of bringing great harm to even the most righteous of individuals.

3. *Questions to and from God.* Job is a book filled with questions, and so are its

readers. Job has the capacity to help readers speak and hear questions in a time of suffering, both questions to God, even shrill ones, and questions from God. If questions are encouraged when things are going well, and leaders are honest about sharing their own questions, then questions during a time of trauma will be more freely voiced and be more direct and probing. God's strategy with Job could become that of pastoral counselors in certain situations: questions responding to questions. But if we don't already have questions humming; if we deny or paper over the experience of suffering; if we have a ready compartment for all our questions, then the whirlwind, if and when it comes, may be experienced only as stillness. And God will then be silent, because we have no ear to hear God pressing us, challenging us with even further questions.

In the end God is more honored by the impatient probing of Job than by the friends who place certain questions off limits. Job gives voice to those who dare not raise unconventional questions for fear of treading on existing orthodoxies, or being shushed up by those who think it improper to explore the edges of the faith. Job gives voice to those who have indeed experienced great suffering, but who cannot find their voices in the midst of a clamor that suggests that such questions are impertinent. Job gives voice to those who do not have the courage or the theological moxie or the articulateness to raise their deepest questions. Job gives hope that rest and healing may come, but perhaps only on the far side of the probing and the questions; but then the healing will have touched some of the deepest recesses in our minds and hearts. Finally, the descendants of Job can have hope that, in the midst of their most probing questions, they will be caught up into the whirl of the wisdom, the strength, and the infinite resourcefulness of God.

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What Happened from Shittim to Gilgal? Law and Gospel in Micah 6:5

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In Micah 6:5, the prophet invites his audience to reflect upon a particular locus within Israel's collective historical memory. They are to recall events associated with the places Shittim and Gilgal. The phrase "from Shittim to Gilgal," however, hangs in the air begging fuller disclosure of exactly what it was that was supposed to have happened there. Part of the difficulty in understanding this reference is the anomalous syntax of the verse as presented in the Masoretic text:

> My people! Recall what Balak, the king of Moab, schemed,
> And how Balaam, the son of Beor, responded to him from Shittim to Gilgal,
> That you might know the righteous deeds of YHWH.

The chief difficulty with the text as it stands is that it seems to have one event in mind, which involved Balaam engaging in dialogue with King Balak the entire distance "from Shittim to Gilgal." Such however obviously cannot be the case, and most commentators assume that something has dropped out or otherwise gone awry with the text and that there should be some reference to "crossing over" inserted between the phrases "responded to him" and "from Shittim to Gilgal."[1] Instead of referring to one incident, the text therefore would seem to have two separate incidents in mind: the first relating to the Balaam cycle in Num-

[1] The usual proposals call either for the deletion of "king of Moab" and taking the phrase "son of Beor" (בן־בעור) as an original בעברך (i.e., [remember] "when you crossed") or בין עבור (i.e., "think about [your] crossing"; so Artur Weiser, *Das Buch der zwölf Kleinen Propheten*, vol. 1 [ATD 24; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1963], 279); or for the presence of both בן־בעור and בין עבור, with the latter having dropped out of the text due to haplography (so Wilhelm Rudolph, *Micha, Nahum, Habakuk, Zephanja* [KAT 13/3; Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1975], 731; Hans Walter Wolff, *Micah: A Commentary* [Continental Commentary; Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1990], 165, 176). Such proposals often note the use of the term "cross over" (עבר) as a term central to the texts relating precisely to Israel's passage through the Jordan (Josh 3:1–5:1). Allen considers the possibility that the text might be right, but even then has to understand it as "an example of a broken construction" for rhetorical purposes. Leslie C. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 368.

bers 22–24 and the second relating to the Israelites crossing the Jordan River, situated between Shittim and Gilgal (Joshua 3–4). According to common consensus, the text must intend something like the following:

> My people! Recall what Balak, the king of Moab, schemed,
> And how Balaam, the son of Beor, responded to him;
> And how you crossed over from Shittim to Gilgal,
> That you might know the righteous deeds of YHWH.

This generally accepted proposal solves the problem of conflating two different narrative episodes, giving each its own historical locus. However, the difficulty I wish to address in this essay is the question of what it was that was thought to have happened at the sites of Shittim and Gilgal, or between them as the case may be. What valence did these terms hold for Micah's intended audience, and what feelings were they possibly designed to stir?

Narrow vs. broad construction

The normally proposed translation, "And how you crossed over from Shittim to Gilgal," understands the reference—driven by the use of the hypothetical term עבר, "cross over"—to be specifically that of Israel's crossing the Jordan River, which occurred "between" Shittim and Gilgal.[2] So Mays, for instance, suggests that "the only possible role" to which this text alludes is "the miraculous crossing of the Jordan which is described as an event like crossing the Red Sea...."[3] This commonly held position, which one can term the 'minimalist' view, narrows the frame of reference down to the sharpest possible angle, focusing upon one single event, which then is understood to represent in an unqualified fashion YHWH's "saving deeds" on behalf of the people of Israel. Accordingly, the question "What was it that happened 'from Shittim to Gilgal'?" is answered in the simple and singular expression: Israel crossed the Jordan River in a miraculous fashion, thus displaying the graciousness and goodness of God, the "saving deeds of YHWH" (צדקות יהוה). The focus of Mic 6:5 is thus upon two positively reconstructed events: one, the positive way in which God delivered the people from King Balak by means of his faithful servant, Balaam, who countered Balak's request to curse Israel with a blessing instead; and two, the positive way in which God graciously led the people of Israel through the Jordan in a recapitulation of the miracle at the Reed Sea.

I wish to argue, however, that the references to Balaam and to the events "from Shittim to Gilgal" are not as simple and univocal in their use by Micah as this minimalist interpretation might suggest. If one places a broader construction upon the

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[2] Shittim is likely to be associated with Tell el-Hammam, ca. six miles east of the Jordan rift. Thomas Edward McComiskey, *The Minor Prophets. An Exegetical and Expository Commentary*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993):731. This Gilgal is perhaps to be identified with Khirbet Mefjir, one mile from Old Testament Jericho (Tell es-Sultan). Philip J. King, *Amos, Hosea, Micah—An Archaeological Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1988), 40–41.

[3] James Luther Mays, *Micah. A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976) 135. See also Rudolph, *Micha, Nahum, Habakuk, Zephanja*, 110; Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, 368; McComiskey, *The Minor Prophets*, 731. Cf. the note by Smith that the terms indicate God's safely leading the people from Shittim on the east of the Jordan to Gilgal on the west. Ralph L. Smith, *Micah–Malachi* (WBC 32; Waco, TX: Word, 1984), 51.

Shittim and Gilgal are both associated with lengthy residences of the Israelite tribes...

reference to Shittim and Gilgal, the possible meanings implicit in the terms explode exponentially. Both sites are not simply brief residences for Israel—overnight stays, so to speak—prior to quickly moving on. Shittim and Gilgal are both associated with lengthy residences of the Israelite tribes who are on the move from the Plains of Moab into the 'promised land'.

The events at Shittim

The Balaam cycle begins with the note that the Israelites "camped in the plains of Moab across the Jordan from Jericho." There is no immediate indication that this episode takes place at Shittim. Indeed there are a number of different places associated with the cycle: Bamoth-baal (Num 22:41), Zophim (23:14), and finally Peor (23:28). Nevertheless, Num 25:1 takes up immediately following the Balaam cycle with the phrase, "Now Israel was dwelling at Shittim." There is no rhetorical indication that Israel has relocated, and the reader can only assume that, despite the lack of reference to Shittim in the Balaam cycle itself, the editor intends for the confrontation of Balaam and Balak to have happened precisely during Israel's residency at Shittim. Numbers 25:1 introduces a further act of apostasy that occurred during Israel's residency at Shittim—namely the apostasy spurred by "the women of Moab" who induced Israel to "yoke itself to the Baal of Peor" (25:3). Both the reference to Peor as well as the villainous ties between the Moabites (v. 1) and the Midianites (vv. 6–9) link this story of apostasy with that of the story of Balaam and Balak, which likewise is associated with a Moabite/Midianite coalition (22:4, 7) which unfolds at Peor (23:28). Indeed, Israel's campaign against the Midianites, which included the avenging of the plague by means of the killing of Balaam ben Beor, is also located pointedly at Shittim (Num 31:8).

Furthermore, the review of Israel's wilderness encampments in Numbers 33 is instructive. Numbers 33:48–49 links an encampment "by the Jordan from Beth-jeshimoth as far as Abel-shittim in the plains of Moab" (v. 49) to the more general information that Israel "set out from the mountains of Abarim and camped in the plains of Moab by the Jordan at Jericho" (v. 48). The designation "in the plains of Moab by the Jordan at Jericho" echoes the information provided in Num 22:1, forcing the reader to conclude that the Balaam incident took place at no other spot than during Israel's encampment at Shittim. As will later become clear, it is also not insignificant that the other major event that transpires during the residency at Shittim is the command to drive out the inhabitants of Canaan and the allotment of the land (Num 33:50–35:34)

According to this 'maximalist' view, Shittim is not simply the bracket that fronts the miraculous event of the crossing of the Jordan. More importantly, it encompasses a large range of narrative material related especially to Israel's apostasy at Peor. To argue, therefore, that the locus associated with Balaam and Balak is completely divorced from that associated with Shittim, overlooks the significant connections that link the two insolubly.[4]

The events at Gilgal

A similar question must be raised about the reference to Gilgal. According to the 'minimalist' view, it simply represents the end terminus of the miraculous crossing of the Jordan.[5] A few commentators, however, rightly suggest that it has broader connotations. Beyerlin notes that the bare invocation of the names Shittim and Gilgal stand *pars pro toto* for "das ganze gewaltige Lied von Jahwes Heilstaten beim Auszug und Einzug" (the entire powerful song of Yahweh's saving deeds associated with the Exodus and settlement).[6] Similarly, Hillers suggests that the reference to Shittim and Gilgal stands as "a summary of sacred history lead[ing] from Exodus to conquest, from promise to fulfillment."[7]

Both Beyerlin and Hillers understand Gilgal—in the same way that most understand Shittim—to be a symbol of God's graciousness on behalf of Israel, and a sign of the 'good news' of Israel's successful consolidation in the promised land. Indeed, there are two different ways in which the name 'Gilgal' can be taken as a broader 'maximalized' symbol of good news for Israel's consolidation. One is to associate Gilgal with the place where Israel first celebrated its presence in the land of promise. This tradition is reflected pointedly in Josh 5:10–12. Gilgal was the place where Israel kept the first Passover in the land, where they first ate the produce of the land, and where the manna ceased. This tradition understands Gilgal to serve as a bracket for the wilderness traditions. It marks, in this sense, the conclusion of the period of wilderness testing and the ritual consolidation of Israel's entrance into the land, focusing upon Passover and circumcision.[8] In this sense Gilgal still maintains its essentially positive valence.

A somewhat broader perspective, though nonetheless positive, is reflected in

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[4] E.g., Mays, who insists that the reference to Shittim cannot relate to the Balaam incident (*Micah*, 135). Similarly, McComiskey associates the references to Shittim and Gilgal with Israel's triumphant march into the promised land, "beginning at Shittim with God's triumph over King Balak of Moab, through Balaam, and ending at Gilgal with the swollen Jordan miraculously behind them." McComiskey, *The Minor Prophets*, 731. McComiskey overlooks the fact, however, that the Balaam episode is not related to the defeat of the Moabites, whom Israel is commanded *not* to fight (Deut 2:9), but rather of the Midianites, who are not part of the 'people of the promised land.' Thus there is no territorial acquisition gained from the conflict associated with Balaam, and it cannot serve as part of the theme of the conquest of the promised land. Warfare against Midian is simply for vengeance (Num 33:3) and spoil (33:9–12).

[5] The tradition of the Jordan crossing is itself complicated, as at least two traditions seem to be conflated: one associated with the monument in the river (Josh 4:9) and another with the monument at Gilgal (Josh 4:20). Briend associates one with a tradition of the crossing of the people and the other with a tradition of the crossing of the ark. Jacques Briend, "La Transverée du Jourdain dans la Geste d'Israël," *Le monde de la Bible* 65 (1990):20–22.

[6] Walter Beyerlin, *Die Kulttraditionen Israels in der Verkündigung des Propheten Micha* (FRLANT 54; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1959), 69.

[7] Delbert Hillers, *A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Micah* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 78.

[8] It is in this context that Gilgal becomes the site of the first 'mass circumcision' in the land, the place where God "rolled away" (גלתי) the disgrace of Egypt. Though the circumcision is alternatively attributed to Gibeath-haaraloth (Josh 5:3), the story is co-opted by the developing Gilgal tradition as an etiology for the name 'Gilgal.'

the tradition that Gilgal continues to be the encampment for Israel, from which it launches its successful war of occupation against the inhabitants of the land. It is important to note that, according to this tradition, throughout the conquest (Joshua 9–13) Israel never 'settles' in the land. Its home always remains Gilgal (cf. 9:6; 10:6, 15, 43). Even after the summary note in 11:23 that "Joshua took the whole land... and the land had rest from war," Joshua is still at Gilgal when the final partition of the land is made (14:6). The inescapable impression is that Gilgal was 'home' until the very day when the conquest itself was consolidated and the tribes were dismissed to enter their newly acquired territories. According to this tradition, Gilgal does not represent simply the ritual consolidation of Israel's *entry* into the land. It represents the military consolidation of Israel's *possession* of the land.

The prophetic critique of Gilgal

Given the overwhelmingly positive impulses of these Gilgal traditions, it is easy to understand why commentators would reflexively take the name as symbolic of God's gracious saving deeds (the צדקות יהוה) on behalf of Israel. What is jarring, then, is when one turns to the traditions as reflected in the 8th century prophets and abruptly encounters a sentiment toward Gilgal which is wholly out of sync with the positive sentiments we have noted above. Hosea warned his audience not to enter Gilgal (4:15) for all Israel's evil was concentrated there (9:15) and it marked the onset of God's hatred for his people.[9] Similarly, Amos sarcastically invites the people to go to Gilgal "to multiply transgression" (Amos 4:4), then earnestly warns the people—in words hauntingly similar to Hosea's—not to go to Gilgal, "for Gilgal is most assuredly going into exile" (5:5). Why Hosea, a northern prophet, and Amos, a southern prophet—though addressing a northern crowd—would have such hostility toward what was once a venerable border sanctuary that was the locus for many of Israel's most cherished salvation-historical traditions is difficult to determine. The remark by Hosea that "every evil of theirs began at Gilgal" is intriguing, but lacks any specificity that would indicate *why* these prophets hated the Gilgal cult. Did they simply detest cultic abuses in general? Such might be suggested by the reference to "sacrificing bulls" (Hos 12:12) or to the "superlative love" shown in ostentatious presentations (Amos 4:5). But neither is in itself capable of evoking such venomous attacks by these prophets, since any sanctuary would have lent itself to the same charge. It is likewise improbable that either prophet could have despised the Gilgal cult because it stood in competition with the central royal sanctuary at Jerusalem, since neither Hosea nor Amos could have been expected to engage in such polemics on behalf of the Jerusalemite power structure. Furthermore, Amos also took to task a more local southern sanctuary, the temple at Beer Sheba, associ-

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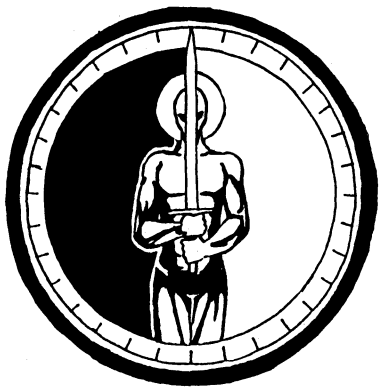
[9] Hos 12:12 indicates that the problem is that at Gilgal the people "sacrifice bulls" (שורים זבחו). That such could be offensive is questionable, causing some to emend to לשדים, "to demons," thus lining up the charge with that of Deut 32:17 and Ps 106:37. Francis I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman, *Hosea* (AB 24; New York: Doubleday, 1980), 619. On the possible implications of reading שדים for the tradition associated with Balaam, see Michael S. Moore, *The Balaam Traditions. Their Character and Development* (SBLDS 113; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990) 71. Moore's suggestion, however, would link Balaam and Gilgal too closely together, which is not justified by the texts in question.

ated with the ancestral traditions of Abraham (5:5). Clearly Amos was not singling out the Gilgal temple because it was a northern sanctuary.

What evil was it that Hosea thought to be concentrated at Gilgal? Any proposal will at best be tentative, but I propose that Gilgal lost its status as a locus of salvation-history and became instead the bane of Hosea and Amos because it came to be associated with Israel's fundamental failure. There are three major traditions that bear witness to the failure associated with Gilgal, and the three may have worked separately or in tandem so that, over the course of several centuries, the name 'Gilgal' came to have the same resonance as might contemporary names such as 'Auschwitz', 'Bay of Pigs,' or 'My Lai.'

Judges 2:1–5 reports that the angel of YHWH "went up from Gilgal to Bochim" in order to accuse the people of the failure of their conquest and of not obeying (v. 3), whereupon the people wept.[10] The result of the people's disobedience was catastrophic in the deuteronomistic schema: the nations would henceforth be left in place by YHWH so that they would be continual adversaries and their gods the ruination of Israel. Though the etiology locates this event at Bochim, once again we find that an earlier etiology has been taken up and co-opted for use within the larger Gilgal tradition,[11] since it is not until Judg 2:6 that Joshua dismisses the people, who only now "go to their own inheritances to take possession of the land." Gilgal thus marks the scene not simply of the *consolidation* of Israel's possession of the land but at the same time comes to symbolize the ultimate *failure* within the deuteronomistic schema of the nation, which

> did what was evil in the sight of YHWH and worshiped the Baals; and they abandoned YHWH, the God of their ancestors, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt; they followed other gods, from among the gods of the peoples who were all around them, and bowed down to them; and they provoked YHWH to anger (Judg 2:11–12).



Israel's fate was, in a real sense, inscribed upon the stones at Gilgal in more ways than one!

A second failure associated with Gilgal concerns the failure of the monarchy. It is at Gilgal where the kingship is established and Saul is made king (1 Sam 11:14–15).[12] Though this event is not in itself a mark of failure, such failure is implicit in the language of Israel's standing in judgment before the "righteous deeds of YHWH" (צדקות יהוה, 12:7), and this corporate

[10] ויבכו, the term thus providing the etiology for the name Bochim.

[11] Compare above, note 8.

[12] The phrase ונחדש שם המלוכה is taken by NRSV to mean "renew the kingship," but as easily means "make new the kingship," i.e., "institute" it. To argue, as does Rudolph, *Micha, Nahum, Habakuk, Zephanja*, 110, that Gilgal in Mic 6:5 is not connected with the anointing of Saul, arbitrarily limits the potential valence the name had for its audience.

evil is seen precisely in their having asked for a king (12:17).

It is also at Gilgal where two subsequent events transpire, both constitutive for the failure of Saul's monarchy. It is at Gilgal where Saul disobeys Samuel by not waiting a full seven days and engages prematurely in the sacrifice, thereby forfeiting the kingship (1 Sam 13:8–15). Gilgal is also the site of Samuel's confrontation of Saul following Saul's refusal to kill Agag. Again the kingdom is torn from Saul's hand just as Saul tears Samuel's garment (1 Sam 15:10–33). In both cases Saul is explicitly told that YHWH has selected a more faithful person who will assume the kingship ("a man after his own heart," 13:14; one "who is better than you," 15:28). In both cases, Gilgal is not only the site of the establishment of the kingship but also the site of its failure. The prophetic movement, closely related to the deuteronomic perspective that understood Israel's fate to have been inexorably sealed by Israel's sin in having asked for a king and by the faithlessness of Kings Jeroboam and Manasseh, could likely look to Gilgal as the beginning of Israel's sin and the seal of its failure.

Gilgal was first of all the locus of the failure of Israel's attempt to consolidate the land and second the locus of the failure of the monarchy. However, a third possibility also suggests itself, one that is closely related to the second. The result of the events at Gilgal was not simply the "failure of monarchy" but was more specifically the "failure of Saul" and the concomitant "success of David." Thus for the David/Zion tradition Gilgal would symbolize the justification for the Davidic hegemony while for disenfranchised persons, both members of the northern tribes and "down-state" southerners whose loyalties lay elsewhere than with David (such as Micah of Moresheth), Gilgal may well have come to symbolize the loss of political power and social prestige. It is with bitter irony, then, that it is precisely at Gilgal where the supporters of David come out to welcome him back from his exile at Mahanaim (2 Sam 19:15–16). Gilgal, already the symbol of Saulide failure in the wake of the Davidic hegemony, now added salt to the northern wounds as the people of Israel come to Gilgal too late, and can only complain that "our kindred the people of Judah" stole the power of the throne away from them once again (19:40–43). History had repeated itself at Gilgal!

The name 'Gilgal' came to conjure up Israel's deepest failures: failure to consolidate the conquest; failure of the monarchy; and more specifically the failure of the northern (or more generally the non-Jerusalemite) political program. It is impossible to determine the extent to which these three traditions—singly or in tandem—affected the prophetic view of Gilgal, but it is unquestionable that the negative and visceral prophetic attitude against the city had its roots sunk deeply in Israel's historical and particularly its anti-Jerusalemite traditions.

Shittim and Gilgal as symbol of law and gospel

As noted above, commentators rush to associate the events of Shittim and Gilgal with God's gracious saving events on behalf of Israel, and thereby translate the phrase צדקות יהוה as "the saving deeds of YHWH." What happened at Shittim and Gilgal is unambiguously good news, and Balaam is understood to be an Israelite hero and the reference to Shittim and Gilgal is narrowed down to focus singularly upon the magnificent grace at work in crossing the Jordan. But there is another story at work in the historical recollections briefly alluded to in Mic 6:5. Whether Balaam is a hero or

The prophetic movement could likely look to Gilgal as the beginning of Israel's sin and the seal of its failure.

not—and I think there is good reason to allow that he is *not*[13]—the reference to Balak and Balaam as well as the twofold reference to Shittim and Gilgal are intended to evoke a recollection not simply of "saving" deeds of YHWH but in fact of "judging" deeds of YHWH that respond to Israel's deepest failure. Micah 6:5 evokes aspects of Israel's history which are Janus-faced, which carry along with them both a word of divine grace and a word of divine judgment.

What is the significance of the fact that Micah refers to the events of 6:5 as the "righteous deeds of YHWH"? Had Micah used the customary word for referring to God's truly miraculous events, he would have referred to them as the נפלאות יהוה. Indeed, the Micah tradition itself uses that term in referring to the Exodus tradition (7:15), consistent with its use in Judg 6:13; Ps 136:4 where it is used specifically of the Exodus event, and in texts such as Exod 3:20, Ps 106:7, 22; 78:11, 32 where it is used of the broader horizon of events associated with Exodus, Wilderness, and Conquest traditions. In fact, Josh 3:5 reflects a traditional association of the term נפלאות precisely with the event of the Jordan crossing. If Micah was familiar with the use of the term נפלאות as a common term relating to YHWH's miraculous saving actions, why not use that term? Why choose a term such as צדקות that rarely occurs in such contexts?

Those few occurrences are instructive, for all three texts have strictly forensic contexts. Most significant is 1 Sam 12:7, to which we alluded briefly above. Samuel's 'farewell address' takes the form of a legal disputation, in which there is the invitation to bring a charge (12:3), a response given before witnesses (12:4-5), and a calling of the people into judgment before YHWH, in the context of which the צדקות יהוה are rehearsed (12:7), which results in the people being declared guilty (12:17–18). But the reference to YHWH's צדקות has a no less forensic context in Judg 5:11 and Ps 103:6. In the former, Deborah is a judge whose song celebrates not simply the "triumphs" (so NRSV) of YHWH but rather the "just

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[13] Greene assumes that, "if one reads the text carefully," Mic 6:5 reflects a positive image of Balaam drawn from the epic traditions lying behind the Balaam cycle in Numbers 22–24, in opposition to the *negative* view of Balaam, preserved in the Priestly tradition, dated by Greene to the period of Hezekiah and reflected in Num 16:31, 31:2–7. Greene may be correct, especially if his thesis is borne out that the Epic Balaam tradition is associated with the positive post-722 effort to normalize the northern priests and that the Priestly Balaam tradition is associated with the negative efforts of Zadokites under Hezekiah to secure their own power. However, there is nothing in Mic 6:5 that necessitates taking the reference to Balaam as heroic. Greene makes the mistake of prejudicing his position by understanding the term צדקות יהוה to mean "savings [sic] acts." John T. Greene, *Balaam and His Interpreters. A Hermeneutical History of the Balaam Traditions* (Brown Judaic Studies 244; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992) esp. pp. 35–75 for his tradition-historical reconstruction and p. 75 for his comments on Mic 6:5.

actions" of YHWH who intervenes when the election of new gods results in chaos in the "gates," the proper place of the administration of justice (5:8). So the people of YHWH march down to the gates of judgment (v. 11) where Deborah the judge is stirred awake for judgment (v. 12). What results from the judgment is not simply the defeat of the enemies but also the cursing of those who did not come out to assist (vv. 16–23). Similarly Ps 103:6 speaks of YHWH doing "acts of righteousness and justice" for all who are oppressed. Here the term צדקות is parallel to the term משפטם, just as the singular terms צדקה and משפט are often semantically paired in a strictly forensic context.[14]

That Micah refers to these "salvific events" in 6:5 as the צדקות יהוה immediately establishes the context in which the words are to be heard. Indeed, Mic 6:1-5 takes precisely the form of a legal suit, in which YHWH is either bringing charges against his people or is responding to charges brought against him.[15] To invoke the צדקות יהוה in such a setting is not simply a benign appeal to Yahweh's gracious saving deeds. It is much more an appeal to the "just deeds" of YHWH, performed in the context of a legally binding covenant relationship, which immediately calls into question the adequacy of Israel's own response. The recitation of such "saving deeds" inexorably sets the stage for a pending pronouncement of judgment in the face of Israel's failure.

Some few commentators have recognized the implications of the context for understanding the 'two-edged' nature of Micah's words. Lescow, for example, appropriately notes that the term צדקות יהוה, in this context, relates to the "'Gerechtigkeitserweisungen' Yahwehs" (Proofs of the Righteousness of Yahweh) which confront the disobedient and unthankful people.[16] Similarly, Beyerlin reminds us that Yahweh's "saving deeds" are not "beziehungslos und bedingungslos" (unconnected and without conditions), but are rather the "Erweise seiner Gerechtigkeit" (proofs of his righteousness), and insolubly connected with the Sinai tradition, a connection which the opponents of Micah have dissolved in their rush toward grace.[17] The forensic context of Mic 6:1–8 requires positioning such "righteous deeds" of YHWH within the framework of Israel being called upon to perform

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[14] Cf. Ps 11:7, where God's "loving צדקות" is a reflex of his being צדיק.

[15] A major question has focused upon the use of the term "prophetic law-suit" to describe the genre of texts such as Mic 6:1–5 (6–8). Recent suggestions call for a more careful application of the term. See especially Michael de Roche, "Yahweh's *rîb* Against Israel: A Reassessment of the So-Called 'Prophetic Lawsuit' in the Preexilic Prophets," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 102 (1983): 563–74; Dwight R. Daniels, "Is there a 'prophetic lawsuit' genre? [Hebrew rîb]," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 99 (1987):339–60. Most commentators, however, continue to apply the therm to Mic 6:1–8, which I feel is wholly justified given the explicit reference to a ריב conducted before witnesses in Mic 6:1–2.

[16] Theodore Lescow, "Redaktionsgeschichtliche Analyse von Micha 6–7," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 84 (1972):187. On the playful but serious ambiguity and reversal of language explicit in Micah, see Anthony J. Petrotta, *Lexis Ludens. Wordplay and the Book of Micah* (American University Studies 7/105; New York: Peter Lang, 1991), esp. p. 109. While Petrotta focuses upon the "ludic angle of the text" (p. 111), such humor ought not veil the earnestness of the prophetic appeal.

[17] Beyerlin, *Die Kulttraditionen Israels*, 72–74. Shaw, too, hints at the "warning" function of this historical recollection. Charles S. Shaw, *The speeches of Micah. A Rhetorical-Historical Analysis* (JSOTSup 145; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 192.

acts of justice and fidelity, concepts which, as Hagstrom has noted, control not only this "law suit" but in fact bind the entirety of Micah 6–7 together.[18]

To understand what happened at Shittim and Gilgal, these צדקות יהוה, as simple references to the "good news" of Israel's past salvific history in relationship with a gracious God, whose basic instinct is to 'save' Israel from its enemies and threatening situations, is one of the major impediments to understanding how Micah's audience was being invited into this text.

Conclusion: law as gospel and gospel as law

We see, therefore, that the implications of Mic 6:5 have often been underestimated or have been skewed in a direction that wishes to subvert the theme of 'law' for the sake of moving hastily to speak of 'gospel.' It is easier to take Balaam as a hero and Shittim and Gilgal as loci of divine favor. What we find, however, is that Shittim and Gilgal are not monovalent. They do not lay the gospel before us like a trophy of divine grace. They are Janus-faced. They insist on speaking both stories. And they will not let us easily off the hook. One cannot hear 'Shittim' without thinking of Balaam and Balak, of the Baal of Peor and of the catastrophe wrought there. One cannot hear 'Gilgal' without feeling the bitter sting of failure: failure of consolidation, failure of leadership, loss of power and social status. Gospel is essentially and necessarily buried in the midst of law, just as law is essentially and necessarily buried in the midst of gospel. The same word confronts us as both—if not immediately and simultaneously, then at least potentially.

What was it that happened "from Shittim to Gilgal"? It was the discovery once again that God's grace and God's judgment are corollaries, that one does not exist without the other. No, even more sharply stated: One does not exist outside the essential and necessary context of the other. One cannot read through the Bible and divide the verses into neat stacks named "law" and "gospel." Every word of scripture and every encounter with God has the potential within it to confront us as both law and gospel, as both the threat because of our failure as well as the promise of God's grace, which carries us through all our deepest failures. We encounter this Janus-faced polarity every time we make the journey from Shittim to Gilgal.

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[18] David Gerald Hagstrom, *The Coherence of the book of Micah. A Literary Analysis* (SBLDS 89; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 105.

David: Sinner and Saint in Samuel and Chronicles

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"Tradition" has been defined as the living faith of the dead, and "traditionalism" as the dead faith of the living. The biblical authors often told the stories of ancestors who had been dead for centuries but whose words and actions were still central to understanding the nature of God, Israel, and divine worship *and* the responsibilities and possibilities of individuals within the believing community. This article is written to honor the recently retired LSTC Old Testament Professor Wesley J. Fuerst, a lover of the tradition, who has embodied a living faith in his many roles in seminary and church.

It was about 400 years after the death of David that the Deuteronomistic Historian (Dtr) penned the words we now call 2 Samuel 24.[1] Nearly two centuries later the Chronicler retold that story in what we now call 1 Chronicles 21. The two authors described a David who sinned, but who confessed that sin and threw himself on God's mercy. What began as disaster ended up with David's new obedience that secured the site for the altar that would be the centerpiece of the temple of Solomon. But an account that had "worked" in 2 Samuel needed changing in 1 Chronicles—new questions had arisen and many details were not so clear on second thought. In addition, the text of 2 Samuel had changed, slightly but significantly, as scribes studied and copied the texts they held sacred. Thanks to the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls and renewed analysis of the Septuagint, we can now partially reconstruct the text of Samuel as it lay before the Chronicler when he started to write.[2] We call this text his Vorlage. The first and third columns in the translation below will be a literal translation of the text of Samuel and Chronicles as printed in Hebrew Bibles today.[3] The middle column will be an attempt to show what the Chronicler's Vorlage of Samuel might have looked like. In reviewing the history of these texts, we will try to empathize with the theological concerns and objectives of both Dtr and the Chronicler.

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[1] Contemporary scholars disagree on whether Dtr wrote near the end of the 7th or in the middle of the 6th century B.C.E. The present shape of the Deuteronomistic History, all agree, was not achieved until the middle of the 6th century.

[2] The Dead Sea Scroll in question is a fragmentary, first century B.C.E. document called 4QSam^{a}. For the Septuagint we follow the Lucianic recension (LXX^{L}). Though it was edited in the 4th century C.E., it contains many ancient readings, some of which are confirmed by 4QSam^{a}. What we call the Chronicler's

A sinful census

2 Samuel Standard Text	*The Chronicler's Vorlage*	*1 Chronicles Standard Text*
1. The anger of Yahweh was again kindled against Israel, and he incited David against them, saying, "Go number Israel and Judah."	1. The anger of God was again kindled against Israel, and he incited David against them, saying, "Go number Israel and Judah."	1. An adversary rose up against Israel and incited David to number Israel.
2. And the king said to Joab, commander of the army which was with him, "Travel through all the tribes of Israel from Dan to Beer-sheba, and number the people so that I may know the number of the people."	2. And the king said to Joab **and to the** commanders of the army which were with him, "Travel (**pl.**) through all Israel and Judah from Dan to Beer-sheba and number the people. **Bring me back a report** so that I may know the number of the people."	2. And David said to Joab **and to the** commanders of the people, "Go (**pl.**) number Israel from Beer-sheba to Dan. **Bring me back a report** so that I may know their number."
3. Joab said to the king, "May Yahweh your God add to the people a hundred times their number, while the eyes of my lord the king are still watching. Why does my lord the king want this thing?"	3. Joab said to the king, "May Yahweh their God add **to** the people a hundred times **as many as they are**, their number, while the eyes of my lord the king are still watching. Why does my lord the king want this thing?"	3. Joab said, "May Yahweh add **to** his people a hundred times **as many as they are**. Are all of them not already servants of my lord the king? Why does my lord seek this? Why should there be guilt on Israel?"
4. And the word of the king prevailed against Joab and over the commanders of the army. Joab and the commanders of the army went out from the presence of the king to number the people Israel.	4. And the word of the king prevailed **over** Joab and over the commanders of the army. Joab and the commanders of the army went out from the presence of the king to number the people Israel.	4. And the word of the king prevailed **over** Joab. Joab went out

Vorlage in this article is primarily a translation of the Lucianic recension of 2 Samuel 24. When its readings agree with the Standard Text of 1 Chronicles, we print both texts in bold. A reading in bold in the Standard Text of 2 Samuel 24 is absent in both the Chronicler's Vorlage and the Standard Text of 1 Chronicles. When we cite 4QSam[a] alone, without support of the Septuagint, we print it in italics. When these readings show up in the Standard Text of 1 Chronicles, they are also printed in italics there. Readings printed in "bold italics" in the Standard Text of 1 Chronicles are supported by both the Lucianic Recension of the Septuagint and 4QSam[a]. Finally, underlined words in the Chronicler's Vorlage differ from both the Standard Text of Samuel and the Standard Text of Chronicles.

[3] This is identified in this paper as the Standard Text. In scholarly circles this is called the Masoretic Text or MT.

5. They crossed the Jordan and camped at Aroer south of the city, which is in the middle of the wadi of Gad and near Jazer.
6. And they came to Gilead and to the land beneath Hermon[4] to Dan and round about Sidon.
7. And they came to Fort Tyre and all the Hivite and Canaanite cities, and they went to the Negeb of Judah at Beer-sheba.
8. And they traveled in all the land and came to Jerusalem at the end of nine months and twenty days.
9. And Joab gave the number of the census of the people to the king. Israel was 800,000 military men who wielded the sword, and the men of Judah were 500,000 men.

5. They crossed the Jordan and began from Aroer and from the city, which is in the middle of the wadi of the Gadites near Jazer.
6. And they came to Gilead and to the land beneath Hermon to Dan and encircled Greater Sidon.
7. And they came to Fort Tyre and all the Hivite and Canaanite cities, and they went to the Negeb of Judah at Beer-sheba.
8. And they traveled in all the land and came to Jerusalem at the end of nine months and twenty days.
9. And Joab gave the number of the census of the people to the king. Israel was 900,000 military men who wielded the sword, and the men of Judah were **400,000** <u>valiant men</u>.

and went throughout all Israel and came to Jerusalem.

5. And Joab gave the number of the census of the people to David. All Israel was 1,100,000 men who wielded the sword, and Judah was **470,000** men who wielded the sword.
6. He did not take a census of Levi and Benjamin in their midst for the command of the king was abhorrent to Joab.
7. And this matter was also evil in the eyes of God,

1. **Samuel** begins in v. 1 by linking this account ("The anger of Yahweh was again kindled") to 2 Samuel 21, where similar themes about Yahweh's anger and the need for expiation are discussed. No reason in Samuel is given for God's current anger against Israel and a careful reader may wonder about the fairness of Yahweh in inciting David to sin. The Deuteronomistic Historian himself seemed to be satisfied that David was accountable for his own actions and raised no questions about the justification for Yahweh's anger against Israel.

2. Joab raised a mild objection to the census in v. 3 and expressed the hope that the people would multiply many times during David's lifetime without a census. David's policy, however, won out.

3. The map of the census (vv. 5-8) is presented in broad strokes, beginning in Trans-Jordan and moving counterclockwise to the northern end of the holy land before winding up at the traditional southern boundary city of Beer-sheba. The task took about 200 days.

4. The census, probably made for either conscription or taxation, came to a total of 1,300,000 (v. 9), with Israel (800,000) larger than Judah (500,000), as it was throughout its history.

5. The **Chronicler** does not include an equivalent for 2 Samuel 21 in his book and hence does not mention that God's anger was kindled again. In fact, he dropped out the notion of God's anger and blamed the temptation of David on an unidentified adversary who somehow incited David to take a census (v. 1). Translations traditionally render this by the word Satan although the Chronicler never refers to this figure elsewhere. "The Satan" does appear as an supernatural adversary to humans in Job 1–2 and Zechariah 3. Whether the text in Chronicles refers to Satan or merely to some unknown human adversary, the Chronicler has exonerated God of any involvement in David's fall by the changes made in v. 1.[5]

6. Joab's objection to the census in Chronicles (v. 3) is far more strenuous than in Samuel and makes clear to the king from the beginning that a census is sinful and unnecessary since the people are already obedient servants of the king. Census-taking, in Joab's words, would bring guilt on Israel (v. 3) and was abhorrent to him (v. 6). It is not explicitly stated why census-taking was wrong, and the Chronicler elsewhere reports censuses without theological objection. Since David had just been successful in battles against neighboring nations according to 1 Chronicles 18-20, the Chronicler may have felt that counting the people implied that David relied on the size of his army rather than on divine aid. Verse 7 notes divine disapproval of the census as well.

7. The Chronicler does not repeat the geographical data from Samuel about the area covered by the census, either because he found it unimportant or perhaps because he did not completely understand the itinerary. The Chronicler gives the extent of the land as "from Beer-sheba to Dan" (v. 3), reversing the order of city names in this common biblical cliché.[6] The census was made "throughout all Israel" (v. 4).

8. Joab did not number Levi and Benjamin (v. 6). Two passages in Numbers prohibit Levi's inclusion in military censuses (Num 1:49; 2:33) and justify Joab's

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[4] For this reconstruction, see P. Kyle McCarter, Jr., *II Samuel*, AB 9 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984): 502.

[5] The Targum to Chronicles partially reverses Yahweh's exoneration: "And Yahweh let the Satan stand up against Israel."

[6] Cf. 1 Chr 13:5; 2 Chr 19:4; 30:5.

decision to omit Levi in this case. His reason for excluding Benjamin is no longer clear. Some scholars have proposed that the location of the tabernacle at the Benjaminite city of Gibeon (see below) was the reason for its exclusion of the tribe of Benjamin from the census.

9. A number of biblical tribal lists include both Ephraim and Manasseh, the sons of Joseph, to make a total of twelve tribes when Levi is treated as a priestly tribe and omitted from the list of twelve. Such a list plus Levi would total thirteen tribes. The Chronicler apparently assigned 100,000 people to each tribe and since he did not count Levi and Benjamin the grand total for all eleven Israelite tribes in v. 5 came to 1,100,000 (1,300,000 less 200,000).

10. Some time after the Chronicler's original composition, a reader interpreted "Israel" in v. 5 as a reference to the Northern Kingdom only (cf. Dtr) and therefore mistakenly included a census number for Judah, 470,000.

11. The **Chronicler's Vorlage** had several readings in vv. 2-4 that provided a rationale for minor changes in the Chronicler's own text.[7]

[7] We do not know why the numbers in the first two columns for 2 Sam 24:9 differ from each other. Perhaps the Chronicler knew the numbers that are attested in the second column, calculated that 70,000 would be later killed, and therefore created an original number of 470,000 for Judah. The commentaries are full of other conjectures.

The punishment of Israel

2 Samuel Standard Text	*Chronicler's Vorlage*	*1 Chronicles Standard Text*
10. And the heart of David smote him after he had numbered the people. David said to Yahweh, "I have sinned exceedingly in what I have done. And now, Yahweh, cause the iniquity of your servant to pass away for I have acted very foolishly."	10. And the heart of David smote him after this for he had numbered the people. David said to Yahweh, "I have sinned exceedingly in **this thing** which I have done. And now, Yahweh, cause the iniquity of your servant to pass away for I have acted very foolishly."	7. [continued] and he smote Israel.
11. David got up in the morning, and the word of Yahweh came to Gad **the prophet**, the seer of David, saying,	11. David got up in the morning, and the word of Yahweh came to Gad the seer of David, saying,	8. David said to God, "I have sinned exceedingly in **this thing** which I have done. And now, cause the iniquity of your servant to pass away for I have acted very foolishly." 9. Yahweh spoke to Gad the seer of David, saying,
12. Go and speak to David, "Thus says Yahweh. Three things I offer to you. Choose for yourself one of them and I will do it."	12. Go and speak to David, **saying**, "Thus says Yahweh. Three things I offer to you. Choose for yourself one of them and I will do it."	10. Go and speak to David, **saying**, "Thus says Yahweh. Three things I offer to you. Choose for yourself one of them and I will do it."

13. Gad came to David and told him and he said to him, "Will there come to you seven years of famine in your land, or three months of your fleeing before your enemies with them pursuing you, or will there be three days of pestilence in your land?

Now know and see what answer I should respond to the one who sent me.'

14. And David said to Gad, "It is exceedingly distressing to me. Let us fall by the hand of Yahweh for his mercies are manifold. Let me not fall by the hand of human beings."

15. And Yahweh brought a pestilence against Israel from morning until the appointed time, and there died from the people, from Dan to Beer-sheba, 70,000 people.

13. Gad came to David and told him and he said to him, "Choose for yourself one of them and I will do it. Will there come to you **three** years of famine in your land, or three months of your fleeing before your enemies with them pursuing you, or will there be three days of pestilence in **the** land?

And now know and see what answer I should respond to the one who sent me.'"

14. And David said to Gad, "Even these three things are exceedingly distressing to me. Only let **me** fall by the hand of Yahweh for his mercies are **exceedingly** manifold. Let me not fall by the hand of human beings." So David chose for himself the plague, and in the days of the wheat harvest

15. Yahweh brought a pestilence against Israel from morning until dinnertime, and the scourge caused sickness among the people. And there died from the people, from Dan to Beer-sheba, 70,000 people.

11. Gad came to David and said to him, "Thus says Yahweh, 'Take what you will.

12. Will there be **three** years of famine, or three months of your fleeing (emendation) before your enemies with the sword of your enemies overtaking you, or will there be three days of the sword of Yahweh, pestilence in **the** land, and the angel of Yahweh destroying throughout all the territory of Israel. **And** now see what answer I should respond to the one who sent me.'"

13. And David said to Gad, "It is exceedingly distressing to me. Let **me** fall by the hand of Yahweh for his mercies are **exceedingly** manifold. Let me not fall by the hand of human beings."

14. And Yahweh brought a pestilence against Israel, and there fell from Israel 70,000 people.

1. The reasons in **Samuel** (v. 10) for David's feelings of guilt and remorse are unexplained. Note that Yahweh was involved in leading David to number the people (v. 1) and that Joab objected to it only mildly (v. 3). David admitted his faults and prayed for the iniquity to be removed.

2. God's word came to Gad the prophet (vv. 11-13).[8] The choice between seven (or three) years of famine, three months of flight from enemies, or three days of pestilence is a bitter one with the primary distinction being in the duration of the punishment. All of these punishments are to affect the people as a whole.

3. David resolved the dilemma posed by Gad by selecting none of his options, but threw himself instead on the manifold mercies of God (v. 14). He stated that he would rather fall by Yahweh's hand—because of God's reputation for mercy—than take his chances on natural or human disasters. David concluded that his only resort was to choose the potentially worst punishment, that is, punishment that came directly from God.

4. Yahweh's means of destruction was pestilence (v. 15). It caused 70,000 casualties in less than one day.

5. The **Chronicler** explained David's sudden change of heart by having Yahweh smite Israel immediately after the census (v. 7). Such punishment brought David to his senses (cf. the response of the officers and the king to the invasion of Shishak in 2 Chr 12:6 and the response of Manasseh to his exile in 2 Chr 35:12).

6. The three options for punishment in Chronicles (v. 12) are similar to those in Samuel, but the third is presented in a series of appositions that foreshadow the punishment itself: the sword of Yahweh, pestilence in the land, and the angel of Yahweh destroying. The angel with the sword is prominent in the rest of the Chronicler's account. The Chronicler makes it clear in any case that the third punishment will be brought directly by Yahweh. Thus David's decision to fall into—or by—the hand of Yahweh is provided with a better rationale.

7. Throughout these verses there are small changes in the **Chronicler's Vorlage** that explain some of the differences of Chronicles from the standard text of Samuel. The Chronicler's use of the adverb "exceedingly" in v. 13, while theologically important, was probably found by him in his Vorlage. Gad is given two titles in 2 Sam 24:11 (the prophet, the seer of David). "David's seer" is preserved in the Chronicler's Vorlage and in Chronicles (cf. 1 Chr 29:22; 2 Chr 29:25); there was probably once a text of Samuel that called Gad only a prophet. The two titles have now been conflated in the standard text of Samuel.

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[8] The complete divine message must be compiled from God's word to Gad in v. 12, and Gad's speaking to David in v. 13.

Divine pause and David's confession

Samuel Standard Text	*Chronicler's Vorlage*	*Chronicles Standard Text*
16. And the angel stretched out his hand toward Jerusalem to destroy it, but Yahweh repented of the calamity. He said to the angel who was wreaking damage among the people, "It is enough now; stay your hand." And the angel of Yahweh was by the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.	16. And the angel stretched out his hand toward Jerusalem to destroy it, but Yahweh repented **about** the calamity. He said to the angel who was wreaking damage among the people, "It is enough now; stay your hand." And the angel of Yahweh (4QSam^{a}; God LXX^{L}) was ***standing*** by the threshing floor of ***Orna*** the Jebusite.	15. And God sent an angel to Jerusalem to destroy it. And when he was about to destroy it, Yahweh saw and repented **about** the calamity. He said to the angel who was wreaking damage, "It is enough now; stay your hand." And the angel of Yahweh was ***standing*** by the threshing floor of ***Orna***n the Jebusite.
	And David lifted up his eyes and saw the angel of Yahweh standing between earth and between heaven. And there was a drawn sword in his hand stretched out against Jerusalem. And David and the elders fell down on their faces, covering themselves in sackcloth.	16. *And David lifted up his eyes and saw the angel of Yahweh standing between earth and between heaven. And there was a drawn sword in his hand stretched out against Jerusalem. And David and the elders, covering themselves in sackcloth, fell down on their faces.*
17. And David said to Yahweh, when he saw the angel slaying the people, and he said, "Behold, I have sinned and I have acted perversely, but these sheep, what have they done? Let your hand be against me and against the house of my father.	17. And David said to Yahweh, when he saw the angel slaying the people, and he said, "Behold, I have sinned and I ***the shepherd have done wrong***, but these sheep, what have they done? Let your hand be against me and against the house of my father.	17. And David said to God, "Have not I given orders to number the people? I am the one who has sinned and I ***indeed have done wrong***, but these sheep, what have they done? Yahweh my God, let your hand be against me and against the house of my father; but let not the plague be against your own people.

1. The angel's appearance in **Samuel** (v. 16) is abrupt and without preparation. As the punishment moved from the people as a whole toward Jerusalem, Yahweh changed his mind about the catastrophe, thus vindicating David's reliance on Yahweh's many mercies.

2. At this stage, the angel's presence by the threshing floor of Araunah (v. 16) seems incidental to the story.

3. David repeats his confession of sin in v. 17 (cf. v. 10) and contrasts his behavior with that of the innocent people who have been punished for his sin. He asks for God's hand to limit itself to himself and his wider family.

4. The **Chronicler** has God send the angel (v. 15) rather than allowing the angel to act on its own initiative. This change also makes the first appearance of the angel less abrupt.

5. The paradoxical and merciful behavior of God is highlighted in Chronicles (v. 15). The very one who sent an angel to destroy Jerusalem called a halt to that punishment.

6. Verse 16 in Chronicles, however, is not an addition by the Chronicler, but a text he found in his Vorlage as we now know since the discovery of 4QSam^{a}. It is likely that this paragraph was lost in the standard text of Samuel when a scribe's eyes skipped from "and David lifted up" to "and David said" in the next verse.

7. The motif of an angel with a terrifying drawn sword has biblical antecedents in the story of Balaam's ass (Num 22:23, 31) and in the story of Joshua's meeting with a man with a sword, identified as a leader in Yahweh's army (Josh 5:13–15). From this point on and up to v. 27 the Chronicler pictured an angel with a drawn sword hovering over Jerusalem.

8. The Chronicler added a clause to v. 17 in which David asks explicitly that the plague not affect the people.

9. The best reading in v. 17 may be the bold type in the Chronicler's Vorlage in which David admitted he had done wrong as the royal *shepherd*, and therefore the punishment of the innocent people/*sheep* is inappropriate.

10. The participle "standing" in 1 Chr 21:15 and in its Vorlage in Samuel is an interesting example where the Lucianic Septuagint agrees with 4QSam^{a} against the Standard Text. Araunah is a Hittite or Hurrian name; its spelling in 4QSam^{a}, the Septuagint, and Chronicles (Orna[n]) represents a later development.

Erection of an altar

2 Samuel Standard Text	*Chronicler's Vorlage*	*1 Chronicles Standard Text*
18. And Gad came to David on that day and said ***to him***, "Go up, rear for Yahweh an altar on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite."	18. And Gad came to David on that day and said, "Go up, rear **an altar for Yahweh** on the threshing floor of **Orna** the Jebusite."	18. And the angel of Yahweh said to Gad to say to David that David should go up to rear **an altar for Yahweh** on the threshing floor of **Orna**n the Jebusite.
19. And David went up according to the word of Gad, **just** as Yahweh had commanded him.	19. And David went up according to the word of Gad, the prophet, **as** Yahweh had commanded him.	19. And David went up in the word of Gad, **as** he had commanded in the name of Yahweh.

20. And Araunah looked down and saw the king and his servants passing by him, and Araunah went out and bowed down to the king, with his nose to the ground.	20. And **Orna** looked down and saw the king and his servants passing by him, and **Orna**n went out and bowed down to the king, with his nose to the ground. *And [Orna] looked down [and saw the king and his servants coming to him, hiding themselves, and covering themselves] with sackcloth, and Orna was threshing wheat. [And David came to Orna and Orna looked and saw David and his servants, cove]ring themselves with sackcloth, com[ing to him....]*[9]	20. And **Orna**n turned and saw the angel (LXX: king) and his four sons with him, *hiding themselves*, and *Ornan was threshing wheat.*
21. And Araunah said, "Why has my lord the king come to his servant?" And David said, "To acquire from you the threshing floor to build an altar for Yahweh so that the scourge can be averted from the people.	21. And Orna said, "Why has my lord the king come to his servant?" And David said **to him**, "To acquire from you the threshing floor to build an altar for Yahweh so that the scourge can be averted from the people.	22. And David said **to Ornan**, "Give me the place of the threshing flour, and I will build on it an altar for Yahweh. For the full price, give it to me.
22. And Araunah said to David, "Let my lord the king take and offer up that which is good in his eyes. Look, the ox will do for the burnt offering, and the threshing sledges and the harnesses for the wood.	22. And **Orna** said to David, "**Take** (it) and let my lord the king do for Yahweh that which is good in his eyes. Look, the ox will do for the burnt offering, and the threshing sledges and the harnesses for the wood.	23. And **Ornan** said to David, "**Take** (it) for yourself and let my lord the king **do** that which is good in his eyes. Look I have given the ox for the burnt offerings and the threshing sledges for the wood, and the wheat for a cereal offering.
23. Everything Araunah **the king** gave to the king. And Araunah said to the king, "May Yahweh your God respond favorably to you."	23. Everything **Orna** gave to the king. And **Orna** said to the king, "May Yahweh your God respond favorably to you. I have given everything."	

[9] Reconstruction from McCarter, *II Samuel*, p. 507. It seems to me that this text conflates two slightly varying sentences.

24. And the king said to Araunah, "No, for I will surely acquire it from you for a price. I will not offer to Yahweh my God burnt offerings that cost nothing."

So David acquired the threshing floor and the ox for fifty silver shekels.

25. David built there an altar to Yahweh and he offered up burnt offerings and peace offerings. Then Yahweh accepted supplication for the land, and the scourge was averted from Israel.

24. And the king said to **Orna**, "No, for I will surely acquire it from you for a price. I will not offer to Yahweh my God burnt offerings that cost nothing."

So David acquired the threshing floor <u>for a price</u> and the ox for fifty silver shekels.

25. David built there an altar to Yahweh and he offered up burnt offerings and peace offerings. <u>Solomon added to the altar later, for it was small at first.</u> Then Yahweh pardoned the land, and the scourge was averted from Israel.

24. And king David said to **Ornan**, "No, for I will surely acquire it for the full price. For I will not lift up to Yahweh that which belongs to you nor offer burnt offerings that cost nothing."

25. So David gave to Ornan for the place six hundred golden shekels by weight.

26. David built there an altar to Yahweh and he offered up burnt offerings and peace offerings. He prayed to Yahweh, and Yahweh answered him in fire from heaven upon the altar of burnt offering.

27. Yahweh commanded the angel and he put back his sword into its sheath.

28. At that time, when David saw that Yahweh had answered him at the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite, he offered sacrifices there.

29. But the tabernacle of Yahweh, which Moses had made in the wilderness, and the altar of burnt offering were at that time at the high place in Gibeon.

30. David had not been able to go before it to seek God for he was terrified because of the sword of the angel of Yahweh.

22:1 David said, "This will be the house of Yahweh God, and this will be the altar for burnt offering for Israel."

1. In **Samuel** (v. 18) Gad delivered a second message to David in response to his second confession (cf. v. 10), instructing him to build an altar on the threshing floor of Araunah.

2. Bowing down and prostrating himself (v. 20), Araunah showed proper respect for the king as he went out to begin negotiations with him. David's carrying out of Gad's order is a necessary prerequisite for averting the angel's punishment which had only been temporarily interrupted in 2 Sam 24:15. As David recounted his purpose in v. 21, he mentioned explicitly the need to acquire the threshing floor in addition to building the altar.

3. Araunah generously supplied David with an ox for the burnt offering and with parts of farm equipment as firewood for the sacrifice, and he offered best wishes for divine approval (2 Sam 24:22-23).[10]

4. David declined Araunah's offers and insisted that he pay for the threshing floor and the sacrifices himself (v. 24). The price was fifty silver shekels.

5. David offered burnt and peace offerings, and Yahweh accepted his entreaty for the land. The scourge (divine blow) was averted for the people (v. 25).

6. The **Chronicler** makes clear that Gad was speaking by divine authority ("the angel of Yahweh said to Gad") and not merely offering a human suggestion (v. 18). This understanding is only implicit in 2 Sam 24:19//1 Chr 21:19.

7. Verse 20 in Chronicles is puzzling. If the standard text is chosen, it is unclear whose four sons are being referred to. If LXX is chosen, the sons are clearly David's. Some scholars have proposed that since Solomon is identified as David's fourth son in 1 Chr 14:3-7, Solomon, the temple builder, was present when the altar's land was purchased. The whole verse is difficult, however, and I suspect that the words "four sons" result from a misreading in Hebrew of the words "and his servants" from the Vorlage.

8. In v. 22 the Chronicler omitted Araunah's question from 2 Sam 24:21, perhaps thinking that the king rather than his subordinate should begin the conversation. The reference to a "full price" in vv. 22 and 24 is an allusion to Gen 23:9 and Abraham's purchase of the Cave of Machpelah for the full price.

9. Chronicles adds to Ornan's offer in v. 23 "wheat for a cereal offering" in order to conform to appropriate sacrificial laws (Exod 29:38–41; Num 15:1–4).

10. David's purchase price in v. 25 is enormous, twelve times the amount in 2 Sam 24:24 (50 shekels for each of the 12 tribes?).[11] The shekels are also of gold which is more valuable than silver.

11. Instead of the supplication referred to in 2 Sam 24:25 (perhaps alluding to v. 17), the Chronicler mentions a new prayer (v. 26), which brought an answer in the form of fire from heaven. Fire here and elsewhere indicates God's approval of an altar or a sacrifice (Lev 9:24; Judg 6:21; 1 Kgs 18:37–38; 2 Chr 7:1).

12. In v. 27 the Chronicler finally has the angel put the sword back into its sheath, erasing the tension that has existed since the mention of the angel with the drawn sword in v. 16. The sacrifice freed the rest of the

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[10] The standard text of v. 23 makes it appear that Araunah is a king, but this is a result of early textual corruption (see McCarter, *II Samuel*, 508). Note the humble acts of Araunah in v. 22 and the fact that he is merely threshing wheat and not carrying out royal tasks in 1 Chr 21:20 and its Samuel Vorlage.

[11] The Chronicler's Vorlage may have prepared for this change. Note that the fifty shekels are only for the ox while the threshing floor itself is sold for an unspecified price.

land from the pestilence.

13. The next three verses (vv. 28–30) explain why David sacrificed at the threshing floor of Ornan while the national sacrificial cult was being carried on at Gibeon, where the tabernacle and the altar from the wilderness period justified sacrificial worship until Solomon erected the temple (1 Chr 16:39; 2 Chr 1:3; 5:5). David had been intimidated from going to Gibeon by the drawn sword of the angel, but Solomon later did go there (2 Chr 1:3–6).

14. David designated Ornan's threshing floor as the future site of the house of Yahweh and the future altar of burnt offering for Israel. While the text of 2 Samuel 24 is sometimes understood in a similar way, there is actually no explicit connection made between the altar at Araunah's threshing floor and Solomon's temple (cf. 1 Kgs 5:15 [EVV 1]–9:9).[12] Chronicles gives Davidic authorization to this site, which is also connected with Moriah, the site of Abraham's near sacrifice of Isaac in 2 Chr 3:1. Here as elsewhere in Chronicles the temple is the central focus of the people's religious life.

Conclusion

We have seen how David's sin in numbering the people led to his confession of sin and his carrying out of the consequent obligations God laid upon him. The Chronicler interpreted this old tradition for a new situation by addressing a number of issues that were troubling to him, some of which were probably problematic to readers from the beginning.

It is often said that the Chronicler idealizes David, leaving out his questionable rise to power, his adultery with Bathsheba, and the rebellion of Absalom. The same could be said of Solomon since the Chronicler's account leaves out all of 1 Kings 11 and its discussion of Solomon's wives and the apostasy they introduced. But the Chronicler's picture of David the saint is more ambivalent than many propose. After all, David erred in his first attempt to bring the ark to Jerusalem, since his man Uzzah touched the ark and was struck dead. It was only many years later, and with priests and Levites properly installed by David, that the king was able to bring the ark to its final resting place in Jerusalem.

In 1 Chronicles 21, it is not that David is sinless that makes him a model, but rather that this great sinner, who trusted in the exceedingly great mercies of God, confessed his sins and followed through on divinely prescribed obligations of repentance. The Chronicler's tradition of a fallen but repentant David is a model for his own time—and for us and for our time as well.[13]

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[12] But note the underlined addition in v. 25 of the Chronicler's Vorlage.

[13] For a full discussion of David as repentant sinner in 1 Chronicles 21, see Gary N. Knoppers, "Images of David in Early Judaism: David as Repentant Sinner in Chronicles," *Bib* 76 (1995):449–70. Contrast John W. Wright, "The Innocence of David in I Chronicles 21," *JSOT* 60 (1993):87–105.

De Profundis: Psalms 130 and 131

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Gerhard von Rad once cited a remark of Franz Rosenzweig to the effect that the sign "R" used to designate the work of the redactor in the formation of biblical books should rather be regarded as standing for "Rabbenu," "our teacher," in recognition of the contribution that these persons make to our understanding of texts.[1] Recent study of the psalms has been marked by special concern for the work of the redactor or redactors in the ordering of the psalms, the construction of smaller collections, and the shaping of the book as a whole.[2] The thesis of this paper is that the redactor (or redactors) of the Book of Psalms has placed Psalm 131 after 130 in a manner that provides an important clue for the understanding of Psalm 130.

Ordinarily, one moves from exegetical study of a text to the writing of a sermon. In this case, the preparation of a sermon led to an exegetical insight. This essay is offered in honor of Wesley J. Fuerst, Professor of Old Testament at the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago.

The depths

The days at the end of September and the beginning of October, 1998, were days of tragedy and mourning at the seminary where I teach. Months before, I had been assigned to speak at our daily chapel exercises on the first Friday of October, 1998. On Wednesday of that week, I received a call from the young woman who was to be my assistant in the service. We agreed to get together to

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[1] Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, trans. John H. Marks (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), 41.

[2] See James L. Mays, "Going by the Book," in *The Lord Reigns* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 119–27; "Past, Present and Prospect in Psalm Study," in *Old Testament Interpretation*, ed. Mays, Petersen, and Richards (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 147–56; *Psalms* in the *Interpretation* commentary series (Louisville: John Knox, 1994). See also J. Clinton McCann, Jr., *A Theological Introduction to the Book of Psalms* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), and McCann's commentary on the Psalms in *The New Interpreter's Bible* Vol. IV (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996). The works of Erich Zenger of Muenster are especially insightful and important; for example, the section on Psalms in his *Einleitung in das Alte Testament* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1995); "Der Psalter als Buch und als Sammlung" in *Neue Wege der Psalmenforschung* (Freiburg: Herder, 1994); most recently, "Psalmenforschung nach Hermann Gunkel und Sigmund Mowinckel," paper given at the International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament meeting in Oslo, August, 1998; see also his commentary, with F.-L. Hossfeld, on Psalms 1–50 in *Die Neue Echter Bibel* (Wuerzburg: Echter Verlag, 1993).

plan things but did not hold our meeting, because later that day she received word that her husband had been killed in a construction accident.

After a faculty meeting on that same day, we heard the news of the automobile accident that took the life of a young Illinois pastor, son of one of my faculty colleagues and a graduate of the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. Said a friend to me as we walked across the campus that day, "The angel of death has been hovering too close to this place."[3]

For my Friday chapel talk, I had prepared a lighthearted review of a new book by Dr. Laura Schlesinger, *The Ten Commandments*. The title of the talk, "Dr. Laura, Dr. Luther and the Decalogue," was printed in the day's bulletin.

But it was clear that the context of our community called for something else. And so I did what countless preachers before me have done when unexpected tragedy has struck. The night before I was scheduled to preach, I tossed the prepared sermon into the wastebasket and reached for Psalm 130.

Out of the depths: Psalm 130

The power of this psalm has long been recognized. The ancient church ranked it as one of the seven "Penitential Psalms" to be used at times of confession (see also Psalms 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 143). It is known as *De Profundis*, "Out of the Depths," the first words of the psalm in the Latin translation. Modern pastoral handbooks recommend Psalm 130 as the text of choice for the most difficult of occasions: stillbirth, death shortly after birth, burial. It is the basis for Luther's hymn, "Out of the Depths" (*Lutheran Book of Worship*, 295). The Revised Common Lectionary assigns it to five Sundays in the Church Year (5 Lent A, Proper 14 B, Proper 8 B, Proper 5 B, Vigil of Pentecost ABC).

1. I sat there late at night, with the Bible on my desk and a blank screen in front of me. As I read through Psalm 130, my thoughts went back to an unforgettable encounter with that psalm:

It was a cold and gray day in January. My wife and I were living in a small town in Germany, just south of Munich, on sabbatical leave. We were just finishing breakfast when the telephone rang.

It was Eberhard, a man we had come to know as a member of our congregation in that town. "Can you and your wife join us in a visit to Dachau this morning?" he asked. "Of course," I replied, not even checking with my spouse. I cancelled my usual visit to the University and agreed to be ready for our friend at 10 a.m.

At precisely that time a black Mercedes pulled up and Eberhard came to the door. We got into the car and he introduced us to his brother-in-law, who would join us. Our friend began to speak, and we listened.

He told us that he had been taken to the concentration camp at Dachau in 1944, when he was just 14 years old. His father, an officer in the German army, had been part of a small group that had attempted to assassinate Adolf Hitler. When the plot failed, his father was executed and our friend, along with his family, was sent to a sequence of concentration camps, including Dachau.

We saw the film at the memorial center and began to walk through the fog across the area where the barracks had been. On the outside of a building were some huge knife switches with white porcelain handles. "I remember the night they brought us in; those same switches were there," said our friend.

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[3] The tragedies have continued; shortly after these deaths, we learned of the death in Africa of a colleague's granddaughter, and in December, one of our faculty members died suddenly.

Eberhard's brother-in-law was Jewish, an American violinist. He told us that he had lost his parents and his entire family in concentration camps. This was his first visit to Dachau.

We visited the crematorium and some model barracks. Then I went off by myself, walking through the mist. I saw a group of school children with a teacher, on a tour, and thought about the thousands of children who had died at Dachau. Just outside the small Jewish chapel, I saw a young man sitting alone, reading a Hebrew Bible. He was a Hungarian, but spoke German. He had lost all his relatives at Dachau, he told me, and had come back here to pray.

I entered the Protestant chapel and sat for a few moments. As I left, I noticed some black words on the gray brick wall. I drew closer and recognized Psalm 130:

> *Aus der Tiefe rufe ich Herr, zu Dir,*
> *Herr, hoere meine Stimme!*

The entire psalm was printed on that wall. When believing people needed help in expressing their feelings at that darkest hour in the planet's history, they reached for Psalm 130. In this dark hour for our own community, I was doing the same thing. Since that day, whenever I've encountered real tragedy, I've gone back to *De Profundis*. And I've never read Psalm 130 without thinking of that morning at Dachau.

2. The psalm begins with an urgent cry for help:

> [1]Out of the depths [Latin, *De profundis*]
> I cry to you, O LORD.
> [2]Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be
> attentive to the voice of my supplications!"

The psalm is made up of the typical elements of a biblical lament. Behind this opening *cry for help* is an implicit *complaint*: "Lord, I can't hold on much longer.



I'm about to go under! And you aren't paying any attention!"

The person crying for help pictures himself as in deep water, about to drown. Similar imagery opens Psalm 69:

> [1]Save me, O God, for the waters have
> come up to my neck.
> [2]I sink in deep mire, where there is no
> foothold I have come into deep waters,
> and the flood sweeps over me.

The problem of the one crying out in each of these psalms is not just a matter of physical pain. Nor is it only an emotional problem, a case of deep depression. It is not only a spiritual problem, that of being weighted down with sin. In fact, the person praying in this psalm doesn't "have" a problem at all. At issue is survival. In this psalm, for the one praying, it is a matter of life—or death.

3. After the initial cry for help, the major portion of the psalm is an expression of *trust* in the Lord, such as is typical for psalms of lament:

> [3]If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities,
> Lord, who could stand?
> [4]But there is forgiveness with you,
> so that you may be revered.

The psalmist knows the Lord well, and knows that the Lord does not deal with people by keeping track of sins and shortcomings. The psalmist is sure that the Lord forgives (v. 4).

Verses 5 and 6 express hope with the image of the watchman, weary after staying at the post through the long hours of the night. "Watchman, what of the night?" is the call to the city's sentinel (Isa 21:11 RSV). One can imagine how eagerly the watchman longs for the first rays of morning light! The psalmist says that his own longing for help from the Lord is even more intense:

> [5]I wait for the LORD, my soul waits,
> and in his word I hope;
> [6]My soul waits for the Lord more than
> those who watch for the morning, more
> than those who watch for the morning.

How could the desperate "I cry" of the one at the beginning of the psalm be transformed to the "I hope" of one who expects to be rescued (v. 5)? The answer lies in the psalmist's confidence in the steadfast love of the Lord (v. 7). Now the psalmist addresses the entire community:

> [7]O Israel, hope in the LORD! For with the
> LORD there is steadfast love, and with
> him is great power to redeem.
> [8]It is he who will redeem Israel from all
> its iniquities.

The basis for the psalmist's hope is the Lord's "steadfast love," or in Hebrew, *ḥesed*. This is the kind of love that never never gives up, like the love of a husband for a wife, even for a wayward wife (Hosea 1–3). This is the kind of love that the New Testament calls *agape*, illustrated in the picture of the Waiting Father who never gave up on his rebellious son (Luke 15).

Psalm 130 began as an individual's cry for help. It comes to a close with that individual calling the gathered community to continued hoping and trusting in the Lord.

With childlike trust (Psalm 131)

Back to the writing of the chapel sermon. It was now near midnight, and I had been pondering the 130th psalm. I reviewed the movement of the psalm: it begins by reaching down into the depths of human sorrow and concludes with a call to "hope in the Lord." The basis for that hope, the psalm declares, is the "steadfast love" of the Lord.

But can the sense of "steadfast love," the Hebrew *ḥesed*, be brought into sharper focus? I wondered. The notion seemed too abstract. The sermon needed some sort of down-to-earth illustration, some concrete picture. The stories of Hosea's love for his unfaithful wife and of the father's love for the prodigal again came to mind.

Then I suddenly realized I had been overlooking a clue to the sense of "steadfast love" that was built into the Psalter itself.

1. Years ago, Walter Zimmerli wrote an important study of "*Zwillingpsalmen*" (Twin Psalms) in the Psalter.[4] His article focused on Psalms 105/106 and 111/112. In reading through the Psalter, said Zimmerli, one notices psalms that are paired together in a variety of ways. Psalm 1, for example, begins with "Happy are..." and Psalm 2 ends that way, tying the two together as a double introduction to the Psalter. Psalms 103 and 104 both begin and end with "Bless the Lord, O my soul," a unique expression suggesting that the two psalms complement one another: Psalm 103 speaks of the work of God in salvation (the second

[4] In *Wort, Lied und Gottesspruch:* Festschrift fuer Joseph Ziegler, herausgegeben von Joseph Schreiner (Wuerzburg: Echter Verlag, 1972), 105–13.

article of the creed) while Psalm 104 speaks of God's work in creation and of the work of the Spirit (the first and third articles). In these two examples, these "twin psalms" are complementary, each assisting in understanding the other.

Psalms 130 and 131 share the obvious common expression, "O Israel, hope in the Lord" (130:7; 131:3). I speculated: Could it be that these common expressions suggest that the two psalms are to be understood together? Could Psalm 131 provide an insight into understanding Psalm 130?

Psalm 130 begins with a desperate request from someone in deep trouble. The nature of the trouble is not spelled out (illness? betrayal by a friend? interpersonal difficulties?) and thus the psalm could be used in a variety of situations (vv. 1–2). The psalm continues with a resolve to hope in the Lord (vv. 5–6). Finally, what started as an "I" now moves to address the entire congregation, inviting them to *hope* in the Lord (7a).

As I worked through the psalm, a question came to mind: What basis do people have for hoping? There is that favorite Old Testament word, *ḥesed* or steadfast love (v. 7). But "steadfast love," it seemed to me, is too much of an abstraction. It wouldn't really communicate with our chapel listeners. I needed something more concrete—one picture that would be worth the proverbial ten thousand words.

Then I realized I had been overlooking a hint built into the psalm itself or, more precisely, into the ordering of the psalms in the Psalter. The "redactor" was becoming "my rabbi," "my teacher"!

2. Toward the end of Psalm 130 is the expression, "O Israel, hope in the Lord..." (v. 7). Years ago, a student wrote a paper on this psalm, pointed out that the same expression occurs in Psalm 131:3, and made suggestions about interpreting them as a pair.[5] As I was working on that chapel sermon and was left with the question about the grounds for hope, that paper came to mind. It occurred to me that here was a signal linking these two psalms. Could Psalm 131 furnish a key to understanding Psalm 130?

Late into the night, I continued pondering the deaths of these young people. Why should a young husband be cut down in his 20s, just as he was preparing to enter seminary? Why should a young pastor, also in his 20s, be taken away, just as his ministry was beginning? Why? That word was beginning to haunt me.

Then I saw it. Psalm 131 seemed to respond to those "Why" questions with its initial verse:

> O Lord, my heart is not lifted up, my eyes are not raised too high, I do not occupy myself with things too great and marvelous for me.

The first two statements refer to arrogance. In Ps 101:5, a ruler says "a haughty look [literally, "eyes-raised-high"] and an arrogant heart I will not tolerate." When my eyes are "raised high" the only way I can see others is to look down my nose at them. This sort of body language is an expression of pride; Prov 6:16–19 lists "haughty eyes" or pride as the first of the seven things the Lord hates.

In the next lines, the writer of the psalm owns up to mystery. The psalmist admits that there are some things in life that are unexplainable. One of my teachers used to say that "as Christians, we need to learn to live with mystery." This psalm is saying the same thing. What about those "Why" ques-

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[5] Thanks to Robert Dahlen, now pastor in Goodridge, Minnesota, for helpful insights on this pair of psalms.

tions that were plaguing me, those questions that were haunting all of us in our campus community in those days?

Psalm 130 expressed exactly where we were: in the depths.

It also indicated what we were doing: crying to the Lord for help.

It ended by encouraging us to "hope in the Lord." The reason for this hope? Because of the Lord's steadfast love, or *hesed*.

3. But to speak of "steadfast love" or, in the older translations, "mercy," is something of an abstraction. I needed an illustration, and that is just what Psalm 131 provides: a picture of the Lord's steadfast love:

> [2]But I have calmed and quieted my soul,
> like a child quieted at its mother's breast;
> like a child that is quieted is my soul.
> (RSV)

When I am in the midst of difficulties, tormented by things I cannot understand, struggling with those "Why" questions, this psalm asks that I think of myself as a child.

When I see a mother nursing a baby, I think of this psalm. Remember that the image for you or me in this scene is not the mother, the one in charge of things. Rather, the image for you or me is that baby: calmed, quieted, confident, lying peacefully on its mother's breast. Remember that this psalm considers us as "children of the heavenly Mother." The psalm invites us to let our weight down into our heavenly Mother's arms, to own up to mystery, to admit that there are some things we cannot understand and will never understand. Among those things that remain unfathomable, not understandable, are untimely deaths.

4. I discovered that night, while writing a sermon to address a real community that had just experienced two real deaths, that Psalm 130 is still the psalm that reaches the deepest into our human sorrows. But it came as a surprising new insight to discover that Psalm 131, not often heard or used and linked with Psalm 130, provides a new insight into *De Profundis*.

My teacher was right. As believers, we shall have to learn to live with mystery. But we do not need to live as if we are orphans. We can place our faith in the steadfast love of the Lord. We can let our weight down into the arms of a loving heavenly Mother. Psalms 130 and 131 form a pair of "twin psalms." Taken together, the two of them encourage bewildered believers to let go, and to let God care for them.[6]

An old hymn catches the sense of this psalm very well:

Not haughty is my heart, not lofty is my pride;
I do not seek to know the things
God's wisdom has denied.
With childlike trust, O Lord,
in Thee I calmly rest,
Contented as a little child
upon its mother's breast.
Ye people of the Lord, in Him alone confide;
From this time forth and evermore
his wisdom be your guide.

(S. M.; may be sung to "We Give Thee but Thine Own," *LBW* #410)

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[6] In addition to the standard commentaries and the works already cited, the following are especially helpful on Psalm 131: Willem A. vanGemeren, "Psalm 131:2—*kegamul*: The Problems of Meaning and Metaphor," *Hebrew Studies* 23 (1982): 51–57; B. P. Robinson, "Form and Meaning in Psalm 131," *Biblica* 79 (1998): 179–97; Patrick D. Miller, *They Cried to the Lord* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 239–43. For helpful sermons, see H. Stephen Shoemaker, " Psalm 131," *Review and Expositor* 85 (1988): 89–94; Eberhard Jüngel, "Psalm 131" (in German) *Einfach von Gott reden*, ed. J. Roloff (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1994), 240–42.

Qoheleth: A Teacher for Our Times

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I offer no apologies for reading Qoheleth from Latin America for readers who are mostly pastors in the U.S. Today we live in one world in an increasingly important sense, and that world's "underside" is not only the largest part thereof but also the place from which the view of the whole is clearest. Also, Wesley Fuerst, whom we are honoring in this collection of studies, spent some time in Latin America.

We are at the end of a century marked by several historical efforts at social transformation to save our single globe, most of which have now ended in failure. The century opened with the peasant uprising against Porfirio Díaz's enlightened government guided by the most scientific liberal thinkers of the time. That costly social experiment died slowly of hundreds of betrayals, ending in the Free Trade agreement (NAFTA) with the world's dominant power in January of 1994. The century ended with the collapse of the greatest experiment of all, the Soviet Union, largely through the lack of will of its own leadership. The twentieth century was a great century marked by great failures which may or may not prove to be inspirations for future generations in centuries to come.

Regardless of the long-term future, which is out of our hands, the present is a bleak one. The victors in the Pyrrhic victory symbolized by the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989 believe, in the manner of many victors we have known this century, that theirs is a final and definitive victory. The economic scientists of the currently victorious Global Market, much in the manner of President Díaz's political scientists, a hundred years ago, believe that theirs is the path of the future and that there is no alternative to their Global Market. Since they firmly believe this to be so, they feel justified in imposing their "only way" through the "scientific" measures of the Enhanced Structural Adjustment Programs on the hapless poor peoples of the one world. And, because they hold a great surplus of power at this time, they can impose their way on the world.

A pupil of Qoheleth's recommends him as one who "teaches knowledge to the people" (12:9 [these numbers will in this article refer to chapter and verse of the Masoretic Text of Qoheleth, a numbering followed mostly by modern versions except in chapter 5]). It is apparent from a reading of his book of wise instructions that Qoheleth lived in a time of few opportunities when despair was widespread and when those who had the power and the wealth took full advantage of them without regard for their neighbors.[1] I would like to urge pastors and others today to consider that Qoheleth has

become in our desperate times a wise guide of unusual pertinence. Let us teach and preach Qoheleth as the wise teacher he is for the people in our time when the horizons seem to close in.[2]

Qoheleth's instruction: Everything is hevel

Qoheleth's book is not a hodgepodge of wise sayings, for it has an overall framework, an introduction and some salient poems. It is wise to begin our reading by paying attention to these markers he has given us.[3] The collection opens and closes with the same generalization, "Hevel, most hevel, says Qoheleth, the whole is hevel" (1:2 + 12:8). Hevel means vapor and is the name of Eve's son in Genesis, Abel in the English versions. The word occurs forty-one times in Qoheleth, usually as a reflection on some situation just observed by the wise teacher. Its meaning is best left open until we have seen the situations which Qoheleth characterizes as hevel.[4] After the opening generalization Qoheleth begins his instruction with a haunting poem on the repetitiveness of everything in his world. The sun rises and sets to its place, only to rise again where it began before. The wind (*ruaḥ*) whirls around from different directions, only to end up where it began. The rivers go into the sea and the sea is never filled, since the rivers start again where they began. What was done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun. What appears new and is acclaimed as such, behold, it was known before. But there is no memory of the past nor will there be memory in the future of what happens now. The poem is dizzying in its whirling repetitiveness, and its culmination in the lack of memory is a damning commentary on what Israel always believed of itself as a people that lived by remembering the saving deeds of its God.

I would like to suggest that this opening blast is a polemical statement. Hellenistic culture had arrived in Palestine. The Greek military techniques had proved in-

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[1] Most commentators agree that Qoheleth comes from the Ptolemaic Palestine of the third century B.C.E. The major exception in our time is Coon-Leong Seow, who argues in a learned fashion for a dating during the Persian empire (fifth or fourth centuries). See Seow, "Linguistic Evidence and the Dating of Qohelet," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 115 (1996), 643–66, and also his 1997 *Ecclesiastes* in the Anchor Bible Commentaries. True, there is evidence of Persian linguistic influence, but the social analysis seems to fit the Ptolomaic administration and society better.

[2] I refer to the recent and extraordinary commentary by Elsa Tamez, *Cuando los horizontes se cierran: Relectura del libro de Eclesiastés o Qohélet* (San José: Departamento Ecuménico de Investigaciones, 1998). Elsa is a major inspiration for this essay, and I gratefully acknowledge my debt to her.

[3] I say "he" with some misgivings but also with some conviction. The name Qoheleth is feminine, and it once appears with a feminine verb (7:27), precisely in a context where the content most reflects a male perspective. In the poem where Qoheleth assumes the play-role of king in Jerusalem it is a masculine role. The disciple's reflections in 12:9 assume a male teacher (a *hakam*) and the perspective in places like 9:9 ("the woman you love") and 11:9 ("young man," "your [masc.] heart") is masculine.

[4] Hevel occurs 73 times in the Hebrew Bible, often with reference to false gods in the prophets and psalms. In these cases it seems to mean both the non-reality and impotence of these gods and also the evil and stupidity of putting one's trust in them. This has a basis in the root meaning of vapor but is not the direction in which Qoheleth draws the symbol. The statistics are taken from Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann's *Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum A.T.* (München/Zürich, 1971), Vol. I, column 467.

vincible, and many young Judahites were proud to serve in such great armies. Greek administration of economic productivity had proved extraordinarily fruitful, and the Hellenistic economic organization had revolutionized the world. Hellenistic gymnasia (schools) scattered in the principal cities of Egypt and Palestine promised science, prosperity, and victory. A new age had dawned! In such a world the considered conclusion that there was nothing new under the sun was a polemical unmasking of the powers that were charming the youth of Palestine. The opening statement (1:2) in this context means something like, "nothing important at all, declares Qoheleth, it is all trivial."

Our initial look at Qoheleth's teachings reveals three large blocks that stand out of their contexts: The mental experiment with kingship (1:12–2:26), the poem on diverse times (3:1–8) and the final advice to youth (11:7–12:8). To enter Qoheleth's teaching it would seem advisable to begin with these.

It seems clear that Qoheleth was not really a king in Jerusalem. His disciple in the comment of 12:9–12 calls him simply a wise man. So we must take 1:12 as the start of a mental experiment. Qoheleth imagines himself king, and with the resources this position allows him tries life in varied forms to explore the business God has given to humans to do. He begins by exploring wisdom (1:16–18) but concludes that "knowledge adds pain," presumably because what there is to know in this world is painful and is better ignored. Next he goes in for accumulating pleasures (2:1–11), with gardens, palaces, fountains, singers, money, but his final assessment of this pursuit of pleasure is "It was all hevel and the pursuit of wind" (2:11). This led him back to pursue wisdom, for the superiority of the wise over the fool is obvious in that the wise knows where he is going while the fool walks in the dark (2:14), but the hevel of it all is that wise and fool both suffer the same fate, death (2:15–17). "This is hevel and a pursuit of wind." Worse still, after all one's effort to become wise and to undertake worthy works, one does not know who will inherit it (2:18–23); this also is hevel.

Qoheleth's conclusion is not that pleasures or wisdom or work are bad. In fact, it seems quite clear that he believes them to be good. But they do not give meaning to life; their value is relative and, above all, none of the three assures well-being. The wise man and the fool suffer the same fate. That stinks!

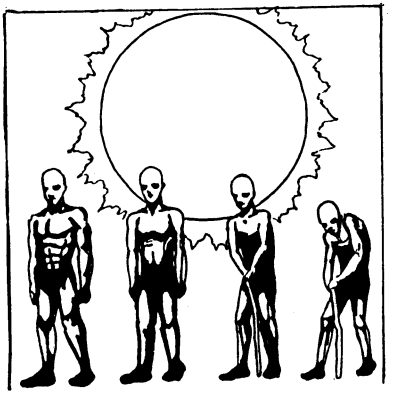
Qoheleth's next longer section is the beautiful poem on the various times (3:1–8). The intention seems to be to assure his students that there are alternatives; life is not locked into the patterns established by the superiors in this social system. Nevertheless, there is a grievous problem in that God has reserved the knowledge of the times for Godself (3:11). Thus, even though one can know that there are times for many varied activities, God has not revealed to humans what is to come nor the right time for each thing. One supposes that this is also hevel, even though Qoheleth does not say so explicitly.

Qoheleth's instructions finish with a poem addressed to youth (11:7–12:7). Its placing suggests its importance. There is a hevel-statement in 11:10, where the vapor symbol points to vanity, the quick passage of youth. Youth is definitely a good. Light is sweet (11:7) and life is meant to be enjoyed in its prime, "Rejoice, young man, in your youth and may your heart make the most of your youth (11:9). Here Qoheleth is repeating advice tendered several times before to his students, for instance: "Go, eat and enjoy your bread; drink your wine with a glad heart, for God is already pleased with your works. Let your clothes always be

white and don't deprive your head of perfume. Enjoy life with the woman you love all the days of your hevel-life which he gives you under the sun all the days of your hevel" (9:7–9). Young people should know that darkness and hevel are coming (that is, either old age or death or both), and also, surprisingly, that God will lead them to judgment for "these things" (11:8–9). Nevertheless, the main recommendation Qoheleth has for youth is to enjoy life aware of its brevity but not fearful because of what is coming. As the poem progresses it gets darker. Old age sets in, with its pains and discomforts (12:1–4). Also, it appears that the social fabric is being torn apart, the fields plagued with locusts and the houses falling apart (12:5–7). The advice stands: Enjoy!—in spite of everything. Enjoyment is possible in life, but Qoheleth's final summary of life in his world is that all is hevel, to the meaning of which we shall return.

One could imagine that life "under the sun," as Qoheleth puts it, is literally life on earth. Still, there are reasons to believe that Qoheleth is speaking much of the time about the age in which he and his students must live their lives. In other words, "under the sun" may refer to a particular historical period, probably Ptolemaic Palestine. Clues are the importance Qoheleth gives to the variety of times, even though their fixing is outside of human science, and Qoheleth grieves over the lack of memory and the inability to foresee the future in this time. Furthermore, Qoheleth has some damning observations about the world which do not appear to be generalizations about the human condition but descriptions of conditions in the society in which he and his students live. Let us look at some of these.

> I circled around and observed all the oppressions that are done under the sun; the tears of the oppressed who have none to comfort them; power is in the hand of their oppressors and they find no defender. So I praised the dead who already died more than the living who still live, and more than either those who do not yet live who do not see the evil deeds which are done under the sun. (Qoh 4:1–3)



> If oppression of the poor and suppression of judgment and justice you should see in the city, do not be surprised at this. For a high one is over a high one, and higher ones yet over them. (5:7)

The first statement looks like a prophetic denunciation of exploitation of the poor and the lack of honesty in the court system to give the poor some public defense. It could apply to many a society but does not seem to be a universal statement. The second looks like the description of a bureaucratic society. Justice is not rendered because the bureaucrat is more anxious to please his superior than he is to perform honestly the tasks before him. This description fits what we know of the administration of Palestine under the Ptolomies.

> Again, I have seen evil men buried who are taken with holy honors, and it is forgotten in the city how they behaved; this also is hevel. Since there is no judgment done with promptness upon

> the wicked, human hearts are filled with evil deeds. (8:10–11)
>
> There is a hevel which is done on the earth: There are just persons who meet with the consequences of the evil ones, while there are evil persons who benefit from the consequences of the just. I declare that this also is hevel. (8:14)

The age is one in which values are inverted. Wickedness thrives because its perpetuators are not brought to justice. It is painful to see that a wicked man is given funeral honors in total disregard for the evils he caused the city in his lifetime. That is hevel, a judgment which begins to take on a tone of damnation. After the second quote above Qoheleth does not just observe that this is hevel but *declares* it to be so. This begins to give us a better idea of what this teacher means by his repetitive declarations of hevel upon his society.

There is a common practice in his world which Qoheleth judges to be "hevel and a bad business":

> There was one and not two, neither a son nor a brother to him, and yet there was no end to his grievous labor; his eyes didn't even enjoy his wealth; "for whom am I toiling and depriving my soul of the good?" This also is hevel and a bad business. (4:8)
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> One loves money and never has enough of it. And who loves wealth and has no produce? This also is hevel. (5:9)

Not surprisingly, in the thriving economy of Qoheleth's time one could observe those who put all their efforts into accumulating wealth. Even without considering their lack of disposition to defend the oppressed or even comfort the poor, this is a bad business. It easily and frequently becomes a life of all work with no pleasure. And Qoheleth had also reached the well-known conclusion that the accumulation of money has no end. It is absurd that one should never have enough, that there should not be an enough of the accumulation of money. This is a characteristic of any economy built on making wealth for whoever is capable of doing so, with little or no consideration for the community.

Interestingly, one of the most troublesome features of his world for Qoheleth was the loss of memory (1:11; 2:16). Our teacher may have been especially sensitive to history because of the traditions of his people, the people of Israel. On the other hand, when Qoheleth speaks of God he does not speak of deeds performed in the past. His concern seems rather to do with the fact that it makes little difference to be wise or foolish if neither the one nor the other is remembered by their successors (2:16). When a society builds its wealth on forgetting its traditional values and suppressing the values of those who are defeated in the race for wealth, it must perforce live without history. This is suicidal, however. To have no memory of those who went before is to condemn the present generation to disappear into oblivion after its passing. This is hevel!

And, finally, Qoheleth characterizes his world as a society in which the wise are not honored. There is a little parable whose translation is not certain but whose meaning seems reasonably clear which underlines this point:

> I have seen wisdom under the sun, and great in my opinion: A small city with few men in it, once a great king came against it and surrounded it and built great towers against it. Now there was in it a wise man who was poor who could have saved the city with his wisdom. But no one remembered that poor man. I say: Better is wisdom than grandness, but wisdom is despised and its counsels are not listened to. (9:13–16)

Qoheleth's society has become bewitched by wealth so that it can no longer recognize

wisdom when it sees it and when it needs it. This is of course related to the forgetfulness of history. When wealth becomes the dominating value in a historical epoch traditional values become submerged. Nobody recognizes them anymore. Wisdom and joy and work are universal values, for Qoheleth, but in his world they have been devalued so they do not bring the social benefits they ought to bring.

Qoheleth's world "under the sun" combines considerations that apply to every place and every time with observations that have to do particularly with his historical period. We have tried to separate them in this section of our paper for clarity's sake, though Qoheleth himself in his teaching seems not to have concerned himself to do so. We are now ready to consider Qoheleth's overall judgment of hevel.

We recall to the reader that the basic symbol in hevel is that of vapor or mist. What precisely Qoheleth means by calling "everything" hevel we must discover from the uses to which he puts it.[5] Twice Qoheleth "declares" (*'amar*) that everything (*hakkol*) is hevel, in the opening and the concluding statements (1:2 and 12:8). Here we have, without doubt, the deepest expression of Qoheleth's rejection of the way things are. We could try to render it into English, "Swirling vapors, declares Qoheleth, this whole world stinks."[6] This is a declarative statement, not a simple affirmation of a matter of fact. It carries conviction and expresses the revulsion of the speaker. A declaration like this includes the person of the speaker in that while it says something about its object, the whole world, it also expresses the speaker's violent rejection of the world. I propose the sense of the English, "It stinks!"

That it all stinks is the overall verdict of Qoheleth, but not every use of hevel in his teaching has this precise significance. In the early poem with the mental experiment of Qoheleth as king of Jerusalem twice Qoheleth claims to have "seen" that such and such was hevel (1:14, 2:11) and to have thought it twice ("I spoke to my heart," 2:1 and 2:15). What was seen to be hevel in these cases were deeds performed under the sun (1:14) and work (2:11). Qoheleth thought, besides, that pleasures were hevel (2:1) and that the wise person and the fool suffer the same fate (2:15). Work, pleasure, and wisdom are not evil in themselves. They don't stink, so to speak. They are, in fact, positive facts in Qoheleth's view of reality. But they don't perform as one would expect and hope. Their value is relative, because in the end we all die, regardless of the deeds we performed, the

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[5] In a very suggestive article Ana Maria Rizzante and Sandro Gallazzi propose that Qoheleth is a silent observer at the festive gatherings in Israel. This would be appropriate for a woman, that is, to listen and observe but not to speak. The sole feminine grammatical context in 7:27, where negative remarks are made about women, would then be a sarcastic use. The remarks of the disciple in the epilogues (12:9–14) would be irrelevant to determining the gender of Qoheleth, according to this couple of biblical scholars from Macapá at the mouth of the Amazon river. See "O teste dos olhos, o teste da casa, o teste do túmulo (Uma chave de leitura do livro de Qohelet)," in *Revista de Interpretação Bíblica Latino-Americana* 14 (1993): 50–72.

[6] An excellent recent article by Douglas B. Miller analyzes "Qohelet's Symbolic Use of Hevel" (*Journal of Biblical Literature* 117 (1998): 437–54. Miller finds that the symbol ties together three different expressions of Qoheleth, which somewhat pedantically he names Insubstantiality, Transience, and Foulness. We agree with this analysis, and are now discussing the third application of the symbol, Foulness. In her commentary, Elsa Tamez discusses the use of hevel on pp. 20–21, where she favors "mierda!"—literally "shit!" in English.

Qoheleth's most considered statement on life in his world is that it stinks.

pleasures we enjoyed, or the wisdom we discovered. Here we might think that hevel refers to the absurd, the meaningless.[7]

In one case hevel refers clearly to the transience of vapor. This is when Qoheleth is speaking of youth in 11:10, "Keep worry from your heart and pain from your body, for youth and the dawn of life are hevel." Here the quality of vapor that Qoheleth has in mind is its vanity; it is there in the early morning and when the sun comes out it dissipates. The traditional translation, "vanity," is an appropriate one in this case.

Twice Qoheleth uses hevel as an adjective with a person's life, once his own (7:15) and once his disciple's (9:9). "I saw everything in the days of my hevel-life: There was a just person who was destroyed in his/her justice while an evil person extended her/his life in all its evil" and "Look! Live with the woman you love all the days of your hevel-life." These cases are difficult to translate because they seem to combine the sense of vanity with that of absurdity. Life is vapor because it passes quickly, but it is also vapor because it lacks clear and positive meaning (it is absurd). These two examples show how the root symbol, "vapor," serves to unify Qoheleth's reflections on his world. In the end, nonetheless, Qoheleth's most considered statement on life in his world is that it stinks, and this is the way we ought to understand the framing statements declaring it hevel.

What is Qoheleth's advice for this hevel-life?

Qoheleth sees no prospect for changing this desperate situation within which he and his students must live the hevel-life God grants them. Says he:

> I observed all the things which are done under the sun and, behold, all is hevel and a pursuit of wind. What is twisted cannot be straightened, and it is not possible to count all that is lacking. (1:14–15)

This is a basic reality within which we must live our lives. What is wrong with our world with all the injustices we observe, is beyond our power to change. No revolution is possible. And to add injury to insult the end for all, wise and foolish, human and beast, is death:

> For the lot of humans and the lot of beasts is one; as one dies so does the other, and there is one breath to all; there is no benefit of humans over animals, for all is hevel. All go to the same place. All came from dust and all return to dust. (3:19–20)

> There is one lot for all, for the just and for the evil one, for the good and for the pure and for the impure, for the one who sacrifices and the one who does not, the good and the sinner alike, the one who vows and the one who abstains from vows. This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that there is one lot for all, and the heart of humans is full of evil and follies all their lives, and after comes death! And while one is chosen among the living there is one sure thing, for a

[7] This corresponds to the first of Miller's three senses of the symbol hevel (mist), that is, Insubstantiality.

> living dog is better than a dead lion! For the living know that they will die, but the dead don't know anything. (9:2–5a)

Qoheleth teaches that reality must be faced, and this is what his inquiries have led him to believe is the reality of his time. Nothing can be changed, and we all face a common dreary future, a death in which there is no memory or joy. How should one live one's life in such a situation?

Religion. Qoheleth believes in God in a sense, and he recommends that his disciples practice religion. God is indeed in his place, as the king in his, but this is small comfort since we don't know and can't know what God intends with what God does and there is no point in questioning what God does since we will have to accept it anyway whatever the reasons:

> Observe the work of God! Who can straighten what he has twisted? In the day of good, enjoy it! And in the evil day, reflect! The one and the other were made by God, so that humans might not discover anything that comes after them. (7:13–14)

And sometimes what God does, frankly, stinks. Regardless, the wise person lives within the parameters of given reality:

> There is an evil I have seen under the sun, and it is a common human evil: A man to whom God gives wealth and goods and honor and there is nothing he wishes which is denied him, but God doesn't give him the power to enjoy it and a stranger does. This stinks and is a grave evil! If a man should engender a hundred children and live many years, having many days of life, but if his soul has no satisfaction in the good and he does not find burial, I say that the abortive is better than he! For he came in in meaninglessness (hevel) and he went out in darkness, leaving his name covered by darkness. Neither did he see the sun nor know rest from this or from that. Even should he live one thousand years twice and not see the good, will not all end in the same place? (6:1–6)

This is an incomprehensible evil God gives to humans. There is indeed a time for everything, but God conceals the times from humans:

> Everything is beautiful in its moment, and [God] has put eternity in their hearts except that humans don't discover the deeds which God performs, either the beginning or the end. (3:11)

Faced with this divine reality which his explorations have revealed to him, and most of all the reality of human incapacity to know what God proposes, the best course before God is caution (as also before the king). Go to church. Make your sacrifices. But watch what you say and don't make a fool of yourself saying things about God which are not true or which you do not know for a fact:

> Watch your feet when you go to the House of God! And approach it more to listen than with a fool's sacrifice, for they don't know it is evil. Don't hasten to open your mouth or to utter a matter before God, for God is in heaven and you are on the earth. Therefore let your words be few! (4:17–5:1)

Qoheleth is most assuredly not a rebel in religion like his colleague Job. In his instruction we will find no grand accusations against divine injustice. Neither is he prepared to repeat the stories about God's merciful and powerful deeds in the past. It is best not to utter praise when our observations don't bear out their traditional content. But neither is Qoheleth a cynic, for in spite of his many questions he clings to the belief that in the end there will be justice:

> Because there is no swift retribution for evil deeds, therefore the heart of humans continues in evil. For the sinner

> does evil and extends his time, although I know that there will be good for those who fear God, who fear before Him. And good will not be for the unjust one and he will not extend his days as the shadow because he did not fear before God. (8:11–13)

This is a surprising statement for one who begins with a harsh reality, one which has not allowed conclusions about God's justice in human affairs. But Qoheleth is not a philosophical pessimist, just a skeptical realist who clings to a basic religious faith even though he is not able to affirm it with conviction, considering his negative conclusions about reality.

Conventional wisdom. Proverbs and Qoheleth are placed side by side in our English Bibles, following the Septuagint and Vulgate in this. Clearly, the organizers of the holy books wanted to bring out a continuity and a contrast. (In the Hebrew Bible Qoheleth is placed among the five scrolls and is separated from Proverbs in Israeli editions by Job, Song of Songs, Ruth, and Lamentations, and in the Stuttgart editions by Ruth and the Song of Songs.) Whereas in the Hebrew Bible the Writings begin with the Psalms, followed by Job and Proverbs or Proverbs and Job, our English Bibles have inverted the order, that is, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Qoheleth. This reflects a recognition that Job doesn't really fit in the series with Proverbs but Qoheleth does. This is correct. Much of the instructions Qoheleth gives for the living of this hevel-life are simply repetitions of conventional wisdom in areas like seeking wisdom and avoiding folly, speaking with caution, and not provoking the king. Whole sections of his book of instruction would fit perfectly well in the Book of Proverbs. Thus 7:7–10 warn about the effects of bribes and advise against anger; 10:8–11 warn of the negative effects of one's actions, of things that should be avoided to stay out of trouble; and 10:18–20 speak in a very conventional manner about the evil consequences of sloth, the goodness of having money, and the dangers of speaking ill about the king even in private.

And yet, Qoheleth is certainly not a conventional teacher, for his observations have led him to mistrust conventional wisdom. Although not a rebel against the wisdom of his teachers, he is very aware of the limits of this wisdom. His advice is then: Follow the wisdom of the elders, but don't trust it!

> I saw everything in my days of hevel. There is a just man who perishes in his justice and there is a wicked one who extends his days in his wickedness. Do not be too just, and do not be too wise; why destroy yourself? Don't be too evil, either, or too foolish; why die before your time? Hold onto what is good, and neither slacken your grip on this, because he who fears God succeeds in all. (7:15–18)

Qoheleth is surprisingly conservative in his practical advice, considering that his research has not confirmed the universal success of the wise or the just person.

Work. The word chosen by Qoheleth to speak of work already reveals his perspective on the subject. Twenty-two times we find the work *'amal*, which connotes the harsh and tedious side of labor that we designate "toil" in English; never the more common and less charged word *'abodah*, simply "work" in English. His more neutral reference to the subject is made with words like *'asah*, the verb "to do," and *'inyan*, "business." But his preferred word is definitely *'amal*.

Qoheleth's general evaluation of work is that it is hevel, apparently in the sense of meaninglessness or of no substance. So it is in the first reflection on the subject:

> I gave myself to search and investigate wisely into all that is done [a form of *'asah*] under the sun, which is a bad business [*'inyan*] God gives to humans to do. I saw the deeds which are done under the sun, and, behold, it is all hevel and grasping the wind. (1:13–14)

As he returns to the subject, the most painful aspect of this hevel is not to know what will be the outcome of one's toils or who will benefit from what one has done with such effort:

> I hated all my toils [*'amal*] with which I toiled under the sun which I shall leave to one who comes after me. Who knows whether he will be wise or foolish who administers all my toil with which I toiled and which I considered wisely under the sun. This also is hevel. (2:18–19)

> For there was a man who toiled with wisdom and knowledge and ability, and to one who did not toil he left it; this is hevel and a great evil. For what remains to a man of all his labors [*'amal*] and the pain of his heart with which he labored under the sun? For all his days were pain and his business trouble, not even by night did his heart sleep. This also is hevel. (2:21–23)

In spite of the pain produced by labor and the ignorance of who the beneficiary of one's effort will be in the end, Qoheleth's recommendation is to do what God has set before one as one's portion in one's life:

> And I saw that there is nothing better for a person than to enjoy his works [a variant of *'asah*] for that is his portion, for who can show him what will be after him? (2:22)

Again, we find a surprisingly conservative conclusion when it comes to practical advice. After Qoheleth has warned his students of the pain of labor and the uncertainties about its results, his advice is to do one's work and enjoy it!

Life and death. Sometimes it appears that Qoheleth has nothing to offer. He seems to counsel death rather than life. But this cannot be so, or he would not have taken the trouble of writing a book of advice for young people. The deceptive factor is that Qoheleth thinks that this life in this world in which he and his students live stinks. It is, nevertheless, a world which has its attractions for those who are able to make money and enjoy the pleasures it has to offer. So the first lesson the student must learn is to recognize the stench, so to speak. This is why Qoheleth sometimes sounds as if he had nothing to offer. Let us see:

> And I turned and saw the oppressions which are done under the sun and, behold, tears of the oppressed and there were none to comfort them! Nor were there any to defend them from their oppressors! So I praised the dead who have already died more than the living who are still alive. And better than either are those who are not yet, who have not seen the evil deeds which are done under the sun. (4:1–3)

In this world where nobody cares about the victims of "progress" it would be better to have already died and better still to not have been born yet!

Let us follow Qoheleth's teaching a little farther on this subject:

> A good name is better than fine perfume, and the day of death than the day of birth. It is better to go to the house of a wake than to the house of joy because this is the end of all humans and the living can take it to heart. Pain is better than joy because through the evil of the surface the heart is improved. The heart of the wise is in the house of the wake while the heart of the fool in the house of joy. It is better to listen to the reproof of the wise than to listen to the song of the fool, because the sound of thorns under the pot, thus is the laughter of the fool! This, too, is hevel. (7:1–6)

> For the living know they will die, but the dead don't know anything, and there is no reward for them because their memory is forgotten. (9:5)

We learn from this final counsel that at least the living have one advantage over the dead, they know that they will die! This minimal difference makes life worth living! But, if this is the difference between the living and the dead, it is well to remind oneself of one's coming death and preserve the advantage. The situation stinks, but it is better than the alternative.

Some positive advice: Practice solidarity! We have learned that life stinks, and that is the beginning of wisdom. But there are some positive recommendations Qoheleth can offer his students for their hevel-lives. The first is this: Practice solidarity! Don't be caught alone!

> Two are better than one; there is gain for them in their toil. For if one should fall, his buddy will lift him up. But if the lonely one falls there is none to lift him. Again, if two sleep together they will heat each other, but how will the solitary one heat himself? And if one is attacked two can stand together, and a rope of three strands is not easily broken. (4:9–12)

The message of 11:1–2 appears to be similar although, since it is given in symbolic language, the precise meaning is not fully transparent:

> Toss your bread on the waters, for after many days you will find it. Give a portion to seven, and even to eight, for you do not know when there will be evil on the earth. (11:1–2)

The idea here seems to be to practice generosity so that when the evil day comes there may be those who will be generous with one. The parable about the bread makes no sense literally, but when read along with the second saying seems to mean the same thing.

More advice: Enjoy yourself while you can! The most important advice Qoheleth has is to get as much enjoyment as possible out of life when one can. Life is a sorry business under the sun, but it does permit moments of pleasure. One must make the most of these moments. It is true that pleasure like toil is hevel. But, again like toil, it can make life worth living. This is an important theme, and Qoheleth returns to it often:

> I said to myself: Go, now, and test pleasure and contemplate the good, but, behold, that was hevel. (2:1)

> Behold, I saw that it is good and fine to eat and drink and to enjoy good things in the midst of one's toil with which one toils under the sun the number of the days which God gives for that is one's portion. Again, everyone to whom God gives wealth and goods and the ability to use [literally, eat] them, to take one's portion and to enjoy one's toil, this is a gift of God. For the days of one's life will not long be remembered but God allows your heart to enjoy. (5:17–19)

> As for me, I praise pleasure, because there is nothing better for a person under the sun than to eat, drink and be happy, and that will accompany him in his toils the days of his life which God gives him under the sun. (8:15)

> Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a light heart, for God already takes pleasure in your deeds [variant of *'asah*]. Let your clothes be always white and do not spare the perfume for your head. See, live with the woman you love and the days of your hevel-life which he gives you under the sun all the days of your hevel, for this is your portion in life and in your toils with which you toil under the sun. (9:7–9)

This series of counsels to enjoy life scat-

tered through the book of instructions, plus the specific one addressed to youth for the fleeting days of their youth (11:9–10) make up a view of life which can hardly be called pessimistic. Life is indeed a bummer in a time when injustice prevails and the rich care only for their own wealth, but in this difficult situation without any guarantees from God and much assistance from wisdom and science, it is possible and necessary to enjoy the small pleasures which life allows. This is the portion God gives, and God doesn't begrudge humans these small pleasures.

A teaching for our times?

This is a time when we are told insistently that there are no alternatives. World organizations like the World Trade Organization are set up to guarantee that governments not interfere with the functioning of the transnational corporations that direct the global economy. Labor unions are put under ever stricter controls to assure that they not interfere with the profit-making activities of corporations. Poor countries are policed by the multinational financial organizations, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, to assure that they facilitate to a maximum the flow of money and goods out of and into their borders and that they not deflect resources into the support of the health, nourishment, or education of their peoples. It is no longer affirmed that there will be development for the poor. Mozambique, the poorest country in the world, has faithfully met the requirements of the IMF for years but is more deeply in debt than ever before and its people deeper in poverty than ever before. After the devastating hurricane of October, 1998, Mr. Michel Camdessus, Director General of the IMF, visited the region and promised significant reduction of the debt burden to Honduras and Nicaragua, if they stick faithfully to the prescriptions of the international banks, prescriptions which guarantee that they will shortly be "safely" back into the fold of deeply indebted countries with no alternatives but to do what their debtors impose. The medicine is tough, they are told, but there is no alternative.

How can we live our short lives in such a hopeless world? Qoheleth starts by reminding us that we must firmly reject a world which is hevel, which stinks. There is a time for everything, a time for the global market and a time to disarticulate the global market. We should, however, not be naive. God controls the times and does not reveal to humans the rhythms they will follow. Our lives are short and we cannot straighten what God has twisted, nor can we wait until the time when things will be different. Don't fight the system. But resist it! You can't change it, but you don't have to play along with it.

Life is vanity, for shortly it is over and we are buried. But life does have its good points. It is possible to find satisfaction in one's work, even though one can't be sure that it will last or that it will benefit the right people. Work is in the end meaningless, but it does give some provisional satisfactions, so do it well! Wisdom is better than folly. Even though society in such a time as this does not favor or recognize the wise, they have eyes in their heads and can see where they are going. The fool can't even find his way to the city. Don't knock yourself out to acquire wisdom, but acquire what you can and enjoy the knowledge you get, even if you are not recognized for it. Life is meaningless and life is short, but it has its pleasures: Eat when you can, drink when you get a chance, enjoy the love you share with your partner and the friendships you can cultivate. Don't dream big dreams which you cannot accomplish, but enjoy the small

pleasures in life. Be generous and support the needs of those who lack the basics. And, above all, take as much pleasure as becomes available to you in this lousy life you are given to live.

This is not a Christian teaching. Christians follow another teacher who asked us to take up our cross and follow him. The twentieth century after Christ produced more heroic followers of this sort than most centuries: Emiliano Zapata, Mahatma Gandhi, Augusto Sandino, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Ho Chi Minh, Martin Luther King, Jr., Ernesto "Che" Guevara, Nelson Mandela, and many more. Most of them failed, and were killed in their youth, as Jesus failed and was killed in his youth. Still, to them it seemed worthwhile to give their lives in the struggle for an alternative which was costly but worth giving one's life for. Many of the heroic figures of this past century were able to achieve significant changes in the societies for which they gave themselves. But it seems as if the next century will be different. Like the Hellenistic Empires in the days of Qoheleth, the Global Market looks firmly entrenched for the time being.

Obviously, the call of Jesus was not intended only for times when success could be expected in social transformations. But Qoheleth may be a wiser teacher for the bleaker times some generations must face. Qoheleth shares with Jesus a rejection of the structures of "this world." The difference comes in his advice for living "under the sun," a sun which is hostile to ordinary humans in their life. Qoheleth is less sanguine than Jesus about the active support of God for the redemption of society, for what Jesus called the kingdom of God. And from the point of view of Latin America at the end of a century of failures, it looks like Qoheleth is nearer to the truth than Jesus. Perhaps following Jesus in such a time calls for what Paul called "hope against hope," a

How can we live our short lives in such a hopeless world?

desperate faith that the alternatives need not be for some indeterminate future generation. Not many people in our time are ready to follow Jesus, even those who pronounce his name with affection in their daily prayers. For most of humanity today, including the poor who are the victims of a global system that stinks, Qoheleth seems to offer a teaching that is closer to reality.

For myself, I confess I am still attracted to Jesus and his heroic call to take up the cross and give one's life for God's kingdom. But for the living of these days I find Qoheleth extraordinarily insightful. Even heroes who are ready to take up crosses must find enjoyment in the hevel-lives they are forced to live. Even for them, Qoheleth has a word of wisdom by which they can live in honest rejection of a world that stinks while they engage in the slow process of building alternatives for a better day.

Book Reviews

The Language and Imagery of the Bible. By George B. Caird (with a new Introduction by N. T. Wright). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997. 280 Pages. Paper. $24.00.

This 1980 classic is now available (and affordable) in paperback. Caird was a premier British scholar of the Bible (d. 1984) who was also a masterful linguist. In this volume, he begins by laying out an analysis of the dynamics and functions of language. He then proceeds to discuss the biblical writings, with great respect for the subtle and beautiful ways the authors of the Bible used language. Far from being pedestrian and literal, the biblical writers knew what they were doing when they used imagery, idiom, simile, metaphor, and myth. And they were quite capable of opacity, vagueness, and ambiguity.

Caird works his way through the meaning and rhetoric of biblical language with numerous examples from both Old and New Testaments. The book comes to a climax with his treatment of eschatology, in which he argues that the prophets of the Bible did not literally expect the end of the world. Rather, they used end-time language in a metaphorical and mythical way to depict the ultimate nature of an imminent historical crisis. Caird's viewpoint provides an original contribution to the current debate about whether Jesus and the early Christians did or did not expect the end of history.

Caird's book is full of examples of the richness of biblical language. His book runs directly counter to the flatfooted way in which fundamentalists often view the biblical writings. The new introduction by N. T. Wright, which offers personal reflections on Caird's life and work, is a wonderful addition. And, of course, Caird's own engaging style in itself makes for delightful reading. For preachers, teachers, and any student of the Bible who wishes to appreciate the power and beauty of its language, this is well worth reading.

David Rhoads
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The Source of Life: The Holy Spirit and the Theology of Life. By Jürgen Moltmann. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997. 148 pages. Paper. $16.00.

Jürgen Moltmann has given the church a wonderful gift! Moltmann, one of the giants in the theological world in the second half of the 20th century, treated the subject of the Holy Spirit in a formal dogmatic manner in his book *The Spirit of Life*, 1991. The present book is a rendition of that larger work for the general priesthood of believers. Moltmann sees "theology" as a task of every believer and he therefore wishes to set forth his theology of the Spirit in such a way that the whole church might read and think about life and the Spirit.

As the titles of both books indicate, Moltmann's basic understanding of the person and work of the Holy Spirit is in keeping with the Nicene Creed's confession of the Holy Spirit as the *Lord and Giver of Life*. Where Jesus is, there is life. This is Moltmann's argument. And since the Holy Spirit carries on the ministry of Jesus it is also true to say that where the Holy Spirit is, there is life. Humans need life, argues Moltmann. The Holy Spirit brings life, "whole, full, and undivided life." Moltmann's take on the Holy Spirit demonstrates itself to be fundamentally biblical and spoken forth in the down-to-earth realities of life and death.

Beyond being a summary of *The Spirit of Life*, the present work includes some lectures on the Spirit that Moltmann has given since the publication of the earlier book. This causes some unevenness in the presentation, but this is a minor problem. Let me say it straight: I know of no better book on the life and work of the Holy Spirit that can be used in congregations today than this marvelous gem from the hand of Jürgen Moltmann. I cannot find words to recommend it highly enough.

The book responds to at least four crucial

needs. The first of these I have already stated: Moltmann has given us a sophisticated, brief, and easily accessible treatment of the Holy Spirit that can be used in a congregational setting.

Second, it responds to the needs of the busy parish pastor. Not many of us will have the time to read his tome, *The Spirit of Life*. We do have the time to read this newer book! It is not long; it is not difficult reading; it is direct and to the point and will challenge and assist us in many areas of our ministry. It has been a number of years since I taught systematic theology, but reading this book made me zealous to get back in the systematic classroom and share the treasures of this book with those training for ministry in Christ's church. *The Source of Life* is simply one of the best theological books I have ever read.

Third, Moltmann has helped to demystify a subject that is often puzzling to pastors and parishioners alike. What is all this Holy Spirit business anyway? What difference does it make for ministry? Moltmann's work speaks to these issues in a clear and persuasive manner. This is a work with a wide variety of practical implications for our work as pastors and teachers in the church.

Fourth, and perhaps most important, this little book speaks a very clear word on the matter of Christian spirituality. Spirituality is everywhere today. We are confronted with a grand variety of spiritual prescriptions for life. Look in any bookstore: the demand is overwhelming. People are searching. They are also quite gullible. People are almost *too* "spiritual" today. They seem to buy any old spiritual kind of advice that comes along. In the context of today's plurality of spiritualities, Moltmann's book comes as a breath of fresh Holy Spirit air! His chapter on "life's new spirituality" may well be worth the price of the book. There also are chapters on prayer, charismatic gifts, and sanctification.

Moltmann's fundamental assertion about spirituality that wishes to be Christian is that it must always involve both body and soul. Paul tells us that our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit. Moltmann mounts a polemic against spiritualities that are only of the soul variety. He attributes such spiritualities to the influence of Plato, gnosticism, and Augustine. In this sentence Moltmann puts his finger on the fundamental problem: "God's Spirit was no longer viewed as 'the source of life'; it was now the Spirit who redeems the soul from the prison of the mortal body" (p. 75). What was created was a gnostic-influenced spirituality, "a mild, nonsensuous spirituality, hostile towards the body, remote from the world, and completely unpolitical" (p. 75). Versus Augustine, Moltmann contends that the image of God is not hidden in the innermost chamber of the soul. Whereas most of today's spiritualities find their home here calling us to seek within ourselves for the divine, Moltmann writes: "According to the biblical traditions, God's image is not to be found in every individual soul, elevated above the body. It is men and women in their wholeness, in their natural community with one another, who are God's image.... This is a social concept... this tells us that God is not perceived through self-knowledge in the depths of the individual soul" (p. 79). Moltmann claims that there is no "Christian" mysticism of the soul without a mysticism of the body. There is much food for thought here for our contemporary discussions of spirituality.

The Source of Life is a practical, embodied, down-to-earth treatment of the person and work of the Holy Spirit for all who turn its pages. Do yourself a favor. Read this book!

Richard A. Jensen
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Martin Luther: Learning for Life. By Marilyn J. Harran. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1997. 284 pages. Paper. $16.99.

This book is for those who have an interest in the Reformation and education. Main themes include: Luther's education in school, university, and cloister and how it shaped his education vision; his impact on education for that time and his place in the history of education; the relationship between religious and curricular reform.

Harran makes a strong case for how Luther expanded the possibilities of education as never before. Luther argued for more funding for schools and libraries, for support for needy students, and for adequate pay for teachers. Not all

reformers were equally committed to education but saw education as a threat.

Luther's emphasis on education is closely linked with his concept of the priesthood of all believers which transformed the status of the laity. Education therefore is joined to vocation. Justification by faith frees all Christians to act freely in the world, as a servant of Christ under bondage to no one. Literacy undergirded vocation for all; Luther advocated education for girls as well as boys, a radical concept for that day. (Educational and vocational equality is still not fully implemented today in some quarters.)

This work is well documented and highly readable. It opens us to seeing Luther's reforming work as an educator as well as a theologian. One is reminded of the work of F. V. N. Painter, *Luther on Education* (Concordia Publishing House, 1889).

Marilyn Harran is Professor of Religion and History at Chapman University, Orange, California. This work stems from her experiences in Leipzig, Germany, during the fall of 1989 when she witnessed the role of pastors in leading to a peaceful revolution which had vast implications for freedom, education, and society. She sees also the vast impact of the information highway globally and the possibilities for building new community.

Norma Cook Everist
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Theology of Creation in an Evolutionary World. By Karl Schmitz-Moormann in collaboration with James F. Salmon, S. J. Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1997. xiv and 205 pages. Paper. $18.95.

Teilhard de Chardin's attempt to integrate evolution and Christian thought has been an important part of science-theology dialogue. But his writings are difficult for the uninitiated, and considerable scientific and theological development has taken place since his death. The present book, in a Teilhardian spirit but clear, up to date, and providing its own insights, is thus welcome. Karl Schmitz-Moormann was, until his death in 1996, the translator and coeditor of the German edition of Teilhard's works. His collaborator is a chemist and theologian.

The entire universe is evolving, and the challenge is to construct a view of creation consistent with that reality and with the developing Christian tradition. Chapter 1 sets out "Theology of Creation as a Permanent Task." If our understanding of creation is to deal with the real world, it must take into account what science tells us about the world. As scientific knowledge changes, the forms theology takes will change as well. In particular, the basically static pictures of the universe held in earlier centuries by both scientists and theologians must be given up. We will be asked to think of "*creatio appellata*,... a universe called forth out of nothingness toward God" (p. 121).

This modern view of an evolving cosmos is sketched in chapter 2, and following chapters deal with development of consciousness, information, and freedom. The final chapter synthesizes these concepts in a trinitarian vision of the creator. But that doesn't end the book. There is an appendix with several pages of study questions, as well as numerous references and notes. Many of the scientific references are to *Scientific American* articles, making them accessible to nonspecialists.

It is repeatedly emphasized that we must judge significance of phenomena by quality and not merely quantity. The consciousness which has evolved in our tiny portion of the universe should not be ignored in comparison with far larger but perhaps lifeless regions. Unfortunately this valid point is obscured by a repeated but incorrect statement that most of the energy of the universe resides in the microwave background radiation.

It is crucial for the church to develop a theology that takes evolution seriously and to do so in a way that can be communicated to laypeople. While some points, such as the role of natural selection, need more emphasis, the present book provides a helpful beginning of this task.

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Virtual Faith: The Irreverent Spiritual Quest of Generation X. By Tom Beaudoin. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998. xxiii and 210 pages. Cloth. $22.00.

Did you ever think of MTV as a religious channel? Tom Beaudoin in *Virtual Faith* might just convince you that this is the case. For beneath the irreverence of GenX pop culture, Beaudoin identifies the elements of a deep spiritual quest. To argue his case, the author makes particular reference to the images and words of five recent music videos, from Madonna's "Like a Prayer" to R.E.M.'s "Losing My Religion." Enough description of the content of these videos is offered to keep the reader's interest, although actually seeing the videos would deepen appreciation for the argument. Beaudoin provides a contemporary analysis of culture according to Tillich's method of correlation in which pop culture poses spiritual questions which the church through its theology is challenged to address.

Four major themes emerge to characterize the nature of GenX religiosity. First, institutions are suspect. The institutional church and its clergy are held in contempt for their hypocrisy and irrelevance. Second, experience is key. If religion is to prove itself valid, its primary appeal must be through providing personal experience of the sacred. Third, suffering has a religious dimension. GenX has a genuine sensitivity to human suffering, based on its own deep longing to find meaning in the face of the absurd. Fourth, ambiguity is central to faith. This is a generation reluctant to submit to orthodoxies of any kind and willing to tolerate uncertainty as a dimension of faith. A chapter is devoted to each of these four characteristics and each is abundantly illustrated with examples from contemporary culture.

Beaudoin offers guidance to a church that desires to minister to the spiritual quest of GenX. He sees the mystery of the liturgy, an undomesticated Jesus, an openness to ecumenism, and courageous orthopraxis as elements of an approach that can speak authentically to their search for God. The irreverence of GenX—body piercing, tattoos, and so on—are not merely designed to repulse but are signs of a genuine search for identity and meaning. The church must have eyes to see and ears to hear the deeply religious questions being posed.

Beaudoin concludes his book with these words: "The more popular culture is explored, and the more irreverence is viewed as a legitimate mode of religiosity (in all its illegitimacy), the more Generation X will be shown as having a real religious contribution to make. GenX can make great strides not only toward fostering its own spirituality but also toward reinvigorating religious institutions and challenging the faith of older generations" (p. 180). How prepared is our church to take up the challenge posed by GenX to repent of its hypocrisies and to address the young people of this generation in an idiom which effectively communicates the gospel for which they long?

Craig Nessan
Wartburg Theological Seminary

Call and Response: Biblical Foundations of a Theology of Evangelism. By Walter Klaiber. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998. 272 pages. Paper. $19.95.

What expectations do you have when you open a book on evangelism? My expectations are for a heavy emphasis on "how to," practical and programmatic suggestions for carrying out the evangelism task. For me that would be true even for a book whose subtitle is *Biblical Foundations of a Theology of Evangelism.* In my own experience I do not expect a book on evangelism to be very theological.

Walter Klaiber's *Call and Response* is very theological. The book is a translation of a German work originally published in 1990 as *Ruf und Antwort: Biblische Grundlagen einer theologie der Evangelisation.* Klaiber is Bishop of the German Area of The United Methodist Church. When I realized that the author was German, I was not surprised to discover that he begins the book by reviewing the understanding of evangelism throughout history and analyzing contemporary understandings of the word in the light of biblical language.

Klaiber faithfully delivers on his promise to present the Bible basis for a theology of evangelism. The chapter on "The Gospel of Evangelistic Preaching" is a gem. With first-rate biblical

scholarship he distinguishes three New Testament ways of saying what the gospel is. For the synoptic writers it is the gospel of the kingdom. For the apostle Paul it is the word of the cross. For the Johannine literature it is the word became flesh. In each case Klaiber describes the missionary character of the message, which, though it can be presented in various forms, is one gospel. In a separate chapter Klaiber points out how the one gospel is shaped and nuanced by the many situations to which it is addressed.

Very helpful are his chapters on "Divine Action and Human Response" and "Salvation and Decision: A Systematic Reflection." His biblical analysis is a corrective to easy assumptions about "decisions for Christ." While affirming that we human beings can say No to God's grace, Klaiber asserts the primacy of God's action in evangelism.

Klaiber makes it clear from the New Testament that evangelism must be a priority for the church. His book is a good dose of realism concerning what the evangelism task is and how we should go about it.

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A Case for Excellence: Case Studies in Congregational Ministry. By Glenn L. Borreson. Lima, OH: CSS Publishing Co., 1998. 173 pages. Paper. $15.95.

This compilation of materials by Glenn Borreson is a valuable introduction to the case study method. I used the book with a group of Korean pastors in a Doctor of Ministry program at Hyup Sung University. It proved very helpful.

Borreson divides his book into consideration of the case study method and the consultation method. The descriptive case study section is introduced by an essay from James Glass which explains the practicalities of its usage. The book then provides thirty-four different descriptive cases.

The second section takes up the consultation, or clinical, method for cases in ministry which are ongoing. An explanatory essay by C. David Jones precedes seventeen cases.

I found the volume accessible, easy to teach, and an effective way to integrate biblical, theological, and practical issues in the practice of ministry. It would be an interesting method for the local pastor to use in an adult or youth Christian education class. My only quibble is that there are few cases that focus on issues of social ministry.

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To Liberate and Redeem: Moral Reflections on the Biblical Narrative. By Edward LeRoy Long, Jr. Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1997. xiii and 363 pages. Paper. $18.95.

Long's latest book is accessible, precise, and immensely relevant. With surprising, gentle humor and broad vision, Long reflects on the ethical choices of biblical characters and the contexts that influenced those decisions. Long does not encourage readers to duplicate their particular choices but to consider how our forerunners in faith can inform our methods of ethical appraisal and moral practice.

The scope of this book could barely be larger. Aided by current biblical scholarship and humility, Long walks the reader through the Hebrew Bible and New Testament. Two main events garner more of his attention: the exodus and the exile. The exodus serves as the primary definition of and experience of oppression and liberation. The Ten Commandments and the ordinances describe the obligations of Israel after God heard the cries and brought the people out of Egypt. The exile event also stirred questions of behavior: Did morality (or lack of it) cause the exile to occur? How could Israel build and maintain identity in a foreign land?

The Jesus event exemplified a moral model of compassion and controversial inclusiveness. While this model is commendable, one could surmise from Long's argument that Jesus was a superior liberator who presented a morality foreign to Judaism. This approach could lean toward unwitting anti-Semitism. As Paul and early Christian communities discovered, the relationship with Judaism, their former parent, was tricky. Born in a world already swarming

with religious ideas and practices, these communities needed to determine how to live faithfully.

My critique, albeit a mild one, is that Long sounds like a teacher. The rapid-fire contemporary illustrations are suited to spoken language but can lead the reader to lose track of the objective. This book will undoubtedly enrich discussions of Christian ethics and the biblical story, as well as one's preaching on these topics.

Bonnie Flessen
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The Immerser: John the Baptist within Second Temple Judaism. By Joan E. Taylor. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997. xvi and 360 pages. Paper. $30.00.

In her own words, Taylor's purpose "is to provide a concise and accessible argument that redefines John as a Jewish immerser and teacher of righteousness who was accepted by many Jews as an exceptionally good and faithful man and regarded by some—including Jesus—as a prophet" (p. 8). Actually, that statement of purpose is too modest for the actual scope of the book. Taylor argues that while the first century church sought to Christianize John, the reality is that John "johannized" the church. That is, John the Baptist, through Jesus, had a formative influence on the ethos of Christianity.

The book begins with a critique of the frequently repeated notion that John had contact with Essenes and was influenced by them. Chapter 2 proposes that the framework for John's immersions is a twofold purity system: John demanded that unrighteous persons first produce an inner purity, consisting of righteous actions; this inner purity would then pave the way for an outward purity, which was effected by ritual immersion. Chapter 3 seeks to bring to the foreground John's role as teacher and, consequently, as one who gathered disciples. Taylor contends that John attracted disciples who learned from him for a period of time before they were immersed. One demonstrated one's righteousness by bearing good fruit, because "if someone was not truly righteous, or had not borne good fruit, then the immersion would not have been truly acceptable to God" (p. 112). In Chapter 4 Taylor argues that John and the Pharisees regarded each other favorably. It is the Gospel writers, Taylor maintains, who represent John's history otherwise in order to claim John for Christianity. Chapter 5 seeks to give breadth to designations of John as a "prophet" and "a good man." The final chapter then attempts scholarly speculation about Jesus on the basis of what has been proposed regarding John, asserting that we can reason from John to Jesus based on Jesus' association with John.

There is much to commend this book to pastors as well as to other New Testament scholars. The book is clearly and carefully written, and therefore a pleasure to read. Taylor's proposals are bold and interesting. If I remain unpersuaded by a number of the proposals made, it is because I found the logic involved to be reminiscent of the late Harry Carey's home run call: "It might be, it could be, it is!" That is, possibility slips into probability. Nevertheless, her arguments are well-formed enough to warrant serious consideration. Her critique of views that link John to the Essenes is devastating. Moreover, the footnotes in the book are an absolute gold mine. Theologians will be struck by how "Reformed" John's immersion comes across, i.e., immersion as the outward sign of an inward transformation. Still, I can think of no better way for persons to bring themselves up to date on John the Baptist than to read *The Immerser* in conjunction with chapters 12 and 13 in volume two of John P. Meier's *A Marginal Jew*.

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Briefly Noted

Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament. Edited by Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann (Hendrickson, $119.95). This theological reference work was originally published in two volumes in German (1971 and 1976), was translated into Spanish in 1978, and now finally appears in three volumes in this fine English translation by Mark Biddle. It has long been a favorite of Old Testament scholars since it gives reliable results in a competent and relatively brief manner. It will be prized by scholars and by those responsible for teaching and preaching in the church. A resource list has been added which provides links to the Brown-Driver-Briggs and Koehler-Baumgartner lexicons, to the ten-volume *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* and other reference works. The text of the original entries remains virtually unchanged, but bibliographies have been updated, especially to take note of English translations. The 330 articles actually treat several thousand words since the nouns and adjectives derived from verbal roots are included in the discussion. A very useful feature is a table at the beginning of many essays that shows the distribution of a word throughout the Old Testament. 204 of the 1,638 pages are devoted to indexes, including 130 to Scripture references alone. Each article has five divisions: root and etymological derivation; statistical data on the word's occurrences; its general meaning; its theological usage; and concluding remarks, which often discuss the use of the concept in early Judaism and the New Testament. This is a classic and a "must buy" for anyone who is seriously interested in the Old Testament. *RWK*

The Dead Sea Psalms Scrolls and The Book of Psalms. By Peter W. Flint (Brill, $105). This is a very meticulous study of the 39 Psalms scrolls found at Qumran and at various other sites in the Judean wilderness. F. concludes that the Psalter was finalized in two stages, the first stage involving Psalms 1–89, and the second, 90–150. The latter group remained unstable until the end of the Qumran period in 68 C.E. There were several collections of psalms at Qumran, and the divergent order of psalms in the famous manuscript from Cave 11 was affected by two factors: a devotion to the 364-day solar calendar (cf. 1 Enoch and Jubilees) and a focus on David. F.'s findings support in large part the work of Professor James Sanders, but he offers more nuanced terminology, is able to distinguish two stages in the process of finalization, and demonstrates that the Psalter known from Cave 11 was copied at Qumran but not compiled there. *RWK*

Scribes and Schools: The Canonization of the Hebrew Scriptures. By Philip R. Davies (Westminster/John Knox, $24). D. is part of an articulate minority, sometimes dubbed "biblical minimalists" by their critics, that proposes a relatively late date for the origin of the Old Testament and calls into question much of biblical history, even in the monarchic period. The monarchic traditions in his opinion do not correspond to any society that occupied Palestine in the Iron Age, and Jerusalem only became a significant city in the eighth century. "To assume that the canonized writings originate in the monarchic period... is no more than a hunch" (p. 87). Deuteronomy, confidently dated to the time of Josiah for the last two hundred years, is moved two hundred years later, into the Persian period, by D. He also challenges the notion that the great prophets had disciples who preserved their sayings and puts the date of the book of Kings in the Persian period at the earliest. "The likely creators of the canon that the rabbis inherited were, therefore, the Hasmoneans" (p. 182). "This book, then, is not about how ancient Israel produced its canon, but rather about how a canon produced 'ancient Israel.'" In D.'s judgment, the confrontation between canon and historian ought to be somewhat antagonistic, and in this book it is. While many of the "assured results" of biblical criticism in mid-century have been overturned, D.'s positions in most cases are extreme. *RWK*

No Other Gods: Emergent Monotheism in Israel. By Robert Karl Gnuse (Sheffield Academic Press, $78). G. believes Israel arose in a peaceful, internal and gradual process and had close social and intellectual connections with Canaanite culture. What we know as biblical religion, therefore, in G.'s opinion, was a minority view in pre-exilic Israel and only emerged as dominant in the exilic or post-exilic period. The Israelite or Jewish ethos expressed in the Hebrew Bible arose later and more gradually than previously expected, but its ultimate emergence was nonetheless a dramatic intellectual and cultural breakthrough. G. summarizes clearly a number of contemporary scholars who are writing about the settlement process and the development of pre-exilic religion, including the emergence of a Yahweh-alone party. He emphasizes the continuity of key Israelite ideas with the thought of the great predecessor cultures, but acknowledges that the Jewish religious experience did significantly advance the development of these ideas so that they became the foundations for our modern world view. One interesting byproduct of this research is a renewed appreciation for the priestly tradition in Second Temple Judaism, which furthered the development of monotheistic values and impressed this faith and its values on the Jewish masses. G. proposes a scientific model called Punctuated Equilibria to explain these phenomena. This model posits that change occurs in rapid leaps in the evolutionary process after long periods of relative stasis. This book summarizes the disintegration of many of the reigning pictures of Israelite history and religion in wide reaches of scholarship. No new consensus has yet emerged nor has the full impact on biblical theology yet been felt. *RWK*

N. F. S. Grundtvig: An Introduction to his Life and Work. By A. M. Allchin (Aarhus University Press, $39.95). This is a valuable English introduction to a lesser known, 19th century Danish Lutheran renewer of the church. The *Lutheran Book of Worship* designates September 2 as a day to remember his ministry. This book provides rich detail for rediscovering Grundtvig's witness. Contemporary with Kierkegaard, Grundtvig (1783–1872) founded a theological movement that revitalized the Danish church and thereby also Danish American congregations. The book discusses his life, five major themes (church, ministry, trinity, the earth in God's image, and "a simple, cheerful, active life on earth"), and testimony from Grundtvig's sermons organized around the church year. Impulses from Grundtvig could continue to renew the church for mission as we enter a new century. *Craig L. Nessan*

Isaiah 13-27. A Continental Commentary. By Hans Wildberger (Fortress, $65). This is the second of three volumes on Isaiah written by the late Professor Wildberger, with the German original published in 1978. Thomas Trapp of Concordia University, St. Paul, has ably translated it into English and is now at work on volume 3, chaps. 28–39, which will complete First Isaiah. Volume 1 was reviewed in *Currents* in 1993 (June), p. 226. W.'s commentary is encyclopedic in scope and careful in judgments. As all are aware, the Oracles Against Foreign Nations in chaps. 13–23 and the Isaiah Apocalypse in chaps. 24–27 are among the more difficult—and controverted!—passages in the Old Testament. All will welcome this classic. *RWK*

The Masorah of Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia. By Page H. Kelley, Daniel S. Mynatt, and Timothy G. Crawford (Eerdmans, $26). The Masorah refers to a body of marginal notes to the Hebrew Bible, preserved both in medieval manuscripts and in modern editions. The Masorah Parva consists of notes in the side margins of manuscripts, and the Masorah Magna includes notes in the upper and lower margins (in BHS they are published in a separate volume). The Masorah Parva gives the frequency of certain words or of peculiarities in spelling; the Masorah Magna provides the lists of those words themselves. The Masorah Finalis, at the end of a book, records the number of verses in a book and other statistical information. The Masorah was created to establish quality control over the text and prevent changes to it. By studying the Masorah students learn much about the Masoretic text itself and the process by which it was formed. This wonderful and accessible introduction shows students how to decipher these

highly abbreviated, Aramaic notes, and it provides an easy-to-understand Glossary of the Masorah (the terms are translated into English and furnished with a detailed examination of how each term is used in one or more passages in BHS). *RWK*

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

Unearthing the Lost Words of Jesus: The Discovery and Text of the Gospel of Thomas (Seastone, $17) contains an account of the discovery and publication of the Nag Hammadi Coptic manuscripts (John Dart and Ray Riegert), and introduction to and translation (with epigrammatic commentary) of the 114 sayings in the *Gospel of Thomas*, accompanied by a brief theological analysis and bibliography (John Dominic Crossan). The sayings of Jesus are printed in red, like a Bible edition that highlights Jesus' words. A useful booklet, a bit overoptimistic about the value of this Coptic gospel, and also overpriced. *Edgar Krentz*

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Preaching Helps

The Day of Pentecost—Eighth Sunday after Pentecost
Series A

Written in the Wind, Written in the Flesh

"Written in the wind" and "blowing in the wind" are standard images of transiency. They are phrases that speak of things weak and unsubstantial. On the other hand, "carved in stone" and "set in cement" conjure up feelings of constancy and dependability.

But here we are on the threshold of the Pentecost Season, pondering once more the potency of the Wind of God. The ruach or pneuma or wind of God blew over the surface of the chaotic and uncontrolled waters in the beginning. "Of God" in the phrase "Wind of God" suggests awesome, colossal, potent, and eerie. So it was a "divine storm," something more than hurricane-force winds, that swept across the face of the primeval deep.

Most of us do not live in houses of straw like the first of the three pigs. We live in houses of wood and brick and steel, and we hardly feel the force of the winds, no matter how wildly they blow. I wonder about those who live closer to the ground than we do. I imagine that they experience wind differently from us. I don't even have to "imagine," since the media reported in gripping and graphic detail on the ravages of Hurricane Mitch last year. Do the people who live in houses of straw also think of the Spirit and the power of the Spirit differently? Do they think differently of their own bodies and vulnerability?

Both the Pentecost Season and our author for this issue set me to thinking along these lines. Pastor **William Lee Yancey** speaks of God's word etched not just in stone (as on two tables in the days of Moses) and not just on leather or papyrus (as histories and prophecies, psalms and gospels were committed to writing long ago). He ponders the way that God has signed the divine name in the flesh of Jesus. And not just in the body or flesh or humanity of Jesus but in the wounds of Jesus.

I have long thought that Thomas is no doubter but one of the premier theologians of the New Testament. I don't buy the notion that Thomas said, "I

won't come to faith until I can punch him in the ribs and grip his cheeks between my thumb and forefinger or pull his hair, because what I want is to know that he has flesh and bones and hair and blood again." No. Thomas wanted to be assured that God wins victories through the wounds inscribed on the body of Jesus. To assent with Thomas that God triumphs through suffering, through wounded hands and pierced side, through the lifting up of Jesus on to the cross—that is Christian faith.

Crossword puzzles are fond of giving the clue: "sign of healing." The answer is "scar." Good answer! In one common form of popular piety we should all rise from the dead on the last day whole and handsome, without liver spot or blemish. Wonderfully triumphalistic! But why then does Jesus appear to Thomas and the others with wounds? If he had waited another week or two, would the wounds have healed up completely? Of course not! The wounds will never go away. The cross will never be superseded. It is wrong to describe Jesus as having been crucified in the past tense as though the cross were a matter of ancient history. Jesus "is" (not "was') the crucified. Cruciform agape is the mystery of the kingdom of God.

Pastor Yancey speaks of being influenced by the power of the example of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and by the words of Bonhoeffer, who said that "we Christians are loyal to a person, not a doctrine." And the person is the Crucified. Yancey writes, "I understand 'loyalty to Jesus' and a theology of the cross to be foundational for what is going on in the scripture and our hearts."

Jesus is not a doctrine, not a theory or idea, not a law or rule, not a book. Paul could describe the Corinthians as an epistle, a letter written not with ink but with the Spirit of the Living God, no on tables of stone but on human hearts (2 Corinthians 3). How much more is Jesus "God's handwriting, God's message, God's world." Especially those indelible and everlasting wounds. They are the signature of God.

Pastor William Lee Yancey is pastor of Bethel Lutheran Church in University City, Missouri. He earned a Ph.D. in systematic theology from LSTC. Before that he was an English teacher, a correctional counselor and a Director of Social Services for a small inner city housing ministry working with low-income families. He is still involved in housing ministries.

He writes that in recent years he has found the book *A Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels* by Bruce Malina and Richard Rohrbaugh to be very helpful in understanding the cultural world of the Gospels. How easily we forget that our Gospels are "third world" documents written by unknown members of a tiny powerless movement in the heyday of the mighty Roman

Empire. The Christian (and other) inhabitants of that empire were ancient Mediterranean people living in a patriarchal, honor-shame society suffused with ideas and values far different from our own. Malina and Rohrbaugh are two of the pioneers in bringing to bear on New Testament studies the results of investigations by cultural anthropologists of that ancient world.

Exegesis is no easy task. A good exegete is sensitive to a plethora of cultural and linguistic data. And more. How can we exegete the mind of God? Paul says that he has the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2). The prologue of the Gospel of John begins by calling Jesus "the Word of God." And it ends by declaring that "no one has ever seen God" (John 1:18a). Really? No one? Not Abraham? Not Moses? Not Isaiah? Not Ezekiel? Not Daniel? The flat declaration remains: "No one has seen God at any time, but the unique one, himself God, who sits on the lap of God, he [the Word] has exegeted God" (John 1:18b). Jesus is "the exegete" of God for us. And the Fourth Gospel does not end until it identifies the crucified Jesus, Jesus with his wounds, as the Word and Exegete of the invisible God.

How can we today interpret God and communicate God and exegete God and share the Good News of God? Hard to do without wounds, or at least hard to do well or with authenticity without wounds. But it is good work and in fact the most necessary work in the world. Even when other work seems more substantial, more solid, more enduring. Thomas looked at the wounds and confessed, "My Lord and my God!" Nothing is more solid and enduring than "Lord" and "God." Thomas made the good confession.

As we enter the Season of the spirit which is still a Season of the Word made flesh, I wish you good exegeting, good communicating, good confessing.

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The Day of Pentecost
May 23, 1999

Psalm 104:24–34
Acts 2:1–21
1 Corinthians 12:3b–13
John 20:19–23

First Reading

"The day" is not just any day. It is the day when former things pass away and the new age begins. But who knows? Everyone is sitting around in one place, waiting, when suddenly the Holy Spirit falls upon them. They have not sought her out, but are waiting when she rushes upon them. The experience is complete, whole. God shows no partiality. All are in one place and filled, in a rush, completely. Practical consequences follow. Now everyone knows what to do: speak about "God's deeds of power."

Jerusalem is a cosmopolitan city, and the Galileans are country peasants who could not possibly speak this city's sophisticated language. However, "the message makes the messenger." The story of "God's deeds of power" unifies and empowers the speaking, and the message is spoken to all with a single intent—salvation. Some listeners have open minds and ask questions, but the faithless sneer and impose their own spin (spirit) on God's actions: "They're drunk!"

Peter, a Galilean outsider, reminds the insider Judeans of their own scripture, Joel's prophecy which foretold the new age and this day. The new age is for those who faithfully call "on the name of the Lord."

The Corinthian lesson underscores the role of the Holy Spirit in the new age. Except by the Holy Spirit no one recognizes Jesus as Lord. The confession "Jesus is Lord" is prologue to the new age and the "common good." Without this confession of faith, "old selves" live fragmented lives in an old city on any day, relying upon their spin (spirit) for life.

Again, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit has practical consequences. Without the Holy Spirit and our inspired confession, we are simply people with a variety of talents with no focus on the "common good." The unbelieving citizens of Jerusalem, Corinth, or St. Louis are talented people making choices for freedom, yet they inevitably find themselves in bondage in the old city. Those who wait upon the Spirit, however, are activated for a holy service which unifies the community of faith.

John's Gospel also brings us to "that day." Behind locked doors the Galilean disciples are in one place, waiting. They wait in fear that their opponents will rush in upon them. Jesus breaks into their fear and brings peace. His loyalty to them is unfailing. Not even the grave prevents him from bringing them to life.

The disciples fail to receive the gift at Jesus' first offer. Their fearful eyes do not see the resurrected Jesus until he shows them the marks of his crucifixion. These marks proclaim God's love for them. Seeing the marks of crucifixion, which mark Jesus as the true Son of God, the disciples see with the eyes of faith and receive peace. The marks of Jesus' crucifixion are God's inspired writing, and that writing in the flesh of Jesus declares our salvation.

A third time today (this day) there are practical consequences. Get out of this house of fear. "I send you" for freedom, the common good, and the forgiveness of sins. The new age will be marked by mission, and the Holy Spirit will guide the disciples' judgment in these matters.

Pastoral Reflections

How are we to live? What are we to do? Each of the lessons leads to the practical consequences of faith and the reception of

the Holy Spirit. Jesus sends us to tell the story, to use our gifts as the Spirit chooses for the common good, that is, to forgive sins, to unify and build community.

Although our lessons emphasize a theme of waiting, this waiting is not a mark of quietism or neglect, but of faith in God's promise to come. A waiting people become a sanctified people, set apart for the highest service.

Our problem with waiting is not the time it takes. God, after all, appears to be very urgent: the Holy Spirit rushes in, gifts abound, Jesus comes quickly into the room. No, our problem is an alien spirit. I have been calling it "spin." In our age, all is interpretation. We decide what is real and what is an illusion. To spin every event seems like freedom, but it becomes a burden. Because we are bound to put our own spin on events, we are cursed to live in a critical age, forced to control everything. Everlasting criticism is true bondage.

Jesus has endured the spin (sin) of our judgment of him. He was marked by our rejection, yet these marks illustrate the fullness of God's love for us. Jesus' wounds are the doors of perception, the entrance to the new age. They are God's inspired scripture, proclaiming forgiveness and reconciliation. From these marks of crucifixion rushes the Holy Spirit, who inspires us in moments of waiting—in a hospital room with parishioners as their husband and father lies dying; while sitting with a young mother and father as tests return confirming that their newborn will face a life of special needs; in taking time to pray with a special needs teenager whose troubled heart aches for others; waiting for the Spirit as parents present their child for baptism. Faithful to the crucified and resurrected Jesus, we know what to do. By the power of the Holy Spirit we are set free from spin, for service, to make our mark—the mark of the cross. Today is always "that day." How practical!

The Holy Trinity
May 30, 1999

Psalm 8
Genesis 1:1–2:4a
2 Corinthians 13:11–13
Matthew 28:16–20

First Reading

Scholars suggest that the priestly editors of the creation story sought to link chosenness all the way back to creation. What could it mean to be the chosen people? Chosen for what? Chosen to be with God! Let us understand "chosen" to mean that God chooses to be with a people, for a people, and that the people are of God. When does this "with-ness" begin? "In the beginning," in the very midst of the storm of creation God is with us. God's "with-ness" constitutes creation by dispelling chaos and establishing an order of relatedness. There is no "with" before creation, only emptiness, formlessness, darkness—chaos, and there is no "with" in chaos, because nothing is related.

Light, the firstborn of creation, brings form and relationship. Bathed in light, things come into view and are "with" others. Light and life go together. In order, then, God creates sky, earth, vegetation, the lights in the heavens, fish and fowl, land animals. Now the commencement. Humankind is created to be with God, to be responsive and responsible, communicative in the divine image, male and female, that they might be with and for one another and God.

Now God sees everything and it is very good. God's sight indicates God's complete attentiveness to creation. God is completely "with" it, and us, who in turn are completely related to God. This relationship to God is what makes us and all creation good.

Creation is not God's hobby, something to skillfully pass the time. Creation, the

establishment of "with-ness," expresses God's nature. Creation is God's will to be with us. Our blessing is in all the ways we are created to be with God, to be responsive and responsible, to see, to speak, to multiply....

Then there is that seventh day, a day set aside, sanctified. Not that God is tired. Instead, God sets aside a time to locate humanity within the whole blessing of life. In the midst of the storm of creation we enter God's rest. We are not set loose in creation. That would be only another version of chaos. Rather, creation is complete on the seventh day when everything is with God.

In the epistle lesson Paul ends his correspondence to the Corinthians with the trinitarian greeting which opens our worship service. This short greeting is a full statement of trinitarian theology: the gracefulness of redemption, the love of God which encompasses all, the community of the Holy Spirit. The whole of God's work for the whole of God's people. May it be "with all of you."

The Corinthians need this trinitarian blessing to remind them of their eternal relationship to God. They have been disorderly. Chaos threatens their community. Relationships have been damaged by selfishness, false doctrine, and misplaced loyalty. Paul constantly calls them back to "with-ness." "Agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you."

The real question is: Can I get a "with-ness"? Paul answers, "by the cross of Christ." Never is God so deeply with us in forgiveness and reconciliation as when Jesus suffers because of our sin. The crucifixion is the fundamental trinitarian moment: God sends Jesus; Jesus reaches into the depths of chaos and forsakenness to retrieve us; the Spirit works in our empty hearts to bring forth faith.

At the end of Matthew's Gospel the disciples see Jesus, the new creation, and worship him, as if to say, "It is very good." The outcome of trinitarian faith is mission oriented: make disciples of all nations. "And remember," says Jesus, "I am with you always." You will not fall back into chaos and sin.

Pastoral Reflections

We often hear God described as a "verb." Trinity Sunday suggests "prepositions." My wife, Valerie, has taught me about the pragmatic wisdom of the American philosopher William James. For one thing, he was a man who loved prepositions; that is to say, he wanted people to be aware of "of-ness," "in-ness," and "with-ness." Why? Because these prepositions focus our attention on the conjunctive aspects of existence, and awaken in us a spirit of unity, relationship, and responsibility. I am thinking about the Trinity in this way.

When I first realize that Trinity Sunday is upon me, I fret. How can I proclaim this abstract doctrine of the Triune God? However, in the Scripture the Trinity is expressed in almost childlike simplicity, not as an abstraction. The issue is not so much doctrinal as relational. The point of the Trinity is not mystery, but the clarity of God's care for us.

The progression of today's lessons form a possible sermon outline, a trinitarian one at that. The creation story reminds us of our original goodness in creation. The Corinthian community is typical of how loyalties become misplaced and God is set aside for selfish or fearful reasons. The lesson from Matthew not only suggests Jesus' work of reconciliation but also announces the mission to which we are called.

How can we confess the Triune God when so much of our lives give witness to our separation from God? We have damaged our "with-ness" beyond human repair. To use Luther's image, our hearts are captured by false gods.

We live the pain of damaged relationships. An extreme example is someone like the "unabomber," who claimed to live only for revenge. He was *of* revenge, loyal *to* it, gave his heart *over to* it. We do not have to cite only extremes to recognize that brokenness constitutes human existence. I like to use an example described by Kathleen Norris in her book, *Amazing Grace*. In reaction to his father's yelling at him, a little boy has a troubled dream in which he wrecks his room and pushes his sister down the steps. He writes a poem, "My Messy Room." We live in messy rooms. Original sin always leads to disconnections, revenge, terror, prejudice, and stereotype. Death is in control of our lives.

Jesus is yelled at and pushed down the steps. Worse than that, he is crucified by us and forsaken by God. Taking the consequences of our sin in his suffering and bearing the very hell of our separateness from God, he demonstrates the deepest loyalty and a transforming "with-ness."

Consequently, our confession and our hope come by this path of suffering which we travel only by the power of the Holy Spirit. With the promise of Christ with us always, we are free from hatred, fear, and prejudice, to be *with* those who suffer.

Second Sunday after Pentecost
June 6, 1999

Psalm 50:7–15
Hosea 5:15–6:6
Romans 4:13–25
Matthew 9:9–13, 18–26

First Reading

What is God's desire? God longs for steadfast love, not a one time or periodic sacrifice. God longs for a relationship that does not evaporate like a "morning cloud," or the "dew that goes away early."

Hosea uses extreme imagery to communicate the life and death circumstances which he perceives being played out on the stage of history. Powerful invaders from the north, led by Tiglath-pilser III, are overrunning Israel. But the problem is fundamentally spiritual. The priestly penitential song (6:1–3) illustrates a proper response to God: "Let us return."

Unconvinced of the people's loyalty, God laments, accuses, and threatens consequences. God's loyalty can be known and experienced, but not if ritual is used to manipulate. Only those who are torn beyond repair, as if by a lion, can trust that God will "heal."

In Romans, Paul takes up this problem of a ritualistic or legalistic approach to God. God's promise to Abraham and Sarah's descendants can be available to all, but not "through the law." In the context of human loyalty to God, the law can only bring wrath. When people base their loyalty to God on adherence to rules (even doctrine), they enter a realm of manipulation and forget that all depends on faith in the promise (no faith, no promise).

God's promise is effective, giving life to the dead. God calls into existence the

things that do not exist, brings forth Isaac, and raises Jesus. These events are not demonstrations of power but signs of God's gracious activity on humankind's behalf. Raising Jesus from the dead raises those who believe. Faith and life are worked in people through Jesus's death and resurrection.

In the Matthew text, Jesus acts outside the sinful restraint of prejudice and stereotype. He demonstrates relationship (healing) and loyalty (following) in his encounters with Matthew, the ruler, and the woman with blood. Notice the criterion for selecting Matthew as a disciple? Jesus "saw" him. Matthew's credential is simply that he is seen by Jesus, encountered in an accepting way, which ignored traditional conventions. This encounter is immediately transformative for Matthew. Leaving his former life and following Jesus, Matthew is to be neither oppressed by, nor loyal to, conventional social norms. He becomes part of the new wine skin (to use Jesus' image from verses 14–17).

In the next scene, Jesus is at dinner with other tax collectors and sinners. Eating with outcasts is a great show of honor toward them. By this example, Jesus is teaching his disciples true hospitality. By contrast, the religious leaders are offended. Where Jesus sees a man or a woman to be accepted into community, his opponents see misfits who should be excluded.

Jesus' opponents then try to use his radical hospitality to dishonor him before his disciples. Jesus quickly responds to the challenge. He has come for the sick who are defined out of existence by the dominant society. He refers his challengers back to their own scripture (Hos 6:6) for instruction, because they have not understood this lesson at dinner.

Each event is an occasion to learn the lesson of mercy. "Suddenly" here is another opportunity. A leader of the synagogue kneels before Jesus and implores him to bring life to his daughter. A righteous man has lowered himself (reversal) and prays for mercy. The peril of his child has cleared his vision. There is no doubt in his mind what Jesus can do, and no hesitation to ask. In a remarkable reversal, Jesus becomes the *follower* who will respond to any who seek mercy.

Before they get started, "suddenly" appears a woman with a flow of blood who is following him from behind, that she might be made well. As with Matthew, she is seen by Jesus as one who is connected to him and worthy of acceptance. She has demonstrated praying faith and faithful following. Health is already at work in her.

When Jesus finally arrives at the leader's house, he encounters the conventional reaction to death—commotion and confusion, which are characteristic of the crowd's attitude to Jesus. Because the one who brings mercy is laughable to the crowd, they cannot follow and are cast out. Finally Jesus encounters the girl. While healing has already occurred in the ruler's world, it is now ratified by his daughter's resurrection.

Pastoral Reflections

The lessons indicate the reality from which trust in God springs. Life comes from barrenness. When we are torn beyond human repair and have lost hope, Jesus brings mercy. Those who encounter Jesus exemplify Paul's famous phrase, "hoping against hope." When human hope is spent, we run like the ruler and the woman to Jesus. The hope that is beyond hope is always associated with help. Jesus illustrates true discipleship by becoming a follower in the face of prayers for mercy, bringing help to those who suffer.

Jesus practices holistic medicine. He treats the whole human being. Physical health relates to the restoration of meaning in people's lives and their acceptance into God's

community as valued people. Jesus demonstrates that mercy is to be sought and offered against all odds. Neither authority nor social humiliation will shake his loyalty to those who seek mercy. As with all of Jesus' public ministry, these encounters foreshadow his merciful act upon the cross.

In our age, practical questions of freedom arise from our relationship of faith. Who is entitled to health care? Whom shall we invite to our tables, our communities, our churches? Where in our histories are we suddenly confronted with opportunities to bring hope and help? Following Jesus means to follow sufferers who seek mercy, suddenly. Instead, we often ruminate, or we fear involvement and lose the opportunity. Although patient with his disciples, Jesus always acts decisively and mercifully. We are called to act now, to respond to those who seek mercy, not allowing social convention or fear to restrain us.

Third Sunday after Pentecost
June 13, 1999

Psalm 100
Exodus 19:2–8a
Romans 5:1–8
Matthew 9:35–10:8

First Reading

The Israelites journey in the wilderness, yet they are a people with a home. God brings them "to myself," from Egypt, the wilderness, anywhere. This realization comes from the place of revelation, the mountain, where they are invited to be a covenant people. God has freed them from slavery and made them a holy nation. Their journey is to God, whom they find already present. Obedience to God's voice constitutes the covenant's renewal. The people promise to do everything. That's a big promise. Can they keep it?

A different approach to right relationship with God is justification by faith. What are the outcomes of justification? Do they depend on our promises? Romans 5:1 is a summary confession that peace with God is through Jesus. More than a cessation of hostility, peace with God is a healthy relationship which guides our being. On the basis of peace, humankind has a sure hope, a future with God. We boast of this hope for the future as that which is most meaningful to us. Surprisingly, we also boast in our sufferings. Why? Wouldn't we want to forget suffering? Only if we want to lose hope. Our very suffering leads to hope because that is when God's help comes to us. Our hope is certain because God's care works in our hearts so that we can find peace even in the midst of suffering. Furthermore, hope is enduring because God's love inspires us to help. We live lives of hope by caring for others. In mission, we cannot be disappointed.

We receive peace and hope because Jesus died at the right time, when we were broken. When we are least worthy, God is most anxious to help. When we suffer in sin, Christ comes for us. The future is at work at the right time; hope is active in a time of suffering. For Paul, and us, this is proof of God's love; no human could be this beneficent.

The Gospel in the metaphor of the harvest offers another take on the "right time" theme. Because the crowds are helpless, they are also hopeless. Lacking any sense of a future for themselves, they are uneasy with God. The helplessness of the crowds constitutes the right time to send disciples on a mission to the lost sheep. The harvest is plentiful because the need is so great.

In contrast to Mark and Luke, Matthew expands Jesus' itinerary in his Gospel to

include cities, but he narrows the mission to the lost sheep of Israel alone. Only in Matthew do the disciples receive such expansive authority to care. Jesus commissions them to do as he does, to preach the kingdom and heal the sick.

Pastoral Reflections

In baseball when a batter is at the plate in a crucial situation, players often call out, "Right guy at the right time," expressing confidence that the right person is in the right place at the right time to achieve a positive outcome for the team. How do we become right with one another, God, and for the time in which we live? St. Paul says, "at the right time Christ died for the ungodly." What is right about this time? Of course, it seems like a lousy time for us, "while we were still weak." What can we do? That is the point. Because we are hopeless and can do nothing, it is a time we need help. The extent of this help leads to the cross. Jesus pursues us in our weakness all the way to the cross, and makes us right with God.

Matthew describes Jesus' program and the sending of his disciples. What makes it the right time for sending the disciples to the helpless, hopeless crowds? The crowd's need defines the time and is constitutive of the disciples' authority.

We might compare Jesus' program and ours to the current discussions of holistic medicine. There is always a social dimension to an unhealthy situation. Jesus seems to link physical health with social health; that is, one is not healthy when lost to the community. In ministry, we often experience the greatest health and hope in the midst of dying when the family and community gather with the weak in sure and certain hope of our future which then can be said to be already at work. When we encounter the helpless and lost, we know that we are the right people in the right place and at the right time. Jesus sends us like the disciples to bring help and hope, to preach the gospel, to heal, to bring peace.

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost
June 20, 1999

Psalm 69:7–10 [11–15] 16–18
Jeremiah 20:7–13
Romans 6:1b–11
Matthew 10:24–39

First Reading

Jeremiah offers one of his "confessions," in which he speaks personally, and sometimes bitterly, of his intimate feelings about his calling. Jeremiah seems to have every right to complain. He has been made a laughingstock. His message, "Terror is all around," has been turned into a derisive nickname. His close friends (who needs enemies?) are searching for a chance to take revenge upon him. What's more, God seems to have taken advantage of him. At least, that's what Jeremiah feels, and he describes this relationship in violent imagery. He would like to stop his prophetic work, but he is compelled to continue, even though the very message he announces marks him as an enemy even to his family and friends.

Jeremiah's confession moves from bitter complaint to a confession of faith. Jeremiah's enemies will not prevail over him because the Lord is fiercely loyal to Jeremiah. His enemies will be dishonored, not him. In confidence that God is with him, he concludes with a song of praise expressing his faith.

In Romans 6, the antinomian attitude toward sinning reminds me of the old line about the symbiotic arrangement between human beings and God: we like to sin, and

God likes to forgive. Paul says that our new relationship does not work that way. It cannot.

Christ's crucifixion, his death once-for-all, has destroyed the body of sin of those who are in Christ through baptism. Because death releases people from sin's rule, when in baptism we are plunged into Christ's death, we are dead to sin. The whole nature of death is transformed. We die to sin, but not to life. Death does not go away, but it loses its power over us. Therefore, we are not dead to God, but live now in a new realm, alive to God.

We may yet sin (*simul iustus et peccator*), but we no longer live in it. Consequently, grace abounds in another way, not by sinning, but by a new way of living, by our new relationships to our neighbor (sanctification).

In Matthew's Gospel, the disciples are to know that Jesus is more than teacher. He is Lord, and worthy of complete allegiance. Like Jeremiah, their ministry may be maligned, but anxiety should not rule them. Their ministry is one of openness. (They lived in small communities, making life very public. Privacy, as we know it, would cause suspicion.) There will be no sneaking around, so that the people will think them untrustworthy. Their value in God's heart is so powerful that fear will be overcome.

Free of fear, discipleship is marked by radically new relationships. The disciples' loyalty to Jesus takes precedence over all other relationships, even family. Life as they know it very well may be lost. This new relationship is marked by the cross and following Jesus, which means treating people with mercy.

Pastoral Reflections

How violent discipleship is! Who wants to be a Jeremiah, the disciples, or even Paul's Christian person? These lessons suggest the strongest imagery of baptism. We are plunged to the bottom of the waters. We are immersed in the grave. But what a joy and peace when we come up for air. It takes strong measures to snatch us from death.

Christ is with us in this death, and bears the violence. We are not loyal followers of Christ because God commanded it, but because God is with us when we are "under" attack. The cross is the deepest expression of Christ's presence and the full value by which we are held by God.

We might say that these are extraordinary people in extraordinary times. However, they are extraordinary by virtue of their faith and mercy. Otherwise their lives would have moved along unconsciously at the old deadly pace. Faith and mercy puts disciples in a new realm and pits them against powers that want to overcome them. In this eschatological light, the old ways cannot be followed.

Discipleship leads to a new reality. When we offer mercy to those whom we encounter, common events burn with the Spirit. Extraordinary opportunities come to us in the most ordinary moments of our lives. When we ignore the gift of these opportunities, life becomes anonymous and dead.

Have you taken the plunge? I remember the Urban Training Center in Chicago used to put pastors in the street with no money so that they might know the experience of the "city" and its poverty and homelessness. They called it the "urban plunge." The goal of the plunge was to learn mercy.

I am also reminded of my family's plunge into a new reality when a family of Vietnamese "boat people" came to live in our house some years ago. During the time this family of nine lived with us, there was no ignoring their needs. They also looked hospitably after us, as if we were guests in our own home. This "mercy" lives on in all of our hearts yet today. We cannot be the same.

As a church, where do we plunge in?

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost
June 27, 1999

Psalm 89:1–4, 15–18
Jeremiah 28:5–9
Romans 6:12–23
Matthew 10:40–42

First Reading

Who is a true prophet? Anyone can announce peace. But Jeremiah perceived that the people had no interest in true peace. The prophet Hananiah in a symbolic action broke the yoke, which Jeremiah was wearing, to predict that servitude to Babylon would soon be over. Does Hananiah have a clue to what will make the word of peace true? Jeremiah doubts it, even though he would like to believe Hananiah's prophecy.

Peace is the only true prophecy because it is God's true and eternal will for all humankind. Prophecy, therefore, does not turn on God's intention, which remains consistent, but upon the heart of the people. The people must have a heart for peace. Jeremiah is worried on this score.

As there is no cheap peace, so also with grace. And it's not a matter of remaining a free agent, independently making choices in life. Paul uses the analogy of slavery, which is striking in our age because it is so repugnant to us who have our rights. Paul knows that human beings are always in service to something, slaves of sin or slaves of righteousness. On this topic, Luther cites Augustine's image of a horse that will always have a rider. We are the horse, and we do not choose the rider. Paradoxically, to be enslaved to God is to be bound to the free gift of life. It is like being devoted to a spouse or children or a noble task.

On the other hand, how remarkably simple to show hospitality. A cup of water to a little one will do it. Jesus' words form an inspiring statement of universal welcome and hospitality, even though it is clear in the context of chapter 10 that division comes if inhospitality is shown.

Because they are relational and spiritual, the rewards of hospitality are such that they cannot be stolen or lost. No one can steal my welcome to another human being. So it is with God. God's welcome and care for us are eternal.

The disciples in their mission bring the hospitality of Christ and the One who sent him. This relationship has been prophesied and is peaceful. Those who believe and welcome the one who comes in the name of Jesus enjoy community with God. So Jesus turns out to be the true prophet and prophecy, because the peace he announces, he also gives through his welcome of little ones.

Pastoral Reflections

Often our first reaction to new people or unexpected opportunities is to seek safety in the familiar, or retreat from the threat of the unexpected. Hospitality is often not our first inclination, even in church communities. Sometimes by our exclusive attention to friends, we fail to welcome and thereby exclude the stranger. Christ, however, has sent us to welcome the "little ones" who are not sure they belong. Professor William Danker once told me that church is for the person who has not yet arrived.

How shall we be hospitable? Not by doctrinal demands. I heard on the radio recently a Lutheran pastor who identified doctrine as the entry point of his church. I wonder who can get in. It is an old conundrum. Do we gather in community through our need and then struggle as a community with doctrinal issues, or do we seek doctrinal agreement prior to welcoming the neighbor? I find myself guided by Bonhoeffer's assertion that we are loyal to the person of Christ,

not a doctrine. Jesus does not use doctrine to build his community, but says, "Follow me."

Although the Messiah was hoped for, Jesus was unexpected. It is always easier to welcome the expected, but how does Jesus show up? I am moved by the idea of "little ones." Jesus is probably speaking of his disciples, but I am thinking of a little girl who suddenly appeared one day in my office (down the hall from our grade school). I was expecting peace and quiet and time to write a Thanksgiving Day sermon. A flash storm had arisen, bringing intense winds, hard rain, and pellets of hail. In she rushed, red-faced, crying, afraid of the storm.

Well, the pastor has work to do. But what work? Isn't this a time for hospitality? Was this moment prophesied? "Whoever welcomes this little one, welcomes me." Is this what Paul had in mind by the obedience of faith, to experience a change of mind and heart when a hospitable possibility surprises us? What an unexpected arrival and reflection of the one long expected and hoped for, the one who did the unexpected for us by bearing our inhospitality.

We got out the tissues and dried the tears. We talked about fear of storms, and played with the yellow plastic slinky on my desk. Then back to the first grade she went. There was a reward in this encounter with the little one, never to be lost.

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost
July 4, 1999

Psalm 145:8–14
Zechariah 9:9–12
Romans 7:15–25a
Matthew 11:16–19, 25–30

First Reading

The oracle in Zechariah 9 describes a coming ruler with a universal reach, sea to sea. Yahweh commands peace to the whole world. Yahweh is also a military victor, a royal warrior, who is ruler by virtue of overcoming enemies. A humble hope comes with a horrific help; peace may be fashioned, but first the engines of war must be smashed. By Yahweh's mighty actions, the holy city, the beloved daughter, will experience freedom for all the captives. Those heretofore captive to enemies will be captive to hope. Those bound to hope like prisoners will experience restoration beyond their imagination, even beyond their hope.

Paul's autobiographical description of the self is also universal. Although we moderns often assume the relativity of truth and the inability of one person to understand the experience of another, Paul's description fits us too. We, like Paul, are transparent to the world, though we imagine ourselves to be enigmas. Paul's perception and honesty about the self flow from his concept of sin, even as the modern confusion of self flows from a confusion about sin's reality and power.

Paul knows first hand of sin's power which overwhelms the law and the self. The law demands, the self wills, but sin compels. "Wretched person that I am," say we all. Under sin's compulsion, the nature of who we are is defined by sin so that we are deformed from spiritual bodies which are

outlined in hope into "bodies of death" which are surrounded by sin.

However, the one who rescues us is totally different in nature and incomprehensible by our self-reflection. Jesus comes to us like Paul's exclamatory last line, like nothing we have experienced, unbound by sin, from God's future into our lives. Yet, he arrives into the middle of our sinfulness and could not be more available to us.

It has been said, "Show me your kind of person, and I will show you your God." Paul has the courage to describe the worst about humanity because he has been struck down by hope and given a new self. Paul's God is most visible saving humanity from its worst.

In the lesson from Matthew, Jesus encounters a generation he can't satisfy. They experience wisdom in John, the man of desert wisdom, and in Jesus, the man of hospitality, but do not want either. They prefer their "yoke," which is the desire to be in control. This false desire renders them hopeless and prevents them from "following" Jesus and taking the easy yoke.

We all know how heavy the burden is when a person needs to control everything. For "control freaks" there is no rest, only worry all the time, or scheming, or anger, or hatred. Terrible crimes, rape or murder for example, usually flow from abusive power and a need to control others. There is only one way to control Jesus, conclude his enemies: the cross. How shall we be saved from this body of death which controls us? Only one way!

Pastoral Reflections

Out of human wisdom and desire, we construct images of ourselves which we defend, to our detriment, if not to our death. Jesus encounters a defensiveness in people who have constructed their relationship to God based upon ancestry or ritual. The human problem is not simply this false image but our insistence upon defending it as freedom.

All of us like our controlled, self-constructed worlds. For instance, as a preacher, I have a certain image of myself as a communicator, which I defend by keeping various criticisms at bay. To become a better preacher I must first permit these false images to die. Always comes the question, "Who will save me?" Jesus promises to always be the answer.

When this dynamic is played out in society, destruction can become genocidal and global. We see this currently in places like Eastern Europe where entire ethnic groups become a body of death , eliminating others to preserve their own culture. As a people, we need to ask (particularly at the celebration of our independence), What images of ourselves do we defend at all costs? What stereotypes are maintained to protect an image? "Saving face" has been a powerful motivator throughout the ages. Jesus was very good in defeating those opponents constantly trying to humiliate him before others, hoping to control his behavior and power. Still, he willingly endured the humiliation of the cross to put an end to the need to control.

As I write this, New Year's resolutions are in the air. We all make them (exercise more, read more, watch TV less, control our tempers) and we all break them. Broken resolutions exemplify Paul's insight about our inability to do the good we want. A more powerful example is the reality of addiction. We see how drugs, alcohol, or destructive behaviors control many lives. We also know how badly people want to be free of addiction, but are simply overcome.

Christ's actions are salvific in such circumstances because he bears the force of the body of death, our need to control, our prejudice, and our addictions. Jesus not only shows us how to be peaceful or hopeful, his forgiving embrace gives us peace and hope. I think of this embrace as a "yoke" which sets

us free. Christ refuses to turn us loose, even in the worst circumstances, so that we become truly prisoners of hope.

We can all identify in our lives a person (perhaps a spouse, a teacher, or friend) who has endured with us through our own addictive failings. Such a relationship transforms our hearts. God in Christ, by way of the cross, resides eternally in our hearts and minds so that when we fall, we do not collapse or lose hope. We are raised.

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost
July 11, 1999

Psalm 65:[1–8] 9–13
Isaiah 55:10–13
Romans 8:1–11
Matthew 13:1–9, 18–23

First Reading

Like the rain that drenches the earth to bring forth vegetation, Yahweh's word creates and restores. The Babylonian words are empty, bringing chaos and destruction, reminiscent of a time before creation. The prophet reports from Yahweh that it is time to leave Babylon, and urges an Exodus and a return to Zion. Servitude is not the way to go.

Second Isaiah speaks of the intimate way the cosmos reacts toward history. Mountains sing out, trees clap, as the people act in history. The created world is not indifferent to the faithfulness of Yahweh's people, but speaks as an "everlasting sign" of Yahweh's outcry over dead words.

St. Paul would say that the people need a new mindset. Those living according to the flesh have indifferent mindsets and hearts, distant from God. Paul urges his readers to seek freedom from the familiar attitudes of captivity to sin and death, and to be guided instead by the Spirit, to act with the mind of God in order to "please God." How does one get a new mindset? God is at work in Jesus to make this happen, just as God sent God's word to Israel. The Spirit has come from Christ who spoke a profound word of forgiveness.

With the mind of the Spirit, persons experience the freedom of "no condemnation," and no longer need to live on the defensive. The life of the Spirit draws people closer to God and makes them responsive to others, free to become truly human (spiritual beings) in caring relationships. Life without condemnation is possible because Christ took sin upon himself, in a very literal and historical way, and then spoke forgiveness.

The parable of the sower is one more of chapter 13's parables of the realm of heaven and is spoken to the crowds and their leaders. Jesus knows the crowds are lost in their orientation to God, so he goes out from his house to speak to them. The dynamics are such that Jesus is set apart from the crowd, sitting in an unusual place of honor—the boat. The crowd's regard for Jesus is unlike that of the authorities, who have been "in his face" and unwilling to give him a place of honor. Perhaps the crowds will hear and understand the word their leaders have rejected.

Listening is the key. Many in Israel reject the word. For those who refuse to hear, judgment comes in the form of the evil one, who snatches the gift. To those who hear, on the other hand, comes extravagant growth, illustrative of God's realm. Because understanding is a matter of the heart, the word works productively in them.

Some call this parable the parable of the seed. What makes for good soil? Is it not the seed itself? The seed does its work and does not return empty (see Isaiah). There is a steadfastness of God which can be likened to the persistence of growth in the natural world.

Pastoral Reflections

I experienced the Spirit as I was studying Romans 8. I find myself repeating Paul's opening line, "There is no condemnation." It has become for me a prayer which shows no sign of ceasing. Instead of pop tunes or catchy commercial lines, "There is no condemnation" keeps rolling around in my mind. Periodically, I'll say the whole verse, "There is... no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

How much we struggle against (or with) condemnation, as if it were a being trying to capture our minds. In our critical age, we live acutely aware of condemnation in every aspect of life. The old mindset (old self) critiques everything, at the same time it must work to protect the self against succumbing to the criticism of others. Driven by a need to make ourselves right, the old mindset leads to chronic anxiety and worry—a body of death, especially when we consider our relationship to God.

I am thinking of President Clinton as reality and symbol of one standing under critique and condemnation. Is there another individual whose failings have been so universally broadcast? I think of him as a man completely surrounded by condemnation, coming even from those who support him. What would it mean to an individual in such circumstances to hear, "There is no condemnation"? (No condemnation is not to be interpreted as "no accountability or responsibility.")

Several years ago, I heard an interview given by Albert "Race" Sample, telling of his experience of condemnation and acceptance as recorded in his book, *Race Horse: Big Emma's Boy*. Race grew up fatherless in Texas with his mother, Big Emma, who spoke only words of condemnation. She hated him because he was light-skinned. Society hated him because he was black. Furthermore, Big Emma encouraged Race to steal to support the family. For long periods of time, she would disappear, leaving him completely alone.

Eventually, Race was condemned for his crimes and sent to prison. At some point in his 17 years in prison, he was placed in solitary confinement with only a cold slab of concrete on which to sit—naked and alone in the darkness. He felt like a "bug in a match box," condemned by the whole world. He realized that not a single person had ever given him a moment of love. Race cried out, "You win! You win! Leave me alone." At that instant, a sliver of light shone between his fingers and he heard the words, "Don't worry about a thing... but you must tell them about me (Jesus)." I interpret these words to mean, "There is no condemnation." In that moment of forgiveness, Race knew he was loved and his life was transformed for mission. He stayed in solitary confinement for 28 days, the "finest days of my life." "In Christ Jesus" is an extravagant place to be, like resurrected life eternal, free to be for others.

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost
July 18, 1999

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

First Reading

The divine words which come to Second Isaiah claim that Yahweh, the first and the last, is in charge. Other so-called gods may be in opposition and may destroy, but they cannot create and make a new way. Only Yahweh empowers a new deed, such as Cyrus' rearrangement of the political land-

scape which benefits Israel. The people are to be Yahweh's faithful witnesses of the one God who is their rock and salvation.

Where Second Isaiah speaks of God in majestic and regal terms, Paul's imagery is familial and parental. However, living according to the flesh places us outside the holy family. Living according to the flesh means basing one's life upon those activities which protect the self against anything threatening to it. Because self-protecting ideas and actions completely surround us and permeate our being, as if we were embalmed and entombed, it can be said we live in a body of death. This attitude, or mindset, is motivated by a fear which leads to a rejection of the Christ, the one who proposes to break into our bodies of death.

With his mindset, suffering is always the critical moment, because it is in moments of crisis that the Christ meets us. Christ is always entering our hearts when our systems break down and death confronts us. Moments of crisis bring fear and prompt us to repair our defenses and patch up our tomb. Jesus, however, brings a new spirit of adoption. Paul's language of family, parent, and an intimate relationship to God signals the triumph of faith over fear.

The way out comes only through the cross of Christ, for at this place and at in this moment, Christ takes all fear, suffering, and death upon himself and breaks their bondage over us. Paul claims that such action has consequences for creation itself, which now reflects our body of death. The creation, too, will experience redemption as we do. Furthermore, Jesus' saving action is a redemption of our bodies from death, not a rejection of our bodies in life.

Hope and suffering then, are inextricably linked (see also the Third Sunday after Pentecost). Although suffering is not fully erased in our lives, we know and trust that Christ will come to us and carry us to a place of redemption. We experience fear but wait with patience.

Therefore, life—abundant life—begins in suffering, for there we find Christ. Taking up the suffering of others, bringing the sure and certain hope of Christ's redemption into a sister's or brother's despairing moment, is the key to our mission life. Suffering becomes an opening, a wound in the exclusive protective armor of the entombed individual, like the opening of a womb in pain to bring forth life.

In the parable of the tares (Matthew 13), a farmer has sown good seed, but an enemy has tried to ruin the crop. Feuding, vengeance, jealousy are at work in this parable on several levels. This common and ongoing social dynamic is a cultural metaphor for the similar conflicts Jesus and his followers faced with the authorities and rulers. Probably Matthew had in mind a conflict between the emerging church and the established synagogue. On a cosmic level, the enemy of Jesus and the church is the devil. At all levels, opposition is active. Malevolence is at work. Sin is more than the lack of care, it is an active opposition to the rule and realm of God. (This same understanding of sin shows up in the Apology of the Augsburg Confession.)

Even so, the church's task is not to uproot. That would simply be another way of feuding. The church shall not be defined by what it is against. Rather, the church shall be known by its missionary effort and its allegiance to God's universal salvific intent. Judgment and separation shall be God's task.

Pastoral Reflections

Much of life is taken up by "feuding." I cannot help but think of the national cultural war between Mr. Starr and Mr. Clinton, between Republicans and Democrats. While each side can rightly point to honored values which are worth defending, our national

consciousness perceives that the destruction of people and institutions is the fundamental outcome of this feuding.

Among some extreme groups, the people's militia, for example, the feuding takes on millennial proportions. Government and authority are judged to be enemies to freedom and must be blown up. There is feuding in churches, too. In various denominational communities, we've seen several decades in which seminaries "blow up" over rigorously defended differences. Saint Paul terrorized Christians prior to his experience on the Damascus Road. How many of us have not found ourselves embroiled in protracted controversies over how to manage things in our work and home environments?

Jesus takes a different approach. His ministry is dynamic and transformative because it is rooted in his being for us, not against us. Yes, division occurs, but opponents set themselves apart by their rejection of Jesus and those whom he saves. Paul understands the way this works. We work toward the adoption of one another by forgiving others and being present in their suffering.

Would this be a good Sunday to speak about ecumenical relations, particularly emphasizing Jesus' point in the parable that churches are fundamentally defined by their mission? Where we share missions, there is true ecumenicity.

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