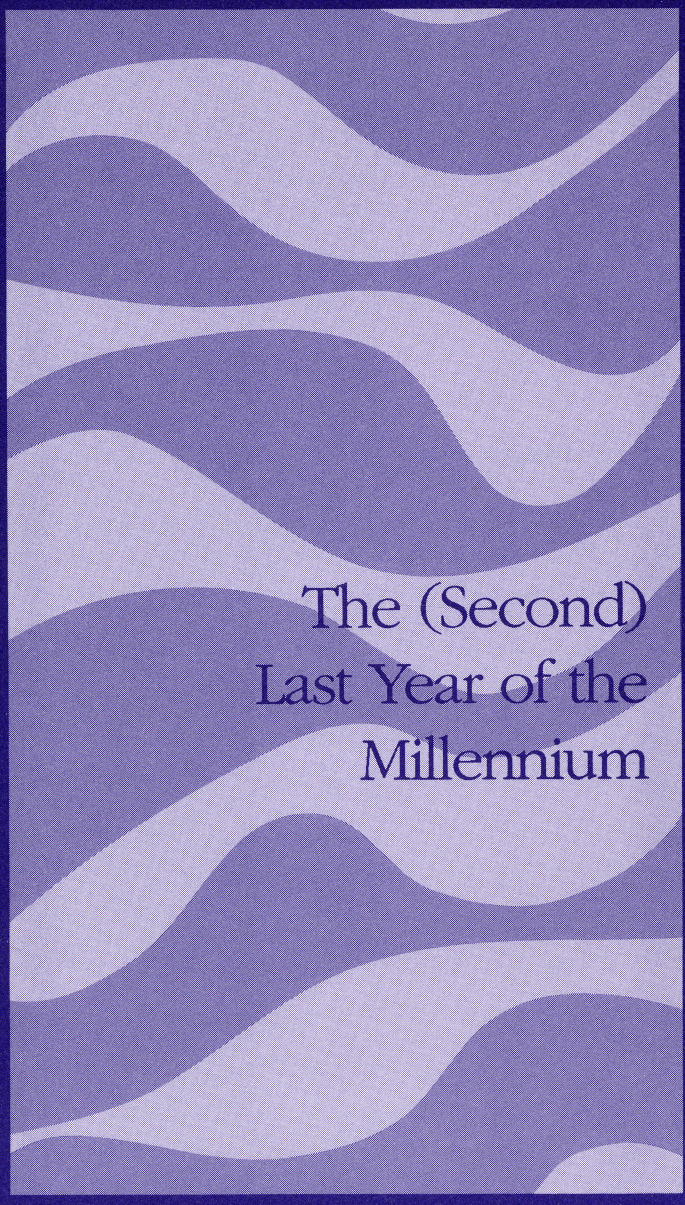
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The (Second) Last Year of the Millennium

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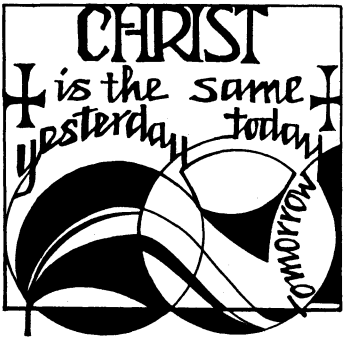
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The (Second) Last Year of the Millennium

It's a losing cause—like trying to correct the improper use of "lay" for "lie"—to convince people that the new millennium starts with the year 2001. You know everyone will see the year-ometer roll over to 2000 next December 31 and yell, "Happy New Millennium!" Technically, the new millennium begins in 2001. But if Jesus was really born in 7 or 4 B.C.E., we're already well into the third Christian millennium, the 2000-year computer bug to the contrary notwithstanding. One way or the other we're already there or almost there, and in the Hein Fry lectures from 1998 published in this issue **Martha Ellen Stortz** gives us help on ethical questions we will face in that new millennium.

Assisted suicide is a big issue for many at this turn of the millennium, and the first article shows how current attitudes toward death confuse the issue and deprive us of resources for dying. Death is now framed in the language of rights, or death is medicalized and turned into a private matter. While medieval thinkers dwelt on the art of dying, we should focus on the art of living, with Christ triumphant over the sinister trinity of sin, death, and the devil. Baptism, after all, is a way of practicing to live and practicing to die. Baptism puts us into a web of relationships that will support us in living and accompany us through dying. These relationships mean that no one dies alone. We need to remind one another of our final destination in the life to come, and we need to remember ritually those among us who have died. Just as there are few easy births, so there are few easy deaths. But at the end of each dark passageway we can anticipate a great light and God's loving arms.

Welfare as we knew it is no more, but it is hard to measure what exactly has improved or deteriorated after the passage of the Welfare Reform Act in 1996. The second essay catalogs the diverse responses that have emerged to the new situation in several states. Liberals tend to blame the external situation for poverty, while conservatives blame internal attitudes of the poor. The operative anthropology in welfare discussions is that we are all economic beings, who respond only to financial incentives or punishments. We need a welfare civics, reformation style, to displace the marketplace as the dominant metaphor for political life. In the 16th century, when the role of the Catholic

Church in supporting the poor no longer applied in Protestant circles, Luther transferred responsibility to the community we know as the priesthood of all believers. This priesthood draws people from different walks of life into a common vocation shared by all: worship and welfare. The Eucharist embodies practice in welfare civics by incorporating all into a whole and by fostering sharing with the poor. *Gottesdienst* (worship) results in *Dienst Gottes* (serving God).

The third essay provides methodological reflections on being a practicing Christian. Practices orient the community to a certain way of life and shape action. We Christians pray, baptize, and break bread. What do these activities mean for our way of being in the world? Without appropriate Christian practices, doctrines are disembodied. Practices enact doctrines, and doctrines norm practices. Christian practices respond to God's initiating act of grace. Our ethics should be empirical, concrete, and inductive. Christian practices evolve as communities struggle to enact baptism in a life of discipleship. Formation is initiation into the practices of discipleship. Formation shapes moral agents and requires a community for support. What we are is at least as important as what we do.

Rounding out this issue are two article-length reviews of important books published in this last decade of the millennium. **John H. Tietjen** reviews John Dominic Crossan's *The Birth of Christianity*, and **Mark C. Mattes** discusses Wolfhart Pannenberg's three-volume *Systematic Theology*.

I wrote this editorial and edited these essays last July just before my wife Marilyn and I took off for a sabbatical in Jerusalem. Seeing the essays through their final journey, laying out the issue, checking changes with the author, securing the art, and all the other chores of producing this issue have rested in the competent hands of our efficient Assistant Editor, Peggy Eldredge. The Hein Frey essays hold up dependence as an ideal, and it is a pleasure to confess how much I—and you, dear readers—depend on the ability and faithfulness of Peggy, whose anonymous contributions go too often unacknowledged.

Ralph W. Klein
Editor

"The curtain only rises": Assisted Death and the Practice of Baptism

Martha Ellen Stortz
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Outside the royal city of Madrid in the foothills of the Sierra de Guadarrama Spain lies Philip II's great palace of death. Upon its completion the king retired there to die a long and painful death. He surrounded himself with thousands of relics he had rescued from certain destruction at the hands of Protestant Europe and with the sarcophagi of kings and queens of Spain who had predeceased him. But death, like the royal court itself, had its attendants. In waiting were family, friends, and a raft of recorders with pens poised to document a royal death. The poet Garcia Lorca summed up Spanish attitudes toward death: "In all other countries death is the end. It arrives and the curtain falls. Not so in Spain. In Spain, on the contrary, the curtain only rises at that moment...."[1]

The poet claims too much for the singularity of Spanish attitudes towards death. In Germany some 52 years earlier a similar crowd of friends and witnesses gathered around Luther's deathbed. Would he die secure in the beliefs for which he had lived, confident in the grace of a Christ he had claimed was "for us"? Or would he die a Godforsaken death, despairing and miserable, a sure sign of the folly of the Reformation? Luther's deathbed was a litmus test of reform; it would prove the Reformation to have been either tragedy or epic.[2]

Similar sensibilities lie behind these two deaths: crucial to both is the transition, *el transito*, the passage between life and death, something best approached as lucidly as possible. Nor was death a private matter, the kingdom of individual choice, control, or dignity. One died in public. Friends and family witnessed the transition, because that was indeed the moment when the curtain rose. Then and only for a moment, they caught a glimpse of what lay on the other side. The final gift and greatest responsibility of dying was to leave behind this glimpse of the world beyond. Death was public; death was didactic; death was sacramental. For Luther, as for Philip II,

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[1] Quoted in Carlos M. N. Eire, *From Madrid to Purgatory: The Art and Craft of Dying in Sixteenth-Century Spain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 7.

[2] "The deathbed in the Eisleben inn had become a stage; and straining their ears to catch Luther's last words were enemies as well as friends." Heiko A. Oberman, *Luther: Man between God and the Devil* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 3.

dying and dying well was one's final responsibility.

I begin historically, because history is both a window and a mirror. History offers a window into centuries and sensibilities far different from our own. We see through the window into a world apart. Like every window, history simultaneously contains a reflection of the one looking. History holds a mirror to our own century and its peculiar sensibilities about dying. The very foreignness of these sixteenth-century attitudes towards death functions as a mirror to the culture of living and dying that surrounds us.

For a measure of the distance between these stories and our own, we need only turn to the language of the litany from our own hymnals. It has changed in the last four decades. The colorful language which many of us heard as children has been strangely altered. "From the crafts and assaults of the devil; from sudden and evil death...."[3] All this has been changed. The *Lutheran Book of Worship* intercedes: "From all sin, from all error, from all evil; from the cunning assaults of the devil; from an unprepared and evil death...."[4]

The response is still the same: "Good Lord, deliver us." That from which we seek deliverance has changed. We no longer want to be delivered from "sudden death." Indeed, sudden death is what many people pray to be delivered to, what many people pray fervently for. Sudden death is increasingly on the ballot of state initiatives and on the agendas of the courts: assisted suicide.

While the legal arguments seem calculated to confound, the ordinary reader hears powerful rationale for such initiatives every day: "If I get to be like that, kid, shoot me," my husband remarks only half-jokingly after a visit to a friend with Alzheimer's. "I want to go just like that," says a woman to me in the locker room, snapping her fingers. "I don't want to be a burden to anyone," says an elderly relative, showing me a stash of pills she's been hoarding. We've all been there; we've heard these things; we've perhaps even said them.

Lingering in pain, suffering, and isolation constitutes the worst imaginable end. So, far from being lucid when we face our own transitions, many choose to be as drugged up as possible. If there are responsibilities to be numbered, they belong not to the dying but rather to the physicians and caregivers, possibly even family members, whose responsibilities toward the dying feature prominently in assisted suicide initiatives.

I want first to examine this issue and the terms in which it presents itself, then argue why it needs to be reshaped for Christian discussion, and finally examine how Christian practice, in this case the practice of baptism, gives us a way of recasting and redressing the issue presented.

A legal problem, a legal debate: assisted suicide

Legal disputes present us with too many of our "moral" issues, and assisted suicide is no exception. There are three important and recent legal developments: two in state courts in the western United States, one in the U.S. Supreme Court.

1. One legal initiative hails from Oregon. In November 1994 and by a narrow margin of 51 to 49 per cent, the state of

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[3] "The Litany," *Service Book and Hymnal* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1958), 158.

[4] "The Litany," *Lutheran Book of Worship* (Minneapolis and Philadelphia: Augsburg Publishing House and Board of Publication, Lutheran Church in America, 1978), 169.

The symmetry between abortion and assisted death has not escaped watchers of the courts and the culture.

Oregon became the first state to pass a law permitting assisted death in its "Death with Dignity Act." The act permitted physicians to prescribe lethal drugs under certain specified conditions: the patients must be terminally ill, be of sound mind, and have made a written request to die. Physicians were not allowed to administer lethal injections. Rather, the law featured patient's choice, patient's written request, and patient's self-administration of the prescribed drugs. A verbal sleight-of-hand simultaneously allowed the state to maintain its interest in preserving human life and yet permit patients to demand medical assistance in dying: the bill stipulated that such a death "shall not constitute suicide, assisted suicide, mercy killing or homicide."

The law met immediate challenge and was quickly snagged in the courts. In the midst of the legalese dominating the court battles and legal challenges, the voices of people whom the initiative would affect bubbled up. Dorothy Hoogstraat's husband Emerson died of prostate cancer while the law was tied up in the courts. "In his final months, Emerson lived in agony, unable to use the law he helped to pass to end his own suffering. My husband of 40 years died exactly the death he feared because opponents stopped the Death with Dignity law in court."[5] In the fall of 1997 and by a majority of 60 per cent, Oregonians voted to uphold the "Death with Dignity" law. Oregon became the first state in the union to permit assisted death.[6]

2. A second legal initiative comes from the state of Washington. In May, 1994, in a decision entitled "Compassion in Dying v. Washington," a federal judge there struck down Washington's ban on assisted suicide. The decision noted that the U. S. Constitution had been interpreted to uphold a competent patient's right to refuse life-sustaining treatment. The precedent for finding this negative right was the Nancy Cruzan case in 1990 (Cruzan v. Missouri 1990). The federal district court argued to extend this negative right to refuse treatment into a positive right which allowed patients to demand physician-assisted suicide.

This was and should have been a contentious decision. Traditionally jurists have distinguished between negative rights, which impose duties that are quite stringent, and positive rights, which impose less stringent duties. Accordingly, an appeals court reversed the decision reasserting the traditional distinction between positive and negative rights. The appeals court simply argued that a right to refuse treatment could not legitimately be extended to include a right to demand treatment that was not medically indicated and would surely issue in death.

But the case was not closed. Request for rehearing was granted. In a second

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[5] Timothy Egan, "Issue of Assisted Suicide Comes Full Circle,to Oregon," *The New York Times*, 26 October 1997.

[6] Timothy Egan, "Oregon Doctors Caught between State and Federal Rules on Assisted Suicide," *The New York Times*, 19 November 1997.

hearing, the appeals court found that a mentally competent, terminally ill adult did have a right to a doctor's assistance in determining the time and manner of her death. This second decision appealed not only to the Cruzan case but, more significantly, to the U. S. Supreme Court decision on abortion, Roe v. Wade 1973.[7] Roe v. Wade, the court found upon rehearing, legitimated the extension of a negative right into a positive right, because Roe v. Wade had identified a negative right, the right to noninterference, and extended it to embrace a positive right, the right to a medical procedure that did not have to be medically indicated and would issue in certain death. Appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court decision on abortion established the necessary bridge between negative rights and positive rights. Moreover, elective abortion was judged to be a patient-requested, physician-assisted death.[8]

The symmetry between abortion and assisted death has not escaped watchers of the courts and the culture. Writing in the fall of 1997, one analyst wondered if physician-assisted suicide "could be to the next century what abortion has been to this one...."[9] Certainly, the energy and pattern of debate show disturbing parallels.

3. A third decision stands as important background for these cases. In June, 1997, ruling in two other cases (Washington v. Glucksburg and Vacco v. Quill), the U.S. Supreme Court declared that there is no constitutionally protected "right to die" but encouraged the states to pursue "the earnest and profound debate about the morality, legality, and practicality" of assisted suicide. While the ruling was hailed by religious groups as affirming of life, their praise may have come too quickly. The court's ruling in effect kicks debate into the states, extending the issue without resolving it. How will the states square their interest in preserving and protecting human life with demands to end it? Bioethicist Arthur Caplan commented on this move: "I see this not as the end of anything, but as the beginning of what is going to take years to work through."[10] Legal scholar Laurence Tribe was more laconic: "The decision leaves the hard questions for another day."[11] Dr. Jack Kevorkian observed that the ruling would make "not the slightest bit of difference" in what he does.[12]

Clearly the legality and even the practicality of assisted suicide are being debated—and hotly. But what can we notice about the tenor of these debates? How might we as Christians begin to debate not the legality or the practicality but the morality of assisted suicide?

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[7] For a legal overview of these cases and the issues involved, see Carol A. Tauer, "Philosophical Debate and Public Policy on Physician-Assisted Death," and Allen Verhey, "Assisted Suicide and Euthanasia: A Biblical and Reformed Perspective," in *Must We Suffer Our Way to Death?* ed. Ronald P. Hamel and Edwin R. DuBose (Dallas: SMU Press, 1996), 47–53, 245–46. For an update, see "Laws Banning Assisted Suicide Are Upheld," *The New York Times*, 27 June 1997.

[8] Surveying this juridical jungle of rights, legal scholar Ann Dudley Goldblatt argues: "...an elective abortion is a patient-determined need arising from a condition other than physical disease or dysfunction, a patient-desired outcome, and a patient-determined medical treatment." Ann Dudley Goldblatt, "Knocking on Heaven's Door: Medical Jurisprudence and Aid in Dying," in *Must We Suffer Our Way to Death?* 73.

[9] Timothy Egan, "Assisted Suicide Comes Full Circle."

[10] "The Ruling on Suicide Still Leaves Open Issues," *The New York Times*, 27 June 1997.

[11] David Stout, "From Emotional to Intellectual, Secular to Religious," *The New York Times*, 27 June 1997.

[12] *Ibid.*

The tenor of debate on assisted suicide and assisted death

When we look through the window of history, a window which is also a mirror, what do we see about our own attitudes and sensibilities surrounding death? Attending in this manner helps us excavate the tenor of these debates, which is threefold:

1. Death involves rights and autonomy, choice and control;
2. Death is highly physicalized and medicalized;
3. Death is a private matter.

I will examine each of these presumptions in turn.

Rights and autonomy, choice and control. Assisted suicide invokes a language of rights and autonomy, choice and control. Supporter of the Oregon Death with Dignity Act, Penny Schleuter, who has been diagnosed with ovarian cancer, demands the freedom to make her own decisions about the end of her life: "I look at this as the ultimate civil right—the last big decision."[13] She regards opponents to the Death with Dignity act as people who are trying to "force religion down her throat."

But one wonders if framing the debate in terms of competing realms of rights makes it any easier to swallow. Like abortion, assisted suicide divides too easily into opposing camps: on one side, the right to die camp, those who believe death is their "last big decision;" on the other, the right to quality of life camp, those who believe people are entitled to compassionate and palliative care until the moment of death. Rights imply duties: my rights are your duties. If states like Oregon vote to uphold assisted death, they confer a right that minimally obliges someone not to interfere and maximally obliges someone else to assist. Why physicians would be more obliged to assist than someone else—say, a friend or a family member—foreshadows my second observation: death is medical-ized.[14]

It is striking that rights are absent from either of the cameos out of the sixteenth century with which we began. There is no entitlement to anything, either dying or living: one's time has simply come. There are plenty of responsibilities, but these also belong to the dying. Our culture simply does not view the sick as having responsibilities to others, but wouldn't dying well involve dying in a way that promotes peace and trust among those who mourn?[15] One prepares for death, whether with the grandiosity of Philip building his great "palace of death" or with the simplicity with which Luther drew up his own will nine months after the death of his daughter Magdalena.

Physicalization and medicalization of death. Physicians govern the kingdom of dying in ways that would be strange to both Luther and Philip II, both of whom regarded death as more a religious than a medical event. Advances in medical technology provoke the whole discussion of rights, because technology seems to allow physicians more control over patients' lives than the patients themselves have. Patients want to regain that control.

A bold doctor tells a story that he admits has happened too many times.[16] Put-

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[13] Egan, "Assisted Suicide Comes Full Circle."

[14] Many physicians argue that consenting to assisted suicide constitutes a complete travesty of their vocation. See Jon Fuller, "Physician-Assisted Suicide: An Unnecessary Crisis," *America* 177:2 (July 19-16, 1997), 9–12.

[15] Patricia Beattie Jung makes this point in her article, "Dying Well Isn't Easy," in *Must We Suffer Our Way to Death?* 184–85.

ting a stethoscope to his ear, he thumps a chest. Exposed and vulnerable, the patient begins talking nervously. The doctor holds up his hand to silence all conversation: "I can't hear you while I'm listening." Patients fear doctors who cannot hear them for listening; they fear technologies that reduce them from a living, breathing, valuing whole to a chest, a liver, a blocked artery. Their fears are real. Like it or not, most Americans will come before such arbitration: in 1950 only 25% of all Americans died in a hospital or care facility; now a full 50% can count on such surroundings in their last hours. Instead of being the mediators of what was a natural phenomenon, physicians have become "the arbiters of an artificial existence."[17]

Understandably, patients retaliate, demanding control over the time and manner of dying. But their retaliation refuses to question the terms of the debate. Patients accept without question the medicalization of death; they want nothing more than control of the medical arsenal themselves. Assisted suicide eliminates suffering by eliminating the sufferer. Absent is any consideration of social, psychological, or spiritual dimensions, which may indeed be more at issue.

French philosopher Simone Weil sorts through these various dimensions of dying in her analysis of affliction. Physical pain, social alienation, and the sense of spiritual abandonment comprise affliction (*malheur*).[18] Debates on assisted suicide swirl around physical pain but remain mute about other dimensions of pain that might be social or spiritual. I do not want to minimize physical pain, and more can and should be done to reduce it. After all, "A toothache has a way of reducing the world to itself."[19] But physical pain invokes these other dimensions of suffering, which we have a hard time talking about at all. Hospice and



palliative care, a medical specialization in Great Britain, emerge as some of the most riveting challenges to assisted suicide, because they marshal the medical arsenal not to cure, but to care for the whole person.

That this is necessary seems without dispute. In a 1992 study Nessa Coyle of the Department of Neurology Pain Service at

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[16] Cited by Warren Thomas Reich, "A New Era for Bioethics: The Search for Meaning in Moral Experience," in *Religion and Medical Ethics: Looking Back, Looking Forward*, ed. Allen Verhey (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1996), 97. Reich references Richard Baron, "An Introduction to Medical Phenomenology: I Can't Hear You While I'm Listening," *Annals of Internal Medicine* 103 (1985): 606.

[17] Cynthia M. A. Geppert, "The Rehumanization of Death: The Ethical Responsibility of Physicians to Dying Patients," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 17 (May 7, 1997), 1208.

[18] Simone Weil, "The Love of God and Affliction," in *The Simone Weil Reader*, ed. George Panichas (Mt. Kisco: Moyer Bell Limited, 1977), 441, 454.

[19] William F. May, "The Sacral Power of Death in Contemporary Experience," in *On Moral Medicine*, ed. Stephen E. Lammers and Allen Verhey (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans), 181.

Death presents loss of relationship, and we understand ourselves relationally. We are who we are in our connections to others...

Sloan-Kettering reported that when patients ranked symptoms in order of the seriousness of distress they caused, patients ranked pain only fifth. The four more distressing symptoms were all aspects of social and spiritual suffering: abandonment, loss of dignity, loss of control, and fear of becoming a burden to others. Weil's analysis of affliction resonates with these concerns.

Death presents loss of relationship, and we understand ourselves relationally. We are who we are in our connections to others, and disrupting those connections is truly terrifying. Augustine's lament, over sixteen centuries old, rings true today:

> My heart grew sombre with grief, and wherever I looked I saw only death. My own country became a torment and my own home a grotesque abode of misery. All that we had done together was now a grim ordeal without him. My eyes searched everywhere for him, but he was not there to be seen. I hated all the places we had known together, because he was not in them and they could no longer whisper to me 'Here he comes!' as they would have done had he been alive but absent for a while. I had become a puzzle to myself....[20]

Death disrupts a web of relationships, cuts us loose from our moorings, leaves us a puzzle to ourselves.

The sense of spiritual alienation is difficult to assess. The rage veiled in a comment like "How could this happen to her?" suggests that someone should have stepped in to prevent this, and that Someone is whoever is in charge of the kingdoms of heaven and earth. Simone Weil puts the matter sharply: "Affliction causes God to be absent for a time...more absent than light in the utter darkness of a cell."[21] Luther spoke of the absence as the *deus absconditus*, the hidden God, and depicted this in the story of Joseph, languishing in the bowels of Pharaoh's prison. Joseph could not see God's face; he could only see God's back. He could not hear God's voice; he could only listen to God's silences.[22]

These physical, social, and spiritual facets of a phenomenology of suffering

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[20] Saint Augustine, *Confessions* 4.4, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin (New York: Penguin Books, 1961), 76. He continues: "I suppose that the great love which I had for my friend made me hate and fear death all the more, as though it were the most terrible of enemies, because it had snatched him away from me. I thought that, just as it had seized him, it would seize all others too without warning.... I wondered that other men should live when he was dead, for I had loved him as though he would never die. Still more I wondered that he should die and I remain alive, for I was his second self." (77)

[21] Simone Weil, "The Love of God and Affliction," in *The Simone Weil Reader*, 442.

[22] Martin Luther, "Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 38-44," in *Luther's Works* 7 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1965), 103ff. From earlier in the book of Genesis, he listens to Hagar's response to an angel of the Lord regarding a pregnancy that will mean exile: "I have seen the back of Him who sees me" (Gen 16:13). Without diminishing the terror of that absence, Luther nonetheless asserted the presence of Christ as the one who saw and cared for Joseph.

provide a template for talking about death, which can be known only partially through suffering. Admittedly, it is hard to find anything to say at all. When forced to say something, we may find it easiest to "say it with flowers."

Death in private. Framing death in the language of rights, medicalizing it, and focusing on the physical all serve to privatize death. Part of this privatization stems from an excessive individualism. So far from being a communal event, death is *my* last big decision! Beneath this attitude is a possessive individualism, a my body–my self mentality. This is my body; this is my death; this is my choice; these are my wishes. The Oregon Death with Dignity law stipulates that patients retain the right not to notify next of kin of their decision. This provision overrides all advance directives, which must be signed with next of kin present and carve out a tiny space for discussion of dying with family and friends.

Medical defeatism also plays a role in privatization of death. You've seen it in old movies: a doctor, who could in those times do a lot less, turns away from the patient, huddles the family to say: "There's nothing more we can do," and leaves the room, defeated. Death always defeats a profession whose only metaphors for itself are military ones. Medicine "defeats disease," "conquers cancer," "vanquishes hostile tumors." Defeat in this scenario registers keenly.

But what if there were another way of re-imagining the profession and directing it toward compassionate caring, hospice, and palliative care?[23] Death would be neither a riddle to be solved nor an enemy to be conquered, but an event to be dealt with—in public. If death is not a private matter, the question becomes: how do we behave toward it? Attention could turn to pain management, comfort, and companionship, tasks which could be parcelled out to friends, family, and caregivers of the dying person.[24]

The stories at the beginning of this article exhibit different attitudes towards death. They may not be entirely benign, but they certainly are attitudes that regard death as a public event. The fate of a nation hung on Philip II's death, while the fate of reformation hung on Luther's. Even on a smaller scale, we must take Lorca seriously, because we have experienced this ourselves at the deathbeds of our own loved ones: at death the curtain goes up, and for a brief moment we see between worlds.

How can we face death? How can we respond to these other aspects of suffering, social and spiritual? How do we face death? How do we practice dying?

Baptism: a way of practicing to live and practicing to die

If we are to align our attitudes with our practices, we find a tight connection between living and dying, between birth and death. Baptism brings beginning and ending of human life together with sacramental

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[23] Neil MacDonald, M.D., "The Emerging Field of Palliative Medicine," *The End of Life*, National Public Radio, 1997. MacDonald defines palliative care as "the active total care of patients whose disease is not responsive to curative treatment. Control of pain, of other symptoms, and of psychological, social, and spiritual problems are paramount. The goal of palliative care is achievement of the best possible quality of life for patients and their families." (http://www.npr.org/proceedings/essays/macd.html)

[24] Cf. Stanley Hauerwas, *Suffering Presence: Theological Reflections on Medicine, the Mentally Handicapped, and the Church* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986).

power. Baptism is the sacrament that welcomes people into this world as children of God. It incorporates them into the body of Christ. Yet, that incorporation is finally complete only in death. Baptism ushers people out of this world. The pall harkens back to the white garments of baptism; sprinkling of water on the casket or urn recalls the waters of baptism. Death in the Lord is final inclusion into the body of Christ.

Death in the Lord is final inclusion into the body of Christ.

But baptism is not the sacrament only of beginning and ending of life; daily return to baptism forms and informs the lives we live in between these two events. Baptism bears the key both to how we live and to how we die. Throughout our lives, we turn to this practice, because it offers powerful alternatives to the world's ways of dying, to the world's denial of death, and to the world's despair in the face of disease.

Baptism incorporates us into the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. Paul proclaims this in his letter to the Romans: "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life" (Rom 6:3-4 NRSV). In his Small Catechism, Luther identifies the gifts of baptism: forgiveness of sins, deliverance from death and the devil, salvation to all who believe.[25] To understand the significance of this sinister trinity that Luther identified—sin, death, and the devil—we need to look through the window of the world from which Luther spoke.

The printing press speeded the production and dissemination of written material and visual images throughout Europe. Its impact on the Reformation cannot be overestimated, but not only Reformation tracts and treatises fanned out in its wake. Another genre of literature also found its way into popular imagination and piety: the whole literature of the *ars moriendi*, treatises on the art of aging and the art of dying well. The genre extends back into the classical world, boasting such fine literature as Cicero's *de senectute* (on old age) or his treatise on friendship, prompted by the death of a friend.[26] With the printing press these books and pamphlets could be widely disseminated and easily illustrated. Each page contained both text and a drawing or woodcut; it was therefore accessible to those who could read and those who could not read but only see. It is the illustrations I want to look at.

Typically, these depict a bedroom, with the dying man or woman lying in bed, surrounded by grieving family and friends. Above the bed, entire armies of heaven and the legions of hell break in through the rafters. These hosts witness, comfort, and terrify.[27] This literature presents a power-

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[25] *The Book of Concord*, ed. Theodore Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 348.

[26] Thanks to Dr. Angeta Enermalm of Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary for making this point and asking what has been lost in the gradual disappearance of this literature.

[27] Philippe Aries, *The Hour of Our Death* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1981), 105–9.

ful iconography of death, which imprinted itself on the hearts and minds of literate and illiterate alike.

Images like these doubtless haunted one of Luther's parishioners who hounded him for counsel: how did these new proposals of reform alter the cosmic drama at the deathbed? The good doctor finally responded with counsel which appears as "A Sermon on Preparing to Die" (1519). The treatise presents Luther at his pastoral best, but it also affords an alternative iconography of death, which is etched into Luther's theology of baptism. In the midst of sage practical advice, like regulating "all temporal goods, lest after...death there be occasion for squabbles, quarrels, or other misunderstandings among...surviving friends,"[28] Luther supplants the macabre iconography of the *ars moriendi* with a very different image: the figure of Christ. Where elsewhere he speaks of Christ as gift and example, here Christ becomes icon, a figure that triumphs over the sinister trinity of sin, death, and the devil.

Luther displaces the hosts of heaven and hell with a simple image: the image of Christ. Christ defeats the sinister trinity: He is the image of immortality against death, the image of heaven against hell, the image of God against the devil. The dying person should have this—and this alone!—before her eyes. The Devil "hides these images... [and] frightens us with...untimely images."[29] Christ is the timely, true, and only icon above the deathbed.

The *ars moriendi* literature further emphasizes confession of sin; indeed, for the medieval Catholic church, a deathbed confession promised perfect penance.[30] Luther minimizes confession, urging that the dying occupy themselves more with the virtues of the sacraments than their own virtues—or their absence.[31] Twentieth century historian Steven Ozment thinks a bit of anguish might be appropriate. He fears that Protestants, with their focus on "greener pastures" ahead, look like "children of Prometheus." In their effort to avoid the undue burdening of conscience on the deathbed, he wonders if Protestants have not succumbed to the other extreme, contributing to a denial of death that plagues our own attitudes and practices to this day.[32]

Ozment's conclusion follows only if one ignores Luther's inversion of the *ars moriendi* and the significance of baptism. For the art of dying well does not begin in the hour of death, but rather with the moment of birth, which is ritually articulated in baptism. Luther knew all too well the perils of denying the reality of death. For that reason he counseled his parishioners again and again "to look at death while you are alive"; he urged the wisdom of "inviting death into our presence when it is still at a

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[28] Martin Luther, "A Sermon on Preparing to Die," *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, ed. Timothy F. Lull (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 638–54.

[29] Luther, "A Sermon on Preparing to Die," 641.

[30] Steven E. Ozment, *The Reformation in the Cities* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), 55.

[31] "We must occupy ourselves much more with the sacraments and their virtues than with our sins." Luther, "A Sermon on Preparing to Die," 639. While conceding that such deathbed practices would surely make dying less fretful as well as obviate the need for priest or confessor, twentieth century scholar Steven Ozment finds them nonetheless troubling. In his view, the medieval Catholic practices embody the strongest argument for salvation by grace alone: faced with God's judgment and one's own demerits, one could throw oneself on the merits of Christ alone. Cf. Ozment, *The Reformation in the Cities*, 55–56.

[32] Ozment, *The Reformation*, 55.

[33] Luther, "A Sermon on Preparing to Die," 640–41.

distance and not on the move."[33] This is decidedly not the denial of death that Ozment feared. Moreover, full confession ought not be reserved for the deathbed; rather, it was part and parcel of every day. For this reason, Luther counseled a daily return to baptism, where sin is acknowledged "by daily sorrow and repentance" and where daily the new Adam is invited forth. His attitude evokes the advice of the Jewish rabbis, who with wisdom and humor exhorted their congregations: "Repent one day before your death!"[34]

In Luther, the *ars moriendi* becomes an *ars vivendi*; the art of dying becomes an art of living, choreographed by a daily return to baptism, chastened by daily remembrance of sin, and strengthened by daily experience of forgiveness. We need to hear again that "the just shall *live* by faith," emphasis on the word "live." That life does not begin in heaven. According to the medieval mind, in the midst of life we are surrounded by death. Luther's sturdy conviction of justification turned this on its head: "In the midst of death we are surrounded by life."[35] As incorporation into the body of Christ, baptism allows the iconic meaning of Christ to be in us, our seal against sin, death, and the devil.

At this point, a window into Luther's world becomes a mirror for our own. Many modern people do not share his sinister trinity of sin, death, and the devil; rather, our sinister trinity is suffering, death, and loss of control. We battle this enemy not with Christ and not in public, but alone as individuals, armed with rights, medical technologies, and physician-footsoldiers. Because we frame the whole matter of dying in terms of rights and choices, medicines, and bodies unconnected to souls, we come up with secret weapons like assisted suicide. But what if the whole practice of baptism were to frame the question?

Reframing death and dying

I want to suggest several ways in which a daily return to baptism reframes our way of dealing with death. Literally, I want to review through the lens of baptism the three dominant ways of dealing with death in our contemporary culture: rights and autonomy, choice and control; the physicalization of death; and the privatization of death.

Revisiting rights and autonomy, choice and control. Baptism clearly articulates that we are not our own: not rights, but relationships mark the Christian life. We are members one of another, bound together by reciprocal responsibilities. Luther inflates his explanation of the Fourth Commandment in his Large Catechism to encompass a whole taxonomy of relationships. Then he identifies the reciprocal responsibilities each relationship entails: responsibilities of children to parents, but also parents to children; responsibilities of servants to masters, but also masters to servants; responsibilities of citizens to their princes, but also princes to their citizens.[36]

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[34] B. Shabbat 153a. Cited in Elliot N. Dorff, "Assisted Death: A Jewish Perspective," in *Must We Suffer Our Way to Death?* 154. Dorff also notes that rabbinic exegesis of the creation story underscores the goodness of death: "Noting that the Bible describes each of the first five days of Creation as "good" and only the sixth day's creations as "very good," the rabbis say that death was one of the things God created on that day to make it very good (Genesis Rabbah 9:5)—a remarkable statement, in light of the rabbis' emphasis on the value of living life to the fullest." (154)

[35] Oberman, *Luther: Man between God and the Devil*, 330.

[36] The theme of reciprocal responsibilities echoes throughout Paul Lehmann's treatment of Luther on the Decalogue. See his book, *The Decalogue and a Human Future: The Meaning of the Commandments for Making*

Baptism sets one into a web of relationships that will sustain and nurture, admonish and challenge, support us in living and accompany us through death. Luther loved baptizing infants, because they could not answer for themselves. Their faith was confessed on the lips of others; the burden of their Christian nurture was placed on the shoulders of others. The baptism of infants becomes a model for living as well as a model for dying. The responsibility of the community was to believe on the infant's behalf and to nurture and support the child in the faith. Baptism extends this community responsibility to the deathbed, as we companion these brothers and sisters into a new life. Concretely, the practice of baptism articulates reciprocal responsibilities in the face of death: responsibilities of the community and responsibilities of the dying.

Responsibilities of the community are easy to identify, harder to implement. I would like to identify three: companioning, reminding, and remembering.

Companioning. Baptism means that no one moves through life and death alone. Baptism identifies a community and extends that community into death and beyond. Ministry to the shut-in and the dying is not the pastor's responsibility alone but falls squarely upon all the baptized. Congregations should be bold about setting end-of-life discussions in the midst of congregational life and in the context of baptism, lest the terms of discussion be set by court decrees and state initiatives and cast entirely in terms of rights. Congregational forums on living wills, durable power of attorney, Do Not Resuscitate (DNR) orders, hospice and palliative care could be part of this, as well as visitation teams to the dying that offer relief to family caregivers. No one ought to die alone. There should be frank and fearless preaching of death from the pulpit, and follow-up discussion in the Sunday school rooms and church basements afterwards. One Sunday at my husband's parish afforded a simultaneous example of how this should and shouldn't happen. A marvelous sermon on All Soul's Day which named eloquently the hopes and fears we all have about death was followed by the annual stewardship talk. The invitation to ponder the mystery was cut short by an appeal for increased giving.

> Luther loved baptizing infants, because...their faith was confessed on the lips of others.

Reminding. Companioning the dying means that we present and represent hope in the world to come. Chaplain and medical ethicist Jeanne Brenneis expands on the notion of dying as a journey, and "if you know you're going on a journey, it helps to know that you have some sense of a destination, even if you can't fully picture or define that destination. If you thought your journey was to nothing, it would be different."[37] The responsibility of Christian caregivers is nothing more and nothing less than to remind the dying person of his or her final destination.

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and Keeping Human Life Human (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1995).

[37] Jeanne Brenneis, "Roundtable Discussion on End of Life Issues," *All Things Considered*, 3 November 1997 (Washington D.C.: National Public Radio, 1997).

Remembering. Companioning the dying means that we remember the dead in that great communion of saints. Early Christians, especially in North Africa, used to have picnics on the graves of the martyrs, companioning the dead beyond the grave. Bishop Ambrose of Milan admonished Augustine's overly pious mother Monica that this was not the Italian way: she was continuing the practice on the outskirts of Milan. But there is something here. We put flowers on the altar; we name the departed in intercessory prayer. But are there other practices of remembering those who are now in the communion of saints, this cloud of witnesses?

There are responsibilities of the dying, though these are hard to talk about and perhaps even harder to live out. As mentioned earlier, there is a responsibility to leave behind the greatest possible peace, hope, and trust among the survivors. The practice of baptism provides another clue: the responsibility of the one being baptized is very similar to the responsibility of the one dying—and infinitely more difficult. both need simply to receive the blessing of God and the faith of the community on their behalf and, in accepting, acknowledge their utter helplessness in the face of death and their absolute dependence on God and the family, friends, and congregation of the faithful gathered around the font or around the deathbed.

Perhaps this is what Luther meant with a comment on his deathbed: "We are all beggars."[38] Both as infants and as dying men and women we find ourselves in the same state of utter helplessness and absolute dependence, hands outstretched to the neighbor. A key responsibility of the dying is to leave the world as much a beggar as one entered, dependent upon the kindness of human community and the mercy of God. Contrary to right-to-diers' claims that "this is my last big decision," I suspect that dependence, not independence, is the only posture consonant with our baptism. Christians should not think of trying to control the means, the time, or the setting of their deaths. Our ethos is and ought to be a long way from the sovereignty of rights that rule in our contemporary world, without which we seem not to know how to begin to think ethically.

Revisiting the physicalization and medicalization of death. Using the practice of baptism as a way of understanding death revises our intense preoccupation with the physical aspects of death. Surely baptism presents itself in physical form—water that washes and words that are heard—but its effects embrace the whole person. Baptism is not "an indifferent matter...like putting on a new red coat."[39] Baptism uses the body

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[38] Cf. Oberman, *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil*, 230–32, 324.

[39] "The Large Catechism" in *The Book of Concord*, 437.

[40] Peter Brown states this more eloquently: "In the desert tradition, the body was allowed to become the discreet mentor of the proud soul. No longer was the ascetic formed, as had been the case in pagan circles, by the unceasing vigilance of his mind alone. The rhythms of the body and, with the body, his concrete social relations determined the life of the monk: his continued economic dependence on the settled world for food, the hard school of day-to-day collaboration with his fellow-ascetics in shared rhythms of labor, and mutual exhortation in the monasteries slowly changed his personality. The material conditions of the monk's life were held capable of altering the consciousness itself. Of all lessons of the desert to a late antique thinker, what was most 'truly astonishing' was 'that the immortal spirit can be purified and refined by clay.'" Peter Brown, *The Body and Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 237. The "late antique thinker" mentioned is John Climacus, *Ladder* 14: 868C.

to mentor the soul, much the way monks in the desert used their bodies to teach their minds and hearts.[40] We baptize, because it is God's command. The words joined with water create a "joyous exchange" by which the one being baptized receives the righteousness of Christ and Christ takes on the sins of the baptized. If this is what happens in baptism, then penance need only be a daily return to baptism, in acknowledgment of what happened decisively there. To live out our baptisms in the midst of dying means simultaneously confession and celebration.

Concretely, this suggests that congregations be places of healing, even and especially after hope for cure is abandoned.[41] Healing is a process that embraces body, mind, soul, and spirit. Montana rancher Russell Haasch, interviewed by National Public Radio reporter Howard Berkes, reflects on the reconciliation that happened when he left his ranch in the Big Sky country to take an apartment in Missoula so that he could be near his doctors and the now necessary hospice care:

> I'll say it: my family got to know me a lot better. It made better people out of us. I went to my brother and my sister and sister-in-law and said there's no hope; there's no hope on ever—ever healing me up or getting me well. Now do you really want to keep fighting about whose rooster that is over there? It has changed for the better, or just we've straightened it out for the better, for sure not the worse.[42]

How can congregations be places of healing, where stories are told, sins are acknowledged, and reconciliation is offered?

Revisiting death as a private affair. Finally, seen through the lens of baptism, death cannot be either a private affair or even a community matter. Baptism makes of death

How can congregations be places of healing, where stories are told, sins are acknowledged, and reconciliation is offered?

a family concern, but the family is not the biological family but the family redefined by the children of God. For baptism names us not Mary Elizabeth Wolff or James Luther Adams but "child of God," and baptism defines the community into which we are born. At death that same community is present. Embedded here is a symmetry

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[41] Hospital chaplain and spiritual counselor Sr. Sharon Burns argues that if death is not regarded solely as a physical or medical phenomenon, it can truly offer a possibility of healing: "Even though hospice personnel cannot hope for a cure, they can see the possibility of *healing*, that is, the achievement of spiritual unity that produces wholeness of being.... Efforts to help patients toward wholeness necessitate helping them accept freely their whole lives, all phases of their lives, past, present, and future." Sr. Sharon Burns, "The Spirituality of Dying," *Health Progress*, September, 1991, 50, quoted in Vigen Guroian, *Life's Living Toward Dying* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1996), 91.

[42] "Dying Well in Missoula," *All Things Considered*, 6 November 1997. Linda Wertheimer and Robert Siegel, *The End of Life: Exploring Death in America*, National Public Radio, 1997. http://www.npr.org/pro...eath/971106.death.html.

between being born and dying.

After the death of Philip II, memorial services were held throughout the nation in all of Spain's major cathedrals. These elaborate rituals replicated quite literally the dead man's rebirth into eternal life. Heavy black cloth was hung from ceiling to floor to create a narrow tunnel that blocked all aisles and side chapels. Upon entering the eye was drawn to the huge gilt catafalque placed at the transept and festooned with thousands of candles, generating light and heat and smoke. Mourners ritually reenacted the parallel journey from the womb to world and from death into the afterlife. Imagining this display, we cannot help but be haunted by Lorca's words: "at death the curtain goes up." Participation permitted everyone a glimpse into the next world. The memorial services were carefully choreographed to be the king's final counsel and finest moment.[43]

Ever translating the extraordinary into ordinary life, and always raging against such "papish" adiaphora, Luther counseled a daily return to baptism, where the old Adam was put to death and the new Adam given life. For Luther baptism was where the curtain went up, where the community of the faithful joined for a moment with the communion of saints to welcome a new Christian into the body. Just as we are received into the loving arms of parents and family at birth, and into the loving community of the faithful at our baptism, so we will be received into the loving arms of God at death. Just as there are few "easy" births, there may well be few easy deaths. But just as we surround people at times of birth, we should equally surround them in times of death. We know of difficult births; we know also of difficult, terribly difficult deaths. But we know that at the end of each dark passageway is a great light—and loving arms.

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[43] Eire, *From Madrid to Purgatory*, 288–91.

"Practicing what it means": Welfare Reform and the Lord's Supper

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This is the lecture that was supposed to be about sexuality, which should have qualified as one of the big "issues" for the church in the twentieth century. As mandated by the 1997 churchwide assembly that met in Philadelphia, the ELCA will have to say something about ordination and homosexuality by the next churchwide assembly in 1999, and there is already consternation in all camps about what that might be.[1] Sexuality has been much on Lutherans' minds, and this ecclesial obsession with sexuality in the last gasp of the twentieth century ought to give sober minds pause. I remain both instructed and chastened by words at another churchwide assembly, these from Bishop April Larson in 1995. One of three finalists for the office of bishop of the churchbody, Larson was asked to respond to a question posed to each: What do you think the Bible has to say about homosexuality? She paused for a moment, shook her head sadly, and said: "I really don't think the Bible has much to say about homosexuality the way we understand and speak of it today. But the Bible has a great deal to say about the poor. And I wonder why we're not talking more about poverty today in our congregations."

Her words were particularly chastening to someone who has written so much about sexuality. They are a sharp reminder of at least two things. First, I am reminded of how social location determines what we regard as an "issue" or a "non-issue." For example, genetic manipulation is a real issue for those who can afford that kind of therapy. To the woman who routinely panhandles outside the Bank of America genetic manipulation ranks as fairy tale. Food, shelter, and a rest room rank as issues for her in ways that they will never be for the rest of us. Where we find ourselves shapes what we deem to be an ethical issue. Second, I am reminded that the way in which something becomes an "issue" itself carries moral freight. In the waning days of the Lutheran Church in America I participated in a panel of churchfolk charged to do a study of homosexuality—a group of people

[1] As reported in *The Lutheran* 10:10 (October, 1997), the Churchwide Assembly of 1997 requested a status report at the 1999 assembly of conversations about ELCA policy and practice on ordination, consecration, or commissioning of noncelibate gay and lesbian members.

I am reminded of how social location determines what we regard as an issue or a non-issue.

that included no person of gay or lesbian orientation. Many of us wondered if the real issue were not sexual conduct in general. The raft of ensuing lawsuits involving clergy sexual misconduct, the majority of them among heterosexual people, proved our suspicion. Nonetheless, the "issue" identified and funded was "homosexuality."

Reminded and chastened by Bishop Larson's remarks, I want to examine an issue that is not high on the churchly agenda, but one that perhaps should be: welfare reform and poverty.

"Ending welfare as we know it": a description of the policies

Pledging to "end welfare as we know it," President Clinton signed the Welfare Reform Act on July 31, 1996. The bill ended more than six decades of antipoverty policy, five years of partisan warfare, a standoff with Congress that had already produced two vetoes, and a battle that split the President's party and his cabinet, causing two from the Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) team to resign in protest, Peter Edelman and Mary Jo Banes.[2]

The twin pillars of the bill are time limits and work participation, with block grants remanded to the states. The bill places a cumulative lifetime limit of five years on benefits paid for with federal money, and states are free to impose shorter time limits if they like. States retain the discretion to allow up to 20% of their caseloads to be people who have already received assistance for five years.[3] In regard to work participation, the bill required 25% of the then current caseload to be working or in training by the end of 1997 and 50% of the caseload to be working or in training by the year 2002. States are encouraged to develop their own policy for implementing these two provisos; block grants set at the 1992 Federal grant level allow them to develop and implement the programs they see fit.

Since the legislation was enacted, states have explored a variety of programs, three of which may be representative: Idaho, California, and Wisconsin.

Idaho enacted a program called Temporary Assistance for Families in Idaho, which cut off aid to welfare recipients completely after 24 months. In contrast, the old program had no time limits. The new program further limits cash assistance to $276/month, regardless of how many children live at home. In contrast, the old program granted $382/month for a single woman with three children. In five months of operation, between July 1,1997 and December 6, 1997, the new program resulted in a 70% decline in the number of single

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[2] Jason DeParle, "Success and Frustration, as the Welfare Rules Change," *The New York Times*, 30 December 1997.

[3] If this seems generous, it must be held in tension with the fact that about half of the current national caseload is composed of people who have been on the rolls longer than five years. Time limits look feasible in hearty economic times, with a low unemployment rate of 4.6%. A more desperate economic scenario would alter this picture considerably.

women with children applying for Federal and state cash assistance: from 6,800 families to 2,000 families. But the Idaho program must record success as well as failure. One former welfare mother praises the overhaul, because "there were too many ways to cheat the system." Meanwhile, the Boise Rescue Mission doubled the number of meals served in its soup kitchen between June and December, 1997.[4]

California. Charged with implementing a new state program that replaced AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children) on January 1, 1998, California counties prepared by sending a questionnaire to a seldom-tapped pool of experts: recipients themselves. San Francisco and Los Angeles counties included recipients on the committees that drafted their plans, even including focus groups of welfare recipients for feedback. Responses to the resulting plan, CalWORKS, consistently named three obstacles to employment and self-sufficiency: lack of child care, unreliable transportation, and unpaid child support. Gratitude was also a consistent theme in the responses. A 29 year-old mother wrote: "It feels nice when someone cares for single parents, asks for our opinion, and doesn't shut us out."[5]

Wisconsin. A combination of strict work requirements and expanded services, such as child care and job placement, undergirds Gov. Tommy Thompson's flagship program, Wisconsin Works. With few exceptions, those who do not work do not get paid, but a work-based safety net extends underneath both working recipients and other low-income workers. Thompson plans to incorporate health care into that safety net. The year 1997 saw a 20% benefit increase, further incentive to move from welfare to work.

While the states are mired in implementation of the federal directives, analysts wonder about broad effects. In an article written six months after the Welfare Reform Act was passed in July 1996, Peter Edelman, one of the Clinton HEW aides who resigned in protest of the bill's passage, stated the grounds for his opposition. He argued that the bill proposed only welfare cuts, under the guise of "welfare reform." Edelman further predicted that the effect of block grants would be "a race to the bottom," as states vied with one another for the least attractive benefit structures, the most stringent time limits, and the lowest benefit levels.[6] Finally, he noted that the real losers of this legislation would be poor children and legal immigrants.[7] Almost a year later, authors of the Welfare Reform

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[4] "Soup Kitchens Fill After Idaho Welfare Cuts," *The New York Times*, 7 December 1997.

[5] Michael Hytha, "A Novel Approach to Welfare Reform," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 22 December 1997. High school dropouts were as common as high school graduates among the group of respondents, and they made suggestions that ranged from starting a small-business loan program to starting English language classes. Some of the suggestions, however, defied easy response. A 34 year-old mother from the Sacramento River Delta wrote: "First I need help with alcohol abuse. Then, I need to be taught how to become a responsible person and mother."

[6] Peter Edelman, "The Worst Thing President Clinton Has Done," *Atlantic Monthly* 279:3 (March, 1997), 52. But hear the guarded comment of Bob Greenstein, director of the Center of Budget and Policy Priorities, a Washington Advocacy Group: "Those of us who worried about a race to the bottom, have we seen that? No. We really won't have a full test until we go through a full economic cycle." Quoted in Jason DeParle, "Success and Frustration as Welfare Rules Change," *The New York Times*, 30 December 1997.

[7] Edelman, "The Worst Thing Bill Clinton Has Done," 43.

Act pointed to an astounding 17% reduction of welfare rolls nationally. In their eyes, this counted as a veritable "exodus" from welfare, and they claimed victory. Representative E. Clay Shaw, the Florida Republican who sponsored the bill, summed up this sentiment: "It shows the faith we had in the human spirit was well placed."[8]

Daniel Patrick Moynihan was more cautious: "It doesn't show anything yet."[9] Over two years into "ending welfare as we knew it," the effect is far less easy to read. Close observers identify several "surprises." First, it was remarkably easy to reduce the welfare rolls, both in states with good economies (Wisconsin) and in states with bad (Mississippi). Even modest work requirements drove people off the rolls. Undoubtedly the anti-welfare rhetoric generated by the legislation also helped. Second, despite talk of moving people from welfare to work, statistics show that less than half of those leaving the rolls actually had jobs.[10] Third, the crises predicted—job shortages, child care shortages, rampant homelessness, and child abandonment—simply did not emerge. At 4.6%, unemployment remained at its lowest levels in 24 years. Child care seemed adequate and available, though the quality of available care is, as ever, a concern. Moreover, Idaho offered evidence that, although homelessness did not appreciably increase, the new laws nonetheless created casualties among people who could not or would not comply and reduced income levels that were already dangerously low. Fourth, the law has effected a more civil discourse surrounding welfare. Congress restored many of the cuts affecting legal immigrants, and states rejected the harshest options offered them under the Welfare Reform Act. California Governor Pete Wilson tried without success to push a one-year time limit on benefits through the State Legislature. In North Carolina, the Charlotte Chamber of Commerce paid for billboards urging employers to give welfare recipients a chance. Fifth, a law presented as a budget cut—on this Edelman is exactly right!—actually produced a significant increase in per capita spending for those who remained on the rolls. Alabama state legislator Jim Carns confessed that he had supported reform because "I thought it'd be easier to save money," but found himself supporting new spending in his state, e.g., earnings supplements for recipients who find jobs and child care for teenage mothers. He concluded: "You have to put in an investment to get people into the work place."[11]

The possibility of welfare civics

Clearly more time is needed before a thorough analysis of the Welfare Reform Act and its impact is possible. Two immediate questions dominate civic concern: What will happen when current recipients reach their five-year lifetime limits on benefits? When the economy is flush, the reforms look good, but what will happen when the economy is not so healthy? In this uneasy interim, even before these economic cycles grind out, I want to make some initial observations and raise some broader attitudinal questions.

Initial observations. First, people find themselves on welfare for a wide variety of reasons. Liberal critics of the welfare system focus on the external surroundings of the poor, e.g., drugs, public housing, crime,

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[8] Quoted in DeParle, "Success and Frustration as Welfare Rules Change."

[9] *Ibid.*

[10] *Ibid.*

[11] *Ibid.*

abuse, violence. Liberal critics propose that the economic system adapt itself to the needs of the poor. Accordingly, liberal solutions feature work training, remedial education, child care, and so on.[12] Conservative critics of the welfare system focus on internal factors, e.g., behavior and attitudes of the poor themselves. Conservative critics propose that the poor adapt themselves to the economic system. Accordingly, conservative solutions feature behavioral modification such as workfare, market incentives, and strict limits to benefits. While both liberals and conservatives could support a campaign to "end welfare as we knew it," the Welfare Reform Act of 1996 presents a conservative solution on the federal level (e.g., workfare, time limits on benefits), but, for the most part, liberal implementation on the state level (child care provisions, substance abuse treatment, job training and recruitment, etc.). Idaho would be an exception in this general trend.

Second, in effect, the Welfare Reform Act of 1996 moves implementation to the local level, where there is a chance for compromise between individual situations and federal, state, and county programs. The faces of the poor move into sharper focus. The move echoes the principle of subsidiarity, a long-held tenet in Christian social teaching, which mandates that no social task be allocated to a body larger than the smaller one that can effectively do the job. Recall the conclusion of Alabama state legislator Carns, who thought the Welfare Reform Act of 1996 would save money but found himself making investments in people at the local level: earnings supplements for recipients who find jobs and child care for teenage mothers.

Third, on the local level, the Welfare Reform Act of 1996 already has encouraged conversation among nonprofit organizations at the local level as to how they



might most effectively do the job.[13] California's Alameda County pulled together various local organizations to define the contours of their work, to collaborate among themselves, and to coordinate their programs, avoiding duplication and achieving focus and efficiency. These diverse agencies include Catholic Charities, Salvation Army, the Bay Area Urban League, the Oakland Chinese League, the East Bay

[12] Earl Shorris identifies no less than 25 external factors in a "theater of force" that kept his interviewees in generations of poverty: drugs, public housing, the government, helpers, family violence, abuse, graffiti, selling, neighbors, police, landlords, criminals, health, meanness, luck, hurrying, guns, isolation, hunger, feudalism, the law, ethnic antagonisms, racism, media representations, intellectual muggings. He does not intend an exhaustive list. Earl Shorris, *New American Blues* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1996), 97–200.

[13] My thanks to Nancy Meyers, case manager for East Bay Perinatal Council, a program sponsored by the state-funded program Cal-Learn, for information and debate surrounding local implementation of the federal mandates. Meyers brought to this research the faces and stories of people affected by these changes.

Vietnamese Association, and others.

Finally, a 17% overall reduction in the welfare rolls raises questions. Fewer than half of the people in that 17% have jobs. What happened to the rest of those leaving the rolls? Have they had other sources of income all along and simply turned there for help? Will all those who have jobs be able to keep them? Or will they be like Mary Ann Moore, her picture plastered on the cover of *The New York Times Magazine* in 1994 as she moved off welfare and into work with a full-time job as a cook, back on the welfare rolls in 1998 and living in darkness and depression on her living room couch?[14]

Underlying attitudinal issues. Any construction site is plastered with warnings: "MEN AT WORK," "HEAVY MACHINERY." In this particular construction site of welfare reform, it is worth asking: Which women and men are at work? What kinds of heavy machinery are operative in this welfare reform? Policy wonks on all sides of the political spectrum working on welfare reform are economists, sociologists, and various other social scientists. These diversely trained experts nonetheless share common presuppositions. First, the social reality all are working with is primarily economic. Second, as an economic system, social reality is a physical mechanism subject to measurement and quantification that yields invariant laws or tendencies. If one had to distill the operative attitudinal laws from the policies that have been set in motion, they would be the following:

1. People, like stocks, require an investment before they yield productivity. Therefore, if you invest in people, they will be productive.

2. People will have children in order to get money; therefore, if you take away money, people will stop having children.

3. Welfare creates dependency; therefore, removing welfare will create independence.

4. Most people would not work if they did not have to. If they have to work, they will work.

5. People are motivated by incentives. Take away their incentive to be on welfare and replace it with an incentive to work, even if that work is in low-paying, menial jobs, and they will work.

The operative anthropology is an understanding of humans as *homo economicus*. Regardless of gender, these are people who respond to financial incentives and punishments. There is little acknowledgment of more complex motives or psychologies. The operative understanding of community, however, is even more troubling. There may be talk of public values, public virtues, and the public square, but in practice we are looking at society as a microcosm of the marketplace. This is an economy masquerading as a society or public realm.

The heavy equipment operative in current welfare reform policies features the machine of the marketplace coupled with the machine of a depoliticized democracy which has lost sight of everything but the

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[14] Jason DeParle, "Welfare to Work: A Sequel," *The New York Times Magazine* 28 (December 1997), 14–17. Interestingly, DeParle notes that "the role of men is one of the great missing elements of the welfare debate" (16). Women may leave welfare for work, but they —and they alone—have to contend with men who feel left behind. Toby Herr, director of Chicago employment program called Project Match, registers some cautionary statistics on workfare. Of her clients she has found that 36% settle into stable employment within two years. Another 13% do so after a much longer period of spinning their wheels. That leaves 23% who do no formal work and 28% who work intermittently but never stabilize.

individual, enshrined in a cocoon of inviolable rights. Here, I suspect, is where both liberal and conservative critics of welfare policy share common ground and common equipment: both presume a contest between individuals and an economic system. Liberal critics want to honor the individual and mold the marketplace to fit the needs of the individual; conservative critics lift up the needs of the marketplace and demand that individuals shape themselves accordingly.[15]

As evidence of the dominance of the economic metaphor and marketplace civics, note how welfare recipients have become "clients," the market's designation of everyone, even those who cannot participate in it. Those who disrupt the marketplace or threaten disequilibrium become downright criminals. In his heart of hearts the *homo economicus* regards the poor as losers in a society that values hard work and prosperity. Is it surprising that solutions for the problem involve either hard work or financial penalty? Where in the midst of the marketplace is there room for the citizen?

Voting records among the poor are even worse than they are in the nation at large, and only 46% of the electorate turned out to elect Bill Clinton as President in 1996. Failure to compete in the marketplace *de facto* disqualifies people to participate in the rites of citizenship, and this message trickles down.[16] In 1995, a conversation with a group of five- and six-year-olds at Mount Calvary Missionary Baptist Church outside the city of Chicago went like this:

Did they think voting was a good idea?

Yes? No hands.

No? Many hands.

Why did they think voting was a bad idea?

A little girl raised her hand. "Because you could drown." The others nodded in solemn agreement. Voting was such an alien concept to this group of children that their closest verbal analogue was "boating." Boating was decidedly dangerous. Upon further questioning, they named the president of the United States as "George Clinton."[17]

In his heart of hearts the *homo economicus* regards the poor as losers in a society that values hard work and prosperity.

How do we politicize the polis, populate it with more than a collection of individuals? How do we displace the marketplace as the dominant metaphor for political life? Is it possible to create a welfare civics alongside welfare politics and welfare policies?

In his book *New American Blues*, Earl Shorris argues that a return to study of the humanities holds most promise for repo-

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[15] This point is powerfully made by Dutch economist Bob Goudzwaard, "Who Cares? Poverty and the Dynamics of Responsibility: An Outsider's Contribution to the American Debate on Poverty and Welfare," in *Welfare in America*, ed. Stanley W. Carlson-Thies and James W. Skillen (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans), 77.

[16] Quoted in Jean Bethke Elshtain, "Why End 'Welfare As We Know It'?" in *Welfare in America*, 5. Elshtain cites Judith Shklar, *The Quest for Inclusion* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).

[17] Recounted in Shorris, *New American Blues*, 17–18.

liticizing the polis. He observes that only those families that can organize themselves around a common goal and assign duties to each member toward that goal are able to climb out of multigenerational poverty. He cites the story of Reka, whose mother was a single woman with children. When the children were old enough to understand, their mother presented them with a proposition. She did not want her children to grow up knowing nothing but the projects, but she knew getting out required enough money for a deposit on an apartment. If the family ate nothing but red beans and rice for two years, the mother calculated, they could have enough money for a deposit in two years. There was a goal, and everyone had a role and the attendant responsibilities in reaching that goal. That, Reka insists, is when her family stopped being poor.[18]

> Christians have an important voice against rampant individualism and economic determinism.

Certainly, Reka's mother managed to do this without studying Pericles, Plato, Aristotle, or Hannah Arendt. But Earl Shorris believes she could have—and should have. Taking seriously William Maynard Hutchins' motto that "The best education for some is the best education for all," Shorris proposes teaching the humanities at all levels of society, not only to those who can afford college or private school. This would, he maintains, provide the poor with skills of self-reflection, confidence, and action, displacing habits of despair, depression, and reaction. Admirably, Shorris road-tested his proposal, offering courses to young people in two locations: among inmates at the Bedford Hills Correctional Facility, a maximum-security prison fifty miles north of New York City, and among a group of poor young adults at the Roberto Clemente Center in the Bronx. His remarkable successes include college admission at Bard College, steady jobs, and organization among other low-income workers for better wages and benefits. But perhaps one of the biggest successes was that of "David." In the midst of a nasty verbal exchange with a supervisor, which he had not provoked, he considered escalating the conflict and then reconsidered. "I asked myself: 'What would Socrates do?'"[19]

Shorris' proposal may create citizens, but it cannot guarantee them a public realm. It creates citizens, one by one, but do they have anywhere to go other than the marketplace? Are there any other citizens out there? Do we hold to a thin version of citizenship, "citizenship lite," in a polity composed of aggregates of individuals and driven by the market? Or can we muster a thicker, richer version of citizenship nurtured by a sense of a common good?

The language and practice of welfare civics, Reformation-style

In the final part of this lecture, I want to explore the public witness we have as Lutheran Christians, not to create an alternative polis, but to enhance and inform public discourse in a public square. Here, I

[18] Shorris, *New American Blues*, 320.
[19] Shorris, 377.

confess to parting company with someone with whom I clearly hold a great deal of sympathy, Stanley Hauerwas, and all who argue for Christianity as an alternative polis.[20] Instead, I suspect our convictions drive us not toward an alternative public realm but into a common public realm, which we share with strangers and non-Christians but to whom we witness a distinctive understanding of who we are and what we are about. The question for us is not "What would Socrates do?" but "What has Jesus done?" In answering this question and in witnessing to that answer in the public square, Christians have an important voice against rampant individualism and economic determinism, both of which characterize contemporary United States of American culture.

Lutherans have a particular stake in this because of our history. Not insignificantly, Earl Shorris reminds his readers that "Martin Luther practically invented the idea of welfare."[21] Indeed, Luther faced his own dilemma of welfare reform. Long sustained and supported by the Roman Catholic Church, support services lost their key sponsors and sources of support with the Reformation. While the ideal of apostolic poverty had begun to slide off its pedestal long before Luther, clerics and religious orders continued to play a key role in poor relief. Priests dispensed alms to the poor; tables outside the cathedrals collected food and other goods for the poor; masses gathered funds. Dismantling the Roman Church meant disrupting services on which the poor depended. What would take their place?

Luther faced this social situation and authorized a transfer of responsibility to the community. The language that authorized this transfer was language of "the priesthood of all believers"; the practice that sealed it was the Eucharist. I want to examine each in turn.

A language of welfare civics: the priesthood of all believers. For Luther, the language of "a priesthood of all believers" had civic import. That civic resonance is hard to hear today, given a contemporary predilection for finding in such words confirmation of individual vocation, implicit anti-clericalism, and abstract approval of a particular kind of ecclesiology. For Luther, it did not so much validate the various vocations of the people to whom it applied, as it gave them an additional job description in the public realm. "Priesthood of all believers" conferred upon all the people, pastors and

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[20] The church as an alternative *polis* has been a consistent theme in Hauerwas' work. See especially his books *A Community of Character* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981); *Christian Existence Today: Essays on Church, World and Living In Between* (Durham, NC: The Labyrinth Press, 1988); *After Christendom?* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991); *Dispatches from the Front: Theological Engagements with the Secular* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994). See also his books with William Willimon: *Resident Aliens* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989); *Where Resident Aliens Live* (Abingdon, 1996); *Lord, Teach Us* (Abingdon, 1996).

[21] Shorris, *New American Blues*, 205. Shorris goes on to puzzle whether something in the Reformation also led to a view of the poor as "losers" in the economic game. "Could it be that something in the Reformation led to this view of poverty? that somewhere in the sudden worldliness of the birth of capitalism, with its emphasis on time as God's own and the waste of time as an affront to God, the Western world lost sight of the blessedness of the meek? Martin Luther may have begun a welfare program, but Protestant clergy did not wash the feet of the poor. God was served in many ways, but poverty was not one of them. The notion that trade and moneymaking was sinful disappeared. Was it then that the idea of poverty as sin was born?" (205)

In the priesthood of all believers, poverty becomes a civic concern.

parishioners, the duties and responsibilities of the office, chief among which were worship and welfare.

To hear that civic call, we need to listen again to Luther's 1520 address "To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation," which extends to that group the title and vocation "priests." That title authorizes sweeping reforms in worship and welfare throughout the land, among them the demand that every city should support its own poor, because, as Luther writes: "Nobody ought to go begging among Christians."[22]

The "beggars" here represent no single monolithic group. Many "beggars" were members of mendicant orders, and Luther argues here and elsewhere for the elimination of both practice and practitioners. Voluntary poverty and self-chosen suffering make no one more acceptable to God; Christ justifies all who believe. Other "beggars" were frankly "false" beggars, who covered themselves with salve, mud, even manure to feign sickness or disease. Ten years earlier Luther had penned a preface to an edition of the ever-popular "Book of Vagabonds," or *Liber Vagatorum*, in which he admitted that he had been fooled often by "vagabonds and blabbermouths."[23] But in that 1510 preface and in this 1520 address to the German princes, Luther focuses on begging that is not at all feigned, pleading that "every town and village should know and be acquainted with its own poor."[24] This is what the priest would have done; this is what a priest would have known. I recall a conversation with a Syrian Orthodox Catholic businessman several years ago: the duty of the village priest was to know the poor. In the priesthood of all believers, that responsibility falls on the community. Poverty becomes a civic concern.

In writing to the German princes, Luther implies that the poor are always "among us," never "out there." In fragile economic times, the possibility of financial failure was omnipresent, and its target could be anyone. In Luther's time, as in the Great Depression in this country, the "haves" identified with the "have nots," whose plight might too easily have been their own. Subsequent and more robust economic times have not only created a larger gap between the highest and lowest income groups but have erased the possibility of identification. Poverty ceased to be "the nation's problem," as Franklin Delano Roosevelt told the country in 1940, to become the problem of the poor. Terms like "the underclass" and "a culture of poverty" further segregate poverty, making it a problem of the poor alone.

Luther would use language of the "universal priesthood of all believers" in connection with welfare reform not only with princes, but with common people as well. He issues the same civic call in counsel to citizens at Leisnig, a community of reform-minded citizens near Leipzig. In 1522 mem-

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[22] Martin Luther, "To the Christian Nobility," *Luther's Works* 44 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966): 189–91.

[23] "Foreword" to Mathias Huetlin, *Liber Vagatorum* (1510), in Carter Lindberg, *Beyond Charity* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress 1993), 182–84. Lindberg provides the translation.

[24] Luther, "To the Christian Nobility," 183.

bers of the parish wrote Luther for advice on how they might select their leaders, organize their worship, and establish a common chest—questions of worship and welfare. Eventually, a diverse group of people drew up an agreement for their common life and requested from Luther a preface. They name themselves diversely as "nobility, council, craft supervisors, gentry, commoners, masters and mistresses of households."[25] But Luther reminds them of the common vocation all share in the universal priesthood of all believers.

In his preface to the "Fraternal Agreement," Luther commends the "fellowship of the gospel"[26] these citizens have created, but language of the priesthood of all believers authorizes administration of the common chest: "We, the parish assembly, by virtue of our universal priesthood, have always had and should have the full right and authority...."[27] By such authority, they commit themselves to the practices that befit their priestly vocation: worship and welfare.[28] The details of administration are worth noting. The chest was funded initially by expropriation of church properties, but ongoing funding would have to be secured. Support of the common chest became the responsibility of "every noble, townsman and peasant living in the parish [who] shall according to his ability and means, remit in taxes for himself, his wife, and his children a certain sum of money to the chest each year...."[29] Here, as in his address to the princes, Luther reminds the assembly that its first step was to know all the poor. With the princes, as with the citizens, he proposes an "overseer or warden who knows all the poor and informs the city council or the clergy what they needed."[30] Within a civic context, individual need was to be acknowledged.

This is how one group of rather diverse Christians understood in very concrete terms their common civic responsibility. If they were to be a "priesthood," if they were to consider themselves "priests," then they all —clergy and lay alike—assumed the duties attendant upon that office: worship and welfare.

A practice in welfare civics: the Eucharist. The practice that sealed that common vocation was the Eucharist. Luther had to argue the connection between worship and welfare; it was no more apparent to his own century than to ours. By the time of the Reformation, masses had become indispensable travelers' aid for the dead and dying of all classes. Upon his death in 1598 King of Spain Philip II requested no less

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[25] "Fraternal Agreement," *Luther's Works* 45 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1962): 177, 178. Luther did not write the "Fraternal Agreement;" the citizens of Leisnig did. Yet, he heartily supported it and published it himself.

[26] Martin Luther, "Ordinance of a Common Chest," *Luther's Works* 45: 169.

[27] "Fraternal Agreement," 179. It is interesting that the citizens do not call themselves "church" (*Kirche*) here but use a more political designation, "assembly" (*Versammlung*).

[28] "We solemnly purpose and promise that every master and mistress of a household within the confines of our parish shall be obliged themselves—and out of Christian love shall also hold their children and servants to it —to listen faithfully to God's saving and comforting word at the appointed days and hours and take it to heart for our own improvement, as God grants us grace.... We solemnly purpose and promise that as masters and mistresses we shall diligently see to it—each one for himself and for his own children and servants in his home as God grants us grace—that God is reverenced...." "Fraternal Agreement," 178.

[29] "Fraternal Agreement," 192.

[30] Luther, "To the Christian Nobility," 137.

Luther shifts the focus of Eucharist from those in transit to the next world to those in need in the present.

than 30,000 masses to be said for his soul at an observant Franciscan monastery in the shortest amount of time possible, 10,000 requiem masses, 10,000 masses of the Passion of Christ, and 10,000 masses of Our Lady.[31] On a more plebeian level the late Middle Ages saw tradesmen organize into fraternal associations or brotherhoods to collect funds to support the sick and unemployed, provide burial for the dead, and offer masses for the departed brothers and their families. While the associations offered services and security to their members, benefits did not extend beyond that circle of membership.

These practices of privately appropriating the Eucharist shape Luther's own theology. He decries "the many masses and the many who receive this sacrament without in the least understanding or practicing what it signifies."[32] He laments the use of the sacrament by the confraternities, a practice which teaches people "to seek their own good, to love themselves, to be faithful only to one another, to despise others, to think themselves better than others, and to presume to stand higher before God than others."[33] The Eucharist should not be marked "for insiders only," an exclusionary feast that separates "us" from "them."

What was proper Christian practice of the Eucharist? Luther applauds the practice recorded by Paul in 1 Corinthians 11 of gathering food and material goods in church and distributing them among the poor. Then, he notes, the sacrament was "properly used;" then, the people "understood this fellowship...well."[34] Properly understood, the Eucharist not only promises, but in the present creates broad fellowship in the body of Christ. In effect, Luther shifts the focus of Eucharist from those in transit to the next world to those in need in the present.

The metaphor of the city, a decidedly earthly and earthy city, captures this eucharistic fellowship; the Eucharist defines Luther's particular brand of welfare civics. Seen from this civic point of view, two features of the Eucharist stand out: incorporation into a whole, and sharing. The Eucharist binds the saints into one body of Christ. Again, Pauline imagery predominates as the body somatic becomes the body politic: "just as the inhabitants of a city are one community and body, each citizen being a member of the other and of the entire city."[35] In this body, food is not merely eaten; food is shared. Sharing food is the central action of the Eucharist, and sharing is captured in this civic metaphor. Luther extends this sharing to embrace all the duties and privileges of citizenship, all the fortunes and misfortunes of citizenship: supports, rights, and privileges, but also

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[31] Carlos M. N. Eire, *From Madrid to Purgatory: The Art and Craft of Dying in Sixteenth-Century Spain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 284.

[32] Luther, "The Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body of Christ, and the Brotherhoods, 1519," in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, ed. Timothy F. Lull (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 250.

[33] Luther, "The Blessed Sacrament," 262.

[34] *Ibid.*

[35] *Ibid.*, 243.

taxes, fire and flood, enemies and death.

This is "thick citizenship," corporate from the ground up. There are no individuals here, demanding insulation one from another. There is only the body, organically interdependent. This is a civics shaped sacramentally and beyond mere solidarity or instruction in the classics. It neither divinizes nor demonizes the poor—dangers in both liberal and conservative perspectives. Nor does it presume an opposition between individual and the marketplace, as each of those perspectives do. Rather, the community is a corporate whole: we are all part of one another, as Paul reminds us in Romans 12.

Such good intentions met with mixed success. Luther's final comment on the Leisnig experiment regarding poor relief expressed disappointment: "But we do not have the personnel for this, therefore I do not think we can put it into effect until God makes Christians."[36]

Conclusion

So what does this mean? Certainly there would be serious problems in running 20th century welfare reform programs according to 16th century insights, and that would not be my counsel. Nor do I think that four centuries has particularly enhanced our ability to be made into better Christians. Nonetheless, Luther, like we, faced enormous issues of welfare reform. Every window is simultaneously a mirror, and this window on the 16th century holds some very important insights for us as we practice our faith and stand in the public square. The insights, not the solution *per se*, challenge us in our own situation. More importantly, these insights flow from the language of the priesthood of all believers and eucharistic practice and stand to form and inform our own practice and public witness. I count five insights of central import.

First, we need to recapture the civic import and public witness of language of the "priesthood of all believers." We too often use this only on the inside: we democratize our churches, forgetting the initial impulse to serve our communities. We need to recover Luther's usage, where the phrase functioned centripetally to draw people from very different walks of life into a common vocation shared by all: worship and welfare. We need to recover the welfare dimension of that vocation today.

Christians do not have sole responsibility for welfare, though some voices in Congress would like to see poor relief remanded to the private realm—churches, NPOs, private organizations. The suggestion robs us of public voice; Christians have a unique witness to make in the public realm. Justice demands that the whole society share this responsibility; philanthropy is not enough. Moreover, we must refuse to divinize or criminalize the poor; we must insist that the poor are "neighbors;" we must demand a richer understanding of citizenship that requires and enables all to join in working toward a common good.

Second, language of the priesthood of all believers holds worship and welfare tightly together. Love and service to the neighbor was *der Dienst Gottes*—literally, serving God. It was formed, informed, and transformed by worship, *der Gottesdienst*—literally, the worship of God. This is the "liturgy after the liturgy," and we need to see both as the various works of our vocation, i.e., ministry in daily life, but also as the work toward which we are called as priests, i.e., a particular concern for the poor.

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[36] Walther I. Brandt, "Introduction" to Luther's "Ordinance of a Common Chest," 167.

Third, the central act of the Eucharist informs both *Gottesdienst* and *der Dienst Gottes*, both worship and welfare.[37] Surely the Eucharist is "foretaste of the feast to come," as we sing and say in our worship. But Luther points us to the present world, demanding that the feast be there. In our context, we are called to extend the feast into the world in service to the neighbor, Christian and non-Christian alike. In this we reenact Jesus' own table fellowship with outsiders, Samaritans, and Gentiles.

Fourth, eucharistic fellowship extends citizenship beyond individualism into incorporation. We bear one another's burdens. This is no *apologia* for liberal welfare reform, which supports individualism by adjusting the system to benefit the individual members. Nor it is an *apologia* for conservative welfare reform, which supports individualism by demanding the individual adjust to fit the system. Rather, incorporation combines social analysis of the whole with relational understanding of the individual. Eucharistic fellowship then demands and enables that person to become part of a community, with the privileges and responsibilities of community membership.

Fifth and finally, eucharistic fellowship focuses around a central human need: the need to eat.[38] In this, it focuses on needs, offering a very different template for understanding human nature than focusing on desires and wishes, as the marketplace does.[39] Moreover, Eucharist meets that need, not by eating, but by sharing food, an act which demands the presence of an other and creates an interdependence between people. Each gives, each receives, and in this mutual reciprocity we are invited into a larger project: the work of the kingdom.

In this we reenact Jesus' table fellowship with tax collectors and sinners. He did not dispense food or drink, he ate with them, he drank with them: he was their friend. In the Ancient Near East, you were friends with the people with whom you shared table, and Jesus was surely friends with all the wrong people. But this push beyond charity and into friendship informs our efforts in the public realm, challenging us to find out who our neighbors are and to create relationships of interdependence with them that will be mutually enriching to all.

This is what Jesus has done, and this is what we do again and again in our eucharistic practice. It is a dangerous thing to be doing, once we stop, as Hannah Arendt suggests, "to think what we are doing."[40] But it is imperative that we keep doing it. Our witness is much needed in the public realm, as we consider issues of poverty and welfare reform. It will not let us segregate the poor, and it demands that we know them. It will not let us settle for a fast food version of "citizenship lite," but it requires that we enrich and complexify our understandings of public life. It absolutely dares us to speak of a common good.

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[37] Cf. Lindberg, *Beyond Charity*, 136.

[38] Monika K. Hellwig, *The Eucharist and the Hunger of the World*, 2nd ed. (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1992). This book is an excellent congregational resource for examining issues of hunger, poverty, and welfare.

[39] Simone Weil offers a developed political philosophy based on needs in her book, *The Need for Roots: Prelude to a Declaration of Duties toward Mankind* (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1952).

[40] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), 5.

Methodological Reflections on Being a Practicing Christian

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When I received the gracious invitation from the Hein-Fry Committee, the assigned task was to address ethical issues the church would be facing in the 21st century. I immediately jumped on worship, prayer, and catechesis. I took the emphasis to be on the word "church," and I thought then and think now that our biggest ethical issues are: Who are we as church? How are we church? More specifically, how do those practices that constitute us as church dispose us to be and to act in certain ways in the world?

The committee explained to me gently that the "issues" it had in mind were issues like cloning, welfare reform, physician-assisted suicide, race, world hunger, economic globalization, the symmetry between public and private life, ethics in the media. Ah! I thought: *those* kinds of "issues." I admit to some suspicion on how events or people or ideas become "issues" or "problems."

Consider the following:

—Charles Trevelyan constructed and solved "the Irish problem."

—When asked if he'd found that race was a problem in multigenerational poverty, Earl Shorris replied sharply that the only problem he'd found was racism, not race.

—Genetic therapy will be quite an issue, but only for those who can afford it.

—At an international conference, a Nigerian woman and I had difficulty understanding each other until we clarified that each of us understood "right to life" rather differently, her referent being the right of already-born children to have enough food to survive infancy.

—A laywoman in Seattle complained: "Everywhere homosexuality is such a big issue. For me it's not an issue: it's my life." And where sexuality is such a big issue, like in our church, what are we not focusing on, while we argue about sex?

—A friend noted during the recent White House sex scandals that it took *The New York Times* until page 24 to report the significant story that health care organizations were planning to spend $1 million on Capitol Hill to defeat lowering the age for Medicare.

Investigating how something becomes an "issue," asking who has a stake in its being an issue, examining the language in which this issue is cast: this is time well spent. I'm suspicious of "issues" in general but cede on this to the wisdom of the com-

A practice cannot be abstracted from its history, because the past is embedded in the practice itself.

mittee: issues plague us; problems demand some response.

In the first two lectures I have tried to satisfy both the mandate of the committee and my own initial impulse. Concretely, how do those practices that constitute us as church dispose us to be, to see, and to act in relationship to the concrete issues of assisted suicide and welfare reform? In regard to assisted suicide, I examined the "issue" as it presents itself to us, excavated the attitudes to life and death the issue presumes, and asked if our Christian practice of baptism in any way informs our position on this issue. In regard to welfare reform, I again examined the "issue" as it presents itself, excavated the attitudes to poverty and the poor that it presumes, and asked if our Christian practice of table fellowship in the Lord does not dispose us in some way on this issue.

Practices: the face of a tradition in the world

I want to say more about practices and what I mean by that, because practices both induct us into a tradition and function as the face of that tradition in the world. For example, I became a Christian in baptism, but I learned to be a Christian by doing the things that Christians do: confessing that Jesus Christ is Lord, worshiping in the name of the Triune God, sharing with other Christians in the Lord's Supper, praying with other Christians, studying the Bible, witnessing to the gospel in my daily life. That's the induction part: I became a Christian by engaging in those activities—or practices—that define what being a Christian is all about. In addition, I am known to my friends as a Christian, in part because I do the things that Christians do. What can I say? Swimmers swim; the practice that constitutes their identity is swimming. You don't see many "swimmers" who never go near the water. They became swimmers by learning how to swim; they are known as swimmers because they do a lot of it, always reeking faintly of chlorine. You get the picture. But here's the question: what do Christians do that makes them Christians? Put a different way, what are the practices that constitute the way of life called Christian? So we arrive at the question of "practices."

Now, I am a swimmer, so I spend a lot of time swimming, and I do reek faintly of chlorine. I also spend a lot of time in locker rooms, in myopic conversation with whomever else might be there. And it was in the midst of a locker-room discussion of religion that a woman asked me, "Are you a practicing Christian?" The word "practicing" caught my attention. "No, I got it right the first time," I said, and we both laughed. Then, more soberly, I continued: "But the truth is that I need all the practice I can get."

As I reflected more on the exchange, I realized how little in fact I had "gotten it right" and how much this tradition, this way of life called "Christian," had "gotten" me, placing me in a community of people who, like myself, need all the practice they can get. What are the "practices" that compose that way of life? What is our particular,

peculiar Lutheran spin on them? How do they form us for action on the toughest ethical issues of our time?[1]

A definition is in order: practices are activities that compose a way of life.[2] Specifically, practices have several salient characteristics.

1. *Practices are activities that ritually address fundamental human needs.* For example, I've been to my share of funerals, especially lately, but I cannot help but be struck by how this specialized form of worship responds to the human need to mourn, to have closure, to have connection with the communion of saints. The liturgy invites out raw emotions of grief and sorrow, fear and rejoicing; it choreographs and contains them. In the two practices I've already examined, baptism responds to the human need to belong and in belonging be marked by a community, and the Eucharist responds to the human need for food and drink. These practices respond ritually: the response is patterned by centuries of other people baptizing and eating at table. In reenacting their response, we not only acknowledge but become a part of them.

2. *Practices are done together and over time.* They are socially established; they presume community and history. We do not need to walk into Holy Week wondering, "what shall we do this year?" The services follow a flexible pattern which Christians have observed for centuries. In the background of Christian practices is Scripture. Christians trace their practices back to deeds and words of Jesus: baptism goes back to the command of Jesus Christ, uniquely reenacting his life, death, and resurrection, the Eucharist to the unique table fellowship Jesus shared with his followers. Lutheran Christians have placed their own distinctive interpretation on these practices—interpretations, I'm arguing, that are worth recovering or in the very least knowing. But a practice cannot be abstracted from its history, because the past is embedded in the practice itself. If we treat these practices ahistorically, they become mere group activities. So why isn't coffee hour a "practice" for practicing Christians?[3] Perhaps it is for the practicing Christians who

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[1] James M. Childs, Jr., emphasizes the role of formation in Lutheran ethics in his *Faith, Formation, and Decision* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991). See my "Practicing Christians," in *The Promise of Lutheran Ethics* , ed. Karen Bloomquist and John Stumme (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1998). I am grateful for conversations with the authors and editors of that volume, which clarified my thinking on the whole issue of practices and formation.

[2] The definition is from an article by Craig Dykstra and Dorothy C. Bass, "Times of Yearning, Practices of Faith," in *Practicing our Faith*, ed. Dorothy C. Bass (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1997), 6-8. Cf. the initiating discussion by Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 175; Jeffrey Stout, *Ethics After Babel* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988), 266–92; Nancey Murphy, Brad J. Kallenberg, and Mark Thiessen Nation, *Virtues and Practices in the Christian Tradition* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1997); Allen Verhey, *The Practices of Piety and the Practice of Medicine: Prayer, Scripture, and Medical Ethics* (Grand Rapids: The Stob Lectures Endowment, Calvin College and Seminary, 1992).

[3] Elaborating Alasdair MacIntyre's notion of "practices," Craig Dykstra emphasizes the historicity of practices. "A practice cannot be abstracted from its past, because the past is embedded in the practice itself. To abstract the practice from its tradition is to reduce the practice to a group activity. An implication of this feature of practices is that a practice cannot be made up, created on the spot by an individual or even a group." Craig Dykstra, "Reconceiving Practice in Theological Inquiry and Education," in Murphy et al., *Virtues and Practices*, 171.

meet at First Lutheran in Rosemount, Minnesota, and has been for decades. But it would not be a practice for a community of Lutherans in Bangalore, India.

Practices possess standards of excellence which are internal to the practice itself.

3. *Practices possess standards of excellence which are internal to the practice itself.* There are ways of doing something well that come from the doing of it, not from a digital display of marks, or a coach's praise, or a teammate's clap on the back. You see it on the face of a skater who just completed a good program. Before he even hears the crowd's wild applause, long before judges calibrate their marks, his face registers jubilation: "I skated well."

Some may caution that I'm skating on the thin ice of "works righteousness" here, but I think not. If there weren't ways of preaching well, or worshiping well, or teaching well, we wouldn't be here. Even Luther counseled people on how to pray—and pray well.[4] But finally the good that comes of skating well, or praying well, is not a place on the U. S. Olympic team or Luther's seal of approval, "Well-prayed!" but the joy of skating well and the goodness of prayer itself, which is communion with God.

Because practices foster internal goods, they are ends in themselves. There may be external goods that can be achieved, but they are secondary. Certainly, a trip to Nagano excites our skater, but skating well is an end in itself. Similarly, prayer is an end in itself. When used as a means to an end—to get something accomplished or to achieve emotional equilibrium—it becomes a technique, not a practice.[5]

However, while distinguishing techniques from practices, I want to observe that techniques may become practices. Imagine teaching a niece to play chess by plying her with candy. She plays chess to earn candy: candy functions as an external good. But the girl soon learns the game and grows to love it. She quickly becomes quite uninterested in whether candy is forthcoming or not. Chess has become a practice.

Perhaps the same thing happens with prayer. Sometimes we do it because we are desperate for something or about something. But the act of praying quite surprises

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[4] See his advice to his barber: Martin Luther, "A Simple Way to Pray, 1535" in *Luther's Works* 43 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968), 187–211.

[5] Practices cultivate and are sustained by virtues; techniques require skills. Building a house is a technique, demanding many and various skills: masonry, carpentry, plumbing, and so on. The workmanship can be judged by the quality of the house produced. Making a home, on the other hand, is a practice that nurtures virtues of forgiveness, compassion, and fidelity and is possessed of goods internal to the activity of homemaking. Cf. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 175ff. A technique requires certain skills and is judged by the quality of the good produced, while a practice is a good in itself and is judged by standards internal to it. If prayer is assessed in terms of what it produces, it is no longer a practice but a technique. Matthew Lamb comments: "Unfortunately, much of the modern instrumentalist orientation has deformed Christian asceticism, prayer, and piety...into techniques rather than the genuine practices they are meant to be." "Praxis," in *The New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Joseph A. Komonchak, Mary Collins, and Dermot A. Lane (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1987), 787.

us. Gradually the end we sought recedes in view of the relationship that embraces us. What we sought out for ulterior motives becomes something we seek out because of its own unique goodness. This leads to a final point.

4. *Practices foster perception, because they create a distinctive horizon.* They are oriented toward communion with God, which is finally not achieved as goal, but revealed as gift. Here the analogy to figure skating breaks down utterly. H. Richard Niebuhr expressed powerfully this meeting of creaturely yearning and divine grace: "We sought a good to love and were found by a good that loved us."[6] Fifteen centuries earlier Augustine of Hippo put this conjunction more graphically: "Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you."[7] His *Confessions* are the discovery of being discovered, of being found by something far greater than anything he had consciously sought.

All of the practices point toward this horizon of the kingdom; all share the goal of communion with God and participate in the grace of its bestowing. Because of this, Christian practices are united.[8] For example, in a course I taught entitled "Praise, Agency, and Action," each of the participants committed herself to a daily practice. I chose prayer for the enemy as my practice, and in my morning prayer I prayed for those "enemies" in my life. I found I had many: everything from structures of injustice to people with whom I had grievance. I confess to using this prayer as a technique: I had ulterior motives and expected external goods—insights, eased relationships, some measure of compassion. Indeed, these came to me in varying degrees.

But more powerful—and utterly surprising!—were the internal goods I had not anticipated. Perhaps the most unsettling was the way in which I began to see myself as an enemy of God, precisely in my ill will toward God's creatures. I found myself lifting this up in the confession of sins, asking for forgiveness. I found myself stunned with the utter gratuity of Christ's sacrifice for us, reenacted in the Eucharist. In prayer, I felt again the overwhelming interconnectedness of all of God's creatures and all of God's world: we were all the body of Christ. Christian practices all aim at this one thing: being in the body.

A practice is both related to and distinct from *praxis*, or action. Praxis, often translated as "practice" and distinguished from theory, means action informed by reflection. Praxis means action in general; it may be any action, but it is the action that experience, context, and reflection suggest. This is not what I mean by "practice." A practice, as I use the term, is always qualified by

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[6] H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation* (New York: Macmillan, 1941), 138. The horizon functions teleologically, but that *telos* is both sought and revealed, the meeting of creaturely aspiration (*imago dei*) and divine grace.

[7] Saint Augustine, *Confessions* 1.1, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin (New York: Penguin Books, 1961), 21.

[8] This is analogous to a story Dorotheos of Gaza tells: "Suppose we were to take a compass and insert the point and draw the outline of a circle. The center point is the same distance from any point on the circumference.... Let us suppose that this circle is the world and that God himself is the center: the straight lines drawn from the circumference to the center are the lives of human beings.... Let us assume for the sake of the analogy that to move toward God, then, human beings move from the circumference along the various radii of the circle to the center. But at the same time, the closer they are to God, the closer they become to one another; and the closer they are to one another, the closer they become to God." The story is recounted in Roberta Bondi, *To Love as God Loves* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 25.

some definite or indefinite article: it is always *a* practice *of something*. It always describes an activity that has been socially established over time by a discrete community. Practices orient that community to a certain way of life. Practices shape action.

"Thinking what we are doing"

Let me be clear about what I mean and what I do not. Protestants in North America have been trying for two centuries to use religion as a motivation to get people to do something. We are used to seeing religion used as a technique to achieve some external goals and to inspire social action or buttress "family values." What I suggest is different. There is not so much an agenda here, as a desire to think through what we are already doing. Hannah Arendt demanded this and only this at the beginning of *The Human Condition*: that "we think what we are doing."[9] The difference could be stated even more sharply. To use religion as a technique would be to argue prescriptively: "Because we are Christian, we ought to do x, y, z, and q." Focusing on practices creates a quite different argument, a descriptive argument: "Because we are Christians, we already do certain things: we pray; we baptize; we break bread. What do these activities mean for our way of being in the world?"

I am trying to think about what we are already doing. It is not that I have a particular agenda for Christians in the public realm. Rather, I am convinced that Christians have a radically different point of entry into the public realm precisely because of the practices that shape us.

The practices of baptism and the Eucharist, as I have tried to show, form, inform, and transform action. Baptism transforms the way Christians regard death, making them wary about privatized, medicalized, and individualized ways of dying. Similarly, eucharistic fellowship gives us a very different template for dealing with poverty and welfare reform in this country. Moreover, these perspectives ought not only direct action in our Christian enclaves, but they need to be heard in the public realm as we continue to consider issues of utmost importance to our civil life.

As activities that compose a way of life, practices frame a way of being in the world. Christian practices respond to God's initiating act of grace in Jesus Christ in ritual actions that have been transmitted by particular faith communities over space and time. Moreover, these practices configure a certain ethos, or way of life, which is a main concern of ethics.

Practices, doctrine, and Scripture

Traditionally, Lutheran ethicists have turned to the doctrines of the faith, and not its practices, for their foundational insights into Lutheran ethics. Luther's rich theological writings offer many important doctrinal touchstones for the moral life: the priesthood of all believers, justification, law and gospel, orders of creation, two kingdoms, Christian freedom, and theology of the cross.[10] Grounding a Lutheran ethic on any one of these doctrines makes two common assumptions: ethics flows from doctrine, and ethics is then applied deductively to concrete situations. Indeed, much of the debate surrounding recent Lutheran

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[9] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), 5.

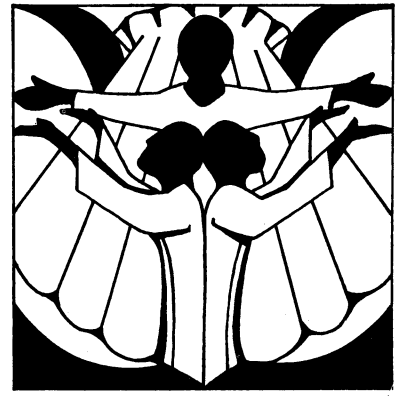
[10] See the suggestions of Timothy F. Lull, "The (Normative) Sexual Hole," *dialog* 32:1 (Winter, 1993), 65–68.

social statements deals with questions about the most appropriate doctrinal starting point. Should a social statement on human sexuality begin from the doctrine of law and gospel or the doctrine of Christian freedom? Depending on the starting point, the resulting statement could be quite different.

I do not propose to jettison doctrines, because they norm and aim practices. But I do not want to ignore practices either, because they enact doctrines. Without doctrines, practices are empty and aimless. We might do them by rote or routine, but we have a hard time figuring out what they are about. But without practices, doctrines are disembodied: we might speak them, even swear by them, but they have not entered the body of either the believer or the community.

Part of the terror and delight involved in teaching in an ecumenical and interfaith consortium like the Graduate Theological Union lies in the wild and wonderful questions put to Lutheran students and faculty by students from other faith traditions. Some questions are predictable, but always disarming: "What do you mean by 'justification by grace through faith?' You talk about it all the time, but what does it mean?" More recently, a Unitarian posed a question in an introductory level course in church history: "What does saying a creed do for you?" Members of creedal churches struggled to express their convictions, but we only got so far using words. In fact, words could not say the half of it. Part of the truth that could not be spoken was buried in the doing: the saying of the creed over time and in community. I want to resurrect the connection between doctrines and practices, and ask how these might compose a distinctive way of life to inform a Lutheran attitude toward sexual ethics, welfare reform, or assisted suicide.[11]

The question raises the issue of the



relationship between practices, doctrines, and Scripture. In the *background* of Christian practices is Scripture; in the *foreground* of Christian practices is doctrine. As I mentioned earlier, Christian practices are derived from Scripture. They reenact what Jesus did or found important or commended to his disciples: his passion, death, and resurrection; his table fellowship; his prayer; his teaching; his own instructions on baptizing in the name of the "Father, Son, and Spirit." Scripture lies behind all Christian practices; it informs and shapes them. In the background of Christian practices is Scripture.

In the foreground of Christian practices is doctrine, all the rich doctrines of justification by grace through faith, the priesthood of all believers, the body of Christ, and so on. These too derive from Scripture; they are the hermeneutical lenses through which we read and understand

[11] In our work together, Larry Rasmussen has framed this question for me most powerfully. See our article, "A Coast-to-Coast Conversation on Sexuality," in *A Reforming Church...Gift and Task: Essays from a Free Conference*, ed. Charles P. Lutz (Minneapolis: Kirk House Publishers, 1995), 151–72.

Scripture. For example, Luther found in the practices of the medieval penitential system a righteousness of works antithetical to the righteousness of Christ. Rereading the Bible, particularly Paul's letter to the Romans, he reformed the practices so that they would better represent the message of the gospel. The doctrine of justification normed the practices of penance, while the practices of penance enacted the doctrine of justification. In a very real way, doctrines articulate the aforementioned standards of excellence for evaluating practices. Doctrine that is not enacted in practices is disembodied; practices that are not normed by doctrine are empty.[12]

In the first lecture, I brought the Christian practice of baptism to bear on contemporary attitudes and practices of dying. In the background of that practice is Jesus' own baptism (Mk 1:9-11; Mt 3:13-17; Lk 3:21)[13] and his instruction to baptize (Mt 28:19). Gospel accounts portray baptism as a dual process, involving confession of faith in the forgiveness of sins and the bestowal of the Holy Spirit. Paul emphasizes that one is baptized "in Christ" and incorporated into the body (Gal 3:27; 1 Cor 12:13). These biblical passages ground our practice of baptism, as we welcome people into a community of "children of God." They also interpret death as the final incorporation into the body of Christ. Taking seriously what we do in baptism gives us a very different stake in discussions about assisted suicide. Moreover, it allows us to question attitudes toward death and dying that assisted suicide presumes, as well as to offer alternative attitudes and actions.

In the second lecture, I linked the issue of poverty and welfare relief with the Christian practice of the Eucharist. In the background of this practice is the table fellowship Jesus enjoyed with tax collectors and sinners (Mt 11:19; Lk 7:34). For Jesus and his followers, eating was a way of enacting the kingdom of God, and Jesus avoided the exclusive dining habits which separated certain groups from others.[14] I also wanted to investigate Luther's understanding of this central practice of the faith, because he read in the ancient practice concrete challenges to his time: a challenge to end begging, a demand to end privatized uses of the mass, a call to a new vocation in the priesthood of all believers. All this hovers in the background as we gather together to break bread, if we would stop to "think what we are doing."

Of course, Christian practices could be easily identified as "marks of the church." Linked with the central Lutheran doctrinal touchstones are central practices that define Christian communities. Luther called them the marks of the church: the proclamation and reception of the Word; baptism; Eucharist; the office of the keys; ordination/offices; prayer/doxology/catechesis; discipleship. These are the practices that constitute the church as church, the means by which the church can be "externally recognized"

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[12] Cf. Reinhard Hütter, "The Church as Public: Dogma, Practice, and the Holy Spirit," *Pro Ecclesia* 3:3 (Summer, 1994), 352–57.

[13] The presence and authority of John the Baptizer shifts in these various accounts. Mark's Gospel states simply that Jesus was baptized in the Jordan by John, suggesting that Jesus was a disciple of John. Matthew's Gospel portrays John as recognizing Jesus' superior spiritual authority, baptizing him only reluctantly. Luke manages to get Jesus baptized without John's presence entirely. Interestingly, Paul, whose accounts provide the earliest evidence of Christian baptism, does not mention John at all.

[14] Bruce Chilton, *Jesus' Prayer and Jesus' Eucharist: His Personal Practice of Spirituality* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1997), esp. 52–75.

as church.[15] These practices or marks of the church are the "other side of dogma," as Reinhard Hütter puts it.[16]

In beginning with practices distinctive to Lutheran communities, I propose a starting point for ethics that is *empirical*, *concrete*, and *inductive*. It is *empirical*, in beginning with the practices of the faith and looking at the kind of life they compose, rather than beginning with a theory about ethics and applying it to the everyday. It is *concrete*, in attending to these actual activities and asking how these shape moral agency, rather than focusing on abstract principles and examining how they dictate action. Finally, it is *inductive*, in moving from actions to the principles that direct them, rather than deducing actions from prescribed principles. I am concerned with how the concrete practices of the Christian life describe a certain way of life as "Christian" and define the people in it as "moral agents." These practices shape experience and train people in a certain way of life and a certain way of viewing relationships to God and the neighbor. My concern is with Christian nurture or formation.

Formation: a foreign word in Lutheran churches?

Any talk of "formation" in Lutheran circles immediately meets a formidable challenge: focusing on formation threatens to reintroduce "works righteousness" into the Reformation. Identifying certain practices as "formational" risks prescribing a series of "self-chosen works" by which one might advance in holiness. These "works," it is feared, habituate one into a certain way of life; one becomes a Christian by doing them. Being follows from doing.

Luther, it is argued, rejected such an Aristotelian understanding of practice and habituation, whereby "one becomes a lutenist by often playing the lute."[17] While this understanding may work for ordinary life, one becomes a Christian by grasping and being grasped by Christ in faith. Works follow naturally in response to this new identity. Organic metaphors describe this response: works follow from faith as fruit

> Doctrine that is not enacted in practices is disembodied; practices that are not normed by doctrine are empty.

[15] Martin Luther, "On the Councils and the Church," *Luther's Works* 41 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 150ff.

[16] Hütter then proceeds to distinguish an inner and outer circle of practices by which the church is publicly identified as church. Actions habitual in the life of any Christian community occupy the inner circle. Practices on the outer circle exist as challenges and calling to the church as a public witness: the remembrance of the saints and martyrs and an ongoing procedure of identifying exemplary lives and witnesses; the public stance of theology as ecclesial discourse; pacifism or a way of discerning just and unjust wars; Christian life as our primary vocation; a regular practice of church visitations; base Christian communities as challenge for all Christians; mutual recognition and fellowship among all Christian communions. These practices enact the doctrines, just as the doctrines inform the practices. Hütter, "The Church as Public," 354.

[17] Martin Luther, "Lectures on Galatians 1535, Chapters 1-4," *Luther's Works* 26 (St. Louis: Concordia, 1963), 256.

Christian practices evolve as communities struggle to enact baptism in a life of discipleship.

from a tree. Thus, doing follows from being, and both proceed organically from baptismal faith.

Many theologians express caution regarding any Lutheran appropriation of "formation."[18] They capitalize on the organic language Luther so often uses to explain the relationship between faith and works: works follow from faith like fruit from a tree. Yet they miss another dimension of Luther's language that speaks of practices and formation. In his catechetical material, Luther trades organic metaphors for direct instruction. People are not plants; they both need and desire concrete ways of responding to divine initiative. In his pastoral counsel, he exhorts pastors in their instruction to "lay the greatest weight on those commandments or other parts which seem to require special attention among the people where you are."[19] Instruction and exhortation replace organic necessity.

Practices shape the life of discipleship, giving a rough outline of what it means to "live out of baptism." For if Christian discipleship is the living out of baptism, baptism is the sacramental enactment of discipleship. In baptism, the Christian receives both a name and a call: she is named "child of God;" she is invited to "Follow me." Simultaneously, the Christian becomes "child of God" and "disciple" of Christ. Christian practices evolve as communities struggle to enact baptism in a life of discipleship. So far from being "self-chosen works," Christian practices allow the baptized to respond to their calling and to offer in lives of praise and service what baptism has conferred. Formation is nothing more and nothing less than initiation into those practices of discipleship.

Formation: initiation into the practices of discipleship

Understanding formation as initiation in the practices of discipleship has important implications for the configuration of Christian ethics in general and for Lutheran ethics in particular.

1. Formation shapes moral agency. On the first day of an introductory course in ethics, I ask students to define what they think they are there to study. For the most part, they define "ethics" as "doing the right thing." They are not alone. Most people turn to ethics for answers to the question "What should I do?" They seek insight into action. An exclusive focus on actions, however, obscures other aspects of the moral life: character, consequences, virtues, and vices.

Formation focuses on the moral agent and frames the question of ethics differently: "Who am I called to be?" Moral

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[18] Cf. Leif Grane, "Luther, Baptism and Christian Formation," *Encounters with Luther: Vol. 2* (Gettysburg: Institute for Luther Studies, 1982), 189ff.; Robert W. Jenson, "The Return to Baptism," *Encounters with Luther: Vol. 2*, 217ff.; Gilbert Meilander, *The Theory and Practice of Virtue* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 100–126.

[19] Martin Luther, "Preface to the Small Catechism," *The Book of Concord*, ed. Theodore Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 340.

agency describes certain kinds of people or communities, whose peculiar attitudes and values express themselves as certain ways of seeing the world and being in it. To a community of pickpockets, all the world is a pocket. More soberly, to a community of Lutherans, all the world is filled with neighbors.

Agency is not an alien emphasis for Lutherans. Exegeting the Sermon on the Mount, a text that for centuries had provided believers with acts of holiness, Luther moves from action to identity: "If you want to be a Christian, then be one."[20] Significantly, he does *not* say: "If you want to be a Christian, *do* this, this, and that." Rather, he focuses on questions of identity, "the kind of people" Christians should be. The heart, not the will, directs the moral life, and throughout his exposition Luther exhorts his hearers to "keep a Christian heart."

Luther further sharpens the question of formation. The question "Who am I called to be?" becomes the question "Whose are we?" Justification rectifies the relationship between Creator and creatures through Christ, and the moral life evolves out of that new relationship, signed and sealed in baptism. Normed and informed by the Decalogue, which tells us "all that God wishes us to do or not to do,"[21] works or actions follow as a cheerful, joyful response to the conviction that in Christ God has acted to reclaim us as creatures of a loving Creator. Christian practices choreograph that response. To focus ethics on actions misses the initiating shape of the Christian life: faith in the promises of God.[22]

2. *Formation requires community.* The United States of American legacy of individualism that Robert Bellah and his colleagues documented so carefully in *Habits of the Heart* fashions people as solitary moral agents and makes moral debate a matter of conflicting opinions: *my* ethics *versus your* ethics.[23] "A decent respect for the opinions of mankind," language from the Declaration of Independence, relegates moral difference to mere clash of opinion, and the individual remains the locus of moral agency. Moral deliberation, discernment, and formation lose any input from a community.

Formation, in contrast, regards the self as relational. "I" am not an essence waiting to be excavated by the proper spiritual practices or enlightening therapeutic techniques. Rather, "I" am, quite literally, the company I keep. Composing his portrait of "the responsible self," H. Richard Niebuhr delineates the contours of such a self embedded in relationships to God, to society, to time and history.[24] Formation focuses on the shaped and shaping role of individuals and communities.

Luther is deeply aware of how relationships constitute both the individual and the community. His explanation of the Fourth Commandment creates a taxonomy of reciprocal relationships between parents and children, church and believers, citizen and state, servant and master. Moreover, the Christian's primary relationship to God orients all of these other relationship and organizes them toward fulfilling God's pur-

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[20] Martin Luther, "The Sermon on the Mount," *Luther's Works* 21 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), 245.

[21] Martin Luther, "Large Catechism," *The Book of Concord*, 411.

[22] Or the works or actions may follow with courage or patience, when we don't feel joyful. Not feeling joy doesn't lessen the duty to respond cheerfully.

[23] Robert Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton, *Habits of the Heart* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 142ff.

[24] H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1963).

poses in the creation.[25]

3. Formation tackles the everyday. Many people turn to ethics for counsel in hard times and tough situations. Should the United States grant "most favored nation" status to a country alleged to sanction human rights abuses? Should you buy clothes that may have been made in sweatshops? How should a pastor respond to a pregnant Luther Leaguer who feels she cannot talk to her parents? The questions reflect real and difficult situations. Yet, if the moral life is construed as a series of tough cases, then ethics must accordingly solve problems, answer questions, and resolve quandaries.[26] Moreover, unless one is engaged in a problem, question, or quandary, one is assumed to be morally disengaged or ethically in neutral gear. Finally, ethics becomes a form of decision-making, disregarding who it is that is making the decisions and the arena in which they are deciding.

In contrast, formation develops perceptual skills, which are then focused on tough situations. Novelist and occasional philosopher Iris Murdoch cautions, "I can only choose within the world I can *see*...," suggesting that the work of ethics is ongoing, as we struggle to see more accurately the world, the people around us, the God in whom "we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28).[27] Formation urges people to attend to details, identify which details are morally relevant, and make judgments informed by certain ways of seeing. Anyone who has meditated on the Psalms will not fail to notice the poor, because, as the psalmist writes, "the needy shall not always be forgotten, and the hope of the poor shall not perish forever" (Ps 9:18).

Writing about the Sermon on the Mount, Luther presents a moral optic. He employs the metaphor of vision to clarify moral orientation. The appropriate conduct, actions, and decision follow from true vision: "'Now, if your eye is sound,' Christ says, 'your whole body is light.' That is, all your activity and life, your outward conduct in your office and social station, is all upright."[28] True vision focuses on God and neighbor; false vision focuses only on the self, casting everything and everyone else in its dark shadow.

4. Christian formation is essentially ecclesial and unabashedly theological. Joseph Kotva criticizes a tendency in too much of what passes as Christian ethics "to declare Jesus irrelevant for ethics." After all, the argument runs, his message was primarily spiritual; his way of life is too deeply contexted in a world vastly different from the contemporary world; his ethics were decidedly interim and apocalyptic, unusable for those who must hunker down for the long haul.[29] To be credible in the public realm and in conversation with people of other faith traditions, Kotva fears that Christian ethics abandons what makes it distinctive in the first place.

Formation challenges this by presenting ethics as inculcation into a certain way of life. Novices encounter years of formation upon their entrance into a particular religious order, as they study Scripture, absorb the unique tradition they have en-

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[25] Martin Luther, "Large Catechism," *The Book of Concord*, 379–98.

[26] Cf. Stanley Hauerwas and David Burrell, "From System to Story," in Stanley Hauerwas, *Truthfulness and Tragedy* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977), 15–39.

[27] Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), 37.

[28] Martin Luther, "The Sermon on the Mount (Sermons) and The Magnificat," *Luther's Works* 21:216.

[29] Joseph Kotva, *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1996), 87.

tered, and learn its charisms. Luther had been so formed upon entrance into the Augustinian Eremites at Erfurt in 1505. Yet, he razed the medieval two-story morality, which dictated a minimalist morality for the laity and demanded perfection of those in religious life.[30] Rather, Luther applied the commandments of God with equal rigor to everyone.

Bonhoeffer gives formation explicitly christological content.

> Formation is not an independent process or condition which can in some way or other be detached from this form. The only formation is formation by and into the form of Jesus Christ. The point of departure for Christian ethics is the body of Christ, the form of Christ in the form of the Church, and the formation of the Church in conformity with the form of Christ.[31]

For Bonhoeffer as for Luther, ethics as formation can only be understood theologically and must be configured ecclesially.

Conclusion

What has preceded argues the importance of practices for a Lutheran ethic. Accordingly, I have presented formation as initiation into the practices of discipleship. This is an attempt on my part not to issue an agenda for what we as Christians ought to do, but rather to help us think through as Christians what we are already doing. As we think through what we are doing, aided by Scripture and the wisdom of our tradition, we find certain distinctive points of entry into public discussions of some of the most difficult issues of our time.

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[30] Cf. Karl Holl, *The Reconstruction of Morality*, trans. Fred W. Meuser and Walter R. Wietzke (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1979), 26, 36ff.

[31] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, trans. Neville Horton Smith (New York: Macmillan, 1955), 84.

A Book Worth Discussing: *The Birth of Christianity* by John Dominic Crossan

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The Birth of Christianity: Discovering What Happened in the Years Immediately after the Execution of Jesus. By John Dominic Crossan. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998. xxxiv and 653 pages. Cloth. $30.00.

Hold on to your seat! If you approach *The Birth of Christianity* as an "intracanonical" Christian, that is, one who derives Christianity from the material in our existing New Testament and not from "extracanonical" sources, you are in for quite a ride.

Perhaps most critical is the issue of the New Testament "story" of Jesus' death and resurrection. According to the author, the New Testament "story" is not "history," that is, a story about what happened. For a decade after Jesus died in 30 C.E., so says the author, there was no "story" as we now have it in our New Testament, telling about the arrest, trial, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus. The Apostle Paul, writing letters two decades after Jesus' death, does not know the "story" Mark tells in his Gospel; he knows only the tradition he has received from Jerusalem: "that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures...and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures" (1 Cor 15:3–4).

So who produced the "story"? Women —the ones with names who were at the cross and the open tomb in the New Testament Gospels. Those women engaged in a ritual lament like that of the "female lament tradition" present in human culture everywhere and "turned [a] male exegetical tradition," which had viewed Jesus' death through material from the psalms and the servant songs, "into a passion-resurrection story once and for all forever" (p. 573).

Proponent of this imaginative view is John Dominic Crossan, Professor Emeritus of De Paul University in Chicago, co-founder of the Jesus Seminar, and chair of the Historical Jesus Section of the Society of Biblical Literature. Crossan is the author of more than a dozen books, including *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* and *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography*.

Just as challenging as Crossan's account of how the passion-resurrection story came into being is his claim that along with a "death" tradition present in cities like Jerusalem and Antioch, there was a "life" tradition present in the rural areas of south-

ern Galilee, which knew nothing at all about a "death" tradition. The "life" tradition is the author's preferred term for the "sayings" tradition that is behind two documents comprised of sayings of Jesus.

One document is Q, the hypothetical text on which both Luke and Matthew drew in writing their Gospels. Crossan prefers to call this text the Q Gospel, an extracanonical text lost to us that can nevertheless be reconstructed, Crossan says, by comparing the non-Markan material which Luke and Matthew have in common and assessing it on the basis of the redactional purpose Luke or Matthew had in mind in incorporating the material into their Gospel.

The second document based on a common "sayings" tradition is the Gospel of Thomas, a text commonly dated as second century, the full text of which was discovered in a Coptic version only as recently as 1945. Like the Q material, the Gospel of Thomas is a list of Jesus' sayings presented with minimal organization or categorization that, scholars agree, is a text independent of Q and of the canonical Gospels. But Q and the Gospel of Thomas share common material, which has given rise to the proposal that both have drawn from a Common Sayings Tradition that may have been oral rather than written and that dates to the 40s C.E.

The Common Sayings Tradition is key to Crossan's understanding of the birth of Christianity. How key is clear from his choice of the term "Life Tradition" for it. According to Crossan, the common sayings are evidence of a way of life practiced by the rural Galilean disciples of Jesus—he prefers to call them companions—who followed Jesus in living the life of the kingdom of God as Jesus had described it in his sayings. In fact, after Jesus' death, they continued the itinerant practice of Jesus, traveling from town to town and house to house, calling people to life in the kingdom of God. Though they did not know the "death" tradition present in Jerusalem and elsewhere, their tradition was as theological and soteriological as the "death" tradition, drawing upon the suffering and vindication theology of Jewish Scripture.

According to Crossan, itinerancy was the earliest form of Christianity, the way of life of Jesus' Galilean companions in the decades following Jesus' death. Echoes of that way of life are evident in the Q material in Luke 10 and in the corresponding section in Matthew. Crossan links the material in Q and in the Gospel of Thomas with the Didache, a second century book of regulations for life in Christian community, which contains material about how to receive itinerants. Using the three documents, Crossan describes "itinerant" Christians, who travel to bring people the healing of the kingdom of God, and "householder" Christians, who offer hospitality to the travelers.

Linking the "life" and "death" traditions and central to both of them is the "Common Meal Tradition." Crossan contrasts the emphasis on Jesus' body and blood in the Jerusalem tradition of the Lord's Supper present in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians with the Eucharist tradition (with no mention of Jesus' body and blood) present in the Didache. Nevertheless, he sees a common meal tradition reflected in them both. He concludes: "The Common Meal Tradition may look to a Last Supper in the past, to a communal meal in the present, or to a messianic banquet in the future—or, quite validly, to all of those at the same time. But it can never get away from this: it is in food and drink offered equally to everyone that the presence of God and Jesus is found" (p. 444).

Crossan's purpose in writing *The Birth of Christianity* is to describe what Christianity was like at the very beginning after

Crossan's book is more a contribution to the present discussion among scholars than a history of the first decades of Christianity.

Jesus' death, in the 30s and 40s C.E. Just as Crossan did not think it impossible to reconstruct "the historical Jesus," so he does not share the scholarly pessimism for reconstructing what happened in the decades before written evidence surfaced in the writing of Paul in the 50s C.E. Crossan does not consider the Acts of the Apostles to be reliable history. Not only was it written more than a generation after the events it describes; it is "gospel" just like Luke's Gospel, of which it is Part 2. Its trajectory is from Jerusalem to Rome and does not know of Christianity in Jesus' Galilean homeland or in Egypt.

To reconstruct what happened, Crossan follows a particular method that begins with context and then links context with text. In separate chapters Crossan deals with cross-cultural anthropology to discover what life is like in peasant societies, describes Judeo-Roman history to understand the political setting at the time of Jesus, and analyzes Galilean archeology to see what was going on in Jesus' homeland. Crossan's conclusion is that Roman commercialization and Herodian urban construction squeezed the peasants of Galilee so hard that they lived in a climate of revolt. Linking the texts of Q and the Gospel of Thomas to the context, Crossan depicts first John the Baptist and then Jesus as revolutionary leaders of a kingdom of God movement to call people to a countercultural life of the kingdom. According to Crossan, Jesus was himself an illiterate peasant—as an artisan he was economically lower than a peasant—and his companions continued the movement after his death.

It is no mean feat to keep up with Crossan as he develops and explores the theses of his book. His scholarship is enormous. He writes clearly enough. But his approach is not to tell us, "Here is how Christianity was born," and then to give us his conclusions and the data that support them. He is much more interested in engaging his scholarly colleagues in debate. His book is more a contribution to the present discussion among scholars than a history of the first decades of Christianity. Crossan interacts with two New Testament scholars in particular, Helmut Koester and Raymond Brown, with whom he is in major agreement and disagreement. Crossan's approach makes it difficult to report, "This is how Crossan thinks Christianity began." Instead of a connected story, we get descriptions of components of what presumably is a connected story.

Does the evidence support Crossan's conclusions? I think the anthropological, historical, and archaeological evidence for the subjugation of peasants in Roman-occupied Galilee and Judea helps us understand the context for Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God and the reason for his execution. Evidence from the New Testament Gospels and the Book of Acts supports the view that Jesus' followers were itinerants following Jesus in proclaiming the kingdom of God. I find it hard to conceive that itinerant believers in Galilee were so separated from fellow believers in

Jerusalem that they did not know the Jerusalem "death" tradition. Surely they knew that Jesus had died. For me it is too big a jump to say that a common "sayings" tradition is a "life" tradition devoid of a "death" tradition. Because Jesus' followers remembered, gathered, and rehearsed his sayings does not mean they were uninterested in his death. Crossan himself argues passionately for keeping the "life" and "death" traditions together. That is precisely what the New Testament Gospels have done. Not only Luke and Matthew in their use of Q, but Mark and John in their reports of the words and deeds of Jesus tell us both about the life and death of Jesus.

I am not convinced by the evidence Crossan gives to explain the "story" of Jesus' death and resurrection. Where is the evidence that a "female lament tradition" operated at the death of Jesus? Or that a "male exegesis" existed which females used to weave their lament? Would there have been a lament if there had been a resurrection? Do not the Common Sayings Tradition and the Jerusalem Tradition agree on a vindication/resurrection reality as the outcome of Jesus' death? Why should there have been a lament?

There is in fact a "life" tradition in the New Testament Gospels independent of the "sayings" tradition. All four Gospels have their own sources for the acts and deeds of Jesus. They are interested in Jesus' life not just as biography. For them Jesus' life as well as his death and resurrection are "gospel." Did Mark invent the Gospel as a form of literature? Isn't it more likely that the Gospel form began with those first followers of Jesus as they told one another and anyone who would listen what Jesus said and did and how he died and was alive again? As good Jews would they not have found allusions in their Scriptures by which to tell the meaning of Jesus' suffering and death? Why conclude that Paul did not know the story of Jesus' suffering and death because he concentrates on the death and its meaning rather than the details of how he died? Arguments from silence lead nowhere. Because Paul did not repeat the "story" does not mean he did not know it.

Crossan's views on eschatology is another issue requiring comment. Crossan helpfully distinguishes between eschatology and apocalyptic eschatology. But he has two more categories: ascetic eschatology and ethical eschatology. He sees Q as an illustration of apocalyptic eschatology, the Gospel of Thomas as an example of ascetic eschatology, and the Common Sayings (= Life) Tradition behind both as proponent of ethical eschatology. Is that because Crossan would like Jesus to be a proponent of ethical eschatology? I find it intriguing that Crossan tells us he would like to get rid of the term eschatology and substitute for it something like "world negation." World negation may be a commendable concept. But you can't be eschatological without some kind of concept of "last things." Could Jesus, faithful Jew that he was, have had an eschatological understanding that was simply "ethical" without some kind of "day of the Lord" component?

The final issue to be joined is that concerning the resurrection of Jesus. In the introduction to the book Crossan includes resurrection within the category of vision and apparition, understanding the resurrection of Jesus to be like the apparition of Hector in Virgil's *Aeneid* or the apparitions of the dead which grieving people experience to this day. His concern is to affirm a monastic and sacrophilic Christianity as opposed to a dualistic and sarcophilic Christianity. Well and good. Genuine Christianity is sacrophilic, that is, it affirms the body and the material world. It is not sarcophilic, espousing a dualism that negates the body

and the material world. But is the resurrection to be located in the category of vision and apparition?

I do not wish to do Crossan an injustice concerning his views on Jesus' resurrection. Affirming Paul's seed metaphor in 1 Corinthians 15, Crossan says of the resurrected Jesus:

> It is the same Jesus, the one and only historical Jesus of the late 20s in his Jewish homeland, but now untrammeled by time and place, language and proximity. It is the one and only Jesus, absolutely the same, absolutely different.... Bodily resurrection means that the embodied life and death of the historical Jesus continues to be experienced, by believers, as powerfully efficacious and salvifically present in this world. That life continued, as it always had, to form communities of like lives. (pp. xxx–xxxi)

I think I agree. But I ask, did the resurrection happen? Is it somehow an event of history that took place in time and space? If so, will that not have an effect on how you understand the historical Jesus and the birth of Christianity? Put another way, I can say, as the Apostle Paul does, "Christ lives in me." I have had an encounter with the resurrected Jesus. It happened in my time and space. Isn't that like what happened to Paul on the road to Damascus? Isn't it similar to what happened to Peter and James and all the apostles, to Mary Magdalene, and the other women at the tomb, and the Emmaus disciples? If so, then I think we can agree with Crossan in his epilogue that justice is the character of God as described in Psalm 82. But we can also disagree with him by claiming that John 1:14 is more important than Psalm 82 because it affirms the ultimate working of God's justice. And we can assert that John 3:16 is of ultimate importance, because as important as God's justice is, God's love is more important.

Pannenberg's Achievement: An Analysis and Assessment of His *Systematic Theology*

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Systematic Theology. By Wolfhart Pannenberg. 3 volumes. Trans. Geoffrey Bromiley. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991–98.

Readers who are already familiar with Pannenberg's voluminous corpus will not find that he charts new waters in his *Systematic Theology.*[1] What they will find is a brilliant systematization of his earlier thinking in conversation with the ecumenical Christian tradition as well as much of the best of contemporary thought. Why should church leaders—pastors and theologians—read and study these three volumes? I can think of no better reason than that with the completion of his *Systematic Theology* Pannenberg has established himself as a teacher or doctor of the church. His work is a classic. I believe that along with Barth, Tillich, and certain feminist and liberation theologians no serious presentation of twentieth century theology can afford to bypass his work. Furthermore, Pannenberg's work as apologetic, biblical, interdisciplinary, and churchly provides the consummate resource for helping church professionals instruct the young and seekers in the dynamics of the Christian faith as we enter the third millennium of the church. In this review essay I aim to accurately present the highlights of his arguments in the *Systematic Theology* and to offer some critical comments about Pannenberg's work.

In volume one Pannenberg investigates theological prolegomena and the doctrine of God. He rejects the positions on truth established by both Protestant Orthodoxy and Protestant Liberalism. In contrast to Protestant Orthodoxy, he claims that the truth of Christianity is not to be established on the basis of the alleged verbal inspiration of Scripture. For Pannenberg, Orthodoxy as merely appealing to the authority of the Bible as God's Word apart from any attempt to verify its facticity falters because the Bible's authority lacks universal recognition. Pannenberg likewise rejects the methodology of Protestant Liberalism

[1] For a thorough bibliography of Pannenberg's work up to the time of the *Systematic Theology* see Philip Clayton's "Works by Pannenberg" in *The Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg: Twelve American Critiques, with an Autobiographical Essay and Response* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988), 338–52.

(Schleiermacher's heritage) on the grounds that individual religious experience is far too subjective to substantiate the truth of dogma. His own approach to theological truth is dependent on two markedly divergent sources: Barth and modern scientific method. With Barth, Pannenberg assures us that if God is to be known, it is only because God is self-revealing. However, he disagrees with Barth on how God's "word" should be understood. He worries that in Barth's perspective God's self-revelation could be seen as telepathic, disclosed as a "word" abstracted from history. By contrast, the truth of revelation can be discerned only if it is indirectly tied to events disclosed as God's deeds in history. With modern science, Pannenberg's perspective could be described as "critically realistic":[2] dogmas are best seen as "hypotheses" (I:56), and theology is described as developing "models" (I:60) about God and God's relationship to the cosmos. Hence, theology should accept the tentativity of its claims. Its truth is eschatological (I:16), awaiting confirmation, and not wholly certain until the Eschaton. This side of eternity, theology's truth can be established only as the claims of a dogmatic system successfully cohere, as they are grounded in scripture, as they are related to the whole of reality as understood by present experience and the wider claims of philosophical reflection, and as they are relevant to the present theological debate.[3]

Obviously God is not a given in secular experience. The issue, then, of how God is real is a pressing concern for modern theology. In an earlier work Pannenberg argued that, metaphysically speaking, God should be seen as "the unifying unity of the totality of the finite."[4] He interprets reality by means of the category of history—reality is developing towards a goal that will complete or fulfill its possibilities and harmonize its differences. Ultimate reality is not fully realized until the end of this cosmic, temporal process. In a sense, God *is* the outcome of history. This implies that God is not yet fully real but is becoming fully real as the history of the cosmos moves ever toward its completion. As absolute origin of all, God is more real than any created thing or all created things combined; nevertheless, God will achieve the fullness of deity only at the end of the cosmic process. Hence, Pannenberg's view of God and metaphysics is thoroughly directed by eschatology.

Similar to many contemporary theologians, Pannenberg sees the medieval and early modern "proofs" of God's existence, i.e., "natural theology," as outdated, tied to discredited metaphysical systems. He thinks that Kant and Hegel instruct us to view

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[2] In particular J. Wentzel van Huyssteen has described Pannenberg as a critical realist. See his "Truth and Commitment in Theology and Science: An Appraisal of Wolfhart Pannenberg's Perspective" in *Essays in Postfoundational Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 69–72. For a general introduction and further discussion of critical realism as a methodology in science and theology see Nancey Murphy, *Theology in the Age of Scientific Reasoning* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 197–98; John Polkinghorne, *The Faith of a Physicist: Reflections of a Bottom-Up Thinker* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 46–51; Arthur Peacocke, *Theology for a Scientific Age: Being and Becoming—Natural, Divine, and Human* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 11–19; Roger Trigg, *Rationality and Religion: Does Faith Need Reason?* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 84–89; and Ian Barbour, *Religion in an Age of Science*, vol. 1 (San Francisco: Harper, 1990), 99–101.

[3] For further discussion see Christoph Schwoebel, "Pannenberg," in *The Modern Theologians*, ed. David F. Ford (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 185.

[4] See *Metaphysics and the Idea of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 143.

these "proofs" as ways in which philosophical reflection can help us rise above our finite, given experience to the thought of the absolute. Pannenberg concedes that there may well be a natural knowledge of God implied by humans' ability prethematically or ecstatically to transcend both themselves and all their finite experiences in the very act of cognition. For instance, the demarcation and recognition of finite things implies an opposite to it that is not itself finite, an infinite horizon that serves as its basis. He surmises that this horizon would be the prethematic recognition or natural knowledge of God, to which Paul seemingly alludes in Rom 1:20–21.

For Pannenberg, if God is to show us who God is, then we do well not to try to seek God's reality in an allegedly authoritative Scripture, nor in individual religious experience (no matter how sincere), nor in the so-called "proofs" of God's existence, but rather in the positive religions. Metaphysics can augment theological claims by encouraging theology to be true to its calling to widen its concerns beyond its own specific narratives or parameters and to seek to glimpse the whole of reality as it is aiming to fulfill its destiny. However, unlike metaphysics, the study of the religions can provide a depth quality to the absolute. For instance, it seems to indicate that spiritual reality is, in some sense, personal. Indeed, a theological approach to the study of the religions affirms the primacy of divine reality as that which initiates, sustains, and unifies religious experience. Furthermore, the study of the religions reveals a developing consensus in religious history that claims that the sacred is somehow one (I:171). Pannenberg believes that humans' movement toward conceiving the sacred as somehow one implies a corresponding reality of the sacred as actually being one, since it is the sacred or God that is in fact coming to light in the history of the religions. Only this theory of religions can accommodate the phenomenological sense that the reality of the divine is epistemologically prior to the actual experience of the divine. The religions, then, are revelatory. However, God's uniqueness, made specific in God's covenant with Israel, can't be deduced from a general knowledge of God (I:190), even in the religions. Hence, God's uniqueness is manifest in the fate of Israel and the man Jesus, in whose mission and ministry there is an anticipation of the totality of history in light of its end.

Having covered the dogmatic notions of truth, the concept and reality of God in contemporary thought, and revelation as expressed generically in the religions and specifically in the history of Israel and the ministry of Jesus, Pannenberg is now ready to present his view of the essence and attributes of God. Pannenberg seeks a view of God which is consistently and thoroughly relational.[5] His view contrasts both to a long-standing tradition that aims to establish God's unity and monarchy independent of God's triune relations and to Barth who, akin to German Idealists, interprets the triune identity as the threefold self-unfolding of the one divine Subject. He challenges the adequacy of the traditional approach to the

[5] Here Pannenberg's work should be compared with that of his contemporaries, especially Eberhard Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World: On the Foundation of the Theology of the Crucified One in the Dispute between Theism and Atheism*, trans. Darrell L. Guder (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983); Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981); Robert Jenson, *Systematic Theology: The Triune God*, vol. 1 (New York: Oxford, 1997); and Catherine LaCugna *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: Harper, 1993).

triune relations as *solely* relations of origin. Here, he appeals to Scripture and Athanasius' trinitarian theology (I:312). The threefold distinction within the one God is based on the self-differentiation of the Son from the Father and the Son from the Spirit (I:272). God's establishing the monarchy of the divine self in the cosmos as the inseparable, cooperative venture of the three persons is the key to understanding how the three persons are one God. All three persons mutually work to establish the rule of the Father throughout the cosmos. Hence, the relations between the three persons of God are best understood not just in terms of their origins (as the early church taught) but in terms of God's goal in and for the cosmos. The Father hands his rule of the cosmos over to the Son, and eschatologically, when the Son has established the Father's lordship throughout the cosmos, he will hand it back to the Father (I:312–13). The Godhead *is* this dynamic interaction between the Father and the Son in the power of the Spirit who everywhere works this rule throughout the cosmos. The triune persons then are not moments of the one God, independent of each other. Nor is the Godhead to be understood as a substance somehow antecedent to the three persons. Rather, the three persons constitute the "field" of God's life in eternal and inseparable perichoretic interaction. God's establishing the divine rule throughout the cosmos is the basis for the divine oneness (I:335). Furthermore, God's attributes are not to be inferred from some concept of the one divine essence abstracted from this trinitarian interaction with the history of the world. Rather, on the basis of this specific trinitarian action Pannenberg infers two sets of divine attributes. The first set of attributes consists of God's infinity, eternity, omnipotence, and omnipresence. These attributes identify certain properties as unique to God. The second set—God's righteousness, faithfulness, wisdom, mercy, patience, and so on—describe God's character in relation to salvation history; they must conform to the first set.

In volume two Pannenberg focuses on the theological loci of creation, anthropology, Christology, and atonement. In keeping with his eschatological approach to metaphysics, Pannenberg interprets God's act of creation as guided by eschatology (II:145, 160). That is, creation is not primarily seen as a past event. Instead, it is the goal of creation that influences the act and the nature of God's creative activity. For Pannenberg, in opposition to thinkers like Kierkegaard, time and eternity are not opposites, not qualitatively opposed to each other. Instead, they are on a continuum in which time is moving toward eternity, and eternity is drawing time into its fulfillment (II:93). In this sense, Pannenberg infers that time proceeds from eternity and is comprehended by it. Hence, it is the future that creates time. In this regard, Pannenberg's thinking is influenced by process thought.[6] He can say, for instance, that once God has created a cosmos, God respects the freedom of the cosmos by *persuading* it to fulfill its well-being, instead of overriding its freedom, in order to accomplish his goals. God allows the divine self to become dependent on the world as the locus in which to establish God's lordship. Nevertheless, in firm opposition to process thinking, Pannenberg sees God as the absolute origin of a contin-

[6] For further reflection on the relation between Pannenberg and process theology see John Cobb's essay "Pannenberg and Process Theology" in *The Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg*, 54–74, and Lewis Ford's essay "The Nature of the Power of the Future" in the same volume, 75–94. For Pannenberg's own criticisms of process thinking see *Metaphysics and the Idea of God*, 113–29.

gent creation and not as a demiurge that cooperates with the creative process immanent in all the world, which would itself be the metaphysical ultimate or absolute. Whitehead's view of God is far more platonic than Christian.[7]

For Pannenberg, a truly Christian understanding of the world acknowledges its contingency, i.e., that God does not *need* the world and thus the world's experience of itself in its essence is that of sheer donation or gift. The cosmos' otherness from God is grounded in the triune life (II:63–64). Jesus as the incarnate Son gives validity to the independent existence of creatures over against the Father. The intelligibility of the cosmos at every stage of its development is the Logos which Pannenberg construes not as a timeless, universal structure, but as a historically unfolded order in the cosmos (II:52). God's preservation of the world likewise is not seen as immutability but as faithfulness to creation's well-being. His metaphysics and doctrine of creation would seem to be in harmony with the old Lutheran principle that the finite is capable of bearing the infinite (*finitum capax infiniti*). For Pannenberg, however, as for the Idealists Hegel and Schelling as well as Tillich, it is no special miracle that this is so. Rather, the finite is capable of bearing the infinite because the infinite is concretizing itself, that is, giving itself specificity, dynamism, and life, in and through time. Hence, Pannenberg construes the relationship between time and eternity in terms of an entelechy—eternity as a *telos* drawing time towards itself as its fulfillment.

In line with his affirmation of the *capax*, the incarnation then is a natural outcome of the relation of God to the world (II:385–86). The world is "anthropic" (II:115)—fine-tuned for the evolution of intelligent life, which can understand the inherent and purposive intelligibility of the

Pannenberg infers that time proceeds from eternity and is comprehended by it. Hence, it is the future that creates time.

cosmos. Anthropically speaking, it is natural (as guided by God's creativity) that creatures such as humans would evolve somewhere in the cosmos. Indeed, human dignity resides in the fact we are destined for fellowship with God. We are the image of God, not statically, but dynamically—that is, in process (II:217)—as we positively respond to God's life-giving ways. We should seek to be God's vicars on earth (II:203)—we are true to ourselves when we want to further God's rule in the world. Humanity is both exocentric, guided by a nonthematic sense of the infinite in all human experiences, and egocentric, focused on needs and desires of the self. Human misery results from sin, the outcome of our egocentricity unjustifiably gaining the upper hand over our more fundamentally human exocentricity. Sin is a result of our attempt to be our own gods; it is a rejection of our fundamental humanity, which is inescapably finite (II:260).

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[7] For Plato's discussion of the demiurge see *Timaeus* 30, 38c, 53b. For Alfred North Whitehead on God see *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, corrected ed. (New York: Free Press, 1978), 342–51.

Sin is a result of our attempt to be our own gods; it is a rejection of our fundamental humanity, which is inescapably finite.

The ministry of Jesus is to make a place for God's lordship in the world in response to our faulty quest to be our own lords and thus to be fundamentally out of touch with our humanity. Pannenberg continues to approach Christology with a "from below" method (II:282) as he has throughout his career.[8] Unlike the Nicene Creed which represents a "from above" approach to Christology, our knowledge about God-in-Christ can proceed only on the basis of what Jesus in history actually did. By his mission to further God's rule by means of words and deeds, living his life in the light of God's coming kingdom, his table fellowship with outcasts and sinners (II:332), his challenging of pharisaic legalism, his offering of forgiveness to sinners, and his willingness to sacrifice his own life in hope of God's vindication, he authors a new humanity. The kingdom of God—God-as-such—was proleptically present in Jesus' life and resurrection.

The "from below" approach to Christology complements a "from above" approach. If Jesus was indeed raised by God from the dead in history and not, as Bultmann would have it, merely into the kerygma of the disciples, then the early Christian attribution of preexistence to Christ makes sense. However, if Christ preexists, then it is likewise possible to name him, as early Christians did, the "Eternal Son." If Jesus is the incarnation of the "Eternal Son," then the doctrine of the Trinity, as slowly developed by the early church, is an accurate presentation of the deity of God. Our reconciliation to God in part includes the experience that through faith we are fashioned into the image of the Son who unlike us accepted his finitude and distinction from the Father (II:230). Along with many Christian thinkers, Pannenberg also affirms Jesus' death as a "vicarious penal suffering" (II:427). Jesus' death is vicarious—it involves an exchange of places between Jesus as truly righteous and the sinners who unrighteously kill him and who are the ones who deserve to die. Indeed, from God's perspective, Christ's death represents the death of all. However, Pannenberg concretizes his atonement doctrine in terms of the soteriological significance of baptism. It is in our baptisms that the death of Jesus as *for us* is effectuated. Our future death and our life of sin as a living death is linked to Jesus' death by baptism through which also we share in Jesus' resurrection life.

In his third volume Pannenberg focuses on the work of the Holy Spirit to build up the church and to bring creation to its completion. Pannenberg sees the church as provisional, a sign of humanity's future, and the horizon of the future of the kingdom of God (III:xv). The church is not itself the kingdom but a witness to the kingdom. The church is literally—not metaphorically—the body of Christ, an extension of Jesus' ministry in her anticipation of the coming

[8] See *Jesus—God and Man*, trans. Lewis L. Wilkins and Duane A. Priebe (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), 33–34.

kingdom. The church testifies to the coming kingdom; she thus witnesses primarily or distinctively to ultimate issues, such as God's future for the world, and not penultimate issues, such as political well-being. Pannenberg consistently claims that political and liberation theologies are inadequate for soteriology and ecclesiology, though he affirms peace and justice as crucial goals for Christian ethics. He criticizes liberation theologies as falling short of the ultimacy of theology's proper subject (God's kingdom), as possessing a pelagian or synergistic nature in their views of human salvation as political, and as failing to recognize the seriousness of human perversion (III:55).[9]

By the same token, Pannenberg argues that Luther has a truncated view of the gospel. He thinks that Luther misread the relationship between law and gospel. Law and gospel, rightly understood from Paul, should be seen not from Luther's late medieval penitential perspective as simultaneous accompaniments, but rather as a succession of epochs (III:75–86); the Christian life as presently belonging to the gospel epoch is not still subject to law. As Paul teaches, Jesus Christ is the end of the law (Rom 10:4). The gospel is not to be understood as primarily God's mercy and forgiveness to sinners but as the establishing of God's rule. For Paul, the Christian ethic is then characterized by contextually deciphering how love ought to be embodied in the world.

Pannenberg's discussion of the doctrine of justification is done within the context of his view of baptism as the sacrament of discipleship and not merely initiation. In contrast to a Melanchthonian interpretation, justification is not merely a forensic judgment in which God declares a sinner to be righteous. Instead, following Luther, God's justifying judgment of the sinner as righteous is analytic, not synthetic (III:224–25). It is based on the prior ontic-ecstatic relationship which the believer shares in Christ. By faith the believer lives ecstatically outside himself or herself in Christ. Justification is the analytic divine recognition of this dynamic life-giving relationship that the believer has in Christ. It is the passing of the Last Judgment proleptically upon believers. Furthermore, the *simul justus et peccator* does not preclude a growth in righteousness—at least in Pannenberg's anti-Gnesio interpretation of Luther.

With many Christians, Pannenberg sees the Lord's Supper as nurturing Christians on their daily path of discipleship. Ecumenically sensitive, Pannenberg cuts a path that surmounts the traditional conflicts between the Reformed and the Lutherans on the Lord's Supper. He also seeks as much rapprochement as is possible between Protestants and Roman Catholics. He affirms the real presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper—specifically Christ's whole person, not just his body (III:313). The Lord's Supper is properly used in Christian worship when one keeps an eye to the reception of Christ by means of the whole celebration of communion and not merely the oral reception. Hence, even the unbeliever communes with Christ in the Lord's Supper, though not to his or her well-being. As an anamnetic event, Jesus is present by the power of the Spirit in the Supper not merely by means of human remembering but specifically by the self-representation of Jesus (III:323).

Finally, Pannenberg presents the doctrine of election and eschatology. He transposes the doctrine of election into a new key, i.e., consummation, that all things in

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[9] Ted Peters, it should be noted, argues that liberation ethics best fits Pannenberg's theology. See "The Systematic Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg," *dialog* 37:2 (Spring 1998), 126.

creation will be gathered up into one in Christ. All things will be summed up in the Son when they are integrated into filial relation with the Father. Finally, Christian theology as a whole is best seen in terms of eschatology, whose content is the lordship of God. As mentioned earlier, the future is the creative origin of the world *as* its final horizon, because only at the end is something what it is. As eternity, the goal of creation, God will include all finite things, discernible from one another but no longer separate from one another as independent forms of existence.

Many observations could be made about Pannenberg's theology. I would like to focus on three important issues: (1) the question of the "reality" of God, (2) his method as distinctively modern, and (3) a "Lutheran" concern about whether or not a *deus absconditus* or hidden God perspective could further his theology.

First, Pannenberg's well-known eschatological approach to God, or "retroactive ontology" as Ted Peters phrases it,[10] seems to be an attempt to take on the problem of God's "reality."[11] Pannenberg notes that God's reality became a problem with the rise of modern science and specifically with the notion of inertia, which can be defined as an innate potential of persistence for any physical reality, whether in a state of rest or in a state of motion, unless it is disturbed by some other force.[12] With this principle God's position in the cosmos, traditionally conceived as creative and providential prime mover and first cause, becomes superfluous. Physical reality can now be seen in terms of an interplay of finite bodies and forces independent of God's activity of creation or providence. God's status then as prime mover or first cause and upholder of the cosmos evaporates. In addition to the principle of inertia, Kant's critique of the limits of reason led to the demise of metaphysics in general, at least as traditionally understood, and this also undermined belief in God's existence. For Kant, one cannot transcend the mental structures by which we interpret experience so as to understand the world as such. While Kant retains the notion of God as a postulate which grounds freedom as the basis for morality and as a postulate that grounds our attempt to coherently or rationally decipher our world as a unity (I:90), his thinking, by undercutting metaphysics as an attempt to describe reality-as-such, evaporates an intellectual locus in which to ground the reality of God. Hence, God's reality disappeared for many intellectuals by the early nineteenth century. "God" could no longer be appealed to as the metaphysical ultimate or prime mover; indeed, for post-Kantians metaphysics itself as a horizon in which to understand God's reality had seemed to have suffered a death knell.

One dominant response to the contemporary absence of a metaphysical reality for God has been the path of the Barthian "Word of God" theologians, as well as Bultmann and the New Hermeneutic. This is to anchor God's reality in a transcendent Word in which God, independent of any metaphysical assumptions about the physical world or human society, speaks through human words. Barth's position was a powerful leverage against Nazi oppression during the

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[10] Peters, "The Systematic Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg," 126.

[11] Schubert Ogden nicely stated this problem almost four decades ago in his essay "The Reality of God" in *The Reality of God and Other Essays* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), 1–20.

[12] See "Theological Questions to Scientists" in *Toward a Theology of Nature: Essays on Science and Faith*, ed. Ted Peters (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993), 19.

Third Reich. He could affirm that there was no *Anknüpfungspunkt* (point of contact) between the gospel and the corrupt culture of Nazi ideology. For Pannenberg, however, Barth's overall methodological move reinforces God's contemporary unreality. Such a "Word" is itself groundless because it has no criteria for its discernment other than pure subjectivism. Pannenberg's solution to the problem is to tie God's reality to the concrete events of cosmic and human history. For Pannenberg, God's reality can be reformulated in terms of the "new physics," a move justified in an anthropically conceived cosmos. Far from being vacuous, God's "actions" can be reconceived in terms of force field activities. Pannenberg can successfully make this move only if he neutralizes any perceived opposition between time and eternity. Eternity should no longer be conceived as some special locus that would keep God immune from time and its accompanying finitude. Rather, Pannenberg believes that time and eternity will be systematized in the Eschaton.

Second, Pannenberg's project is distinctively modern. That is, he favors seeing the world in terms of a unitary history, a "grand narrative," in which history cosmically unfolds itself as a single narrative with a beginning, middle, and end. He wants to develop a theology sensitive to the ideals of the modern research university. While emphatically rejecting secularism, Pannenberg affirms many Enlightenment ideals, including a resounding rejection of authoritarianism and a sturdy affirmation of scientific method. In this regard his work falls on a specific side in a current debate in theological method. The *Systematic Theology* does not indicate much dialogue with or rejection of postmodern literature, which in contradistinction to the Enlightenment affirms pluralism, critiques "grand, unified theories of everything," and disdains "totalizing" reason, since postmoderns tend to see reason never as neutral in itself but as an instrument of power, particularly that of the socially-dominant classes.[13] Postmoderns are skeptical of any attempt to reach reality shorn of human interpretations of reality. Such perspectives would also tend to see scientific method not as a neutral path to universally accessible truth but as "dominating" knowledge, a way to appropriate the world for our own welfare by grasping it. For Pannenberg, by contrast, reason is finally never anything other than a path to get to truth. Scientific reasoning especially has been fruitful in this regard. While Pannenberg would surmise that reason has been misused as an instrument of self-defeating, egocentric domination to control the world, he would also see reason as the means by which to expose such misuse and as a responsible path toward a critically realistic response to God's revelation in history. It is likely that Pannenberg would claim that while it is beneficial for reason to be suspicious of hidden power agendas, it would be self-defeating for reason to turn against itself. Furthermore, science can be a fruitful model for theological method since "assertions about a divine reality and divine actions can be tested by their implications for the understanding of finite reality, to the extent that the object of the assertion is God

[13] For some current literature that engages theology with postmodern concerns see Stanley Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996); Paul Lakeland, *Postmodernity: Christian Identity in a Fragmented Age* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997); *The Postmodern God: A Theological Reader*, ed. Graham Ward (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997); and for a work which represents many theologians influenced by postmodernism see *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine*, ed. Colin E. Gunton (Cambridge: University Press, 1997).

as the all-determining reality."[14] For Pannenberg, the metaphysical quest to understand the process of the cosmos as seeking a unifying harmony need not entail the violence of excluding diverse voices in this process. Rather, reason is capable of comprehending just how such diversity of voices ultimately contributes to an overall harmony.

Third, Pannenberg's ecumenical commitments lead him to unwind the tensions of traditional Lutheran paradoxes. For instance, the tensions between law and gospel, God as hidden and God as revealed, the kingdoms of law and grace, the believer as saint and sinner, and Christ as *miraculously* God and human seem to be dissolved in his system. This is to be expected. Pannenberg has always distanced himself from a narrowly-confessional Lutheran symbolism. Nevertheless, one wonders if he gives short shrift to Luther's views, especially on the relation between God and the world and the power of the gospel. Can we not agree with Luther—even from the perspective of Pannenberg's ontology—that the outworking of God's rule in the cosmos entails perhaps an economy of death, i.e., the end of the old Adam and Eve and their system of "life," as a kind of prerequisite to genuine life, the new humanity in Christ? Are we to ignore the notion of God's wrath as working in human life in terms of lostness, guilt, alienation, and antipathy toward spiritual matters? Shouldn't we agree with Luther that "the righteous God does not deplore the death of His people which He Himself works in them, but He deplores the death which He finds in His people and desires to remove from them"[15]? If such wrath as an alien work can be seen as a legitimate aspect of God's quest to establish the divine rule in the cosmos, then Luther's distinction between law and gospel as applied to the doctrine of God could be a helpful corrective to Pannenberg's metaphysics. If one makes that move, then perhaps the gospel should also be seen as a conveyance of mercy to terrified consciences, and not only the assurance that God will ultimately achieve the divine purpose for the cosmos. Admittedly, terrified consciences in contemporary society may have been buried under the placebos of pop psychology, the dismissals of secularism, and the frenzied and self-defeating quest for the American Dream. Only preachers who can see through these trappings—each in their own way, perhaps, an outworking of God's wrath—would be able to minister the gospel with insight.

Again, why should church workers study Pannenberg? In short, if they are to heed our Lord's command to make disciples of all nations (Mt 28:18–20), they must teach Christian truth. In his *Systematic Theology* Pannenberg, unmatched by few contemporary Christian thinkers, has achieved the status of being a teacher of teachers. While we may not agree with every aspect of his system, Pannenberg sharpens our skills in reflection on the Christian faith and will thus help us equip God's people for ministry in the world.

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[14] Pannenberg, *Theology and the Philosophy of Science*, trans. Francis McDonagh (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), 334.

[15] See *The Bondage of the Will*, trans. J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1957), 170.

Book Reviews

The Missions of Jesus and the Disciples According to the Fourth Gospel. By Andreas J. Köstenberger. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998. xvi and 271 pages. Paper. $30.00.

An associate professor at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Köstenberger, eschewing a word study approach, examines the sense of mission in the Fourth Gospel by means of semantic fields. He identifies the following fields: (1) activity involving movement—sending, coming, going, becoming, descending, ascending, leaving, following, bringing, leading, and gathering; (2) accomplishment of a task—work, do, offer a sign, harvest, bear fruit. With these observations Köstenberger defines mission in John: "Mission is the specific *task* or purpose which a person or group seeks to accomplish, *involving various modes of movement,* be it sending or being sent, coming and going, ascending and descending, gathering by calling others to follow, or following" (41).

Consistent with his definition of the method, Köstenberger then analyzes the character of Jesus (Christology) and the work of Jesus (the signs), followed by the modes of movement in Jesus' mission, that is, sent from the Father, coming into the world, and returning to the Father. Likewise he identifies the disciples and their modes of movement, that is, being gathered and being sent. In conclusion Köstenberger tries to categorize the Fourth Gospel as *Missionsschrift, Gemeindeschrift,* or sectarian document (the present consensus). Köstenberger concludes from his study that the Gospel focuses on the nature of Jesus, not the mission of Jesus' followers, therefore the Gospel is primarily a *Missionsschrift,* a missionary document.

This is a thorough study. The author is careful, utilizes original study of the text, and refers to considerable secondary material. He summarizes various options and positions quite accurately. He rightly rejects the current "sectarian" approach. There is far more to the Fourth Gospel than a quarrel with the synagogue and an appeal to crypto-believers, though it must be said that Chapter 9 and the ironic dialogues do indicate the presence of an opponent. Likewise the Fourth Gospel is not a literary device to encourage mission activity by the disciples (13:16). Only the beloved disciple and Mary actually perceive the real divine presence. Köstenberger misses this with his too broad sense of Johannine discipleship (obedience, separation from the world, and eschatological perspective, 220). Nevertheless, Köstenberger's return to the theory of a *Missionsschrift* is not sufficiently radical. He fails to see a Jesus "mission" which is devoid of sacraments, devoid of cultural accouterments, devoid of ecclesiastical leadership, and devoid of legal requirements. The author of the Fourth Gospel did intend to present such an unencumbered Jesus to the world.

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Hebrew/Aramaic Index to the Septuagint: Keyed to the Hatch-Redpath Concordance. By Takamitsu Muraoka. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998. 160 pages. Paper. $24.99.

This is a wonderful addition to the scholarly tools of biblical interpretation, useful for both Old and New Testament research. It presents the various Greek terms used to translate the Hebrew and Aramaic vocabulary of the Old Testament, including the Hebrew text of Sirach and 1 Esdras. Compiled manually by his wife, Keiko, over thirty years ago, Prof. Muraoka of Leiden University edited the manuscript and saw it through the press. (I think his wife's name should have been included on the title page!)

Users will discover a complete listing of the Greek equivalents for every Hebrew and Aramaic term in the Hebrew Bible, an indispensable tool for recovering the interpretation of Hebrew and Aramaic vocabulary by Jewish scholars

some time before the common era. One cannot find a comparable index at present in any computer program. Since this Septuagint usage shaped some, at least, of the Greek of New Testament writers, New Testament lexical research will turn to this list frequently. Therefore, every owner of Hatch and Redpath will want to add this tool to their philological resources. (Baker has also republished the Hatch-Redpath *Concordance to the Septuagint* in an edition that includes Muraoka's *Index* (also 1998, $125.00).

For a full explanation of the index, see Muraoka's article "A New Index to Hatch and Redpath" in *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 73 (1997) 257–76. (I owe this reference to David Aiken, Editor of Academic and Reference Books at Baker Books.)

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The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus. By Robert W. Funk, Roy W. Hoover and The Jesus Seminar. San Francisco: Harper, 1997. xxii and 553 pages. Paper. $20.00.

The Real Jesus: The Misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Truth of the Traditional Gospels. By Luke Timothy Johnson. San Francisco: Harper, 1997. xiii and 182 pages. Paper. $12.00.

The publication of these books in paperback editions is a welcome addition to recent, affordable historical Jesus studies. In terms of content and methodology, the volumes under review are rather pointedly at odds with one another.

Adopting the format of a study Bible, *The Five Gospels* (orig. pub.: Macmillan, 1993) includes an introduction, a new translation of the NT Gospels and the Gospel of Thomas, and thought-provoking notes on numerous issues and passages. The book's purpose is a noble one: to make available to the general public the findings of this academic society. The "Scholars Version" translation (SV) is touted as "authorized by scholars" and the only major English translation that "is free of ecclesiastical and religious control" (xviii). As is well known, the words attributed to Jesus in these five Gospels are printed in one of four colors (red, pink, gray, or black), depending on gradations of authenticity as designated by voting members of the Jesus Seminar.

One issue critical to the Jesus Seminar's methodology surrounds the claim that the second-century Gospel of Thomas, which contains neither eschatological teaching nor passion narrative, not only existed in an earlier form that was contemporary with or earlier than the NT Gospels, but also offers the least theologically biased presentation of Jesus' teaching. These scholars thus begin with the sometimes incoherent aphoristic wisdom sayings of Thomas, which are judged to be roughly contemporary with "Q" (ca. 50-60 C.E.) and then trace the evolution of attributions to Jesus in Mark and the other NT Gospels. In my view, neither *The Five Gospels* nor the individual members of the Jesus Seminar has produced a convincing argument for the historical priority of Thomas. On this point readers are referred to representative arguments for (Stephen J. Patterson, *The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus*, Sonoma, CA: Polebridge, 1993) and against (Christopher N. Tuckett, "Thomas and the Synoptics," *Novum Testamentum* 30 [1988] 132-57) the early date and independence of Thomas vis-à-vis the Synoptic Gospels.

In *The Real Jesus*, Johnson, a respected NT scholar who teaches at Emory University in Atlanta, is unreserved in his colorful attack on the Jesus Seminar's methodology and intentions. Like a newspaper reporter, he chronicles how these scholars waged a media campaign to popularize their approach to the Gospels in opposition to the religious right. Particularly valuable for nonspecialists is Johnson's review of recent studies of the historical Jesus. Perhaps ironically, all but one of the seven authors he critiques on pp. 29–56 also published with HarperCollins! Questioning the importance of the historical Jesus problem for the church, Johnson emphasizes instead that personal encounters with the living Lord have inspired people to faith through the centuries. He thus calls Christian scholars not to follow the ways of the secular academy. To this paperback edition Johnson adds a preface in which he reflects on the historical Jesus debate since his book was first pub-

lished in 1996 and reiterates that for him the primary issue concerns "the limits of historical reconstruction, and its appropriateness or adequacy for the grounding of Christian faith" (p. x; cf. "The Limitations of History," 81–104).

Concerning Johnson's recommendations, one can wonder whether his call for the separation of church and critical scholarship is either possible or desirable, for traditional questions arising from the different portraits of Jesus in the NT and other early Christian writings still require an explanation. Parts of *The Real Jesus* might be more useful as an introduction to a comprehensive study of the primary sources. Since Johnson has not (yet?) offered this, we are left wondering how to proceed since neither he nor the Jesus Seminar offers an adequate solution.

In spite of their shortcomings, both volumes under review are recommended to pastors and laypersons who are interested in both perennial issues and debates of recent years. I would consider using Johnson's book to introduce the historical Jesus problem to undergraduates. More appropriate on the graduate level are studies by individual Fellows of the Jesus Seminar (e.g. R. W. Funk and J. D. Crossan) who are listed on pp. 533–37 of that volume.

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Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Imperial Society. Edited by Richard A. Horsley. Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1997. xi and 257 pages. Paper. $19.00.

This is a helpful collection of thirteen previously published articles and a presumably original concluding one by Horsley, encompassing both Christian sources and general Roman sociopolitical issues relevant to our understanding of earliest Christianity. It will be informative for pastors and general readers with a solid background in New Testament history.

The editor notes that the collection attempts to take important steps forward in these areas: emperor cult, imperial patronage, and the political significance of Paul's language and his activities.

Part 1, "The Gospel and Imperial Salvation," with articles by P. A. Brunt, Dieter Georgi, S. R. F. Price, and Paul Zanker, shows that, contrary to traditional assessment by New Testament critics, imperial cult and political power were inseparable, and that the influence of the imperial cult was much more pervasive than has been thought.

Part 2, "Patronage, Priesthoods, and Power," with articles by P. Garnsey and R. Saller, John K. Chow, and Richard Gordon, shows that the imperial patronage system was the foundation of the spread and maintenance of Roman power. This was already true by Paul's day in cities of Greece and Asia Minor like Corinth, Ephesus, and Philippi.

Part 3, "Paul's Counter-Imperial Gospel," with articles by Dieter Georgi, Helmut Koester, and Neil Elliott, presents the new image of Paul in recent scholarship, not as the anti-Jewish Christian convert, but as the messianic Jewish preacher who turns the language of salvation, already familiar from the imperial cult, into a message of salvation by the God of Israel.

Part 4, "Building an Alternative Society," with articles by Karl P. Donfried, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, and Richard A. Horsley, shows that both Judaism and Christianity were in a formative period in the middle of the first century, and that Paul saw his strategies of community formation as "building an international alternative society" (8).

The selection of articles is necessarily somewhat eclectic and difficult to unite, but Horsley's general and chapter introductions do that effectively. This is a good way of updating on these aspects of recent Pauline scholarship.

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On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation. By Gerhard O. Forde. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997. xiv and 121 pages. Paper. $20.00.

This book takes the form of a theological commentary on Luther's first 28 theses presented at the Heidelberg Disputation in 1518. Those familiar with the writings of Gerhard Forde will once again discover his core concern to be theologically clear that it is God alone through the death of Christ on the cross who justifies sinners. Luther's theology of the cross unmasks every theology of glory—whether it takes shape as possibility thinking, feminism, or liberation theology. Human beings are endlessly inventive in discovering new ways to elevate their own salvation agendas in contradiction to what God has done in Christ.

Forde does a thorough job of unpacking the theological significance of Luther's theses. In part, this means clarity about the *ordo salutis*, for example, the proper relationship between faith and good works. Chapters are organized around successive sections of the Heidelberg theses and devoted to the problem of good works, the problem of the will, contrasting the way of glory to the way of the cross, and the righteousness of faith. By means of his interpretation, Forde intends to establish a theological agenda for the church today. The church must be as focused on the theology of the cross in opposition to all theologies of glory as was Luther.

There are a number of problems with Forde's proposal. First, the historical context of the Heidelberg disputation scarcely informs this commentary. Luther's necessarily polemical approach, given the historical and theological situation in 1518 and at the occasion of a theological debate, is made into the normative Lutheran theological position. While Luther's Heidelberg theses are brilliant and have lasting significance, they must be interpreted within a much larger historical and theological context.

Second, Luther's theology and even the work of Jesus Christ is reduced to a singular point. While a theology of the cross serves as a necessary critique and corrective to all idolatrous salvific claims, all of Christian doctrine cannot be reduced to this point. There are many legitimate theological concerns that become relativized by such an exclusive concentration on the theology of the cross. Luther's sacramental theology, for example, or the very incarnation of Jesus Christ as one who taught and lived in a certain way which led to his being crucified, fall from view. If the theology of the cross is representative of the Protestant principle, what gives embodiment to the Catholic substance of the church?

I read this book while involved in an immersion experience in Mexico. As I met with poor *campesinos* and witnessed urban squalor, I found myself wondering what theses Luther would bring for debate in Mexico City in 1998. Luther was so attuned to the suffering of the peasants in his own day and their oppression by the ecclesiastical hierarchy that I am convinced he would interpret the cross in our day so that the suffering of Jesus would be good news for the hungry, homeless, and unemployed. For a contrasting interpretation of Luther's theology of the cross, see Mary Solberg's *Compelling Knowledge: A Feminist Proposal for an Epistemology of the Cross* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1997, reviewed in the February 1998 issue of *Currents*) or Walter Altmann's *Luther and Liberation.*

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First and Second Thessalonians. By Beverly Roberts Gaventa. Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998. xiii and 138 pages. Cloth. $22.00.

Professor Gaventa of Princeton Seminary here gives people active in parish ministry a commentary that is just what the series subtitle says it should be: a resource useful for preaching and teaching. She makes clear why 1 Thessalonians is a "neglected gem" in the Pauline corpus, a small letter that is profoundly pastoral, not a major battle ground in Pauline scholarship. Paul deals with faith, hope, and love as a way to "consolidate" the faithfulness of the Thessalonian church (see 1:3, 5:8, a sort of inclusion in the letter, and Gaventa's comments; also pp. 1-2).

She clearly knows and loves this letter.

She interprets 2 Thessalonians as a deutero-Pauline letter. While its structure and language reflects that of 1 Thessalonians, its situation, outlook, and ultimate message stress different motifs. It focuses on the persistence of evil, on God as a God of justice, and all this with a tone of rage, thus reflecting a later situation of persecution. Gaventa stresses that there are times when the church needs to hear this message too, since we need to face the issues of persecution and justice in our own day.

The commentary proper is outstanding in its clarity and its suggestions for relating the text's themes and issues to our time. Nor does she avoid difficult issues. She argues that 1 Thess 2:14–16 is authentic Paul—while presenting the arguments against its authenticity, noting that 1 Thessalonians does not stress the death of Jesus, as Paul's later letters do. Although the common lectionary omits these verses in Proper 26 for year A, she recommends dealing with them. She details the problems pastors face in dealing with the ethic of holiness (1 Thess 4:1–12) and offers specific suggestions to avoid vague generalizations. This commentary will be a useful resource for pastors; but it is also equally accessible to laity and deserves shelf space in every parish library.

Edgar Krentz

The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting. Vol. 5: Diaspora Setting. By Irina Levinskaya. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1996. xiv and 284 pages. Cloth. $38.00.

Levinskaya (L.) has strong interests in ancient diaspora Judaism, classics, and Greek epigraphy which contribute to this useful volume. She discusses diaspora Jews, proselytes, and God-fearers in light of literary (Acts, Greco-Roman, and Jewish) and epigraphic evidence (chapters 1–7). She concludes, against scholars like M. Goodman, that early Jews were conscious of a sharp dividing line separating them from the surrounding non-Jewish world. She further concludes that the Jewish proselytes of Mt 23:15 probably referred to Jews who converted to Pharisaism, while Acts presents Jewish proselytes as a real but insignificant minority. L. also concludes that archaeological and epigraphical data show that the God-fearers were a large and important phenomenon within first century C.E. Judaism.

Overall, L.'s conclusions are conservative but buttressed in detail by epigraphic analysis and close readings of ancient literature. Against A. T. Kraabel and other scholars, she argues that Acts presents an accurate portrait of first-century Judaism. She leaves unresolved the chronological discrepancies between Acts and Paul's letters, Paul's authority to arrest Christians, and Luke's socio-historical perspective. I wish she had addressed the issue of cultural historicity (historical accuracy in the portrayal of cultural details) over against chronological historicity (historical accuracy in the chronology and description of events)—even though such issues are beyond the scope of her book.

The most troubling part of L.'s book was chapter five, "God-fearers and the cult of the Most High God." L. insists that θεὸς ὕψιστος, "the most high God," in Acts 16:17 is to be understood solely in Jewish terms. She too quickly passes over the work of Margareta Tatchareve-Hitova and similar scholars who find no evidence of Jewish influence in their studies of inscriptions where the epithet ὕψιστος occurs. L. does list the occurrence of the phrase in the epithets of Greco-Roman divinities but does not analyze these occurrences in any detail. Her brief exegesis of Acts 16:16–18 rightfully stresses the Jewish dimensions of this text but ignores the Lukan allusion to Greco-Roman oracles in the description of the young woman as having a πνευμα πύθωνα, a "spirit of divination." She attempts to link the Jewish backgrounds of the text to the reactions of the Gentile passersby! This chapter presents extremely useful data but does not definitively conclude the discussion. Beyond that, better copyediting and proofreading could have corrected numerous typesetting errors and occasional clumsy syntax, for which a non-native English speaker should not be held responsible.

L.'s book is a major contribution to the history of diaspora Judaism and to understanding the cultural background of Acts. She presents inscriptions published in difficult-to-

obtain sources for the first time in English and provides a detailed study of the ancient Jewish community in the Bosporan kingdom, both valuable contributions to western scholarship. For exegetes and epigraphers, this book is a partial fulfillment of a "new world order," opening up invaluable eastern European scholarship for the west.

Levinskaya is a researcher with the Historical Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences and a lecturer in New Testament at the University of St. Petersburg.

Lynn Allan Kauppi
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Briefly Noted

Wisdom, You Are My Sister. Edited by Michael L. Barré, S. S. (Catholic Biblical Association, $13). These fifteen essays on wisdom themes in the Old Testament are written in honor of Roland E. Murphy, O. Carm., on his 80th birthday. A fourteen-page bibliography of the honoree concludes the volume. Murphy, who has served as president of the Catholic Biblical Association and the Society of Biblical Literature, was one of the editors of the two editions of the one-volume Jerome Biblical Commentary and has himself written major commentaries on Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs. *RWK*

Canons in Conflict: Negotiating Texts in True and False Prophecy. By James E. Brenneman (Oxford, $45). In this revised dissertation, B. argues that postmodern weapons are needed for discussions of canon in the postmodern period. Conflict between the oracles of Isaiah (2:2–4, swords into plowshares) and Joel (3:9–12, plowshares into swords) force the responsible reader to make a choice. B. defends the canonical autonomy of the interpretative community and concludes that the ethic of the biblical canon suggests a model of nonviolent praxis whose only weapon is persuasion. In the closing years of the second millennium, B. argues, we must read Isaiah as true over against Joel as false. The biblical canon is a canon whose authority derives from its ethical performance as a democracy of words, not of violent acts. Nonviolence is the first principle in any canonical dispute and a nonviolent political stance best incarnates the anarchistic paradigm of the biblical canon. B. is pastor of Pasadena Mennonite Church in California and makes a compelling case for his Anabaptist hermeneutical heritage. *RWK*

Martin Luther's Easter Book. Edited by Roland H. Bainton (Augsburg, $10.99). Bainton was a master interpreter of Luther, delightfully bringing his words to life for a new generation. This book is a companion to the more well-known *Martin Luther's Christmas Book.* The text of this "gift edition" is from Luther's sermons and lectures on the Gospels from Holy Week and Easter. An index of sources is provided, but from the Weimar edition. Eighteen engravings from Luther's contemporary, Virgil Solis, enhance the volume. Here's a tidbit from Luther on holy communion: "The bread is the gospel and consists in this, that Christ must suffer and enter into his glory." *Craig L. Nessan, Wartburg Lutheran Seminary*

A Broader Vision: Perspectives on the Buddha and the Christ. By Richard Henry Drummond (Virginia Beach: A. R. E. Press, $16.95). Designed as a contribution to interreligious understanding, this book compares the life and teaching of the Buddha and Jesus Christ. There are three major divisions. In Part 1 the focus is on Gautama the Buddha, and in Part 2, on Jesus the Christ. Part 3 offers a comparative analysis of the teaching of the two figures on the following issues: the nature of humanity; women and children; the mission of their followers; the world and the cosmos; and the spirit of sacrifice and suffering. *James L. Bailey, Wartburg Lutheran Seminary*

Preaching Helps

The Resurrection of Our Lord—Seventh Sunday of Easter
Series A

Hands On, Hands Off



This morning in church (First in Advent as I write this) I laid my hand on the shoulder of the woman in front of me and she on the fellow in front of her, and all hands on all shoulders led down to the top of the aisle where they converged on a woman facing a bone-marrow transplant. We heard a little of what such a radical treatment involves. As I understand it, radiation will bombard and chemicals will attack her diseased marrow and then she will endure a transplant of healthy marrow. "Bombard" and "attack" are apt terms, since the life-giving stuff of her body will be killed along with her illness. And then the new and the healthy will take over. Or so we prayed as we placed our hands on her and raised our voices for her, speaking her name in the presence of the world's Maker and Healer.

I thought about the themes of Advent and of Easter, of the end of the old and the beginning of the new, of death and resurrection, of illness and health, of despair and hope, fear and faith. But those themes belong not to Advent and Easter alone but to all our Sundays—and Mondays.

Jesus spoke her name, and then Mary Magdalene laid hands on Jesus, thinking she could hold him and keep him in the same old way, have him to the house for dinner again and again and again. But he said her holding him was henceforward not with hands but in some new way. His Eastering involved "ascending" into a new way of relating to her and to all of us.

Two paragraphs later, Mary's story seems almost to be contradicted in the experience of Thomas who was told by Jesus, "Come ahead and put your hands

on me!" I have long thought that we have done Thomas an injustice by dubbing him the "doubter." He seems to me to ask something different from mere sensual experience. He is no seeker after crude physical contact. I think he senses that wounded hands, pierced hands, hands nailed to a tree, are the means of our coming to true life. More than the others, Thomas sees that only pierced hands and wounded side can lead to "the feast of victory for our God."

In the following studies and reflections, **Peter Hanson**, in the context of Mary Magdalene's encounter with Jesus, tells of being ministered to by a neighbor who spoke his name and handed him his mail. He goes on to mine a story about Australian shepherds, drawing attention to the hands of the muscular workers who do the shearing of the sheep. Their faces are browned and wrinkled from their outdoor living, their biceps bulge, but their hands—are as soft as a baby's, because they are in constant touch with lanolin-rich wool. Peter then writes of that other Shepherd whose strength is so awesome yet whose hands deal with us so gently.

There are the hands of the stranger who broke the bread at Emmaus, and then there are the hands that serve coffee after church every Sunday. Peter speaks of the hands that took up stones to murder Stephen and of hands that clap out the rhythm to songs of celebration at the Lutheran Junior Seminary in Morogoro, Tanzania, where he did his internship.

Is our God a "hands on" or "hands off" being? Yes, I know, Tillich told us that God is not "a" being but Being (It)self. But you know what I mean. At times God seems to put the whole business into our hands, giving us the life and power and responsibility and freedom to deal with our issues, whatever they are. At some times God seems distant, silent, keeping hands off.

And then Advent and Easter and all our seasons speak of God's interventions, God's comings (past, present, and future), God's rolling up sleeves and reaching in with both hands. Incarnation means becoming available to our eyes and our hands, and it means that God in Christ touches Peter's mother-in-law, touches Jairus' daughter, touches lepers, touches five loaves and two small fish, touches bread and wine, and in doing all that takes our lives in hand. The resurrection means that God would not let that touching cease. He lives as Lord. He lives with "wounds yet visible." The hymn says that "No angel can fully bear the sight," and it is a vision that haunts us and should cheer us also.

Our writer for this Easter season, Peter Hanson, has been pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in Brattleboro, Vermont, for nearly five years. Trinity is one of seven ELCA congregations in Vermont, Peter tells me, adding that New England is not as densely crowded with Lutherans as is his native Minnesota. He

probably doesn't know that I know, since I was born and raised about fifty miles south of Brattleboro!

Peter's spouse Sarah Grow is the Assistant Director of the World Studies Program at Marlboro College. Their son Elijah Luc-Grow-Hanson is a year and a half old and spends parts of his days at the Marlboro College child care center.

Writing just before the Fall 1998 elections, Peter commented on Vermont's interesting politics: "We love our 'Man with a Plan' protest candidate Fred Tuttle, and unlike Minnesotans we know when we've carried a joke too far." Garrison Keillor has said that California elected a Boxer and Minnesota got a wrestler, but Peter didn't know how things would turn out when he wrote.

In addition to pastoring (or as part of his pastoring) Peter sings in the Brattleboro Community Chorus, plays the guitar, brews beer in his basement, and exercises by trying to keep up with Elijah. All that sounds like healthy hands-on stuff to me.

Thanks to Peter for the work of his heart and hands and voice. And I also express my thanks to all of you who study and pray to make the Easter celebration of your congregation an occasion of fresh and vigorous new life. I am more a consumer than a producer of sermons. I salute you who are the hands-on practitioners of the vital craft of preaching.

Yours,

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The Resurrection of Our Lord
April 4, 1999

Acts 10:34–43
Psalm 118:1–2, 14–24
Colossians 3:1–4
John 20:1–18

First Reading

Kendall McCabe writes, "The lessons and liturgy [for Easter Day] point to an event for proclamation rather than explanation" (*Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary*, 1992). Many among us would argue that the same goes for each and every Sunday, but it is perhaps even more true for the Easter texts. Each one in its own way is solid proclamation, the telling of the good news of Christ crucified, dead, and raised to new life. Even the psalm speaks of resurrection: "I shall not die, but live" (v. 17). And the psalm prefigures Christ's centrality: "the stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone" (v. 22).

In the first lesson, Peter is himself sticking more to proclamation than to analysis or explanation. Specifically, he is telling the story of the story-telling, relating both the Good News of Jesus' life, ministry, death, and resurrection and also what he now considers to be the other good news of the successful spreading of the Good News. Though he acknowledges (boasts, even?) that he was among the few who were first chosen to be witnesses and proclaimers, he is willing because of his more recent vision not only to have the Good News proclaimed to the Gentiles but also to let *them* do some proclaiming, too.

Paul also sticks closely to direct proclamation: "you have been raised with Christ, so set your mind on Christ." While Paul is perfectly comfortable adding explanation elsewhere, here his message is simple and straightforward. If you have died with Christ, then your life is hidden with Christ. If you have been raised with Christ, then your life now points to "higher" things. And if your life *is* Christ, then you will be revealed with him in glory.

John 20 provides us first with a story for us to proclaim about Mary Magdalene's discovering the empty tomb and telling Peter and the other disciple, which leads to their full-out foot race to the tomb to see what was going on. The story itself is so rich with detail that we needn't embellish or explain it too much. (Ever since I was very young, I have had the same vivid picture of this scene in my head. The younger, more fit "beloved" disciple easily outruns Peter, and just as easily "puts on the brakes" at the entrance to the tomb, only peeking in. Peter, huffing and puffing, filled with the emotion and passion he is famous for, barrels out of control past the other and right into the tomb, stopping only after his extended arms absorb his momentum on the far wall.)

In the second half of this passage, we also get to tell a story of story telling, giving Mary due credit as the first of the gospel preachers. At first unable in her grief to see Jesus there, her eyes are opened when he calls her by name. Her sermon that follows is simple, direct, narrative, and personal. "I have seen the Lord," she announces. She moves from experience to proclamation, saving the explanation and analysis for another time.

This is a day for proclamation, from the first "Christ is Risen!" to the last "Thanks be to God!" and all of the "Alleluias" in between.

Pastoral Reflections

How often, like Mary Magdalene, have *we* turned around to see Jesus, not knowing that it was Jesus standing there? How often in our

grief, in our despair, in our confusion, in our anger—or, yes, even in our confidence and self-righteousness—have we failed to notice that the Jesus for whom we were looking was right there all the time?

When I was a youth director at a church in Minnesota, I lived in an apartment upstairs from my landlord, an elderly man named Paul. Since the house had only one mailbox, our typical interaction involved him calling up the stairs that there was mail for me. I would come down, take my letters, maybe exchange some small talk about the weather or the Twins, and go back upstairs. We were friendly, but not exactly friends.

During the time that I lived there, we learned the shocking news of a colleague in a neighboring church who committed suicide amid allegations of sexual misconduct. The fact that he had been such a well-liked and respected person, combined with the startling details of his death, made for much confusion, anger, and questions for youth and adults in that church and in ours. I spent extra time dealing with questions from my youth group as well as trying to sort out questions with some of my other colleagues. It was hard to focus on anything else, and it consumed much of my mental and emotional energy.

After one particularly intense evening of discussion with my youth group, I decided to truly honor my day off and spent the next day "vegging" at home. Early in the afternoon, Paul's voice hollered up the stairs, "mail call!" and I mindlessly made my way down to get my mail. I guess Paul could tell that I wasn't in any mood to talk about rain or baseball, so he just handed me my mail and didn't say anything. Still in automatic, I began to go back up the stairs. When I was about half way up, he called out quietly, "Peter?" I stopped, puzzled, and turned around without saying anything. "Pretty sad what happened up in Stillwater, huh?" "Yeah, it was very sad," I said, flatly. "I can't imagine being so desperate that I would want to do something like that," he said. "No," I replied, "I can't imagine it either." Paul shifted his weight nervously and then said, "Peter, I know you must have lots of people you can talk to when things aren't going well, but I wanted you to know that if you need one more, you can always talk to me."

Until that time, I only thought of Paul as someone to whom I wrote a rent check, someone who handed me my mail, someone who occasionally engaged me in small talk. First in my busyness and later in my confusion and depression, I could not see him as anything more. But when he called my name on those stairs, when he acknowledged my pain and offered to help me, my eyes were opened to see Jesus in him.

Second Sunday of Easter
April 11, 1999

Acts 2:14a, 22–32
Psalm 16
1 Peter 1:3–9
John 20:19–31

First Reading

"A week later...." This phrase in John (20:26) explains why this passage is read in all three years of our lectionary cycle. Other portions of our lectionary seem to condense years and years into one week's readings; one week after we read of the eight day-old Jesus being circumcised, for example, we hear of the thirty year-old Jesus being baptized. Not so during Easter. "A week later" means the Second Sunday in Easter. The forty days from Easter to Ascension Day coincide with the forty days Jesus was physically present with his disciples following his resurrection. Year after year, Pentecost is

still exactly the fiftieth day of Easter. To borrow a phrase from the computer age, we might say that during Easter we are in "real time."

In the first reading, Peter is not so much concerned with time as with clearly identifying just who it was who acted. Peter maintains that God acted in Jesus, and that the divine plan was fulfilled in and through Jesus. The language Peter uses rings with the sound of early confessional material: "...this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law. But God raised him up." While human beings are by no means "let off the hook" in Peter's description, it is also clear that it is God who acted.

The second reading gives us another incarnation of Peter, this time not proclaiming that God has acted as much as he is calling his hearers themselves to act. Whereas in the first reading the connection could be seen between Jesus' resurrection and salvation, now the connection is made between salvation and discipleship. Trials and sufferings, in particular, are held up as methods of testing the fire of one's faith. Believing without seeing is a mark of this faith.

Meanwhile, back in real time, Thomas is a week late and a resurrection appearance short. Though Thomas' absence from the group is not explained, it provides the situation necessary to make the transition to a new kind of faith, one that prepares the disciples for *Jesus'* absence, at least in a physical way. Up to now the disciples were able to rely on a faith whose content was "seeing and believing." And though they are already doing what they have been "sent" to do (v. 21), Thomas' contention that he, too, must see in order to believe turns their faith into doubt. When Jesus appears again, Thomas, too, sees and believes. But rabbi Jesus, not willing to let the teachable moment get by, blesses the future generations of believers who will not have the luxury of seeing in order to believe. Those who will receive the word of those "sent out" by Jesus will have to define their faith in terms of "hearing and believing." This faith is what is at the heart of the evangelist's closing words. You, future disciples, will not be able to see Jesus as we have; we cannot even tell you *everything* he did. But hear these things, and hearing, believe. And believing, you will have new life in Jesus' name.

Pastoral Reflections

It is sometimes a surprise to realize just which nicknames stick with us for years and years. My own inward flinching at someone from my childhood referring to me as "Pete" (publicly) is lessened only by the extreme gratitude that my family never called me "Petey." My roommate from college may have an MBA and be steadily climbing the ladder of success at a Fortune 500 company, but he will always be "Spanky" to me. Even Jesse Ventura, the newly elected governor of Minnesota, is better known by his handle from his professional wrestling days: "The Body." Sometimes it is not worth the effort to try to live down such a nickname.

We don't know for certain why Thomas was called "the Twin" in John's Gospel. Perhaps he had a twin brother. It could have also been a word play on his surname. But we do know that despite the evangelist's grand attempt to have him be remembered by *that* nickname, most of us remember him by another: "Doubting Thomas."

How unfortunate. For so many episodes of Thomas' life lend themselves to better suited, more appropriate nicknames (albeit ones that do not roll off the tongue quite as well). How about "Rhetorical Question Thomas"? It is Thomas, after all, who acts as a cross between a straight man and a Greek Chorus to Jesus, setting him up for one of the

most memorable, most quoted "I am" passages in the Gospels. Jesus says, "You know the way to the place I am going." Thomas says to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" "I am the way, and the truth, and the life," replies Jesus (14:6).

Or what about "Took the Words Right Out of My Mouth Thomas"? After hearing of Jesus' plan to raise Lazarus, he says what many of his fellow disciples later wished they had said: "Let us also go, that we may die with him." Maybe "Missionary Thomas" or "Church-planting Thomas" would be more fair to this disciple. My seminary classmate, Pushpa, a pastor in the Church of South India, was proud of sharing the tradition that her church was founded millennia ago by the Apostle Thomas himself.

Now back to real time. Thomas doubted for no more than one week. One week, followed by the rest of his life devoted to doing just what Jesus commanded him and the others to do, baptizing and teaching and preaching to the ends of the earth. It would seem "Believing Thomas" would be more proportionate, a much more accurate name than the one we seem to remember for him.

The point is that although it is in our nature to dwell on our mistakes, to shudder at certain constructions of our past, or to hold on to perceptions long after reality has changed, it is Jesus' nature to use even our moments of doubt to build faith in us and in others. Jesus saw in Thomas' momentary doubts the opportunity to teach all of his disciples about the need to believe without seeing. More than that, Jesus saw in Thomas an opportunity to spread the good news beyond the limitations of sight, indeed, to the ends of the earth. Despite our doubts, despite the pasts we would rather not hang on to, Jesus sees in us great potential for faith, for witness, and for new life.

And that is good news for Doubting Thomases everywhere—not to mention Petey, Spanky, and the rest of The Body.

Third Sunday of Easter
April 18, 1999

Acts 2:14a, 36–41
Psalm 116:1–4,12–19
1 Peter 1:17–23
Luke 24:13–35

First Reading

It is amazing how a few well-timed words can sway an audience. The crowd gathered in Jerusalem for Pentecost seems to be less than impressed with Peter, the eleven, and the rest of the early followers of Jesus. They do not seem to take them very seriously; in fact, many in the crowd think that they are drunk. As Peter rose to speak I don't suppose the crowd immediately hushed to hear what words of wisdom he had to offer. I rather imagine him continually raising his voice to be heard above them (as I remember the street preachers in Berkeley doing), intentionally ignoring the hecklers that are having a good time taunting and teasing him. But then he does speak, and his words seem to resonate with the eschatological expectations of the crowd on that day. Before long, they are "cut to the heart," and they wonder what they can do to respond. By the end of his address we see a totally different crowd, one transfixed by Peter's words, one feeling both the guilt and the hope behind his words.

The psalmist uses his words to thank and praise God for hearing his cry. His debt of gratitude will be more than amply paid, he says, by proclaiming the great and mighty acts of God in the presence of the people. Like Peter addressing the Pentecost crowd, the psalmist seems much less concerned about how the crowd will react to him than

he is compelled to "pay his debt" publicly.

The two disciples walking toward Emmaus seem less than impressed with Jesus (whom they do not recognize as Jesus) and his seemingly naive questions. "Are you the only one in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place in these days?" They shake their heads, amazed at his lack of awareness, wondering what rock he had just crawled out from under. And they explain (slowly, perhaps loudly, as we do when we are patronizing someone) that "Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word" had been handed over, condemned to death and crucified. "And we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel," they add. And though they also tell him about the empty tomb and the vision of angels, they do not seem to make any connection between these events and the words or presence of the mysterious stranger.

But suddenly Jesus speaks, and it becomes clear that it is they who are being naive, who are missing the point of the events of these past days. By the time Jesus finishes interpreting for them the entire canon of law and prophets, they, too, are a transformed audience. They no longer roll their eyes at him, now that their eyes are opened to the scriptures. Their hearts are too busy burning within them to have any room left for the pity they had felt for this ignorant stranger a little earlier. And they realize that he has not just crawled out from under a rock, but rolled one away.

Pastoral Reflections

Some have facetiously (and others not so facetiously) suggested that the most likely candidate for a third sacrament in the Lutheran Church is the coffee hour. I would rather cast my vote (mostly facetiously) for the sacramentality of potluck dinners. Just as the road-to-Emmaus story provides us with images and meaning for the eucharistic meal beyond those found in the accounts of the Last Supper, so, too, church potlucks offer another glimpse of the people of God gathered around the table, a glimpse that balances, complements, and enlarges images of the same people gathered around the communion table.

The thing about potlucks, at least at the congregations I know, is that there is an open invitation for all people to be involved, and tacit permission to participate at one's own comfort level. Unlike a sit-down dinner, where it is necessary to know exactly how many will be in attendance, at potlucks there is no need for people to RSVP. More people means more food. Extra tables and chairs can always be set up. And though some can make even a simple potluck an occasion for competition or showing off, for most of us there is little of that pressure. We bring what we are able, whether that means working over a hot stove for hours, whipping something up at the last minute, or swinging by the Vermont Country Deli on the way to church.

At a potluck, everybody brings gifts to the table. The last few minutes before a potluck resembles an offertory procession! Each one brings forward a dish, arranges it just so, and then steps aside to let the next person do the same. There is not the expectation that the serving dishes match or even resemble one another; in fact, the mosaic of colorful food in colorful dishes is one of the things I like best about a potluck table. The gifts people bring complement one another, sometimes without even trying. In my experience, the most successful balance of main dishes, salads, and desserts comes when you do not assign certain people to bring them. People somehow instinctively and mysteriously know what is needed and what they can provide.

There is always a balance of the familiar and the not so familiar, the expected and the unexpected. At our church, you can always

count on Annie's Swedish meatballs and gravy, on Ken and Phyllis' Greek salad, and on Don's homemade bread and muffins. You never know what gourmet specialty Mark and Jeff will dream up, what Thai delight Atchar will prepare, which Caribbean food Jose will introduce us to, or what chocolate decadence Elise will place on the dessert table. And then, of course, there are the dishes that one of my confirmation students has politely labeled "manna," the indiscernible and unnameable dishes that get eaten up nonetheless. If you only want to eat things you have eaten before, you can; if you only want to eat new things, there's enough of that, too.

The other remarkable thing about church potlucks is that there is always more than enough to go around, even if a number of unexpected (or unprepared) guests stay to eat. Like the feeding of the five thousand, people seem to take home as much if not more than they brought. Dishes are often exchanged, extra food sent home with single moms or elder couples. Cleanup is a breeze. Dishes disappear as quickly as they appeared, and people are on their way rejoicing before too long.

There are moments at a church potluck when I get a glimpse of the kingdom, and I find myself saying, "*this* is the feast of victory for our God, *this* is the foretaste of the feast to come." And while I still come to the Lord's Supper fully expecting to meet Jesus in the breaking of the bread and the lifting of the cup, he is just as likely to be made known to me in the scooping of the cole slaw, the passing of the rolls, the slicing of the Toll House bars.

Fourth Sunday of Easter
April 25, 1999

Acts 2:42–47
Psalm 23
1 Peter 2:19–25
John 10:1–10

First Reading

The texts for this "Good Shepherd Sunday" open with a description of the earliest days of the church. In the charged atmosphere of what they all believed were the last days, "the flock" was living a radically altered lifestyle awaiting the imminent return of their shepherd. The marks of their life together are described to us briefly and succinctly. They were devoted to a life of faith, they were awed over the signs and wonders performed in their midst, they were generous, even selfless in their attitude towards material possessions, they worshipped every day in the Temple, they gathered at the table for fellowship and praise, and they experienced growth in their community of faith.

The well known and much loved Psalm 23 describes the LORD as a shepherd who lovingly provides all that is needed for the well-being of the flock: green pastures, still waters, safety, comfort. Using imagery commonly used for ancient monarchs, God is portrayed as both leader and provider, knowing—and freely giving—what is best for those who follow. At the end of the psalm, both the voice and the image shift. Now the psalmist is addressing the LORD directly, describing God as a host who sets a festive table, extravagant enough to "show up" enemies, bountiful enough for a cup to overflow. The psalmist ends by assuring us that such providence and protection will follow throughout his life.

The passage from 1 Peter is a call for the

flock to continue to follow the shepherd, even in suffering. First, the listeners are assured that God's grace will provide for them a way to focus on God and not on the suffering that is at hand. Thus, the suffering, though unjust, can be endured and can in fact draw the person closer to God. Second, the listeners are called to follow Jesus' own example of suffering for what is right. He committed no sin, did not return abuse for abuse, did not threaten, put himself in the hands of the true judge of all. Likewise, the followers of Jesus are called to follow in his steps, not returning abuse for abuse, not threatening, placing themselves in God's hands. Finally, they (and we) are assured that Christ has in fact already borne their sins, returning them (and us) to the fold of the Good Shepherd, the leader and guardian of their (and our) souls.

The passage for this Good Shepherd Sunday is the first third of a longer Good Shepherd section found in the tenth chapter of John's Gospel (the other two thirds are used on the Fourth Sunday of Easter for years B and C, respectively). Though Jesus mixes his sheeply metaphor here, it is both to help his hearers understand and to broaden the image of his relationship to his flock. Jesus casts himself as the one who knows his followers so well that they hear and respond to his voice and only his voice. His leading is that of closeness and familiarity.

He then moves to provide criteria for those who will succeed him in leading his flock. He is the gate, the only way that anyone can "get in" to his flock. Those who come through him will have access to his flock, and as the sheep instinctively know the voice of their shepherd, they will instinctively know the one who leads in Jesus' name, who has come through Jesus to serve and to lead them.

Pastoral Reflections

Two of my favorite twists on the image of Jesus as a shepherd come from Jill Ker Conway's autobiography, *The Road From Coorain*. Conway paints a vivid word picture of her childhood and coming of age on a vast sheep station in the outback of Western Australia. The first image is simply a description of the work of a shepherd, adjusted to accommodate the scale of an Australian sheep station, which often encompasses thousands of acres. Such a station could easily support 50,000 sheep or even more. In such great numbers, herding was not done by leading at the front of the flock. "Much of the work with [these] sheep involved riding slowly behind them while moving them from one paddock to another, traveling at a pace which was a comfortable walk for [the flock]." More difficult was the work in the larger paddocks, often twelve to fifteen thousand acres in size. Two shepherds would separate, one going clockwise, one going counterclockwise, turning the sheep into the middle, to be gathered into one flock and moved as a whole to a new spot. Again, most of the "leading" was done from behind, and as this vast number of sheep became one flock, there was plenty of room for them to make their own decisions as they were nudged along by the station hands.

The second image is not of a shepherd but of the itinerant sheep-shearers who arrived at her family's station in order to do their seasonal work. These shearers were the prototypical Australian men according to Conway—big, strong, and muscular, their faces browned, cracked and burrowed from endless days in the intense desert sun. They were the rugged men the outback made famous. But one thing looked strangely out of place on these burly guys: their hands. Because of their endless hands-on work with sheep and with their newly shorn fleece, their hands were always fresh and pink,

gentle and soft from all the lanolin in the wool. Imagine: these hulking, muscular men—with hands as soft as baby skin.

In the vast terrain that we journey, we may not even realize that we are being led and guided, since it is done so gently from behind us and since we have so much freedom to make our own choices. From time to time, we are more directly pointed one way or another, but most of the time we are allowed a vast amount of freedom to roam—so much so that we can fail to see that we are guided at all. But we *are* guided, by Jesus, the Good Shepherd, a shepherd who is hardy and strong enough to withstand the cruelest elements of nature, strong enough to offer us sure and steady protection. At the same time, this shepherd of ours reaches out and holds us in the softest, smoothest, gentlest hands imaginable. Strong yet gentle, powerful yet graceful, rugged yet beautiful, he is the Good Shepherd.

Fifth Sunday of Easter
May 2, 1999

Acts 7:55–60
Psalm 31:1–5, 15–16
1 Peter 2:2–10
John 14:1–14

First Reading

It has been said that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church. In the first reading's account of the stoning of Stephen, we have the telling of the story of the first of the Christian martyrs, the first witness to Jesus Christ who was put to death for that proclamation. Vivid in detail, the scene itself bears many parallels to Luke's passion narrative. Both Jesus and Stephen are tried before the council on false charges brought by false witnesses. Jesus cries out to God, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" while Stephen cries out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" Jesus prays that the soldiers be forgiven, "for they do not know what they are doing"; Stephen prays, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And both Jesus' death and Stephen's death result in a great spreading of the gospel. As the first martyr, Stephen provides a wonderful example of living and dying as Jesus did, and the testimony of his words and his deeds provides growth to the church at one of its most critical stages.

Shifting abruptly from agricultural to architectural imagery has precedent in the New Testament (1 Cor 3:5–15), and so we move from the seed of the church to the living stone upon which a spiritual house can be built. As followers of Christ, those who live by his example and receive power from him are themselves living stones. Building, then, can be as simple as piling one stone upon another, so long as the chief cornerstone is in fact the living stone of Jesus

Christ. Only on him can we build a structure that will be a spiritual house—a lineage, dynasty, or family to rival that of the house of David. Peter then goes on to name this house, to claim this lineage: you are a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people. Where once no people had existed, a people now exists. Where there had been distance to God, now, through the building of a house of faith on the cornerstone of Christ's witness, there is nearness, communion, with God.

The reading from John continues this theme of the spiritual dwelling place: "In my father's house there are many rooms." Though this text really talks about the ways that God is present on earth with the people of God after the physical absence of Jesus, it is interesting how closely this text is now tied with funeral services, and how it is supposed to mean that God is elsewhere, preparing an "other-worldly" room for us. (It is also interesting to note that those most active in the life of the church are open to so many other passages of Scripture to be read at a funeral, while those only tangentially or historically affiliated with our worshipping community seem more often to insist on this one.)

Pastoral Reflections

The congregation I serve recently celebrated our fiftieth year in our present building. At the anniversary celebration worship, I offered a children's message based on the texts suggested for the dedication or anniversary of a worship space, which included the reading we have before us from 1 Peter. As I sat with the children and had them remember with me what we were celebrating as a congregation that day, I also asked them about the building process—Has anyone seen a building being built? What happens first? What's the order of building? What happens if you skip a step? We talked about why you need a firm, solid foundation, what functional and symbolic roles the cornerstone played, and how other parts can be added later if the beginning is strong.

I then made the leap to building as metaphor (which can be dangerous in children's sermons, I know, depending on the age and development of the children present) for the community of believers known as the church. I referred to 1 Peter's quote from the psalms about the very stone that was rejected by the builders becoming the head of the corner. I mentioned Jesus as the cornerstone of our faith, the one upon whom we build our lives of faith as his disciples. Without getting into the gory details of martyrology, I described the foundation of the church being laid by those whose faith was tested by fire and who passed it on to us. Drawing specific connection to our own congregation, I mentioned names of those who had been influential in the process of building our church building, including names of people who were known to them in our present congregation, and how their gift to us had been much more than a building. I mentioned that just as the bell tower and the education wing were added later, so later generations also added their stories of faith to the overall story of our church. There is still a place in the present and the future for more "additions" to our common faith story.

As often happens in my children's sermons, many of the kids were way ahead of me. They even had poetic responses ready for my question of whether the building *was* the church since the children's choir anthem for that day was "The Church Song" by Jay Beech: "The church is not a building where people go to pray, it's not made out of sticks and stones, it is not made out of clay. We are the church, the body of our Lord, we are all God's children, we have been restored." But many of them also caught on to the idea that the church was *like* a building, built on the cornerstone of Jesus Christ, with a firm foun-

dation in his life, death and resurrection; built up on the lives, witness and ministry of those who have gone before us in the faith; and maintained, restored, renovated, and renewed by the ongoing ministry of those who are part of the body here and now.

Sixth Sunday of Easter
May 9, 1999

Acts 17:22–31
Psalm 66:8–20
1 Peter 3:13–22
John 14:15–21

First Reading

"Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all you lands." So begins the psalm for the Sunday once known as Cantate (after the opening line of the psalm appointed for Year C, *Cantate Domine canticum novum*; sing to the Lord a new song), and listed subtly (almost imperceptibly) in the *Lutheran Book of Worship* as Church Musician Sunday. While this is still observed in some parishes, the fact that it comes after the long and busy seasons of Lent and Easter (and as often as not seems to fall on Mothers' Day) has made it more of a burden and less of an occasion for "extra" singing.

Paul is not calling the Athenians to anything "extra," as if to simply move aside the statues to their gods—known and unknown—in order to make more room for "his" God. Rather, he is calling them to fine-tune their praise, to redirect their singing, to finally "know" the object and subject of their worship. He proclaims to them that this is none other than "the God who made the world and everything in it, who is Lord of heaven and earth... [and who] gives to all mortals life and breath and all things." Though I tend to take his praise for their religious life as at least a little "tongue in cheek," Paul made a connection with them. He reaches out to them where they are, letting them know that the one they worship as unknown knows them and calls them to repent and be judged by the righteousness of the one who has been raised from the dead.

The new song that Peter is calling his audience to sing is one of hope, one of ἀπολογία (more of a positive explanation than a defense with our 20th century defensiveness), one of gentle, reverent, yet clear proclamation of Christ as Lord. This song should continually be sung in good faith, so that if suffering comes, it is for all the right reasons. Baptism, like the water in the time of Noah, will be the salvation of those who sing this song. Jesus' resurrection provides the refrain, the part of the song that we return to again and again.

Jesus urges his disciples to sing a new song, a song of love, a song of obedience, a song of truth, a song of life in him. Though he will not be singing along with them anymore, his voice will be heard through the breath of the Spirit, the Advocate. Unlike "the world," which can neither receive the Spirit nor see the soon-to-be-departed Jesus, the disciples will do both. And they will know that Jesus has not abandoned them or left them orphaned. His voice will sing through the voice of the Spirit and will be heard in the voices of all those who keep his commandments, particularly his command to love one another as he has loved them.

Pastoral Reflections

Of the many congregations that I have called home over the years, I can remember only one of them making an occasion out of the Sixth Sunday of Easter, "Cantate Sunday" as it was once called. At the Lutheran Junior Seminary in Morogoro, Tanzania, where I did my internship, it was the tradition to have an afternoon of song on the Sixth Sunday of

Easter. In addition to the standing choirs in the congregation—there were five!—a whole host of impromptu choirs, trios, duets, and small groups (but interestingly, no soloists) presented songs of praise for hours. Variety was the key that afternoon. One student group sang the equivalent of Bible camp songs. A group formed just after the visit of a Lutheran Youth Encounter team sang pop-type songs they had written themselves. The staff choir (whose director was the tractor driver at the farm) sang four- and eight-part chorales. The kindergarten was the only group that sang in two languages. (I don't know which was more impressive, hearing the Tanzanian kids singing in English or the U.S. and Scandinavian kids singing in Swahili!) Bookending the celebration of song were spoken proclamations by two different people that today was about singing a new song, about sharing our gifts of song, about singing praise to God and making a joyful noise.

Back here in Brattleboro, one of the co-directors of our chancel choir is fond of reminding us of two crucial things that we too often seem to forget—especially when we near the end of a rather strenuous rehearsal. First she asks us, "Are you listening to the words that are coming out of your mouth?" And then she repeats a line or two with emphasis on what she considers to be the message we are missing. If we are open to hearing it, this can have a wonderful effect on us, making the word more clear and the music more beautiful.

The second thing she is fond of saying, particularly when we seem lackluster in our presentation, is: "Do you remember who you are singing for? who you are singing to? who you are singing about?" She then reminds us that we are singing to praise God, the Creator of the universe, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the One who was and is and is to come. How we respond to her encouragement depends on our mood and our exhaustion level. But when I take a step or two back, I realize the great power behind her encouragement.

We do not sing praise to an unknown god but to the God who has become known to us in Jesus Christ. We do not sing to a God who is far off, inaccessible, shut up in the heavens. We sing to God with us, God who will not leave us orphaned, who is with us in the Spirit forever. We do not sing to a God who is oblivious to the suffering we must endure in this life. We sing to a God who has lived this life, who has suffered all manner of evil because of our sin and in order to draw us to God. We do not sing to a God who plots to do us in, but to the One whose grace has reached us in our baptism.

Seventh Sunday of Easter
May 16, 1999

Acts 1:6–14
Psalm 68:1–10, 32–35
1 Peter 4:12–14; 5:6–11
John 17:1–11

First Reading

The second option for the Prayer of the Day serves as a good introduction to our readings.

"God, our creator and redeemer...." The psalm calls on the faithful to "Sing to God who rides upon the heavens." God is the one who has created everything and is worthy to be praised by everyone. God is also the redeemer, says the psalmist, the one who is the father of orphans and the protector of widows, who gives a home to the homeless and prosperity to prisoners. In other words, the one who created the universe is also the one who dispenses justice, and goes out before the people so that they will do the same.

"...your Son Jesus prayed that his followers might be one." The most narrative portion of the prayer points to the most narrative portion of our texts. Jesus was indeed praying to God his father, but chose to do so out loud, so that his disciples would "overhear" his prayer and perhaps learn from it what their role might be in bringing about this unity he envisioned. There is a risk of becoming too homiletical in prayers (as many of us know from the pointed "prayer/counter-prayer" which occurs all too often in churches as well as in college and seminary chapels). Here Jesus fulfills multiple purposes all at once. He is praying to God for the unity of his followers, he is encouraging his listening followers to work for such unity, and at the same time he is modeling prayer for them and for us.

"...Make all Christians one with him as he is one with you, so that in peace and concord we may carry to the world the message of your love." While peace and concord may not be the initial goal of this portion of 1 Peter, it is certainly a byproduct of the unity that Christ's followers will have if they endure the kind of suffering he did. Carrying the message of God's love to the world is much closer to the message of the text; even the sufferings of this present age will be an occasion for the name of Christ to be proclaimed and his mission and ministry to be revealed. Unity is perhaps one of the things the followers of Christ must see as a discipline. Disunity is a tool of the prowling devil and something we must diligently resist. In fact, knowing that sisters and brothers are resisting a similar evil can be one of the most unifying things in the world. And while it hopefully will lead to peace and concord, empathy and shared experience is certainly a good start.

Pastoral Reflections

What is the basis of our unity? Only a few generations ago, Lutherans in this country would perhaps have said that it was our language, our culture, our heritage, our background that holds us together and gives us unity. And at a time, that was largely true. German Lutheran immigrants found other German Lutherans, just as Swedes found Swedes, Danes found Danes, Slovaks found Slovaks, Norwegians found Norwegians. Each set up ethnically distinct denominations unified as much or more by shared language and tradition than by the Lutheran Confessions. But as waves of immigration slowed, and as more and more people adopted the language of the new land, these ties to the mother tongue, to the old country, or to the traditional ways of doing things began to seem less like the true cement of unity. In fact, such things began to seem more like

what author Kurt Vonnegut has called a "Granfalloon," an arbitrary grouping of people which in the end is utterly meaningless in terms of the way things really work in the world. (His examples include Daughters of the American Revolution, Chicago Bulls' fans, fraternities and sororities, the Democratic Party, the international Order of Odd Fellows, people from Wisconsin, and alumni of the same school at different times.)

So what is the basis of our unity? What is it that brings us together, holds us together, gives us a common identity and common destiny? Our unity is from God. It is the Holy Spirit who brings us together, who provides the gifts needed to unite us. It is Jesus Christ—the one who prayed that his disciples might become one—who gives us our unity. Our unity comes from the one who lived with us, died for us, rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, and now comes to us through the promised Holy Spirit.

Our unity comes to us through diversity. Our gifts are not the same, but they complement each other in order to make our unity more complete. Our unity is not based on looking the same, being the same, doing the same, thinking the same, even believing the same. Our unity comes as a free gift. Unity is not something which can be manufactured by us or legislated; it can only be discovered among us, and then celebrated.

As Christians, we are *not* a Granfalloon, some arbitrary, random, meaningless grouping of people who find affinity in bonds which in the end do not amount to anything. We are the people of God, the body of Christ, sheep of the one Shepherd, branches of the one true Vine, friends of Jesus. And Jesus' prayer is our prayer, even today: That we may be one.

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