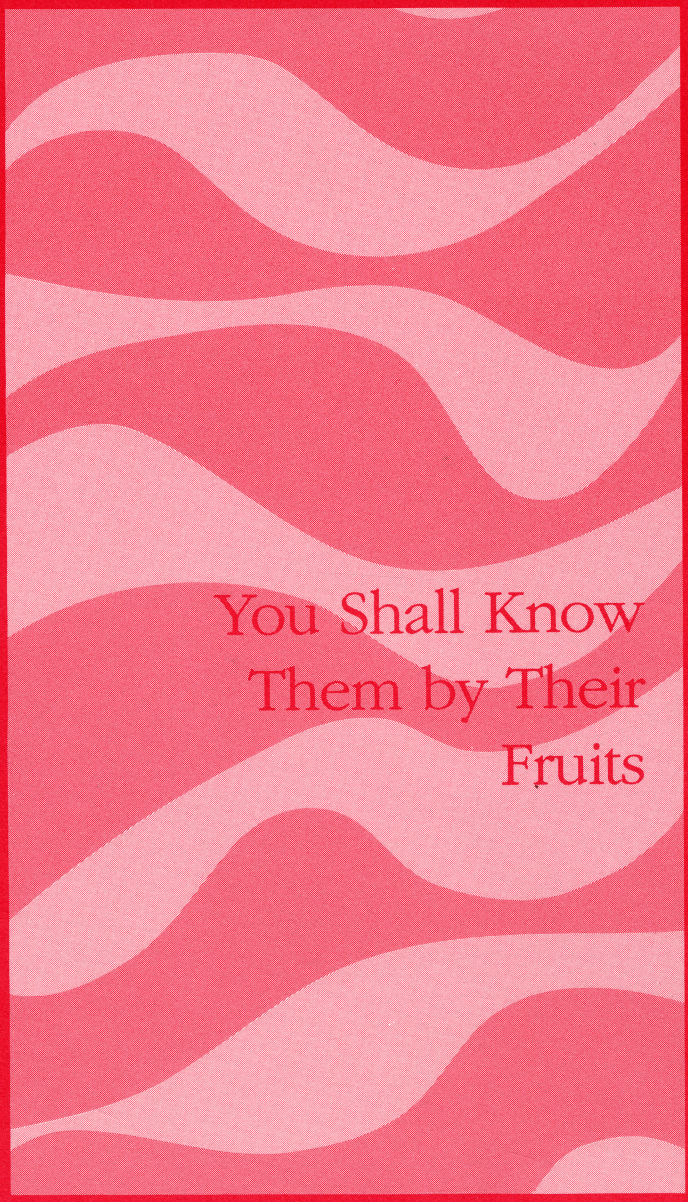
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You Shall Know Them by Their Fruits

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You Shall Know Them by Their Fruits

This is the second collection of essays dedicated to Edgar Krentz (see the June, 1998, issue). Ed and his spouse Becky have raised six wonderful children, who formed a harmonious sextet to honor him at his retirement dinner. Among Ed's other "fruits" have been his doctoral students and colleagues whom he has mentored and inspired during forty-five years of seminary teaching. They take up the pen (talk about an anachronism) in this issue to demonstrate the kind of New Testament scholarship *for the sake of the church* that Ed has so wondrously pioneered.

David L. Balch reports on a conference on the New Testament and homosexuality, which also discussed the current ecclesiastical debates and the situation in ancient and modern psychology. He gives primary attention to a proposed exegesis of Rom 1:24-27 by David Frederickson, suggesting that Paul deals with the problem of insatiable or addictive passion, without introducing the specific issue of homo/heterosexuality. The ancients saw sexual desire and hunger as analogous passions, and Balch cites evidence from Plutarch that treats insatiable eating as a kind of disease. The upshot is that Paul teaches that compulsive sexual activity is shameful and harmful to others in our homes, churches, and society. This is a genuinely new contribution to the current debate.

Mario DiCicco, O.F.M., provides a narrative-critical study of the poor widow who gave her life-savings to the temple. This story represents the meaning of the Gospel of Mark in a nutshell. Her giving is parallel to Jesus' own self-giving: she gave her entire life. Mark's use of character, setting, conflict, point of view, standards of judgment, and rhetorical techniques discloses the meaning of Jesus, discipleship, and the demands of the kingdom. She is the bearer of Jesus' values proclaimed throughout the Gospel and she stands in sharp contrast to many of its other characters.

Marie Noël Keller, RSM, examines the words for "teacher" in the ancient world and shows how Jesus corresponds to and differs from the perceptions this title implies. Jesus was a charismatic teacher, who through unorthodox ways

enabled people to stretch beyond the confines of their society. His call to his hearers was to an ongoing experience that is transformative. He met people where they were and was aware of life around him, using people's daily experiences to full advantage. He was focused on change and centered on God as the source of his authority.

Everett R. Kalin proposes that whereas Luther, in reading the Bible, began with his own troubled conscience, our starting point is the ethnic hostilities that threaten the fabric of life itself. Hence he reads Romans, and especially 14:1–15:33, in the quest for a gracious community. The letter as a whole is about issues between Jews and Gentiles, that is, about ethnic issues. Paul attempted to restore the unity of the Christian house churches in Rome by admonishing the strong (primarily the Gentiles), who are in danger of despising their "weak" Jewish Christian brothers and sisters. One of the contexts for the letter is gentile Christian arrogance over against Jews and/or Jewish Christians. In short, he reads Romans through the lens of 15:7: Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.

David Rhoads believes that the Letter of James is part of the rich diversity of the New Testament and contains consistent ethical norms and a coherent worldview. Following the doctrine of the two ways, James holds that one is either a friend of the world or a friend of God. Friends of the world rely on wealth, power, and status and look to the world for norms of their behavior. Friends of God follow divine norms but are threatened by two pitfalls—thinking that one can be both a friend of the world and a friend of God at the same time and ignoring the fact that faith is inadequate unless it matures to good works. Faith is the active receiving of the word and moves toward maturity by successfully enduring temptations and expressing itself in works of speech and action. James presents his own view of a right understanding of God: God is the source of every good and perfect gift; God does not tempt; God saves by giving the law; and people are to imitate the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ by honoring the poor. Thinking rightly about God will result in behavior that brings humans to maturity. The "wisdom from above" is a combination of correct beliefs and the demonstration of those beliefs in moral behavior.

Barbara Rossing writes that the most eschatological of New Testament texts, The Book of Revelation, is also profoundly ecological. She focuses on Revelation's final two contrasting visions of *polis* or city, Babylon and New Jerusalem. These two contrasting visions of political economy can be a resource for the earth-centered ecological vision of the future that is urgently needed today. The Babylon vision offers a prophetic critique of environmental injustice—including global deforestation and ecological imperialism. New

Jerusalem offers the promise of a totally renewed urban world, where God takes up residence on earth, in our midst. Revelation's visions of God's future home on earth can empower us to work to renew our cities and our world today.

Robert H. Smith reports that previous scholars, including Edgar Krentz, have arguedthat the hymns in Revelation owe their presence to the Seer's polemical position over against Rome. He adds that another contributing factor was the contemporaneous Jewish Merkabah mysticism, which pictures God as Basileus, that is, king or emperor. John and the Merkabah mystics were trying to lift our earthbound hearts to the contemplation of a better form of governance than any founded on military might. The Seer's strategy is to invite his readers to listen to heavenly singing in the expectation that they will be drawn to join that cosmic chorus and so strengthen their connection with one another.

Mark I. Wegener provides a new pre-Pauline reconstruction of the hymn in Phil 2:6-11, based on the usage of Pauline and non-Pauline vocabulary. The original hymn, composed of a symmetrical pair of stanzas about the descending and reascending Christ became, through Paul's additions, an appeal that the Philippians would treat each other in a spirit of mutual subservience, humbly and obediently. Unlike Adam, Jesus did not try to be more than human and grasp at divinity. Paul wanted his auditors to imitate Jesus' style and thereby defer to each other within the pattern of genuine friendship. Readers who want to get right at the reconstruction might want to skim the section on "previous poetic reconstructions," although it demonstrates the kind of bibliographic grasp for which our honoree is famous.

Authors DiCicco, Keller, and Wegener wrote their doctoral dissertations under the direction of Edgar Krentz; the others, with the exception of Balch, have been his seminary colleagues at various times and places. David Balch was approved for Lutheran ordination by a panel on which Ed served. What a harvest! We hope that these essays are not the last you will hear from these Krentz products, and we know that the "original" will himself continue to bear fruit as New Testament book review editor of *Currents* and as the author of future essays, still to be born.

Ralph W. Klein
Editor

Romans 1:24-27, Science, and Homosexuality

David L. Balch
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Lutheran professors of New Testament, including Professor Edgar Krentz, met for breakfast while we were attending the 1993 AAR-SBL meeting in Washington, D.C. Karl Donfried had called the meeting in response to the ELCA's proposed statement on "The Church and Human Sexuality: A Lutheran Perspective. First Draft of a Social Statement" (1993). That group of ELCA New Testament scholars concluded by asking Karl and me to facilitate further discussion, since we represent different poles of the debate. Because of the lifelong commitment of Professor Krentz to New Testament exegesis, especially as it bears on the theological and practical life of the church, I offer the following article to honor him on the occasion of his retirement from the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago.[1] I assume only that Professor Krentz welcomes further discussion, not that he would agree with any of the particular ideas and arguments that either Karl or I propose.

I responded to the request of my Lutheran New Testament colleagues by applying for a grant from the Louisville Institute. That Institute, through its gracious Executive Director, James Lewis, first provided funds for a planning conference, then later supported an ecumenical, academic conference on the subject. Planners who gave their time included Nancy Duff, Victor Furnish, Beverly Gaventa, Richard Hays, Ralph W. Klein,[2] Katherine Sakenfeld, James A. Sanders, and Marty Stortz, plus several of my colleagues at Brite Divinity School, which co-sponsored the event. We agreed to invite an ecumenically diverse group of skilled exegetes. The planners wanted to focus on the biblical texts, and also insisted that we must also hear both what contemporary psychologists are saying about homosexuality and how constructive theologians would interpret the texts. Further, the planners wanted both poles of the discussion to be represented. The conference was held in 1996, and Eerdmans will publish the outstanding papers.

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[1] Examples are Prof. Krentz's works on *Galatians* (Augsburg Commentary; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985), *Easter* (Proclamation 3, Series B; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), and "Historical Criticism and Confessional Commitment," in *For the Sake of the Gospel: Essays in Honor of John H. Tietjen*, published in *Currents in Theology and Mission* 15:1 (February 1988), 128-36.

[2] See Ralph W. Klein, "Dialog with Gay and Lesbian Lutherans: A Response," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 13:5 (October 1986), 304-6, and Lutherans Concerned, "Response," *Currents* 13:6 (December 1986), 358-60.

The following article will briefly survey three of the five seminars at the conference: the introductory comments on current ecclesiastical debates, observations made by scholars commenting on ancient and modern psychology, and David Fredrickson's exegesis of Romans 1:24-27. In addition there were extraordinary contributions in Old Testament and systematic theology, plus another one in New Testament that will be published in the Eerdmans volume.

Current ecclesiastical debates: Mark Toulouse on the muddled middle

Mark Toulouse is a member of the Disciples of Christ, the Academic Dean at Brite Divinity School, and has just completed a sabbatical funded by a Luce Fellowship studying public policy. He denies that our churches are in a culture war over this issue.[3] Toulouse surveys prominent evangelical and mainstream journals published over the past forty years and concludes that the majority of Christians, whether leaning left or right, belong rather to a "muddled middle," while the extreme left and right are making most of the noise. Both evangelical and mainstream churches have changed their positions with respect to homosexuality during these decades. Toulouse observes certain trends in all groups, trends that include a shift away from sexist attitudes to affirming the equality of women as well as a convergence after 1968 of Catholic and Protestant sexual values. Unifying trends in the homosexuality debate include no longer understanding homosexuals as degenerates, but either as diseased, disordered, or normal. Many conservatives have changed by separating sexual orientation from practice. As Christians lose cultural hegemony in North America and Europe, many are re-evaluating the relation between sin and crime, asking whether sin ought to be legislated. Some have begun supporting civil rights for homosexuals to whom they would not give religious rites. Several recent denominational social statements belong to this muddled middle.

Psychology

1. *William Schoedel on Greco-Roman anthropology.* William Schoedel, a member of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and a retired professor of religion at the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana, writes on the subject of his doctoral dissertation for Robert Grant at the University of Chicago. He shows that Greco-Roman biology and medicine as seen in the first-century C.E. pseudo-Aristotelian *Problemata* (4.26 879a-880a5[4]) and in the second-century C.E. medical doctor Soranus (*Gynecology*[5]) informed the ethics of Hellenistic Jews like Philo and Christians like

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[3] See also *The Way Forward? Christian Voices on Homosexuality and the Church*, ed. Timothy Bradshaw (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1997).

[4] Schoedel refers to the translation by E. S. Forster, *Problemata*, vol. VII in *The Works of Aristotle*, ed. W. D. Ross (Oxford: Clarendon, 1927). One text is *Aristotle, Problems*, trans. W. S. Hett (Loeb Classical Library; Cambridge: Harvard, 1953).

[5] Schoedel notes that this section of Soranus was preserved by Caelius Aurelianus in the fifth century. He refers to the text and translation in I. E. Drabkin, *Caelius Aurelianus: On Acute Diseases and on Chronic Diseases* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1950) and to P. H. Schrijvers, *Eine medizinische Erklärung der männlichen Homosexualität aus der Antike (Caelius Aurelianus De morbis chronicis IV 9)* (Amsterdam: B. R. Grüner, 1985), 17-25. Compare Bernadette J. Brooten, *Love between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1996) 146-62.

Paul, Barnabas, and Clement of Alexandria. They debated whether "passion," understood as a disease because it was insatiable, had its source in the body or the mind. Paul assumes the latter medical opinion in Romans 1, an opinion argued by Soranus. Schoedel also documents ancient debates concerning whether sexuality is a continuum between male and female, with some males and females being intersexual, a possibility rejected by Jews and Christians like Philo and Clement of Alexandria, who also appeal to binary conceptions of purity/impurity. Ancient doctors perceived more about sexual orientation than has been acknowledged.[6] These debates about gender are reflected in discussions of "natural" hair styles (1 Cor 11:14) that were culturally symbolic. Still, according to Schoedel, Paul discovered that humans do not have bodies, but are bodies. Therefore, "sexuality is not some sort of addendum than can be easily set to one side." He observes that Paul rejected purity/impurity conceptions with respect to food and asks whether Christians today might both follow him and go further by rejecting binary opposites in relation to gender and sexuality.

2. *Stanton Jones on the abuse of science.* Stanton Jones is an Episcopalian, a psychologist, and the Provost of Wheaton College. He objects to the way scientific research has often been used to caricature the traditional stance. He argues that modern studies have lowered the estimate of those in society who have a lifelong homosexual orientation from 10% to 3%. He objects to contemporary research's focus on biological causation of homosexual orientation, asking why older research into psychological causation has been de-emphasized. Still, he observes that scientists have found high rates of homosexual preference among identical (dizygotic) twins.[7] He questions whether it is a healthy lifestyle, since there is often high personal distress, including alcoholism, drug addiction, depression, and relational instability. Finally, he denies that psychology can guide humans ethically or bridge the gap between what is and what ought to be.[8] His traditionalist argument is that God has revealed that heterosexual union in marriage or chastity are the two desired outcomes with regard to genital sexual experience.

3. *Christine Gudorf commenting on science and sexuality.* Christine Gudorf is a Roman Catholic professor of ethics who teaches at Florida International University. She agrees with Jones that science cannot decide Christian morality but disputes his claim that "God's standard for... all persons is chastity in marriage or celibacy outside of marriage."[9] To see the Bible as the sole source for Christian ethics is idolatry, the worship of a text rather than of the God revealed in Christ, who continues to be revealed. The most fundamental scientific insight was established by Kinsey's research

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[6] See Brooten, *Love between Women,* 3 and chaps. 4-5.

[7] J. M. Bailey and R. C. Pillard, "A genetic study of male sexual orientation," *Archives of General Psychiatry* 48 (1991): 1089-96. J. M. Bailey, R. C. Pillard, M. C. Neale, and Y. Agyei, "Heritable factors influence sexual orientation in women," *Archives of General Psychiatry* 50 (1993): 217-23. Also F. L. Whitam, M. Diamond, and J. Martin, "Homosexual orientation in twins: A report on sixty-one pairs and three triplet sets," *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 22 (1993): 187-206.

[8] See Ted Peters, "My genes made me do it!" *The Lutheran* (March 1995), 25-27. Compare Peters, *For the Love of Children: Genetic Technology and the Future of the Family* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1996).

[9] See Christine E. Gudorf, *Body, Sex and Pleasure: Reconstructing Christian Sexual Ethics* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 1994).

fifty years ago: for most persons sexual orientation is fixed relatively early in life and is extremely resistant to change. This discovery led the Roman Catholic Church in 1975 to declare that homosexual orientation itself is not sinful. But research also indicates that those who have little sexual interest or activity, which is what many churches require of homosexuals, have high incidence of suicidal thoughts, therapeutic counseling, and difficulty coping with life. Remarkably, she and Jones agree that genetic research demonstrates some biological foundation for sexual orientation (see n. 7); this argues against a purely environmental or constructionist origin for orientation. Sexual orientation *per se* is not a pathology. Homosexuals are more likely to be alcoholics and to use drugs, but this is also true of racial minorities and the poor, so that this may be linked more to low social status than to orientation. Homosexual men are more promiscuous but lesbian women less so than their heterosexual counterparts, which makes it difficult to interpret homosexuality in general as sinful. Key factors are legal status, attitudes of employers, and family support, often lacking for homosexual unions. She also makes an observation about interpretative options: Catholicism teaches that the discoveries of science contribute to understanding God's original intention and ongoing will, a contrast to classical Protestantism, which rejected nature as corrupted by sin. Given the traditionally anti-intellectual ethos of conservative Protestantism, recognizing science as uncovering divine intention within creation will not be easy. Ironically, conservative Protestants emphasize the Creator God of Genesis 1, but understand that text as the only place one may look to discover more about the nature and purpose of creation!

I draw two conclusions from these examinations of ancient Greek and of modern psychology. Schoedel has shown that when we interpret Romans 1 we are discussing not only Paul's theology and ethics, but also his Greco-Roman *scientific* assumptions. Second, as contemporary persons in a psychological culture, our ethical choices are also influenced by what research psychologists teach us. We must discuss *Paul's science and* ethics, as well as contemporary science and ethics as they relate to Paul's. It is inadequate to observe that the Bible speaks with one voice on the *ethics* of homosexuality. In the last two millennia scientists have learned and taught us more, and those developments may call for modifying ethical attitudes correlated with ancient Greek scientific judgments.

Romans 1:24-27

1. *David Fredrickson on the word "use" (chresis).* David Fredrickson is a professor at Luther Seminary, and the paper he presented is the most important one I know on Rom 1:24-27.[10] Fredrickson's guiding question asks how ways of conceptualizing sexual matters in Paul's philosophic and literary environment help make sense of his argument. He concludes that Paul points to the problem of (insatiable, compulsive, addictive) "passion" without introducing the modern dichotomy of homo/heterosexual.[11] At the conference a colleague objected that Paul's values come from the Old Testament, not from Greek culture, but Prof.

[10] See also Dale Martin, "Heterosexism and the Interpretation of Romans 1:18-32," *Biblical Interpretation* 3 (1995): 332-55 as well as Martin's review (JBL 117/2 [1998] 358-60) of Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996).

[11] Frederickson documents his interpretation extensively, referencing ancient texts that I omit in this summary.

Fredrickson insists that Paul was influenced by his own Greco-Roman cultural milieu as he read the Bible. Greeks thought of sexual activity as "use" (*chresis*), a term Paul employs in vv. 26 and 27 that is often mistranslated "intercourse" or by the modern term "relation." For example, the NRSV mistranslates: "Their women exchanged natural *intercourse* for unnatural, and in the same way also the men, giving up natural *intercourse* with women were consumed with passion for one another."[12] Fredrickson's translation of vv. 24-27 returns to approximate the old King James:

> Wherefore God delivered them to the desires of their hearts for the purpose of impurity, for their bodies to be dishonored among them—they who exchanged the truth of God for a lie and reverenced and worshipped the creation rather than the creator, who is blessed for ever, amen. Because of this, God delivered them to dishonoring passions. Their females exchanged natural use for that which is beyond nature. Likewise, the males left off the natural use of the female and were inflamed for one another in their appetite, males among males producing disgrace and receiving back in themselves the punishment which was necessary from their error.

Fredrickson observes that sexual desire and hunger for food were thought to be analogous. The pleasure or "use" of sex is to be limited by satisfaction, as a full stomach limits eating. The Greco-Roman question of sexual "use" does not ask about the gender of the subject or the object, does not ask whether the activity is homo- or heterosexual. Texts referring to the wife's "use" of the husband, to which Paul probably alludes in v. 26, are rarer. Fredrickson assumes that this verse does not concern lesbian activity, but rather the passion[13] of a wife.[14] Pederasty is also referred to as the older lover's "use" of the boy as a woman. One source of the terminology is the ancient discussion of managing a house: one possesses and "uses" property, including a wife, an ethical value that is radically different from the modern focus on the quality of the "relationship." "Correct use" was without "passion," that was not to be eradicated but controlled. Paul is not evaluating homosexual "relationships," a modern value, but judges the psychological state of the person experiencing addictive desire. Fredrickson argues that Paul's terms desire (*epithumia*, v. 24), passion (*pathos*, v. 26), inflame (*ekkaio*, v. 27), appetite (*orexis*, v. 27), and error (*plane*, v. 27) suggest that he is critiquing unbridled *eros*, sexual passion. When Greeks considered the terms "nature" and "use" as Paul does in Romans 1, the question concerns controlling excessive "passion." Since *eros* is insatiable, it is "against nature." As Schoedel observes, Paul agrees

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[12] Brooten, *Love Between Women*, 215, adopts this same mistranslation.

[13] As both Schoedel and Fredrickson note, Greeks assumed that "passion" (*pathos*) is insatiable, therefore a disease, an addiction, a meaning that the English word does not have. We might translate *pathos* in this context by "sexual addiction." But Greeks, especially Stoics, made negative judgments about feelings, not true of many modern people, a fact that translation should not hide.

[14] This differs not only from Brooten but also with the important article by Roy Bowen Ward, "Why Unnatural? The Tradition behind Romans 1:26-27," *HTR* 90/3 (1997), 263-84. Ward argues that "unnatural" stems from Plato, Timaeus 91BC, where the philosopher argues that "natural" sexual activity is procreative. If Ward were correct, we might expect Paul to mention procreation in related arguments. In other contexts, however, where Paul treats heterosexual relations and would be expected to mention procreation, he fails to do so (1 Corinthians 7). This does become a concern of deutero-Pauline authors (1 Tim 2:15). See Carolyn Osiek and David L. Balch, *Families in the New Testament World: Households and House Churches* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox 1997), 122-23, 156, 218.

with the opinion later expressed by the medical doctor Soranus about the source of this disease, the mind, but the disease is addictive erotic passion, not homosexuality. "And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind..." (1:28).

2. *Sexual desire and hunger for food as analogous passions.* Fredrickson points out that ancients saw an analogy between sex and food; the "use" of either can become diseased. Readers of Romans 1 have heard this argument repeatedly in relation to sex; the nature of Paul's argument might become clearer to us in relation to food. We use the Greek term "bulimic" to refer to one who has an insatiable appetite, literally one who has hunger (*limos*) for a cow (*bous*). We refer to a person who has a complete loss of appetite as "anorexic," one who is without (Greek *an*) an appetite (*orexis*, the very term Paul writes in Rom 1:27).

In his work against "The Eating of Flesh" I and II (993A-999B, trans. Cherniss and Helmbold in Loeb), Plutarch argues much as Paul does in Romans 1, but concerning appetite for food, not sex, that is out of control. His initial question concerns "what passion (*pathos*)" or "what state of soul or mind" the first man had who ate animal meat (993AB), precisely the question Fredrickson suggests that Paul treats in Romans 1. Plutarch wonders how it was that the pollution (*molusmos*) did not turn away his taste (993B; compare 997F). It happened in a fearful portion of world history when humans first appeared among the living (993D) constrained by the necessity of their poverty, unlike the present when people pass their time in unlawful desires (*epithumiais anomois*) and unnatural and antisocial pleasures (*hedonas para phusin asumphulous*; 993CD; compare 998C). Those first humans contrary to nature "made use" (*chraomai*; see Rom 1:26-27) of animal flesh because their hunger gave them no respite (993E; also 996F). But now (*de...nun*) when the earth can support humans, it is madness and frenzy that drives to the pollution of killing animals (994A). Humans act impiously (*asebeite*; see Rom 1:18) against Demeter and bring shame (*aischunete*; see Rom 1:26 and 27) upon Dionysus, as if humans did not receive enough from their hands (994A; also 996F). Nature (*physis*) produced tame creatures for beauty and grace, not for food (994B).

Humans are not naturally carnivorous as is obvious from the structure of the body: there are no hooked beaks, sharp nails, or jagged teeth (994F). It is not only physically against nature, but spiritually coarse and gross by reason of satiety (995D). Although the doctor does not agree with his argument, Plutarch quotes the medical writer Androcydes: "for wine and indulgence in meat make the body strong and vigorous, but the soul weak" (995E). When the body is burdened with improper food, the soul errs (*planaethai*, 995F; also 997B and Rom 1:27). He asks whether, as some argue, it is really impossible for us to be free from error (*anamarteton*, 996E)? Plutarch argues that human souls are imprisoned in mortal bodies as punishment (*dike*) for the eating of animal flesh (996B; compare Rom 1:21, 24, 26, 28). The unreasonable behavior of eating animal meat does not come from the gods, but from evil spirits (*ou theion alla daimonikon*; 996C).

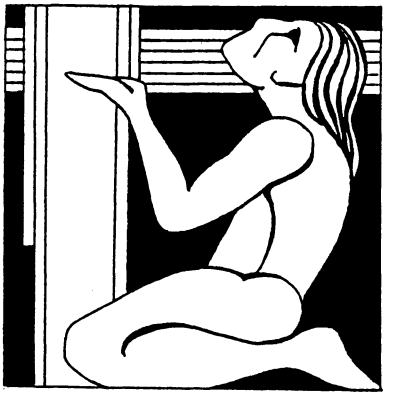
> Then, just as with women (compare Rom 1:26) who are insatiable in seeking pleasure, their lust tries everything, goes astray (*planomenos*, errs) and explores the gamut of profligacy until at last it ends in unspeakable practices; so intemperance in eating passes beyond the necessary ends of nature (*to physikon*) and resorts to cruelty and lawlessness (*paranomia*) to give variety to appetite (*orexin*; compare Rom 1:27). For it is in

their own company that organs of sense are infected and won over and become licentious when they do not keep to natural standards. Just so the art of hearing has fallen sick, corrupting (*diephtheiren*) musical taste. From this [music] our luxury and debauchery conceives a desire for shameful caresses and effeminate titillations.... Just so intemperate intercourse follows a lawless meal, inharmonious music follows a shameful debauch, barbarous spectacles follow shameless songs and sounds, insensitivity and cruelty toward human kind follow savage exhibitions in the theater [Roman gladiatorial games]. (997B-C, trans. Cherniss and Helmbold in Loeb)

This does not happen in a simple house (997D). Luxury and extravagance lead to an evil way of life (997D). Plutarch then quotes philosophers on either side of the debate and compares those who support eating meat to barbarian Scythians (997D-998A). Plutarch does not argue that eating meat is absolutely evil. It was understandable for the first humans who were hungry (993EF), and even now, humans might reasonably eat meat if hungry, but it is wrong to kill and eat simply as a luxury (996EF).

Concluding observations

From Plutarch's tractate I conclude that Plutarch is arguing against bulimia, against insatiable eating that has become a disease. For Plutarch eating vegetables was healthy and good; eating meat was unhealthy and evil. Paul too debated whether to eat meat (1 Corinthians 8 and 10; Rom 14:1-6). For Plutarch and Paul in the first century and for us in the twentieth, the question has both medical/scientific and ethical aspects. Contemporary medical doctors may agree or disagree with the Greek doctor Androcydes. We today reconsider the question that Paul and Plutarch as well as Greek doctors debated, not on the basis of first century medicine, but in light of twentieth century nutrition and ethics.



Paul mentions sexual activity that is insatiable, that has become a diseased addiction. Like Plutarch, Paul illustrates this with women who exchanged the "natural use," sexual activity that satisfies, for unnatural use, sexual activity that is insatiable (v. 26). Paul's words could refer to sexual activity in heterosexual marriage; the words themselves do not refer to same-sex activity.

Paul continues by referring to men who give up "natural use," who give up healthy sexual desire for activity that is compulsive; they are addicted to sex. These men give up natural use with women, and are consumed with diseased passion for one another (v. 27). Paul writes of males who have been engaged in heterosexual activity whose sexual desires become inflamed and insatiable and who act that out with other males. The second clause in v. 27, that "males burned in their desires for one another," makes only the assumptions reviewed above, that desires can become insatiable and diseased.

The third clause, "males with males working shame," could be construed as making the same assumption, as referring to same-sex activity that is insatiable and

therefore shameful. But Paul may make a second assumption, that male same-sex activity itself is shameful. If so, Paul does not argue this but assumes it, probably on the basis of Greco-Roman biology and ethics, that males should be active, not passive like females, that males should penetrate not be penetrated.[15]

The best illustration I know of the Greco-Roman biology assumed is from Aristotle:

> All females are less spirited than the males, except the bear and leopard: in these the female is held to be braver. But in the other kinds the females are softer (*malakotera*), more vicious, less simple, more impetuous, more attentive to the feeding of the young, while the males on the contrary are more spirited, wilder, simpler, less cunning. There are traces of these characters in virtually all animals, but they are all the more evident in those that are more possessed of character and especially in man. For man's nature (*phusin*) is the most complete, so that these dispositions too are more evident in humans. Hence a wife is more compassionate than a husband and more given to tears, but also more jealous and complaining and more apt to scold and fight. The female is also more dispirited and despondent than the male, more shameless and lying, is readier to deceive and has a longer memory; furthermore she is more wakeful, more afraid of action, and in general is less inclined to move than the male, and takes less nourishment. The male on the other hand, as we have said is a readier ally and is braver than the female.... (Aristotle, History of Animals IX.1 608a 32-608b 18, trans. Balme in Loeb).[16]

Paul assumed the biology of his own century when he argued that certain acts were "natural" or "unnatural" (Rom 1:26-27; 1 Cor 11:14) and that "soft" males (*malakoi*) would not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9). We generally assume the experimentally based biology of the twentieth century, for example the articles cited by Jones (n. 7 above), that reach the conclusion that there is some biological determination of human sexual orientation. We must then face the question asked by Gudorf above: do we learn about how God created us exclusively from Genesis 1 and Romans 1, or may we not also learn something new about God's creation from experimental science, from scientists like Kinsey?

Like Paul, I assume that we can learn from the biology of our own century, that there is some biological determination of human sexual orientation, while we also learn from Paul that compulsive sexual activity is shameful, harmful to others in our homes, churches, and society. This is true whether the sexual activity involved is hetero- or homosexual. A related conclusion follows: if hetero- or homosexual activity is not compulsive, then it may be healthy and good.[17] This conclusion suggests support for gay and lesbian marriage and, for those gays and lesbians who meet the church's other criteria, ordination to the Christian ministry.

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[15] This argument is a commonplace, a *topos*. Ward, "Why Unnatural?" 278-84, persuasively demonstrates that this philosophical commonplace does not describe what men and women were actually doing in the Greco-Roman world. Inscriptions and erotic art preserved in Pompeii leave no doubt that women were not always passive sexually, and men were not always active. Ward's warning raises a question about the relationship between professors' and preachers' ideological opinions and what people in our churches are actually thinking and doing.

[16] Cited by Maryanne Cline Horowitz, "Aristotle and Women," *Journal of the History of Biology* 9/2 (1976) 183-213, at p. 196.

[17] See the theological/ethical debate between Kathryn Greene-McCreight and Nancy Duff in the forthcoming Eerdmans volume (referred to on pp. 433-34).

What Can One Give in Exchange for One's Life?

A Narrative-Critical Study of the Widow and Her Offering, Mark 12:41-44

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One would hardly expect the story of the poor widow who gave her life-savings to the temple to show up at one of the most solemn moments in the Gospel of Mark, just before the climactic scenes of the passion and death of Jesus. The story seems to break up the momentum of the narrative with an edifying but apparently irrelevant exhortation toward almsgiving. However, we know that Mark does not haphazardly edit his material without punctilious care for literary design, narrative irony, and rhetorical impact. He makes his meaning clear and with considerable impact by the artful juxtaposition of his traditions. The question to be asked, then, in reference to the story of the widow, concerns Mark's literary intent in positioning these four short verses at the height of Jesus' conflicts with all the religious powers of his day and immediately before the strange insertion of the apocalyptic discourse (chapter 13) and the tragic events of the Passion (chapters 14-15).[1]

On closer inspection, the reader realizes that Mark with this seemingly adventitious anecdote has made both a supremely ironic clarification and commentary on the events and characters of the story up to this point and a rhetorically powerful foreshadowing of the Gospel's subsequent narrative. The compressed account of the widow and her action, placed precisely at this point in the events of the story, serves the rather sophisticated literary function of representing the meaning of the Gospel *in nuce*, epitomizing Mark's paradoxical metaphysics of Christian self-definition in the light of the Passion of Jesus, as the following narrative analysis of the text will show. This analysis will consider Mark's effective literary use of character, setting, conflict, point of view, standards of judgment, and rhetorical techniques to crystallize the multilayered meaning of his Gospel about Jesus,

[1] In chapter 12, which concludes with the story of the widow, the Pharisees, the Herodians, the Sadducees, the scribes, all traditional antagonists of Jesus throughout Mark's Gospel, appear *en masse* in one last curtain call.

discipleship, and the values and demands of the kingdom of God. The story of the widow and her generosity, as we shall see, is not just a randomly inserted pious vignette but the hinge narrative of the entire Gospel holding together both ends of the story world.[2] It looks back to summarize and looks ahead to reveal.

The narrator's point of view

The reader can readily see that Mark's point of view toward the widow and her action is one of inestimable admiration, her unconditional praise sung by Mark's unerring hero, Jesus. In his choice of words and setting, various narrative and rhetorical devices, and the use of his main character, Jesus, to guide the evaluation of the poor woman, Mark is clearly imparting a very important teaching.[3] The widow becomes the litmus standard for Mark in appraising all the characters in his story and the values they represent. He gauges the disciples, the Pharisees, the crowd, and all the rest of the Gospel's personages, even Jesus himself, against the action of this poor woman. The widow is the embodiment of Mark's theology of authentic discipleship, the total loss of one's "life for my sake and that of the gospel" (8:35). Mark uses the widow for three purposes.

First, the widow's total giving (ὅλον τὸν βίον αὐτῆς, 12:44), the donation of her entire life-savings to the service of the temple of Yahweh, serves as a prolepsis of the complete self-giving of Jesus on the cross to be narrated in chapters 14-15.[4] Second, her action functions as an ironic retrospective on the inappropriate behavior of the disciples throughout the text and likewise as an admonition and model to them in living in the dangerous world of the apocalyptic happenings in the following chapter 13. Third, the widow's example reprises by glaring contrast the Gospel's recurring satiric indictment of the fraudulence and self-service of the Jewish religious leaders whose affectation of religion had attenuated the presence of God in people's lives. In pursuit of these suggestive literary connections, Mark crafts the setting and the verbal nuances of the text to convey the serious importance of the widow's example for the Gospel message. Mark has Jesus making a solemn proclamation (ἀμὴν λέγω) in the provocative precincts of the temple while authoritatively sitting after the manner of a rabbi teaching (καθίσας)[5] to call attention to the incident and the lesson the disciples and readers must learn. This is a solemn teaching mo-

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[2] Chapters 1-12 and chapters 13-16.

[3] In a surprising lapse of his position as omniscient narrator, Mark provides Jesus with inside information about the widow. The reader has to wonder, how did Jesus know the woman was a widow and poor (12:43), how did Jesus know she gave all she had to live on to the treasury (12:44)? Why has Jesus and not Mark the narrator made these observations? This unusual shift affects the reader's response to the widow and elicits genuine admiration for her action. The effect of this shift is calculated to elicit the reader's same response toward the total self-giving action of Jesus on the cross to be shortly described in the story world of the Gospel.

[4] These words, ὅλον τὸν βίον αὐτῆς, are the last words in chapter 12 and stand in a rhetorically superior position climaxing important teaching material, verbal threads, and value judgments throughout the chapter, as we shall see.

[5] Mark uses "ἀμὴν" 13 times typically to draw attention to some weighty utterance or serious lesson of Jesus. See the summary by G. F. Hawthorne, "Amen," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Joel B. Green, Scott McKnight, I. Howard Marshall (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 7-8. There are three other times in the Gospel where Jesus is "sitting": 4:1, 9:35, 13:3.

ment. Up to this point, everyone in the Gospel has come to Jesus with questions of his identity, misunderstandings of his message, accusations against his person. Mark now spotlights the poor widow as the compelling key to Jesus' identity and the values that have driven Jesus' life and informed his message: in giving her "entire life," she makes the greatest offering to God. Jesus will do the same. And so must any follower.



Setting

What a narrator does for the setting of an incident is crucial to its meaning. It is highly significant that both Jesus and the widow are in the *temple* close to the time of the *Passover feast.* The mention of the temple, which has been in the background context since 11:12-17 when Jesus cursed the fig tree and then proceeded to enter and cleanse the temple, conjures up the cultic history of Israel and the nation's capricious relationship to Yahweh and the covenant. The actions of Mark's Jesus in this setting climax a centuries-old prophetic legacy of blistering critique of the temple's empty formalism and moribund priesthood. Even more for the meaning of the present incident, the temple has been paradoxically the central stronghold for the terrorism of the little people of the land, like the widow, through the manipulation of religious symbols, as echoed by Jesus in those tragic words condemning the scribes but applicable to his other religious antagonists: "They devour the houses of widows and, as a pretext, recite lengthy prayers" (12:40).

The temple was supposed to be the sign of God's very presence; the nation's leaders and priests were remanded to internalize and practice the meaning of this presence.[6] Jesus' Parable of the Tenants, which opens chapter 12, echoing the Vineyard Song of Isaiah 5 and other laments, evidences once and for all the woeful deficiency of those entrusted with the temple's spiritual patrimony. Jesus closes this passage by appropriating the words of Ps 118:22-23 to complete his picture of the profound bankruptcy of the spiritual leadership of the nation which killed "the beloved son" who had come on command of the landowner "to obtain from them some of the produce of the vineyard" (12:1-11): "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; by the Lord has this been done and it is wonderful in our eyes" (12:10).

Mark has the widow enter the temple in this general context to make her offering. It becomes a moment ironically when the authentic traditions surrounding the temple motif are proclaimed. It is doubly ironic that Mark portrays Jesus as teaching in the temple (12:35) at the time of the widow's entrance to make her offering. He had just pointed out the sterile hypocrisy of the

[6] In this regard, see the vitriolic critique against the corruption and degradation of the temple and the priesthood by the Qumran community in their writings and their complete separation from and rejection of the apparatus of the temple worship.

The widow becomes the quintessential emblem of the meaning of the Passover feast and the great commandment.

Pharisees and scribes in prostituting the worship of Yahweh and now he points to one of the little people of the Gospel as a model of authentic religion, as one who produces fruit, and as the model of those who will now take over the vineyard (12:9). The irony of the setting continues as Jesus makes his way out of the temple for the last time and goes to the Mount of Olives. He *sits* there contemplating the temple's tragic loveliness and proceeds to discourse on the self-giving needed for a disciple, to be followed immediately by the ultimate sacrifice of his life, his own ὅλον τὸν βίον, all that he had!

The setting also includes the feast of Passover which serves as a further commentary on the action of the widow. Perhaps Mark is indicating the roots for the totality of her giving. Her gift at this time of this most sacred of Jewish feasts speaks to the heart of the feast, the sacrifice of one's entire self to Yahweh and a renewal of the ancient covenant expressed in Deuteronomy 6 which earlier (in chapter 12) Jesus quoted in his reply to the scribe who wanted to know what was the first of all the commandments (12:28-31). The widow becomes the quintessential emblem of the meaning of the Passover feast and the great commandment. This is what made her such an object lesson for the disciples and a foil for the Pharisees who should have been professional practitioners of the spirituality called forth by the feast but instead were unproductive tenants. The temple motif, the Passover symbol, and even the Jerusalem background provide the setting that operates in a rhetorically effective way to advance the theme of Mark's Gospel and ultimately his interest in his hero, Jesus.

Characterization

Another way to get at the meaning of this story of the widow and her total offering and to see the reason for Mark's positioning it where he did is to analyze the character of the widow and those around her. Even though Mark gives only four verses to this story, we have all we need to know about the woman to understand her meaning. From the text we know, of course, that the woman is a widow, and not just a widow but a *poor* widow (12:42, 44).[7] We know further that she is generous to a fault and, correlatively, self-sacrificing; she contributed all she had (12:44). One can assume she is a religious person, for she came to the temple to make her offering, thus fulfilling the OT injunction to give alms.[8] One can further say the

[7] According to those who write on social issues in the Bible, a widow lacked ability to maintain inherited status; and if she happened to be a poor one, she became a helpless and easy target of oppression. A widow was one of the three classic categories of Israelite poor, the orphan and the foreigner being the other two.

[8] The widow's gift suggests a whole world of OT and NT discourse on almsgiving. The whole book of Tobit and various parts of Sirach (3:30-31; 12:1-7; 18:15-18; 29:10-13; 34:18–35:10) and other writings talk of almsgiving as a primary duty and an act of supreme righteousness before God which saves from sin and delivers from death. In Matthew's

widow was unpretentious and unashamed of her offering. She deposited (ἔβαλεν) her meager offering in the treasury together with "the rich people [who] put in (ἔβαλλον) large sums" (12:41).[9] Furthermore, Mark suggests the widow had great trust in and dependence on God, for operating in the background of the text is the well-known story of the widow of Zarepath who also gave everything she had to the prophet Elijah and received an abundance in return (1 Kgs 17:7-16). In all of these qualities of the widow, Mark makes an ironic commentary on the reversal of two frequently enunciated OT principles for the pointed intent of his meaning in the surrounding context. These two statements are: God protects widows since they cannot seem to help themselves in a world of greed and status, and God praises almsgiving as a way to save oneself. So it is especially ironic, in view of this background, that the poor widow who should have been the recipient of alms is now the generous giver of them! It is no wonder she receives praise from such a source as Jesus who, in the unfolding of the story's plot, will act in a commensurately prodigal way by his death on the cross.

The widow is what one would call a flat character in a narrative. There is no change in her character in the short space of the story, no development of her psychology. She carries mainly a representative quality of virtue exemplified by Mark's other women characters: the woman with the hemorrhage (5:23-34), the Canaanite woman (7:24-30), the woman who anointed Jesus (14:3-9), and the women at the crucifixion (15:40-41) and empty tomb (16:1), symbols of radical faith, complete trust, sacrificial giving, and fearless following. She is basically a Markan symbol in the Gospel, the bearer of Jesus' values proclaimed throughout the Gospel, as one who gives her "entire life." The irony once again is that the widow has adopted Jesus' system of thought without knowing it or hearing him while those who heard Jesus do not adopt his values.

Mark clearly creates this pointed irony in the contrast of the widow to other characters in the story, notably the disciples, the religious leaders, the rich man (10:17-22), and the other wealthy people. In creating these contrasts, Mark ingrains his point. The poor widow becomes a foil to the ambitious quest of James and John for prestige and power (10:35-45), who want status not because they have given their all but just because they are in physical closeness to Jesus.[10] By her unpretentious act of giving without expecting a return, the widow contrasts with the seemingly self-serving assertion of Peter, "We have given up everything and followed you" (10:28). In parting with all she had to live on, the widow becomes a

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Sermon on the Mount, almsgiving is mentioned before prayer (6:1-4) and has denotative association with righteousness. Ironically for our text, Sirach and others, including Paul in 2 Cor 8:12-15, taught that the giving of alms should not dispossess the giver but should be in proportion to one's capacity. What is Mark indicating when he states that the poor widow gave all she had to live on?

[9] The difference in tenses of the verb βαλλω in the text suggests an interesting, perhaps deliberate, contrast in the donations made. Mark uses the imperfect tense for the rich who are throwing their coins in, denoting a continuous action in past time, a kind of ongoing behavior, since they had plenty more to give. For the widow's action, however, Mark uses the aorist tense, denoting a punctiliar, completed, once-and-for-all kind of action, perhaps to indicate that the widow would not be making any more contributions, since she had already given "all she had."

[10] These two had not really assimilated the words of Jesus already in 3:34 nor the frequent predictions of the passion or Jesus' words about who is the greatest in the kingdom in 9:35.

stark contrast to the rich man who had many possessions but was not able to part with his wealth even when invited by Jesus to give it all away and follow him (10:21-22). Likewise she is a counter-example to the wealthy who were giving out of their surplus to the temple without much damage to their way of life (12:44). Above all, the widow stands in glaring antithesis to the Pharisees and other religious leaders in their superficial values, their desire "to go around in long robes and accept greetings in the marketplace, seats of honor in synagogues, and places of honor at banquets," and particularly in their greed in devouring the houses of widows (12:38-40).

By counterposing the widow and her radical act of giving to the other characters in the story and to what they say and do, Mark endeavors to catechize his community in the radical lessons of his Gospel, particularly to embed the message of the three Passion predictions about losing one's life "for my sake and that of the gospel" (8:35). The widow becomes, at this significant point in the narrative, the embodied clarification of what Jesus had said all along about profit and loss, about gain and forfeit (8:36), about first and last (9:35), about denial and service (10:45). In Mark's theology, she so aptly illustrates, by the totality of her self-giving, the response to that supremely important question of Jesus: "What can one give in exchange for one's life?" (8:36). This is why the poor widow is such a preeminent model for the disciples. Jesus "calls the disciples to himself" (12:43) to make one last teaching before his Passion. The widow is the bearer of Jesus' values, as one who gives her "entire life." She adumbrates in a consummate way the complete self-giving of Jesus on the cross. This is Mark's literary reason for using this story and placing it precisely here before the Passion narrative.

Rhetorical techniques

Mark structures his Gospel in an artfully deliberate manner. He makes connections and drops clues all along the narrative to help the reader hit upon the significance of his Gospel. He does this by using techniques such as framing, foreshadowing, irony, paradox, two-step progression, and verbal threads to comment on a character, emphasize a point, praise or criticize an action, advance a lesson to a deeper level, and, above all, to subvert compromised values. These techniques heighten Mark's rhetorical agenda, to convince the reader (or listener) of the need for total self-giving for the sake of the gospel. We shall now examine some of these techniques Mark uses to promote the importance of the widow's story for his theological purposes.

Framing is a popular technique of Mark's. In one form of framing, Mark links two stories together to interpret each other, such as he does in inserting the cure of the woman suffering from twelve years of hemorrhaging in between the healing of Jairus' daughter (5:21-43).[11] Or else Mark links two stories in some literary parallel to interpret material bracketed or intercalated between the two. A very good example of this is the text under consideration. There is an intimate literary connection between the action of the widow and her poor offering of two copper coins and the act of another woman who anoints Jesus with expensive perfumed oil in 14:3-9. The deeds of these two women frame or intercalate the apoca-

[11] Other examples of this "sandwich" technique would be the death of John the Baptist inserted in between the sending forth and return of the disciples; the cleansing of the temple in between the cursing and the withering of the fig tree; Peter's denial of Jesus and Jesus' confession of himself.

lyptic discourse in chapter 13, thus illuminating and commenting on the words of Jesus inside the frame about the dangers of discipleship and the task of dedicating oneself totally to the preaching of the gospel at the cost of one's life. After his praise of the widow, Jesus makes his way out of the temple area and proceeds to the Mount of Olives where he "sits" to describe the beatings, arrests, trials and hatred that accompany a commitment to the task of preaching the gospel to all nations (13:10). The whole of chapter 13 is a paradigm of the disciples in the midst of a crisis that calls for the total and costly giving of one's life.

Mark's purpose in using these two women as "bookends" for the apocalyptic discourse as well as using them in their own right to recapitulate his message is evident in the parallelisms he establishes between the two. It is interesting to note that Jesus explicitly praises these two women—both of whom, by the way, are anonymous—for their actions of service and self-giving, the only times in the Gospel in which Jesus praises an individual's act. The widow's poor but total offering of two copper coins in the first frame contrasts in the second frame with the costly perfume worth three hundred denarii contained in an evidently expensive alabaster jar, which the woman broke to pour out the entire contents over Jesus' head. The parallelism continues in the echo of ἀμὴν λέγω in both stories to underscore the solemnity of Jesus' instruction on both actions for the purpose of teaching the disciples. The connections abound in the use of the hook word πτωχος, poor. Mark uses the word two times and its cognate, poverty, once in the first frame and twice in the second frame with the evident purpose of connecting them. The poor widow's "entire life savings" parallels the paradoxical use of the word "waste" (14:4) on the lips of some of the guests. The fact that some were "indignant" illuminates the totality of the second woman's gift.

The actions and gifts of the two unknown women embody and proclaim the Gospel's difficult message and reflect on the story's characters, particularly Mark's hero, Jesus. The actions of both foreshadow the tragic events of the passion and death of Jesus. The widow gives her ὅλον τὸν βίον, as does Jesus in his dying on the cross, and the anonymous woman with the perfume anoints Jesus in "preparation for burial" (14:8). The framing is set off with ironic embellishments by the contrasting actions of the characters surrounding both stories. In both cases the behavior of the two women is accompanied by indictments of religious men with their misguided values and attitudes toward money. The immediate context of both incidents likewise share an atmosphere of murderous assault on Jesus by these religious leaders, tragically ironic because their intentions will lead to Jesus' costly sacrifice of his entire life.[12]

The actions of the two unknown women foreshadow the tragic events of the passion and death of Jesus.

Irony, as already indicated in many places above, plays a significant function in the story of the widow, performing in many

[12] See 11:18; 12:12; and 14:1-2, 10-11.

In the poor widow, Jesus makes a definitive statement about the kind of relationship with God that is at the heart of his message.

cases the task of subverting any value not in accord with the total dedication necessary for discipleship. The ultimate irony of the story is that the widow has seemingly deprived herself of life itself by her generous gift of her total life savings. The two-step progression in the characteristic language Mark uses, a stylistic feature that repeats the same thought in different words, offers crucial emphasis to the extent of the widow's self-giving: "She, from her poverty, has contributed all she had, her whole livelihood" (12:44). But she has gained everything by her loss, according to the paradoxical promises of eternal life Jesus declares in his reply to Peter's proclamation of his sacrifice of everything (10:30).

Irony reverberates in the insincere preface to the trick question of the Pharisees and Herodians about paying taxes to the emperor in chapter 12. Unknowingly, these religious men affirm Jesus' commendation of the widow shortly afterwards by stating that Jesus is a "truthful" man who does not care for the *status* of a person and teaches "the way of God in accordance with the truth" (12:14). In saying these words, they ironically set up a situation in which the widow becomes later in the chapter the model for the following words of Jesus, "Repay... to God what belongs to God" (12:17). Again, the poor widow teaches the teachers in Israel and the disciples.

The *verbal threads* running through the context of chapter 12 embellish the irony of the widow story which climaxes the chapter. The use of ὅλον (all), so important in expressing the totality of the widow's gift, finds its initial sounding in the sevenfold repetition of the exact same word in Jesus' response to the question of the well-intentioned scribe and in the scribe's own affirmation of Jesus' teaching in 12:28-34. One should love God with *all* (ὅλον) one's heart, *all* one's soul, *all* one's mind, *all* one's understanding, and *all* one's strength. By reinforcing Jesus' teaching and echoing his use of "all," the rich man hears some meaningful words from Jesus, "You are not far from the kingdom of God" (10:34). In his response, the scribe had also touched upon temple practices by stating that to love God is "worth more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices" (10:33), an observation that finds its ironic fulfillment by the "all" of the widow's gift to the temple treasury for the temple worship of God. The irony reaches new depths as Jesus denounces other *scribes* for "devouring the houses of *widows*" (12:40).

Another verbal thread carrying ironic overtones is the use of πλούσιοι, rich people, symbol in Mark of all that distracts from the kingdom of God and its demands of total self-giving. We first hear of "the lure of riches" in 4:19 as the source for choking the word of God. Jesus' critique of riches deepens in his instruction after the first prediction of the Passion (8:36-37). Jesus confronts the rich man with the invitation to make a total renunciation (10:17-22) and amazes the disciples, after the man's sad departure, with his shocking assertion that the rich would have a hard time enter-

ing the kingdom of God (10:24). Now in the temple area Jesus points out the paradoxical values of the kingdom by stating that the contribution of the "poor" widow exceeds the complete total of the large contributions thrown into the treasury by the "rich people." These verbal threads of "rich" scattered throughout the Gospel up to this point disintegrate as Mark proceeds to narrate the total renunciation of Jesus in the events of the Passion.

Conflict and tension

Every good story has conflict, a clash of values and judgments, a tension between characters, with institutions, and in nature. Conflict makes for a good story, and the delight for the reader is to see how the narrator resolves it, if at all. In the story of the widow, Mark presents conflict that is elemental and eternal, as truth clashes with appearances, as honesty collides against hypocrisy, as sincerity struggles against show. The conflict centers in the story on different attitudes toward God, faith, religion, cult, spiritual existence, standards of judgment. The conflict plays itself out in the characters of the story who make choices on how they will live out their values, particularly in relationship to God and, more specifically, to the story's protagonist, Jesus. The widow becomes momentarily for the plot of the story the lightning rod receiving the total energy of Mark's theme, the absolute and unconditional surrender of one's total being to the demands of God's new kingdom embodied in Jesus. She is the repository of all the values of Mark's Gospel.

The clash of values is ultimately a tension between a religion of ostentation and self-proclamation and humble faith and trust; between sizable amounts of money as a basis for one's self-worth and embezzlement of God and a small amount from the heart and from one's want; between religious appearances to please people and gain respect and the lowliness of the poor widow's simple act to please God. The pull in the story is between the externalism of actions and the interior sentiments of the heart. The conflict between these two value systems, two standards of approaching God, receive its cataclysmic resolution in the tragedy of Jesus' death. In pointing out the widow as an example to his disciples, Jesus offers her to them as an adumbration of the greatest lesson of self-giving he himself will make on the cross. Jesus has already resolved the conflict of the story by his own judgment on the widow and later by his own death. In the poor widow, Jesus makes a definitive statement about the kind of relationship with God that is at the heart of his message and at the heart of the Passover feast he is about to celebrate. The story of the poor widow and her total self-giving is a literary masterpiece in the Gospel of Mark, illuminating ultimately the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Postscript

With profound thanks and in loving admiration, I offer this brief article to honor my Doctor-Father, Professor Edgar Krentz, who, it can truly be said, offered his ὅλον τὸν βίον, his entire being and life, to the teaching of the New Testament. His immense knowledge of the word of God, his love for teaching it, and his high standards of scholarship have greatly enriched my life and the church at large. I am profoundly grateful to you, Ed, for the example to me of your ministry of the word and your life. *Ad multos annos!*

Jesus the Teacher[1]

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One of the strongest portraits of Jesus in the Gospels is that of a teacher.[2] Other than the title "Lord," people call Jesus "Teacher" more often than any other epithet in the New Testament, and often with a great deal of respect and admiration (Mk 10:17; Mt 22:16).[3] Jesus also calls himself a teacher. In the story of the preparation for the Last Supper, for example, Jesus instructs his disciples to find a room for the paschal meal, and to tell the owner that "the teacher" has need of it (Mk 14:14; Mt 26:18; Lk 22:11). Apart from his portrayal as an infant, the episode of the 12 year-old Jesus amazing the teachers in the temple with his learning is the earliest picture we have of him (Lk 2:46-47). Other depictions include the itinerant Jesus teaching multitudes (Matthew 5-7); individuals (John 3 and 4); adversaries (Luke 15), and disciples (Mk 4:10-20, 33-34; 7:17-23; 10:10-11, 23-31). He teaches in the temple (Mt 26:55; Mk 14:19; Jn 7:14); in synagogues (Mt 4:23; Mk 6:2; Lk 4:15; Jn 6:59); in houses (Mk 7:17-18; 9:28); from a boat (Lk 5:3); on the hillside (Mt 5:1-2); at a well (Jn 4:7-30); at table (Lk 7:36-50); on the road (Lk 24:13-32); and by the shore Mk 2:13; 4:1). *In other words, Jesus teaches people wherever he is and wherever they are.* In fact, Mt 26:55 evidences that Jesus taught on a daily basis. Today, this traveling teacher is considered the most famous pedagogue in the Western world.[4] With these thoughts in mind, I want to (1) examine the words used to specify "teacher" in the ancient world and show how Jesus both corresponds to and differs from the perceptions this title implies; (2) suggest some teaching methods of Jesus; and (3) propose a way modern teachers can learn from him.

Didaskalos, rabbi, epistatēs

The evangelists use several words that characterize Jesus as a teacher: *didaskalos, didaskale, rabbi, rabboni, epistata,* and

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[1] This essay honors my Doctor Father, Edgar Krentz, on the occasion of his retirement from seminary committee work, for I cannot imagine that this master-pedagogue will ever stop teaching!

[2] Bernard J. Lee SM, *The Galilean Jewishness of Jesus* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 118, asserts "that Jesus was a teacher, that just about everybody around Jesus related to him as a teacher, and that Jesus thought of himself as a teacher; the Gospels are uniformly and strongly of one voice on this piece of history." See also "The Setting in the Ministry of Jesus," Chapter VI in W. D. Davies, *The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount* (Cambridge: University Press, 1964), 418-25 for additional support.

[3] Jesus is addressed as "Lord" no fewer than 83 times, and as "rabbi" or "teacher" 56 times. The next most frequently used title for Jesus is the enigmatic "Son of man" found no fewer than 37 times.

[4] Gilbert Highet, *The Art of Teaching* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1950), 190.

epistatēs. Of these, the most common term is *didaskalos*. Of the forty-eight instances of *didaskalos* in the Gospels, friends (Mk 4:38; 13:1), enemies (Mk 12:19; Mt 8:19; Lk 20:21), and strangers (Lk 17:13; Mt 19:16; Mk 5:35) alike ascribe the title *"didaskalos"* to Jesus forty-one times.[5] The Semitic equivalents, *rabbi*/master (Mk 9:5; 11:21; Jn 1:38, 49; 4:31) and the more intimate *rabboni*/my master are also used (Mk 10:51; Jn 20:16). Luke, the Evangelist who wrote for Gentiles, prefers his own words: *epistatēs*/master (8:24; 9:49) and the direct address, *epistata* (5:5; 8:45, 17:13). Its etymology (one who "stands over" as an authority) suggests that *epistatēs* is a synonym of *rabbi*,[6] a fact confirmed by Luke's uses of this word in place of *"rabbi"* (9:33), a term that would have been meaningless to his readers.[7] John, the latest of the evangelists, makes the *rabbi*/teacher association explicit (1:38; 20:16).[8]

Early writings speak of four types of teachers who during Jesus' lifetime had adult followers: philosophers, sages, interpreters of the Jewish Law, and prophets.[9] Elements of each category are present in Jesus' teaching.[10] In fact, a recent trend in the renewed quest for the "historical Jesus" has been to find parallels to the sayings of Jesus within the corpus of material that reflects a Cynic philosophy.[11] For the most part, however, the picture of Jesus in the Gospels best conforms to the picture of a rabbi.[12] We see this first in the way people who were not his disciples come up to him and comfortably address him as "Rabbi" (Jn 3:2). Crowds, as well, treat Jesus with the respect accorded to teachers. Second, his words so grip people that they set themselves in the position of disciples. Third, the vocabulary used to describe his disciples (*mathetai*/ learners and *akolouthein*/to walk behind; to follow after) corresponds to the technical terminology used for discipleship in first century rabbinic circles.[13] Moreover, Jesus' relationship to his disciples is parallel to the behavior of rabbinic pupils to their masters, which fragments from early Jewish writings show:

> Learning by itself did not make a pupil, and he did not grasp the full significance of his teacher's learning in all its nuances except through prolonged intimacy with his teacher, through close association with his rich and profound mind. The disciples accompanied their sage as he went to teach, when he sat in law court, when he was engaged in the performance of meritorious deeds such as helping the poor, redeeming slaves, collecting dowries for poor brides, bury-

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[5] Karl Heinrich Rengstorf, *TDNT* 2, *"didaskalos,"* 148-59, quote on p. 152.

[6] Davies, 422 points out that while in Jesus' day the title "Rabbi" did not have the teacher-meanings it later acquired, it was more than a courtesy title and did in fact designate a teacher in the strict sense.

[7] *TDNT* 2, *"epistatēs,"* 622-3.

[8] Epigraphic evidence from Jerusalem in New Testament times also supports the parallelism of rabbi with teacher. Cf. *Corpus inscriptionum iudaicarum. 1266,* 1268-69.

[9] Pheme Perkins, *Jesus as Teacher* (Cambridge: University Press, 1990), 2.

[10] See Perkins, 2-22 for an extended presentation of each type of "teacher" in Jesus' world. Also, Jones, 11-62.

[11] N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1996), 66-74, gives a detailed analysis of the scholars who are pursuing this strand of thought. See also Paul Rhodes Eddy, "Jesus as Diogenes? Reflections on the Cynic Jesus," *JBL* 115/3 (1996) 449-69.

[12] *TDNT* 2, *"didaskalos,"* 153.

[13] Vernon Robbins, *Jesus the Teacher* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) asserts that by the end of the first century C.E., the terminology and pattern of a teacher and his disciples are well established in the writings of Flavius Josephus, tannaitic rabbinic traditions, and the gospels. See also *TDNT* 2, *"didaskalos,"* 154 and Davies, 422.

> ing the dead, etc. The pupil took his turn preparing the common meal and catering to the general needs of the group. He performed personal services for his teacher, observed his conduct and was his respectful, loving companion *(T Negaim 8:2; T.B. Pasahim 36a)*. Some laws could not be studied theoretically or merely discussed, but could only be learned by serving the teacher. The groups which consisted of a sage and his disciples had property in common, or a common fund from which food was brought *(T.B. Erubin 73a)*. Study was not confined to the school or the synagogue, but was also carried on in the vineyard, in the shade of the dovecote, in fields, on paths under fig-trees and olives and in the market. It was not uncommon for the sage to conduct discourses and discussions with his pupils in the town square or in the market place, with the townspeople gathering around them and listening, irrespective of whether they were able to understand all or only part of the discussion *(T. Berakoth 4:16; P.T. Berakoth II. 5c)*.[14]

Jesus also teaches like a rabbi. He sits as he teaches (Mk 4:1; 9:35; 12:41; 13:3; Jn 8:2) and he often cites the scriptures to prove his point (Mk 12:18-23). Furthermore, like rabbis, he is clever in his use of questions (Mt 22:20; Lk 10:25-26).[15] In fact, the Synoptic writers note 187 times where Jesus answers a question with a question. When they tested him with the issue of obedience to Caesar, for example, Jesus requested a coin and then asked, "Whose head is this, whose title?" (Mt 22:20). Most often, Jesus' penetrating questions either confront people or they send questioners off to live their way into the answer! Stories and parables (Lk 15:3-32), a traditional Jewish way of teaching, are also part of Jesus' teaching arsenal. Jesus also decides like the rabbis did in matters of sin (Jn 9:1-2), marriage, divorce, etc. Finally, Jesus teaches through the favorite method of the rabbis, argumentation.[16]

Yet despite the similarities between Jesus and first-century rabbis, there are also significant differences between them. In fact, the evangelists make a point of saying that Jesus' teaching style differed from that of the other Jewish teachers (Mt 7:28-29; see also Lk 4:32 and Mk 1:27). The following are some of these differences.

1. *Jesus is not credentialed.* Usually Jewish teachers were students of famous rabbis from whom they had learned faithfully what in turn they transmitted to their own pupils. As far as we know, however, Jesus did not study under any other teacher than those who would have taught him in Nazareth. First, his father Joseph would have instructed him at home.[17] Then he would have attended a primary school (*bet sefer*/house of reading) associated with the village synagogue, as any Jewish male would have done in his time. Here he would have studied the Hebrew Bible and other forms of reading and writing common in elementary education.[18] Quite probably he also attended a secondary school (*bet talmud*/ house of learning) where he would have been concerned with the Oral law, the *Halakah*.[19] In fact, his style of interaction

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[14] Stephen D. Jones, *Rabbi Jesus: Learning from the Master Teacher* (Macon, GA: Peake Road, 1997), 19.

[15] See Jones, 19-21, for a fuller treatment of the similarities between Jesus and the rabbis.

[16] Jones, 20, proposes that we rethink our characterization of the scribes and Pharisees, since their style is less antagonistic than we thought and more a reflection of the rabbinical style of probing for the truth.

[17] See "Jewish Education" in David K. O'Rourke, *The Holy Land as Jesus Knew It* (Ligouri, MO: Ligouri Press, 1983), 67-72.

[18] Perkins, 23.

[19] Toward the end of the second century the oral law is codified and it becomes known as the *Mishnah*.

with the Pharisees is not intelligible without presuming education.[20] It is highly unlikely, however, that Jesus attended a *yeshiva* or *bet midrash* where he would have done advanced study, since at this point most students took up their profession.[21] It is this scenario as backdrop that explains the objection some people had to Jesus' activities as a teacher. "How is it," they questioned, "that this man has learning, when he has never studied?" (Jn 7:15, cf. Mt 13:54 and par.). Jesus' "credentials" therefore are not derivative. They are autonomous.[22] He is a charismatic instructor!

2. *Jesus teaches with an unprecedented authority.* Rabbis inserted themselves into the tradition. They fortified their statements by calling on the authority of the past.[23] In contrast, Jesus never cites the authority of other rabbis to bolster what he says. Rather, he begins his instructions with an emphatic "I say to you" statement, which is often prefaced by the Hebrew word *āmēn*/certainly." Moreover, there are also instances when Jesus goes a step further saying, "You have heard it said... but I say to you..." (Mt 5:21-22, 27-28, 33-34, etc.).[24] So while others uttered *āmēn* as a response to a blessing or a curse, or to signify their assent to the thoughts of another person (1 Cor 14:16; Rev 5:14; 7:12, etc.), Jesus uses *āmēn* to confirm his own statements. It is a usage without parallel in the whole of Jewish literature and the rest of the New Testament.[25] Likewise, Jesus teaches in the imperative mood and not in the participial form that was customary among rabbis.[26] Finally, Jesus is more than an interpreter of the law. Whereas rabbis exhausted biblical texts so that their students could interpret them, Jesus saw himself not only as an interpreter of a text but as the very embodiment of it. At the end of his synagogue sermon at Nazareth, for example, Jesus concludes by saying, "Today this scripture



[i.e., Isa 61:1-2] has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Lk 4:18-21). Other rabbis considered him blasphemous!

3. *Jesus attracts disciples in a different way.* Jewish students typically sought out their teachers, as John 1:35-39 describes.

> The next day John was standing with two of his disciples; and he looked at Jesus as he walked toward him, and he said, "Behold, the lamb of God!" The two disciples heard him say this, and

[20] Lee, 127; cf. Davies, 423-24.

[21] See "Jewish Education and Literacy at the Time of Jesus" in John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew. Rethinking The Historical Jesus.* Vol. 1 (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 271-78 for an extended discussion on Jesus' education; also Lee, 122-23.

[22] Davies, 420.

[23] 1 Cor 15 gives an excellent example of this principle. Paul says, "I hand on to you what I have received...."

[24] Scholars believe this way of articulating statements must definitely be Jesus' since the evangelists would never make up what was such an obvious deviation.

[25] Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology* (New York: Macmillan, 1971), 35-36.

[26] Davies, 420.

> they followed Jesus. Jesus turned, and saw them following, and said to them, "What do you seek?" And they said to him, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), where are you staying?" He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where he was staying; and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour.

Akiba, for example, journeyed from Babylon to Jerusalem to become part of Hillel's training. Robbins describes this traditional process:

> In rabbinic literature, rabbis are not depicted traveling around as Jesus does to find people who will respond to his summons to become disciple-companions. Instead, the tradition emphasizes the initiative by individual people to receive permission from a rabbi to become one of his student-disciples. The stories that characterize the beginning of a teacher/disciple relationship, therefore, receive their plot from the struggle of a young man to gain acceptance by a rabbi rather than the action and summons of a rabbi to attain a response from a person whom he wants as a disciple-companion.[27]

Moreover, rabbis carefully interviewed and screened prospective disciples because their stature was in large part determined by the impressiveness of their disciples.[28]

Discipleship on Jesus' terms, however, is a different matter. First, the Gospels attest to the fact that Jesus' disciples do not choose him.[29] Rather, he "seeks them out" and "calls" them in the midst of their everyday activities (Mk 1:17, 2:14; Mt 4:19; 9:9; cf. Lk 5:10-11, 27-28; Jn 1:35-51). In addition, Jesus selects individuals who may not be the most worthy or likely of prospects. Levi the tax-collector (Mk 2:13-17) is an example. Regarded as a sinner by many, the pious shunned him (Lk 15:1-2). Finally, Jesus' "calls" prompt an immediate, decisive response that testifies to the deep impression he made on people. Followers leave their homes, their relatives, and all their security. Mark 1:16-20 records such an occasion:

> And passing along by the Sea of Galilee, Jesus saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you become fishers of men." And immediately, *they left their nets and followed him.* And going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending the nets. And immediately he called them; and *they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and followed him.*

Such severance from family is not common among rabbinic students, since preoccupation with the Law did not involve a break from the past.[30]

> And although the sacrifices made by the students of the rabbis for the sake of the Torah shine brightly, and although in times of persecution loyalty to their studies often meant death, nevertheless there was a marked difference between a life dedicated to study at the feet of a rabbi, in which the aim was an increasing knowledge of the Law which would eventually 'qualify' a student himself to become a rabbi, and the life of the Christian disciple (often, to judge from 'the Twelve,' not markedly studious by nature!) called to personal loyalty to Jesus in his way. For the one the Torah is the ultimate concern, for the other Jesus himself, and it is this personalism also that made of the *talmid* of Jesus not

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[27] Robbins, *Jesus the Teacher*, 101.

[28] Jones, 34-35.

[29] The synoptic tradition contains instances when the would-be disciples take the initiative, but these attempts fail, and there is no evidence that discipleship would have resulted.

[30] Davies, 421.

another rabbi but an apostle or witness.[31]

4. Jesus' audience is not limited. Many teachers had a limited audience. They spoke to educated persons, most often men, who were seeking some higher insight into interpreting the Law or "wisdom" about divine things or the teaching of a particular philosophical school.[32] Moreover, these people became a closed community. Jesus' teaching, on the other hand, is addressed to the general populace (Mk 3:7-8), in the open air and in the market places. In fact, the influence he had over the crowds alarmed the authorities. Disciples, as well as named and unnamed people among the throngs, are summoned to enter a special relationship with Jesus and his teaching.[33] Remarkably, most of these persons included "outsiders": sinners, the outcasts, and even women and children. Mark records, for example, that Jesus chided his disciples for turning away children (10:13-16). Moreover:

> By rejecting attempts to keep the children away, Jesus affirms the place of women among his followers. [For] if the children were pushed aside, then the women looking after them would have to return to their homes. By accepting the children, Jesus enabled their mothers to hear his word and become believers.[34]

Furthermore, the Syro-Phoenician woman and the Samaritan woman show that a person did not even have to be Jewish to understand Jesus' message about the reign of God and to share in its benefits.[35] Luke also indicates that women accompanied Jesus from Galilee all the way to Jerusalem (8:1-3), but his story of Mary and Martha (10:38-42) best emphasizes their place in Jesus' following.

> The picture of Mary at Jesus' feet makes it clear that she is receiving instructions just as male disciples would have done. Martha's preoccupation with preparing Jesus' meal has kept her from her role of student (v. 40). When Jesus asserts that Mary "has chosen the good part" (Lk 10:42), he breaks with society's expectation that women should behave as Martha does and busy themselves honoring Jesus with a special meal. Jesus insists that he does not require "hospitality" (cf. rejection of preoccupation with physical needs, Lk 8:18; 21:34). Martha should drop her preparations and join her sister (Lk 10:42-43, "one thing is necessary").[36]

5. The goal of learning in Jesus' discipling community is not informational but transformational. While in rabbinic circles learning takes place by listening to what the rabbi says, and appropriating knowledge and method from him, Jesus' "learners" are not called to learn a body of doctrine or the skills of interpretation from a master. Instead they are called *to be with* Jesus, and to listen to his words and to follow his example so that they might partner with him in his work for the kingdom. Consequently, they are summoned to be transformed: to die to themselves; to be born from above; and to become like little children. Such lessons are not learned in fixed locations, but on the road and in the doing!

6. The relationship between Jesus and his disciples is permanent, lifelong. Contrary to other Jewish students who became rabbis themselves after their rabbinic apprenticeship, Jesus' disciples are called to a lifelong relationship with him, and not merely to his teaching. Furthermore, they would never become rabbis in their own

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[31] Davies, 422.
[32] Perkins, 30.
[33] Robbins, 114.
[34] Perkins, 35.
[35] Perkins, 37.
[36] Perkins, 34.

right, but would always remain disciples. Ultimately, however, these *mathetai* are sent out (*apostolein*) all over Palestine to do and to be what they had heard and seen in Jesus. It is a commitment unto death!

In sum, it may be said that Jesus was a charismatic teacher who through unorthodox ways enabled people to stretch beyond the confines of their society, and that his call was to an ongoing experience that is transformative.

Jesus' methodology

Long before audiovisual aids, transparencies, computer technology, and other forms of modern teaching, Jesus attracted, commanded, and influenced multitudes, small groups, and individuals merely by his words and example. Several facets of his personality come to mind in reflecting how he did this: (1) Jesus met people where they were, or, in modern educational parlance, he worked with men and women at their developmental level; (2) he was aware of life around him, so he took his stories and examples from the daily life and experience of people; (3) he was opened to learning and its consequence: changing; (4) he was centered on God as the source of his authority.

1. *Jesus meets people where they are and thus enables them to be what they can be.* Perhaps the chief incentive Jesus provided his hearers to take him seriously was his compassion.[37] It was his way of life. The Greek word *splanchnizomai* best captures the way Jesus meets people. The evangelists use it often. Literally, *splanchnizomai* means "to be moved in one's bowels." The Greeks regarded the bowels as the seat of violent passion such as anger and love while the Jews considered them as the center of the tender affections, especially kindness and pity. For them "bowels" were what we mean today by "heart." Mark says, "As Jesus went ashore he saw a great throng, and he had compassion (*esplanchnisthe*) on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things (6:34). By this he is saying that Jesus was moved in his bowels which means that his heart went out to the people and he met them where they were! No wonder people responded to him as they did, for his words came from the heart. They were liveable, believable, and life-giving!

Jesus also punctuated his words by doing a number of acts that meant something. His eating habits, for example, became a parable in action, for they emanated from his compassion. In fact, there is hardly a page in the Gospels that does not picture Jesus sitting at somebody's table. Incredibly most of his companions were "outcasts!"

> Given that sharing a meal in first-century Palestine signified acceptance of one's table companions, Jesus' behavior signified his acceptance of them. It must have been an extraordinary experience for an outcast to be invited to share a meal with a man who was rumored to be a prophet. He "spoke from the mouth of the Spirit" and therefore his acceptance of them would have been perceived as a claim that they were accepted by God. Implicit in the action is an understanding of God as gracious and compassionate, embracing even the outcasts, those whose mode of life placed them outside the bounds of respectability and acceptance established by conventional wisdom. Jesus' table-fellowship with outcasts was an enacted parable of the grace of God, both expressing and mediating the divine grace.[38]

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[37] Gerard S. Sloyan, *Jesus in Focus. A Life in Its Setting* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1983), 101.

[38] Marcus Borg, *Jesus: A New Vision: Spirit, Culture and the Life of Discipleship* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), 101-2.

Jesus also taught the idea of compassion in his parables. Samaritans, for example, were a despised class; yet it is an unselfish Samaritan who is willing to care for one who otherwise would most likely spurn him (Lk 10:33). Or who can forget the father embracing his son who has gone on the road, living as if there were no tomorrow? He even throws a party "for his dead one who has come back to Life" (Luke 15:11-32). Then there is the employer who casts equity to the wind and pays laborers who worked a few hours at the same rate as those who worked all day (Mt 20:1-16).[39] In every instance, Jesus' illustrations offer a characterization of a compassionate God or an ideal after which people should model themselves. In fact, his story about the Good Samaritan ends with the injunction: "Go and do likewise!" (10:37).

2. *Jesus is aware of life around him and he uses it to full advantage.* Scripture tells us that Jesus grew up in Nazareth, a hill town in Galilee, some twenty miles from the Sea of Galilee and roughly one hundred miles north of Jerusalem. Most of his neighbors would have been farmers who lived in the village and who worked in the fields nearby. Later, he made his home in the seaside village of Capernaum where his neighbors were fishers. The gospels tell us Jesus was a *tektōn*, i.e., a craftsperson in stone, wood or metal; so he neither fished nor farmed. Yet his words indicate that he must have known a lot about both industries, since he uses many examples of these trades in his teaching. Sayings such as "A city set on a hill cannot be hid" or "No one lights a lamp and hides it under a bushel" also derive from everyday experience. Likewise, Jesus uses aspects of nature as standards for teaching. For example: "Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?" (Mt 6:26) or "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you?" (Mt 6:28-30). In each instance, whether through parable, proverbs, or lessons from nature, Jesus used everyday realities to invite his hearers to see things differently.[40] And more often than not, he took these familiar experiences and drove home his point by standing these realities on their head!

> Jesus' eating habits became a parable in action, for they emanated from his compassion.

3. *Jesus is open to learning and its consequence: changing.* Parker Palmer suggests that to learn, one must face transformation.[41] It is an experience Jesus under-

[39] Sloyan, 106.

[40] Borg, 98, suggests that Jesus' teaching ordinarily did not take the form of elaborating or commenting on the Torah, though he obviously knew it and sometimes referred to it. Rather than appealing to sacred text or citing opinions of earlier teachers, he most often appealed to the world of human experience or made observations about nature. As he did so, he used the typical forms of the earlier wisdom tradition.

[41] Parker Palmer, *To Know As We Are Known: A Spirituality of Education* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983), 40.

went himself. Scholars believe that Jesus was originally a disciple of John the Baptist whose fiery message of a punishing God and the need for repentance influenced his early teaching. The Torah, the primary source of conventional wisdom in Jesus' day, consisted of 613 written laws that if followed brought blessings and concomitantly, if violated, did not. Moreover, people were expected to live within very defined expectations and limits heightened after the Roman arrival into Palestine in 63 B.C.E. In response to the threat produced by this occupation, the Pharisees adapted a "Politic of Holiness" to keep the land holy. This strategy in turn emphasized the need of the pious to keep "separate." Categories such as clean and unclean, purity and defilement, sacred and profane, Jew and Gentile, righteous and sinner became key to its fulfillment. "Sinners," that is, any people who violated the law in any way, were to be avoided. Galilee was full of them! For the combined total of Jewish and Roman taxes imposed on farmers (up to 35% of their earnings) caused many of them to become "nonobservant" Jews in their religious practices. This was not due to the attractiveness of Roman and Hellenistic ways but to economic pressures. Jesus' subsequent encounter with these farmers led him to see the limitation of the "conventional wisdom." Thus, his perceptions changed, and with it his rhetoric.[42] For men and women whom society branded "sinners" were no longer seen by him to be so. In fact, they had been sinned against! It is in this discovery, in this transforming grace, that Jesus' message changed from "Repent" to "Come follow me." Furthermore, his way of "inclusion," i.e. everyone has a place at God's table, models a challenge to the traditional thinking. His "New World Order," a.k.a. the "reign of God," becomes a way of transformation. It is the heart of his teaching.[43]

> In the age of instant learning through technology, students are searching for more than a professional competence from their teachers. They are seeking truth...

> There is a timeless quality to much of what he said, simply because the alternative way which he taught not only stood in tension with his social world but also in opposition to the conventional wisdom of any time. Though he was not a systematic theologian or philosopher who divided his teaching into various topics, his sagely teaching nevertheless revolved around three great themes: an image of reality that challenged the image created by conventional wisdom; a diagnosis of the human condition; and the proclamation of a way of transformation.[44]

Some people listened because they could see he lived his message; others were so threatened by the same message that they killed him.

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[42] See Borg, 79-96, for the backdrop to this statement.

[43] Richard Rohr, *Jesus' Plan for a New World. The Sermon on the Mount* (Cincinnati, OH: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1996), charts Jesus' "New World Order."

[44] Borg, 99.

4. *Jesus is centered on God as the Source of his authority.* The Gospels portray Jesus as a man of prayer who regularly withdraws into lonely places to pray (Mk 1:35; 6:46; Lk 5:16). In fact, Luke shows Jesus communing with God before every major decision (3:21; 6:12; 9:18, 29; 22:32, 34; 23:46). Moreover, he implies that the olive grove of Gethsemane is his customary refuge of prayer (22:39). This regular communication with his Father whom he called *Abba* is the fire that kept him focused. Through prayer he entered a silence and solitude so deeply that he could hear the whole world's speech and feel the whole world's connections. He touched that transcendent Spirit from whom all things arise and to whom all things return and who makes all things kindred as they go.[45] It was the source of his authority.

In a recent article, "The Heart of a Teacher: Identity and Integrity in Teaching," Parker Palmer asserts this importance of prayer in a teacher's life, remarking that

> Teaching, like any truly human activity, emerges from one's inwardness.... As I teach, I project the condition of my soul onto my students, my subject, and our way of being together. The entanglements I experience in the classroom are often no more or less than the convolutions of my inner life. Viewed from this angle, teaching holds a mirror to the soul. If I am willing to look in that mirror, and not run from what I see, I have a chance to gain self-knowledge, and knowing myself is as crucial to good teaching as knowing my students and subject.[46]

Jesus' own good teaching is the result of his prayer and his intimate relationship with God.

Jesus vis à vis teachers today

People came in droves to hear Jesus because he spoke like an original thinker and not like a professional scholar.

> That means that he did not spin out endless interpretations of difficult texts and solve artificially complicated questions of casuistry (like the one the Sadducees asked him, about the woman who had seven successive husbands and met them all in heaven), but that he gave people positive advice, on which they could remake their lives. He knew the canonical books intimately, quoted them often, and was never caught in ignorance of them or misunderstanding. Yet he had apparently gone beyond them to build a new doctrine, which he conceived as *completing* the teachings that had guided his nation until then.[47]

Crowds followed him everywhere to listen.

Jesus offered people the hope that their lives could be different, along with a sense of acceptance that gave them the courage to begin to make that difference. Perhaps this is what students need most from us today. For in the age of instant learning through technology, students are searching for more than a professional competence from their teachers. They are seeking truth along with an encouragement from us that will give them the boldness they need to continue their questing.

> A teacher, not some theory, is the living link in this epistemological chain. The way a teacher plays the mediator role conveys both an epistemology and an ethic to the student, both an approach to knowing and an approach to living. I may teach the rhetoric of freedom, but if I teach it *ex cathedra*, asking my students to rely solely on the authority of "the facts" and demanding that they imitate authority on their papers and exams, I am teaching a slave ethic. I am

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[45] Palmer, 124.

[46] *Change*, November/December 1997, 15.

[47] Highet, 192.

> forming students who know neither how to learn in freedom nor to live freely, guided by an inner sense of truth.[48]

This does not mean that we should turn away from facts and theories, but we must teach more than a body of knowledge or a set of skills. People who write about education often point out that the root meaning of "to educate" is "to draw out" and that the teacher's task is not to fill a student's mind with facts but to evoke the truth he or she holds within them; a truth that is both personal and communal.[49] For long after their course work is completed and the facts have faded from their minds, it is the discovered truth they found within themselves that they will remember.

Years ago I read a lovely story that has always stuck with me. It concerns the great Jewish philosopher Martin Buber, whom the President of Haverford College invited to come and speak to the faculty and students, long before ecumenical and interfaith exchanges were popular. Before his talk, however, the whole college was to attend a Quaker prayer meeting which was based on corporate silence. Buber was told that he could break this silence with a brief message if the Spirit quickened him to do so, to which he replied that although he knew the procedure, as a guest, he would never dream of doing so.

> The meeting convened and after ten minutes the president of the college rose and spoke of what a great thing it was that men and women could meet each other across barriers of race, of nationality, of economic status, of age, and could reach out and touch each other. He amplified this by several telling illustrations. He had hardly sat down when Martin Buber rose in his place, looking with his beard and his strong face and piercing eyes as an Old Testament prophet, and after leisurely taking in the whole group with his eyes, he began to speak, saying that although it was a great thing to transcend barriers and to meet another human being, the meeting of another across a barrier was not the greatest thing one person could do for another. There was still something far greater. *For the greatest thing, he continued, that any person could do for another is to confirm the deepest thing he or she has within them.* After this he sat down for there was little more to say.[50]

To do this, however, as Palmer suggests, teachers must create space in their classrooms where 'obedience to the truth' can be practiced.[53] The Greek word for 'to obey' (*hypakouō*) shows us a way. For hidden within this word is a second word *akouō* that means 'to hear.' Students can only obey what they hear, and they can only hear if there are silences. Furthermore, Jesus' example provides a means toward which teachers can create an environment that is conducive to learning: (1) He met people where they are; (2) He was aware of life around him and used people's daily life experiences as examples; (3) He was open to learning with its consequence: changing; (4) He was centered on God as a source of his authority. His injunction "Go and do likewise" (Lk 10:37) challenges us!

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[48] Palmer, 29-30.

[49] Palmer, 43.

[50] Dr. Douglas V. Steere, "The Spiritual Task of Teachers Today," *Sisters Today* 47 (August/September 1975): 7.

[53] Palmer, 69-105.

Rereading Romans: Ethnic Issues (or, "How can I find a gracious community?")

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For Ed Krentz, to whom this issue of *Currents* is dedicated, the New Testament is the location at which his considerable gifts in the classical languages intersect with his commitment to the gospel. His passion is to practice, teach, and live a gospel-centered interpretation of New Testament writings, often the Pauline letters. This article, written to honor Ed, actually picks up on a recent article of his, which ends with reference to a theme (Paul's "inclusive multiculturality") and a text (Rom 15:7) which will shape my own focus here.[1]

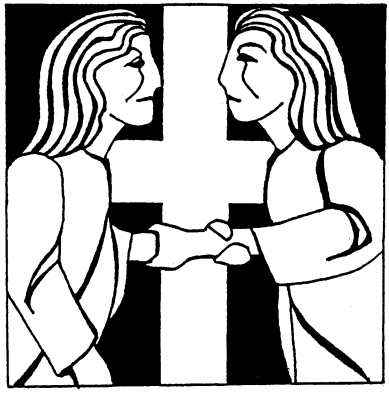
In recent years Ed Krentz was a core member of the Society of Biblical Literature's Pauline Theology Group, which sought to understand the theology of Paul *one letter at a time*.[2] The decision to pursue Paul's theology one letter at a time grew out of the conviction that each Pauline letter is a particular document, written to address a distinct issue or set of issues in a specific Christian community. This stress on each letter's particularity is hard for us to envision, since we read the letters as a collection that forms part of our sacred Scriptures. David Trobisch tries to recapture this idea that Paul sent the letters to certain specific groups of people long ago and far away by referring to a "Peanuts" column in which Linus feels guilty about studying Paul's letters in Church School: "I always feel like I'm reading someone else's mail!"[3]

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[1] "Paul: All Things to All People—Flexible and Welcoming," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 24 (June 1997):244.

[2] The deliberations of the group have been published in a four volume work, with Ed Krentz' contribution on 2 Thessalonians appearing in volume one: "Through a Lens: Theology and Fidelity in 2 Thessalonians," in *Pauline Theology*, vol. I, *Thessalonians, Philippians, Galatians, Philemon*, ed. Jouette M. Bassler (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 52-62.

[3] David Trobisch, *Paul's Letter Collection. Tracing the Origins* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 48.



But while New Testament scholars operate these days with the assumption of the particularity of the Pauline letters, Romans has sometimes been treated as an exception, as a document that summarizes and systematizes Paul's entire theological program. Melanchthon's judgment that Romans is a "compendium of the Christian religion" has for some not lost its force. *The Romans Debate*, edited by Karl Donfried, is an attempt to show that Romans, like the other Pauline letters, is not Paul's "systematic theology textbook" but a particular document addressed to particular issues.[4] Donfried states the significance of this for understanding Romans as follows:

> Obviously, Romans will have a very different meaning if it was conceived by Paul as an eternally valid summary of his theological position, or, if he conceived it as a response to an actual, acute problem... in Roman Christianity. Only when one knows the meaning of an early Christian document in its first-century setting can one adequately interpret and proclaim it in the twentieth.[5]

The assertion in Donfried's last sentence would be challenged by some today who maintain that interpretation starts with the interpreter's own context and concerns and that reconstructing the first century context of, say, Romans, is too problematic to be helpful. It is my view that reconstructing the first century context is, indeed, extremely important and well worth the effort, but that it is equally important to recognize that interpreters come with their own concerns that need to be acknowledged from the start. Interpretation takes place precisely at the intersection of the ancient text, in its life situation, and the life situation of the interpreter. The modern interpreter's concerns can, of course, lead to misunderstandings and distortions of aspects of the ancient text and its alleged contexts. They can, as well, open the text in a new way to give challenge, life and hope in the new situation of the interpreter and his/her community.

Martin Luther's starting point in reading Romans was his own troubled conscience and his own question, "How can I find a gracious God?" The answer he found in Romans, justification by grace through faith (thus not by works, not by human achievement), became the foundation of the Reformation and has brought consolation and confidence before God to an innumerable host of believers from that day to this. But his starting point, his own troubled conscience and his conviction that many in the church of his day sought God's favor by works, by human achievement, led him to some misreadings of Romans and of Paul. To take but one example, starting from the assumption that his own 16th century opponents pushed a righteousness based on works, Luther characterized the Jews in

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[4] *The Romans Debate*, revised and expanded ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991); the Melanchthon reference is from p. xli.

[5] *Ibid.*, xlvii.

Paul's day as those who trusted their own piety and works of righteousness instead of God's grace. We have come to see that this was not at all characteristic of Jews in that day, who based their relationship with God on God's covenantal grace. Thus Stephen Westerholm can say:

> Students who want to know how a rabbinic Jew perceived humanity's place in God's world will read Paul with caution and Luther not at all. [He then wisely adds] On the other hand, students who want to understand Paul but feel they have nothing to learn from a Martin Luther should consider a career in metallurgy.[6]

My own starting point in reading Romans in this article is different from Luther's. I begin with what I see as a critical issue of our own time, and I hope that this reading also will illumine aspects of Romans, as did Luther's. (I have no illusions that those who find my reading unsatisfactory should seek another career and no expectation that it will itself be free of distortions.) The issue with which I begin as I turn to Romans is the ethnic hostilities (or other hostilities, be they racial, tribal, cultural, religious, or ideological) that today threaten the fabric of life itself in many places around the globe—Bosnia-Herzigovina, Rwanda, the Middle East, the central cities across our own land, and on and on. My quest across these deep and sometimes intractable chasms is not "How can I find a gracious God?" (about that I have no doubt, thanks in part to Paul and Luther) but "How can I find a gracious community?" How can groups across deep divides reach out to one another, starting, perhaps, with groups in the church itself? I find in Romans, for all the difference between Paul's setting and our own, a powerful answer.

It is my contention that ethnic issues lie at the heart of Romans and that as Paul discusses his gospel and its implications for life in Christ in this letter ethnic distinctions are constantly in his mind, specifically the ethnic distinction Jew and Gentile, Jew and Greek. As I hope to show, these ethnic divides in Romans threatened to become the occasion for pride and superiority at the expense of the other. God's gracious impartiality and embrace of all—Jew and Greek—was meant to lead all to offer this same embrace. This article will focus on Rom 14:1–15:33, but I shall begin by offering a brief outline of Romans and then showing that ethnic categories dominate the letter from its very first chapter.

1:1-15: introduction—greeting, thanksgiving, opening remarks
1:16-17: the theme—the Pauline gospel of the righteousness of God
1:18–11:36: the righteousness of God for Jews and Gentiles
12:1–15:13: living out God's righteousness in the community
15:14-33: Paul's plans for mission
16:1-23: concluding greetings

Ethnic issues

The explicit references to all of humanity under the rubric Jew and Gentile/Greek begin as Paul states the letter's theme: the gospel "is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (1:16). They continue in the section in which Paul speaks of humanity's universal bondage under sin, 1:18–3:20. Paul asserts in Rom 3:9 that he has "already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin" (cf. 2:9-

[6] Stephen Westerholm, *Israel's Law and the Church's Faith. Paul and His Recent Interpreters* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 173.

11, where "everyone" is twice equated with Jew and Greek, "for God shows no partiality").

In the section that speaks of God's justification of all by grace through faith, as illustrated by Abraham (3:21–4:25), Jews and Gentiles are again explicitly in focus. Notice that the verse so central to Luther's reading of Romans, Rom 3:28 ("For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law"), is followed by these words anchoring in God's oneness (the Shema) God's commitment to all, across ethnic lines:

> Or is God the God of Jews only? Is [God] not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one; and [God] will justify the circumcised on the ground of faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith (3:29-30).

And Abraham, the ancestor both of the uncircumcised and the circumcised (4:11-12) is thus "the father of all of us" (4:15).

These ethnic focuses are again the principal context for chapters 9-11 and chapters 14 and 15. It is this latter passage, which highlights the reasons Paul wrote the letter, to which I now turn.

The reason for Romans in Paul's apostolic ministry—15:14-33

In Rom 15:14-33 Paul outlines his plans for the immediate future—a visit to Rome on his way to Spain and, before that, a visit to Jerusalem—plans that form part of his reason for writing the believers in Rome. He discusses his long-delayed journey to Rome on the way to Spain in vv. 14-24, 28-30, 32, and his journey to Jerusalem in vv. 25-28, 30-31.

Paul's plans to visit Spain and Jerusalem both grow out of his understanding of God's eschatological plan to bring salvation both to Israel and the nations and Paul's understanding of his own role in that plan as "a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles" (Rom 15:16—cf. Paul's assertion at the beginning of the letter that through Jesus Christ he "received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles," 1:5). As Paul read in the Scriptures of God's endtime vindication of Israel, he encountered texts that spoke of the nations sharing in Israel's salvation. It is this image of God's rescue of the Gentiles that Paul draws upon in Romans. He cites Isa 11:10 in Rom 15:12, "The root of Jesse shall come, the one who rises to rule the Gentiles; in him the Gentiles shall hope," while in Rom 15:21 he quotes Isa 52:15, "Those who have never been told of him shall see, and those who have never heard of him shall understand."

This latter text is read by Paul as the "entrance cue" for *his own role* in God's eschatological drama—"I make it my ambition to proclaim the good news not where Christ has already been named..." (Rom 15:20). That's why he had up to now been hindered from coming to Rome; he had to spread the good news to Gentiles throughout the whole eastern Mediterranean region. But he's finished with that now: "from Jerusalem and as far around as Illyricum I have fully proclaimed the good news of Christ" (Rom 15:19). It is ironic in an article discussing ethnic hostilities that Illyricum was a Roman province whose "territory corresponds roughly to present-day Albania and *the lands of the former Yugoslavia (Croatia, Bosnia, Serbia)*."[7] Now what remains before the final curtain

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[7] Luke Timothy Johnson, *Reading Romans. A Literary and Theological Commentary* (New York: Crossroad, 1997), 212, emphasis added.

is for all the Gentiles to hear, even those out on the farthest fringes of the world, in Spain. Enter Paul, apostle to the Gentiles, ready and eager for the task.

When he speaks in Rom 15:16 of being "a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable," he seems to be drawing on images from Isa 66:18-21. That text speaks of God coming to "gather all nations and tongues," of setting "a sign among them" and sending "survivors to the nations...to the coastlands far away that have not heard of my fame or seen my glory," including going "to Tarshish," which may well have been understood to be Spain.[8] The Isaiah passage further declares, "They shall bring all your kindred from all the nations as an offering to the Lord... to my holy mountain Jerusalem.... And I will also take some of them as priests and as Levites, says the Lord."

This Isaiah text is in itself difficult, and the roles played by Gentiles and diaspora Jews are variously construed,[9] but as Paul interprets it in Rom 15:16 ("to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God"), he seems to find himself there as the one who goes to the far-flung nations. And as the Gentiles are brought in as an eschatological offering acceptable to God ("the offering of the Gentiles" seems to mean the offering that consists in the Gentiles rather than an offering that the Gentiles are bringing), Paul sees himself serving as priest. This is shown not only by the words "in the priestly service of God"—*hierourgounta*—but also by the fact that the word translated "minister" ("a minister of Christ Jesus") is *leitourgon*, related to our word liturgist. His mission to Spain and its anticipated saving and triumphant results are surely envisioned by Paul as part of what he describes in Rom 11:25 as the coming in of the fullness of the Gentiles (compare Mk 13:10, "The gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations").

As Paul discusses his gospel and its implications for life in Christ in this letter, ethnic distinctions are constantly in his mind.

What role would the Roman Christians have in this mission to Spain? Paul says in Rom 15:23-24: "I desire, as I have for many years, to come to you when I go to Spain.

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[8] R. D. Aus, "Paul's Travel Plans to Spain and the 'Full Number' of the Gentiles of Rom 11:25," *Novum Testamentum* 21 (1979): 242-46, is cited by Douglas Moo as suggesting "that Spain would have represented for Paul the OT 'Tarshish,' the 'end of the earth' (cf. Isaiah 66) to which Paul must travel to complete his task of bringing Gentiles as an offering to Jerusalem and thus usher in the parousia"—Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 900, n. 19. It will be recalled that when Jonah was asked by God to go east to Nineveh and he wanted to go as far as possible in the opposite direction, he took a ship bound for Tarshish (Jon 1:1-3).

[9] See Norbert Lohfink, "Bund und Tora bei der Völkerwallfahrt (Jesajabuch und Psalm 25)," in *Der Gott Israels und die Völker. Untersuchungen zum Jesajabuch und zu den Psalmen*, Stuttgarter Bibelstudien 154, ed. Norbert Lohfink and Erich Zenker (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Biblewerk, 1994), 57, n. 66.

For I do hope to see you on my journey and to be sent on by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a little while." "To be sent on by you" translates the verb *propempō*, which Douglas Moo calls a "regular technical term for missionary support,"[10] adding:

> What kind of support Paul hoped for is not specified. In keeping with the basic meaning of the verb—"accompany," "escort"—he might be hoping for co-workers to join him in the work. Help with the customs and languages of the new territory may also be included; and almost certainly financial and logistic support.[11]

Latin will have been a principal language for Paul's bringing of the gospel to Spain, and for this and other reasons Paul needed the support of the Christians in Rome for his missionary activity.

Also for his prior journey to Jerusalem (a journey of utmost importance and full of uncertainty and danger) he needed help from Rome, this time in the form of urgent prayer:

> I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in earnest prayer to God on my behalf, that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my ministry to Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints (Rom 15:30-31).

As Paul sat in Corinth writing to Rome and desiring to go west to Rome and Spain, he needed first to go east to Jerusalem with an offering for the Jewish Christian community there, an offering from the predominately Gentile congregations he had founded. This offering played a huge role in Paul's understanding of his own ministry; in addition to this section in Romans 15, he speaks of it in 1 Cor 16:1-4, while in 2 Corinthians he devotes to it two whole chapters (8 and 9). In a monograph on the collection Keith Nickle describes the event as "(1) the realization of Christian charity, (2) the expression of Christian unity, (3) the anticipation of Christian eschatology."[12]

First, the offering was an act of charity for those with physical needs. The offering was for "the poor among the saints in Jerusalem" (15:26). This will call to mind the injunction the Jerusalem church's leaders laid on Paul and Barnabas as they discussed the mission to Gentiles entrusted to Paul (and Barnabas): "They asked only one thing, that we remember the poor, which was actually what I was eager to do" (Gal 2:10).

Second, the collection had eschatological significance for Paul. The discussion earlier in the article about the eschatological pilgrimage of the nations to Jerusalem applied that concept both to Paul's trip to Spain and his journey to Jerusalem, though it must be admitted it is difficult to be sure how Paul specifically saw the connection between these scriptural end-event promises and either part of his current plans. James Dunn makes the connection between eschatology and the trip to Jerusalem this way:

> Also important would have been the widely held Jewish expectation that the wealth of the nations would flow into Jerusalem in the end time.... It would be surprising if this expectation was not a factor somewhere in the background,

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[10] Moo, *Romans*, 901.

[11] Moo, 901, n. 26.

[12] *The Collection. A Study in Paul's Strategy*. Studies in Biblical Theology 48 (London: SCM Press, 1966). My ideas in this section of the essay draw heavily on this book. For another study of the collection see Dieter Georgi, *Remembering the Poor. The History of Paul's Collection for Jerusalem* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1992).

> since it chimes in so well with Paul's sense of eschatological urgency.[13]

Dunn also refers to Rom 11:13-14 ("Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I glorify my ministry in order to make my own people jealous, and thus save some of them"—cf. also 11:11) and asks, "Can we go further and say that Paul saw the collection as part of a climactic strategy to stir the Jews to jealousy (11:13-14) at the success of the gentile mission...?"[14]

It is, in fact, impossible to discuss the eschatological significance of the Gentile offering for the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem without reference to Romans 9-11, especially the section from 11:11 to the end. In these three chapters Paul ponders in depth and in some agony the fact that many of his fellow Jews had not said yes to God's eschatological disclosure of righteousness in the crucified and risen Jesus. To show that the word of God had not failed (9:6) and that God had not rejected God's own people Israel (11:1) Paul used many different arguments (the remnant concept—some Jews had, in fact, said yes; the role of God's election, promise, and mercy; faith rather than works of the law as the way through which God's righteousness is conferred, etc.). But in 11:11-32 he concentrates on ideas that connect Israel and the Gentiles in God's saving plan intended for all, and Paul concentrates particularly on God's determination not to let the stumbling of some in Israel become an irreversible fall (11:11).

First of all, Rom 11:11-32 shows that even this no on the part of some in Israel—variously described as "stumbling" (11:11-12), "rejection" (11:15), "unbelief" (11:20, 23), "disobedience" (11:30-31)—was somehow connected to the Gentile attaining of salvation. "Through their stumbling salvation has come to the Gentiles"—11:11 (cf. 11:30, "you [Gentiles]... have now received mercy because of their disobedience"). And the clear emphasis of this section as a whole is almost entirely on the more positive things that God still has in store for Israel, which are repeatedly hinted at in vv. 11-24 and then triumphantly trumpeted in vv. 25-32, the climax of the entire theological exposition in Romans from 1:18–11:36.

In verses 11-24 Paul considers the possibilities of a reversal of this partial no. Romans 11:12 trumps the bad news-good news of the present (their stumbling/defeat means riches for the world/the Gentiles) with a much more glorious prospect: "How much more will their full inclusion mean!" (cf. 11:15b—"what will their acceptance be but life from the dead!"). And in verse 24, using the olive tree image that controls vv. 16-24, Paul tells the Gentiles, if you have been "grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these natural branches be grafted back into their own olive tree" (cf. v. 23: "And even those of Israel, if they do not persist in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again"). Paul sees the salvation that has come to the Gentiles through his ministry to be in the service of provoking Israel to jealousy so that some of those who had not said yes may yet be saved (11:11, 13-14).

But it is in vv. 25-32 that the climactic announcement is made, the mystery unfolded, that "a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so [or and then] all Israel will be saved" (vv. 25-26). By "all Israel" here Paul almost surely means physical Israel as a whole, not the elect remnant in Israel and not the full number of believers

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[13] James Dunn, *Romans 9-16*. Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 874.

[14] *Ibid.*

God will save both from Israel and the Gentiles.[15] The Scripture quote in vv. 26 and 27 and almost every line of vv. 28-32 confirm for me this understanding of all Israel. Of physical Israel, and not of the church as somehow superseding her, Paul says "as regards election they are beloved, for the sake of their ancestors; for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (vv. 28-29). God has not abandoned and will not abandon Israel. And this is the very thought that permits Paul to bring to a close his eleven-chapter discussion of righteousness and sin, of the human plight and God's gracious act of justification. It permits him to pronounce the intention of God to show mercy to all—here the focus is on *even the Jew* just as surely as in Rom 3:29-30 it was on *even the Gentile*: "For God has imprisoned all in disobedience *so that [God] may be merciful to all (that is, Jew as well as Gentile)*" (v. 32). The whole eleven-chapter theological exposition in Romans could not have had a more powerful ending; nothing remains but doxology (vv. 33-36).

Returning to Romans 15 and the offering for the poor in Jerusalem, it is not only an act of charity and an eschatological act, it is an act of unity between Jew and Gentile. When Paul says in Rom 15:26, "For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to share their resources with the poor among the saints in Jerusalem," the words translated "to share their resources" are, more literally, "to make a certain *koinonian*." The offering is an expression of, and actually is, a *koinonia*, a fellowship, a sharing, an expression of unity (the same word is used about the offering in 2 Cor 8:4 and 9:13). The whole event is an act embodying mutual dependence and relationship: "for if the Gentiles have come to share in their [the Jews'] spiritual blessings, they ought to be of service to them in material things" (15:27). This act of unity is being dared in a fragile and dangerous context—it is unity sent into a chasm of suspicion. Paul has to ask the Roman Christians to pray earnestly that he will be rescued from unbelievers (Jews in Jerusalem who have not acknowledged Jesus as risen Messiah) and that the Jewish Christians will accept the offering despite their reservations about him and his ministry. It is ironic and tragic that "Remember the poor" in Gal 2:10 is sandwiched between Paul and the Jerusalem leaders extending to one another the "right hand of fellowship" and Paul's violent disagreement with Peter over table fellowship and food laws—which leads us to the reason for Romans not in Paul's ministry but in the Roman house churches.

The reason for Romans in the Roman house churches—14:1–15:13

If Romans 15:14-33 reveals Paul's reason for writing Romans out of his own ministry, Rom 14:1–15:13 grounds the letter in an issue in the Roman Christian community. They are at odds with one another over issues of worship and life. The unity between Jew and Greek of which the offering to Jerusalem is an expression is threatened at Rome.

At issue is a dispute between "the weak" and "the strong," though it is interesting that these terms are infrequently used here (the strong only once, 15:1, and the weak three times, 14:1, 2 and 15:1). The principal issue is over food: "Some believe in eating any-

[15] Charles H. Cosgrove, *Elusive Israel. The Puzzle of Election in Romans* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), argues that the phrase is open to all three interpretations and from that draws some interesting and important consequences for the reader of the Romans text.

thing, while the weak eat only vegetables" (14:2; cf. 14:21—"it is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that makes your brother or sister stumble"). Also at issue is the observance/nonobservance of particular days or festivals: "Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike" (14:5). It is likely that the dispute is over the observance or nonobservance in the Christian house churches of the Jewish food laws (though "vegetarianism" would not necessarily suggest such a background) and Jewish festivals, perhaps particularly the sabbath. Despite attempts to see a different background, Dunn's conclusion and supporting arguments seem to me correct:

> ...here Paul must have at least the dietary rules of Jews and Jewish Christians in view, whatever other practices can be included within its sweep.
>
> (1) The whole letter is oriented to the issue of Jew and Gentile, and how they stand in relation to the gospel and to each other.... [Notice] the way he rounds [the discussion] off, by repeating his call for mutual acceptance (cf. 14:1) with explicit reference to the larger thematic Jew/Gentile issue (15:7-13)....
>
> (2) The terms of the discussion itself (14:1–15:6) are most clearly applicable to particularly Jewish concerns. The talk of "clean" (*katharos*—v. 20) and especially "unclean" (*koinos*—v. 14) is characteristically and in the latter case distinctively Jewish.... And the concern about festivals is equally characteristic of Judaism.[16]

This dispute, like the letter as a whole, is about ethnic issues, about issues between Jews and Gentiles. This is true despite the fact that not all Jewish Christians were on one side of the issue (the weak, who believe that faithfulness to God requires they continue to observe the food laws associated with the covenant) and not all gentile Christians on the other (the strong, who have no such scruples about food). Paul and some other Jewish Christians were among the strong (cf. 15:1) while some gentile Christians, perhaps especially those who had been associated with the synagogue before they came to faith in Jesus, will have believed it appropriate to follow the dietary laws and observe sabbath. No matter who was on which side, the issue was over observances that marked the boundary between Jew and Gentile and set God's covenant people Israel over against the rest of humanity.

The offering for the poor in Jerusalem is not only an act of charity... it is an act of unity between Jew and Gentile.

Paul's goal for the fragmented Roman Christians is that they "live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, so that together [they] may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (15:5-6). The means toward that goal are highlighted in the very next verse, Rom 15:7, "Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God," which I regard as the climax and "punch line" of the whole ethical admonition section of Romans (12:1–15:13), if not of Romans as a whole.[17] It

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[16] Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 799-800.

[17] N. T. Wright, in *The Climax of the Covenant. Christ and the Law in Pauline*

> They are to welcome one another in the midst of their strong disagreement.

would, in fact, be quite apt, following the theme of Romans in 1:16-17, to use Rom 15:7 as a summary of the body of the letter as a whole: 1:18–11:36, Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God; 12:1–15:13, Welcome one another, therefore.

As is clear from Rom 15:7 Paul's admonition applies to both (or all) sides of this dispute. They are to refrain mutually from judging and despising those with whom they disagree: "Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgment on those who eat," 14:3 (cf. 14:4, 10, 13).

But it is also true, as has frequently been recognized, that the burden of the admonition is directed particularly at the strong, as is clear from the passage's opening verse: "Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarreling over opinions," 14:1. Before a discussion of the focus on the strong, note two things about this use of the word "welcome" in 14:1. One, as in 15:7, it is grounded in the welcome that has been received (your welcome by Christ in 15:7, the despised/judged one's welcome by God here—for God has welcomed them, 14:3). Second, as "not for the purpose of quarreling over opinions" indicates, this welcome of one with whom you disagree over what each of you sees to be basic issues is independent of and prior to any attempt to "settle" the issue by coming to agreement on who is "right." They are to welcome one another in the midst of their strong disagreement. Now, as to the focus on the strong, this is clear in almost the entire section from 14:13b ("resolve instead never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of another"—cf., from a passage discussing related issues, 1 Cor 8:1–11:1, the admonition in 8:9, "But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak") to 15:1 ("We who are strong ought to put up with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves").

If it is true that the main thrust of 14:1–15:13 is to restore and maintain the unity of the Christian house churches in Rome by admonishing especially the strong, and if it is true that the strong are predominately though not exclusively Gentiles in danger of despising their weak and "unenlightened" (predominately Jewish Christian) brothers and sisters, then one of the contexts for the letter is gentile Christian arrogance over against Jews and/or Jewish Christians.[18] Has Paul already indicated that this is a problem at the *beginning* of the ethical admonition section of Romans? He has: "I

Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 235, regards 15:7-13 as "the climax of the entire epistle."

[18] Mark Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans. The Jewish Context of Paul's Letter* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), has argued that the Christians in Rome at the time Romans was written had a close relationship with the synagogues and that the weak were *non-Christian Jews*. Although this book has many excellent insights that will influence future readings of Romans, the argument that the weak are not believers in Jesus as Messiah is not convincing to me, nor is Nanos' assertion that the authorities to whom the Christians are called to submit in Rom 13:1-7 are the *synagogue authorities*.

say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think," 12:3. And with even more clarity, and with unmistakable focus precisely *on the Gentiles*, he has brought that home in the chapter that closes the theological section of the letter, Rom 11:11-36.[19]

The last word in the three-chapter (9-11) wrestling with the partial Jewish no to the gospel is God's final and unfailing commitment to Israel and God's final and unfailing attack on gentile Christian arrogance over against the Jews. "Now I am speaking to you Gentiles" (11:17): "do not boast over the [Jewish] branches [broken off so that you might be grafted in]" (v. 18); "you stand only through faith. So do not become proud, but stand in awe" (v. 20). In fact the monumental mystery of the salvation of all Israel when the full number of the Gentiles has come in (vv. 25-26) is disclosed by Paul "so that you may not claim to be wiser than you are, [gentile] brothers and sisters" (v. 25).

Before bringing the article to a close I shall mention a historical event that may clarify and sharpen the reading of Romans this article is proposing, namely the expulsion of Jews from Rome by the emperor Claudius, perhaps about 49 C.E. (cf. Acts 18:2, which speaks of Aquila and Priscilla recently arriving in Corinth "because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome").[20] Claudius seems to have expelled many Jews and with them, we may presume, many Jewish Christians.[21] As a consequence the Christian communities in Rome, which from the start likely had a strong Jewish component in membership and leadership, were left largely in the hands of gentile Christians, who will in all likelihood have changed the ethos of Christian life and worship with respect to observances associated with the Jewish laws. When Claudius died in 54 C.E. the edict seems to have been lifted by Nero, and Jews and Jewish Christians returned to Rome in some numbers (Prisca (=Priscilla) and Aquila have returned and have a house church in Rome according to Rom 16:3-4, a chapter that lists other Jewish Christians among those to be greeted in Rome). It is not hard to imagine that the returning Jewish Christians found a climate among the Christians in Rome that did not seem congenial and sympathetic to them and to their ways of life and worship. Such a scenario certainly fits what the text of the letter itself offers us.

Conclusion

Whether we take into account the edict of Claudius or ignore it, we have in Romans a letter in which Paul writes out of his own situation, poised to go to Jerusalem with the offering, eager to visit Rome and be sent on to Spain by the Roman Christians, whose

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[19] On the much-disputed issue of who the primary addressees of Romans are, Jewish Christians, gentile Christians, or both, I believe the correct answer is both, though in several places the thrust of the argument is directed primarily, and sometimes exclusively, to gentile Christians. But I am not persuaded by Stanley Stowers' challenging book *A Rereading of Romans. Justice, Jews and Gentiles* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994) that the intended audience of the letter as a whole is exclusively gentile.

[20] I say *may* clarify because the history and consequences of the edict are much disputed. James C. Walters, *Ethnic Issues in Paul's Letter to the Romans. Changing Self-Definitions in Earliest Roman Christianity* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1993), builds a strong case for using the edict to understand Romans, while Nanos, *Mystery*, 372-87, challenges such a reading at almost every point.

[21] Possibly even some gentile Christians who had associated themselves with the synagogues and observed the Jewish laws, according to Walters, *Ethnic Issues*, 58-59.

unity will have been important (1) in its own right, since it is based on the oneness of the welcoming God, and (2) as a grounding for their support of the final chapters of his eschatological mission. But it is precisely this unity in Rome that is not secure, and so he writes out of the situation of the congregations in Rome as well. He writes to ground and strengthen their unity, threatened especially across ethnic lines. It is a letter about the unity of Jews and Greeks, alike in sin (Rom 3:9), alike in God's justifying grace (3:28-30). What is in doubt is whether the Roman Christians, graced by this gracious God, will be gracious to one another, especially whether those now in power and control can welcome and treasure those who seem to them on the margin.

On the brink of a new millennium the world today is being asked whether it is possible to live together across ethnic (as well as racial, cultural, economic) barriers without destroying one another. On the day I write these final sentences President Clinton is in Bosnia (in "Illyricum") visiting American troops trying to postpone if not avert further genocide. Whether the Christian communities around the world can be any help to the world in promoting ethnic understanding rather than supporting and abetting ethnic terror could depend on how, with respect to these Christian communities' own internal life, they answer Paul's question, "How can I find a gracious community?" *In our own congregations and denominations can we live in welcoming unity with one another, across ethnic and every other line, even and especially prior to coming to agreement on important issues of worship and life about which we have strong differences?* As one step in the right direction I propose as the lens through which Romans is read and as the springboard from which it is lived Rom 15:7: "Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God."

The Letter of James: Friend of God[1]

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The Letter of James was probably written pseudonymously in the latter part of the first century, likely in the name of James the brother of Jesus. It was directed to Christian communities outside Palestine in "the diaspora" (1:1). The few explicit references to Jesus (1:1; 2:1), the address to the twelve tribes, and the view of the Judean law as a means of salvation (2:8) suggest that the author and audience may have been primarily Judean-Christian in orientation. The audiences were perhaps communities of poor people experiencing oppression from non-Christian wealthy elites (2:5-7; 5:1-6) and in some danger of embracing the worldview of their oppressors. The author wrote to encourage these communities to endure faithfully until the Lord (Jesus) returned soon (5:7-11; cf. 1:2-12). In so doing, the author promoted "wisdom from above"—



This "letter" really amounts to a series of ethical exhortations...

the correct beliefs, the proper values, and the right behavior that would enable human life in community to thrive in dependence on God (3:13-18).

The work begins as a letter (1:1), but this "letter" really amounts to a series of ethical exhortations rooted in the apocalyptic wisdom, legal traditions, and prophetic judgments of Judaism. Traditionally scholars have thought that the series lacked a coherent unity. Recently, however, some have argued that the exhortations are united by common themes, recurring images, repeated rhetorical strategies, a consistent style, key words that link the exhortations, chiastic patterns, consistent ethical norms, and a coherent worldview.

Here I will dwell on the last two items—consistent ethical norms and a coherent worldview—in order to show how the beliefs and values of James do indeed reveal a coherent conceptual and ethical worldview.

The two ways: friend of God or friend of the world

James expresses coherence and consistency in a contrast between two ways of living. The ethical traditions of Judaism were sometimes expressed in the "two ways"—the evil way and the good way. Similarly, Greco-Roman traditions were sometimes expressed by means of a "rhetoric of contrast," which praised good and condemned evil. In both approaches, the good way was depicted in a particular way and then the evil way was portrayed as the mirror opposite of the good way. Such contrasts are found throughout the New Testament in both narrative and epistolary writings.

In these traditions of contrast as expressed in the New Testament, the evil way usually represents the human condition, that is, the author's view of what is wrong with human beings. By contrast, the good way expresses the author's vision for human life under God. In the course of showing these two ways, the author also depicts the means by which people are transformed from the evil way in order to embrace the good way. That is, the author shows what means of salvation God provides to liberate people from the evil way of the human condition in order to empower people to live the vision of the good way for human life.[2]

In James, the two ways are expressed in terms of being either "friends of the world" or "friends of God" (4:4; cf. 2:23)[3]—with the following characteristics for each way.[4]

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[1] For ten years I have been privileged to be a colleague of Edgar Krentz at LSTC in what has been for me a most satisfying collegial relationship and a very meaningful friendship. For three years Ed and I taught the New Testament Methods course together. One of those years we used the Letter of James as the case study. This essay represents the fruits of that initial labor together and is dedicated to Ed, who is truly a "friend of God."

[2] This procedure of interpreting James follows the format for analysis I employed to interpret other New Testament writings in *The Challenge of Diversity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996).

[3] The translations of James in this article are my own.

[4] After formulating this article, I came across several others who also deal with the contrasts in James, each of whom helped me to sharpen the contrasts presented here. I am particularly grateful in this regard to the writings of Timothy Cargal, John Elliott, and Luke Johnson.

Friends of the world	*Friends of God*
outsiders	insiders
earthly "wisdom"	wisdom from above
desiring, lacking things	being whole, lacking nothing
succumbing to desire	enduring temptation
impure/stained	pure/unstained
unbridled tongue	bridled tongue
showing partiality	not discriminating
battling and warring	yielding
bitter jealousy	mercy
selfish ambition	compassion
arrogance, boasting	humility
anger	meekness
judging, speaking evil, cursing	silence, blessing
giving birth to death	healing, forgiving, saving
competitive, divisive	peaceful, cooperative
unstable, broken communities	stable, unified communities
judgment without mercy	salvation—kingdom/crown

In James, the two ways are expressed with metaphors of growth. Often this growth is expressed in images from nature—conception, pregnancy, birth, fruit-bearing plants, rains for the field, sowing and harvest, and so on. The images mainly show a progressive growth of evil and a progressive growth of good, each dynamic moving toward the "maturity" of its respective end. The idea of maturity or "perfection"—the attaining of the goal of something or someone—is a central theme in James. As such, evil moves progressively from its conception as desire, through temptation to sin, and then gives birth to death and destruction (1:14-15). Thus, evil grows to maturity and reaches its goal; that is, evil moves to attain its full destructive expression from what is implicit in unchecked desire. In like manner, good begins with the implanted word of God, which is then welcomed with faith, which in turn comes to fulfillment by good fruits done on behalf of the poor and oppressed (1:18-27). Thus, good also grows to maturity and reaches its goal; that is, good progresses so that people attain the purpose for which they were created as human beings under God.

Regarding these progressive movements in opposite directions, James urges readers to reject friendship with the world and to choose friendship with God. James also warns the friends of God about two pitfalls: not to be a friend of the world at the same time as they are claiming to be friends of God, and not to think that faith is adequate unless it matures to good works.

In this essay, I will first of all explain the two ways (the evil way and the good way), then deal with the two pitfalls for the friends of God, and lastly show the transforming work of God that enables people to reject friendship with the world and to become friends of God.

The human condition: "friends of the world"

For James, the problem with people is that they are friends of the world; that is, people look to the world for the norms of their behavior.[5] The world's norms are followed by people who are outside the community and who belong to the world (although people inside the community are tempted to embrace them). Such friendship is characterized by a desire for the things of the world—wealth, power, status, and earthly pleasures. Worldly wisdom tells people to pursue their self-interests and to acquire whatever they desire in whatever way they can. However, if people seek to meet their desires from the world, the result will be competitiveness, the breakdown of human community, and ultimately a final judgment. James claims that such a mentality is "not wisdom from above, but something earthly, unspiritual, demonic" (3:14-16).

There is a close connection in James between desire and envy, between ambition and jealousy.

As we have said, there is a natural progression to evil on the analogy of the birth process: "People are tempted by their own desire, being lured and enticed by it. Then desire, when conceived, becomes pregnant with sin, and sin, when brought to full [mature] term, gives birth to death" (1:14-16). There is no stagnation to evil. It is an active reality with a natural development that leads to death. This progressive conception-to-birth analogy provides a useful framework for the discussion of evil in James.

Desire. For James, evil begins with human desire, desire that comes from the lack of things, an incompleteness. Desire need not lead to sin. If people lack something, they can look to God to provide a wisdom that enables them to find wholeness from God without the things of the world (1:5). However, if one looks to the world rather than to God to meet the desire, then temptation and sin follow. In James, desire for the things of the world is a powerful force, expressed variously by words such as "cravings," "selfish ambition," "envy," and "bitter jealously" (3:14; 4:1-3)

Temptation. The second step occurs when desire leads to temptation: "People are tempted by their own desire, being lured and enticed by it" (1:14). Temptation comes when we do not have what we desire: "We desire and we do not have.... We are jealous and we cannot obtain..." (4:2). Desire grows into cravings that are frustrated by the lack of fulfillment. Furthermore, we become angry when we do not get what we desire (1:20). The temptation, then, is to get what we desire from the world and to obtain it in whatever way we can.

There is a close connection in James between desire and envy, between ambition and jealousy. In peasant societies of the ancient world, people experienced all material goods and human qualities as limited and in short supply. There was only so much wealth, possessions, houses, land, children, power, and honor to go around. Therefore, people did not just desire to get something like someone else's—assuming there was

[5] In his article on friendship in James, Luke Johnson suggests this understanding of what it means to be a friend.

an unlimited supply of things, and people simply needed to acquire them on their own. Rather, people desired precisely what someone else had, and they wanted to get it from them. People coveted what others had, and the only way to get it was to take it from them. Thus, in peasant societies, the world was experienced as a closed system of limited goods, so that to acquire something was to deprive someone else of it.[6] When people saw in others what they wanted for themselves, their desires and cravings for these things naturally led to envy and bitter jealously. The result was a highly competitive culture characterized by agonistic and antagonistic relationships.

People who desire things from the world have failed to ask God for wisdom as the true way to meet a desire. By looking to the world to meet their desires, people "indulge their hearts" (4:3).

Sin. Desire, when so indulged by temptation, leads to sin. As James says, "Desire once conceived becomes pregnant with sin" (1:4). Sin comes when people act on temptation. Sin occurs because of the things people do in order to obtain what they desire—whether it be possessions or status or power. Since they must obtain what they desire from someone else, they will commit sin in order to get it. As James puts it, "We desire and we do not have, and so we murder. We are jealous and we cannot obtain, and so we battle and make war" (4:2). Throughout the letter, James names all kinds of sins that fulfill the desires expressed in selfish ambition and bitter jealousy. James distinguishes two such kinds of sins: sins of speech and sins of action.

"Sins of speech" done out of selfish desire and jealousy are connected with the failure to control the tongue: cursing (3:9-10), speaking evil (4:11), dishonoring the poor (1:24), lying and boasting against the truth (3:14), and blaspheming the name of God's people (2:7). James thinks that the tongue controls the whole body, as a bridle controls the movements of a horse or a small rudder controls a huge ship (3:2-4). Hence, with no control over the tongue, there is no control over the whole person. In James' view, every species of animal can be tamed and has been tamed, but "the human tongue no one can tame." James concludes that the tongue is "an unstable evil" (3:7-8) which can cause great destruction. The tongue is like a small fire that can ignite a huge forest (3:5-6). "It stains the whole body, sets on fire the cycle of nature, and is itself set on fire by hell" (4:6). The culmination of James' concern about the sins of speech is that the tongue is "full of death-bearing poison." Words are capable of murderous injury (4:8). Such sins of speech represent behavior typical of those who look to the world to meet their desires.

"Sins of action" done out of selfish desire and jealousy include adultery (2:11), murder (2:11; 5:6), wars and battles (4:1-2), dishonoring the poor (2:6), neglecting widows and orphans (1:27), failing to provide for the naked and the hungry (2:14-16), oppression (2:6; 5:1-6), dragging into court (2:6), and withholding by fraud the wages of the sowers and harvesters (5:4). These actions serve various desires to gain or maintain wealth or status or power over people. It is the rich, especially, who are guilty of these sins of action. Thus, James says of the rich: "You luxuriated on the earth and took pleasure. You fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. You condemned, you murdered innocent people" (5:5-6). The

[6] In his commentary on James, Luke Johnson suggests the influence on James of this experience of the world as a closed system. I have amplified it here with the concept of limited goods as presented by Bruce Malina.

rich seek to get what they desire without restraint and without regard for others.

The sins of speech and action are the opposite of the fulfillment of the perfect law of freedom that says, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (2:8,12). This single law is the perfect expression of the law as a whole. In short, sin is a matter of being "without mercy." For James, selfish ambition and bitter jealousy are the opposite of mercy. Anyone who commits a sin of speech or action done without mercy has transgressed this law of mercy toward the neighbor and is thus liable for the whole law (2:10-11). Sins can be forgiven, but only if there is profound remorse (4:7-10) and confession (5:15-17). Without remorse and confession, sin moves on to its ultimate goal.

Destruction and death. The next stage is the outcome: "...and sin, when brought to full term, gives birth to death" (1:15). On the one hand, the perpetrator brings death and destruction to the victims of their sin—as a result of murders, cursing, the death-bearing poison of the tongue, battles, wars, and oppression. At the same time, death and destruction also come to the perpetrators. This is especially true in the case of the wealthy. As James excoriates: "your riches have rotted; your clothes have become moth-eaten; your gold and silver have corroded" (5:2-3).

Sin also destroys community. James is very oriented toward community-building. As such, he condemns behavior that destroys community and undermines a peaceful society. For James, the wisdom of the world results in "instability and every foul matter" (3:14-16). The conflicts within people become the seedbed for conflict among people in competition for limited resources. Such unchecked desire is the source of "wars and battles" in the human community (4:1-2). Thus, the wisdom of the world marked by "selfish ambition and bitter jealousy" (3:15) destroys individuals and disintegrates community.

God's final judgment. For James, the final destructive consequence of evil occurs within the larger apocalyptic framework of an imminent final judgment. When the Lord comes, evil will be judged directly by God. There is only one judge, the one who is able "to destroy" (4:12). Condemnation is coming soon; the judge is standing at the gate (5:9). Those who judge others will be judged (5:9). Those whose every word is not as good as an oath will come under judgment (5:12). God will oppose the arrogant (4:6). And the harshest judgment will be reserved for the rich (5:1). The riches of a person will be as testimony against them in the day of judgment and "will eat your flesh like fire" (5:3). The treasures that the rich have stored up will be the judgment against them in the last day. "Weep and howl over the miseries coming to you" (5:1), James writes of the rich, because "judgment will be without mercy for those who show no mercy" (2:13).

Vision for life: "friends of God"

By mirror contrast, the vision for life is that people become friends of God (2:23; 4:4); that is, people look to God for the norms of their behavior. A friend of God looks to God for everything that is needed. The desire God placed in humans was not meant to be expressed in jealousy and conflict over the things of this world, but was meant to be expressed in the wisdom of God (3:13–4:5). So, a friend of God looks to the wisdom from above (1:5). Such wisdom is "first pure, then peaceable, yielding, compliant, full of righteousness and good fruits, unwavering, unhypocritical" (3:17). The behaviors and attitudes of those who live by the wisdom from above will result in community that brings healing and wholeness. In

the end, those who love the Lord will be "heirs of the kingdom" (1:4).

Again, the model is one of growth to maturity. As the process of evil is portrayed by the analogy of a woman giving birth, the process of salvation is depicted by the analogy of the male role in bringing life: "By his own purpose, God gave us birth by a word of truth so that we might be a kind of first fruits of his creatures" (1:18). The process begins with "the implanted word that is able to save your souls" (1:21) and leads to a reception by faith that is then brought to completion through endurance and good works. Through this process, people attain the full maturity they were meant to have as human beings in community; that is, they "become whole and mature, lacking in nothing" (1:4).

God's gifts. The process begins with the activity of God—in particular, the gifts of God—instead of what the world offers. "Every good giving and every perfect [mature, maturing] gift is from above," says James, not from this world. They are "perfect" gifts that bring recipients to "perfection;" that is, these gifts enable people to become the mature fruit-bearing creatures that people were meant to be. These gifts include creation, the law, the implanted word, wisdom, blessings, more grace, mercy, healing, forgiveness, and salvation.

Unlike the goods of the world, the gifts from God are unlimited. In this regard, James challenges the view that the world is a closed system of limited goods because God gives unlimited gifts, gifts that can meet the needs of people in the way God intended for needs to be met. There is no reason for competition and conflict over the limited goods of the world, because God can meet human needs from above. People can ask from God who "gives to all unreservedly" and "it will be given to them" (1:5).

Unlike the goods of the world, the gifts from God are unlimited.

Faith. The progression toward wholeness continues then with the response to these gifts expressed by faith. Faith is turning away from evil and turning toward God: "Therefore," James writes, "putting aside all filth and the excess of evil, receive with meekness the implanted word..." (1:21). Faith is the active "receiving" of the word, expressing the hospitality a person should have toward the gifts of God. Those who have faith are "hearers" of the word (1:22-25); they are "quick to listen, slow to speak..." (1:19). For James, faith is the belief that God is the one and only God (2:19) and that from beginning to end all wisdom, guidance, and resources for life come from God alone (4:7-8). Of course, looking to God to meet all needs includes looking to the community that acts in God's name.

The whole relationship between God and humans, between the divine gift-giver and humans with faith, can be summarized by this metaphor in James: "Heaven gave a shower, and the earth brought forth her harvest" (5:18). That is, all good things come from above like a shower of rain watering the earth, and the earth in turn is able thereby to bring forth a harvest. When people receive by faith the gifts from above, they are able to come to maturity by yielding good fruit (cf. 5:7).

Thus, receiving, hearing, and believing are only the beginning of a faithful

response to God's gifts. Faith itself needs to come to maturity. For James, faith moves toward maturity in two ways: on the one hand, by successfully enduring the temptations of the world and, on the other hand, by expressing faith in works of speech and action. Both of these ways are crucial, because they correspond to James' definition of true religion: "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress [doing works] and to keep oneself unstained by the world [enduring temptation]" (1:27). That is, do good and avoid evil.

Maturity by enduring temptation. In the opening passage of the letter, we see the first means of progression toward maturity and wholeness through the facing of temptations: "Consider it all joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face various temptations, knowing that the successful testing of your faith leads to endurance, and let endurance become a mature work, so that you may be mature and whole, lacking in nothing" (1:2-4). For James, to endure temptation is to be successfully tested. Enduring temptation means to thwart the power of desire to seek fulfillment from the world. By enduring temptation, people will not "wander from the truth" (5:19-20) but keep themselves "unstained by the world" (1:27). The temptation itself does not bring maturity; rather, temptation becomes an occasion to look to God for one's needs and thereby to develop endurance in faith.

What enables people to move toward maturity through endurance is that they keep on looking to God for wisdom: "If any lack wisdom, let them ask God" (1:5). By looking to God and thereby enduring the temptation to meet their desires from the world, people "strengthen their hearts" (5:8). By being successfully tested, people are blessed and show that they love God (1:12).

Maturity by doing good works. Faith also matures progressively by being expressed in works, for true religion is "to care for orphans and widows in their distress" (1:27). In regard to Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, James writes that "faith was working together with the works, and by the works faith was brought to maturity" (2:22). The recurring metaphor of "bearing fruit" depicts the natural process of maturation from seed to fruit-bearing tree or to grain-bearing plant. In this way, plants attain the goal or purpose for which they were created. So also, faith comes to maturity by bearing fruit, because wisdom from above is "full of righteousness and good fruits" (3:18; cf. 5:18). In this way, people are "made righteous by works and not by faith alone" (2:24).

James offers Abraham and Rahab as examples of people who became "friends of God" because they did works that were expressions of their faith (2:18-26). By their actions, they each showed a radical dependency on God that relinquished any chance of meeting their desires from this world—Abraham by being willing to sacrifice his progeny and Rahab by showing hospitality to the enemy. Each work demonstrated the faith they had by bringing their faith to maturity in works. And Rahab's act expressed mercy through hospitality toward strangers.

This production of good works as a expression of the maturity of faith is the carrying out of the kingdom-law of freedom, the law of love and mercy: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (2:8). James writes that people are to "So *speak* and so *act* as those who are going to be judged by the law of freedom" (2:12). Note again the two kinds of works—works of speech and works of action. These correlate positively to the negative sins of speech and action. People should "show mercy" both in speech and in action (2:13) as the means of express-

ing the kingdom-law of freedom.

Faith comes to maturity in works of speech. Here the control of the tongue is a positive virtue that "shows mercy." The mature person bridles the whole body by bridling the tongue, just as one puts a bridle on a horse to control the horse and just as a captain guides a large ship with the movement of a small rudder (3:3-4). Such control is crucial for the works of speech. One who controls the tongue will not judge, not speak evil of another, not grumble against another, not curse those made in the image of God, not lie, not take an oath, and not boast against the truth. "If someone makes no mistake in speaking, that is a mature person" (3:2). People who bridle the tongue are "quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger" (1:19). For James, silence—the refusal to commit sins of speech—is a positive virtue.

One expresses mercy in acts of speech not only by controlling the tongue from doing harm but also by using the tongue to do good. Thus, one who controls the tongue will bless, praise God, pray, repent, confess faith, forgive, and offer correction. The tongue is meant to "bless the God and Father" and to bless rather than curse "those made in the image of God" (3:9-10). Mature speaking always involves speaking the truth without the need to swear an oath (5:12). Mature speaking involves speaking words that are backed by action; that is, not wishing a naked brother to be clothed or a hungry sister to be fed without also providing them with food and clothes (2:14-16).

Faith also comes to maturity in works of action. Actions of mercy include honoring the poor (2:6), giving food to the hungry and clothes to the naked (2:14-16), caring for the orphans and the widows (1:27), and being gentle and peaceable (5:13,18). It means praying for one another (5:15), anointing the sick with oil (5:14), and restoring those who wander (5:19-20). These actions are the fulfillment of the "mature" law of freedom—to "love the neighbor as oneself" (2:8).

The mature person bridles the whole body by bridling the tongue.

Wholeness. The result of this process of growth through endurance and good works is that people are mature—full of joy, whole, lacking in nothing (1:2-4). People who endure temptation "are blessed" (1:12), and people who bear fruit in works will be "blessed in their doing" (1:25). Their works demonstrate their righteousness, so that they are justified before God and can be assured of the promises God has made to those who love him (1:12; 2:5). They fulfill what people were created for and saved for. They are "a kind of first fruits of God's creatures." Such people have come to their full potential of producing "the fruits of righteousness" (3:18) by attaining a maturity that enables them to be called "friends of God." Mature people are stable in themselves and not buffeted around like a wave of the sea (1:6-7).

Maturity results in stability also for the community, because behavior that is "peaceable, yielding, compliant, full of righteousness and good fruits, unwavering, unhypocritical" (3:17) creates communal well-being through good speech and good actions. James fosters an ethic of mutual cooperation. Together, people who care for each other, provide for the needy and distressed

For James, faith comes to maturity by two means: enduring temptation and doing works of mercy.

among them, pray for each other, hear each other's confession, and rescue each other will be blessed, forgiven, healed, raised up by the Lord, and restored from wandering. Because of their good conduct, people who look to the wisdom from above and who avoid the destructive wisdom of the world are "wise and understanding" (3:13). In such a community, people treat each other as "beloved" (3:13; 5:12), as "brothers and sisters" (1:2; 2:1, 14; 5:19), indeed as "beloved brothers and sisters" (2:5).

God's final salvation. The end result will be salvation by "the one who is able to save" (4:12). People of mature faith will "receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him" (1:12) and will be "heirs of the kingdom that God has promised to those who love him" (2:5). Because they have shown mercy, they will be judged with mercy, for "mercy triumphs over judgment" (2:13). The Lord will produce a good outcome for those who endure, as the Lord did for Job, because the Lord is "compassionate and merciful" (5:11). And they "will be saved" (1:21; 5:20). The Lord will come soon to bring all these benefits of salvation to those who endure as friends of God.

Empty religion

For James, faith comes to maturity by two means: enduring temptation and doing works of mercy. Correspondingly, for those who already count themselves the friends of God, there are two means by which the process of maturity can be thwarted: (1) failing to endure (being stained by the world) and (2) failing to produce fruit (not looking after the poor). If true religion is to "look after orphans and widows" and to "keep oneself unstained by the world," then a false or empty religion is the opposite. The Letter of James warns people to avoid falling into these two traps. Both traps result in hypocrisy, doublemindedness, "adultery," and, in the end, being a false friend of God. We have outlined what we understand to be a friend of God. Here we contrast a true friend of God with what it means to be a "false friend of God."

True friend of God	*False friend of God*
true religion	empty religion
pure and undefiled	stained by the world
faith *and* works	faith only
hearing and acting	hearing and forgetting
mature, fruitful	barren, fruitless
asking with unwavering faith	asking with doubt
unhypocritical	hypocritical
enduring in the truth	wandering from the truth
being faithful	becoming adulteresses

We will now explore James' view of the two means by which true religion is thwarted.

Wanting also to be a friend of the world. The first means by which the process to maturity can be aborted takes place when people seek to be a friend of the world at the same time they claim to be a friend of God. This occurs when people who are religious turn to the world to meet their desires. They have jealousy and ambition in their hearts, which will inevitably lead to the sinful behavior that characterizes the world. By failing to look to God to meet *all* their needs, they become a friend of the world. Such people become stained by the world.

Looking to the world to meet desires leads to all kinds of hypocritical and double-minded behavior: people believe in God but fail to ask God for their needs (4:3); people ask God for wisdom but doubt that God can meet their needs (1:6); they bless God but curse those made in the image of God (3:9); they ask God but ask with evil intent in order to indulge their cravings (4:3); and they go to the assembly to worship God but by deferring to the wealthy they dishonor the poor whom God has chosen (2:6). They do other things that reflect worldly behavior incompatible with the imitation of a gracious God: judge others, speak evil of a brother or sister, murder people with their tongues, battle and make war, and fail to make every word they speak as good as an oath. All these behaviors result from looking to the world rather than to God to meet desires.

James knows the easy ways people can fool themselves into thinking that worldly desires are perfectly natural, and he warns his readers to "know this" (1:19; cf. 4:4) and to "not be deceived" (1:16; cf. 1:22, 26; 3:14). He charges people: "Cleanse your hands, sinners, and purify your hearts, double-minded" (4:8). He warns against "doublemindedness" (1:8; 4:8), and he encourages people to be unwavering (3:17). "Whoever, therefore," James writes, "knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, commits sin" (4:17).

Instead of showing remorse for their hypocrisy, the doubleminded "boast" about it and "lie against the truth" (3:14). They are adulteresses (4:4). James makes it clear that there can be no compromise: "Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity toward God? Whoever, therefore, wants to be a friend of the world is confirmed an enemy of God" (4:4). Thus, in James' view, if God's people become stained by the world and then are boastful and arrogant about it, they are confirmed an enemy of God.

Failure to bear fruit. The other way for maturity to be thwarted is by the failure to produce good works of speech and action. People who are hearers and not doers of the word are like "those who glance at themselves in the mirror and go off and immediately forget what they were like" (1:23-24). They are "hearers who forget" (1:25) who they are. They fail to "peer into the law of freedom," and therefore, they fail to see what as humans they were created to be. That is, they fail to remember what God calls forth from them in works of mercy. They think they can have faith without works (2:18); however, in so doing, they "deceive their hearts" (1:22, 26). James points out that even Satan has faith that "God is One," and yet as a result Satan shudders in terror (2:19). So people who have a true faith and not a false faith will "show their good works by their behavior in gentleness of wisdom" (3:13).

Faith without works is like a fruit tree that produces no fruit or like wheat that produces no grain. James says that such faith is barren (2:20), empty (1:26), useless, of no benefit (2:14, 16). It never comes to maturity and therefore does not fulfill its

purpose of bringing forth good works. When faith is fruitless, the person is worthless (2:20), because the person does not fulfill the potential for which they were created. The whole point of faith is that it should lead to works of speech and action that build up the community. In effect, faith and works are so inseparable for James that faith without works is "dead in itself" (2:17), for "just as a body without a spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead" (2:26).

Believers are to be true friends of God by avoiding evil and doing good, and they are to persist in this style of living in relation to God and others until the Lord comes.

Transformation: the implanted word of truth

It is not easy to discern in James exactly what the means of transformation is whereby people are saved from the evil way for the good way. There are no narrative descriptions of a conversion; there are only two brief references to Jesus; and there is no formulation of a "gospel" similar to what we find in many New Testament writings. Nevertheless, we can perhaps infer the means of transformation from clues provided in the letter.

At one point, James writes that God "gave us birth by a word of truth so that we might be a kind of first fruits of his creatures" (1:18). James seems to suggest that the "word of truth" offers a re-birth or regeneration enabling people to become new creatures. Then James adds that hearers should "receive the implanted word that is able to save you" (1:21) by bringing it to bear fruit. In this way, the implanted word (seed) is able to transform believers until the word will "save them from death" (5:20).

What is the word of truth? It seems that the "truth" in the "word of truth" is the right way to think about God that will result in behavior that brings humans to maturity. People are defined as friends of God not just by their moral actions but fundamentally by a right relationship with God. Thus, the "wisdom from above" is a combination of correct beliefs and the demonstration of those beliefs in moral behavior (3:13).

The wisdom in the Letter of James itself may be this "word of truth"—truth about God, the truth about Jesus, and the truth about humans, all coming together to form the wisdom from above. Let us look at each of these elements.

The truth about God. The word of truth involves the correct view of God. If ethical behavior is the imitation of God, then it is crucial to have the right understanding of God.

First, the key to right living is to believe that every good and perfect gift is from above (1:17). For James, this is the defining trait of God, that God is a gift-giver. Therefore, humans are to put unwavering faith in God as the source of every good gift, and to have unwavering dependence on God for these gifts.

Second, no evil thing comes from God. Therefore, it is crucial not to think that "I am being tempted by God" (1:13). James asserts that "God is untempted by evil and God himself tempts no one." God is the one in whom there is "not a single variation or shadow due to change" (1:17). In order to enable humans to endure temptation, God gives "all the more grace" (4:6). If people know that God is not the source of tempting but is the source of good gifts only, they will be able to turn to God without doubt in the face of temptation.

Third, God is a God of mercy toward the oppressed. God raises the lowly (1:9), chooses the poor to be rich in faith (2:5), cares for orphans and widows (1:27), wants the hungry fed and the naked clothed 2:14-16), gives grace to the lowly (4:6), and hears

the cries of the mowers and harvesters in their oppression (5:4-6). At the same time, God opposes the arrogant (4:6), humbles the rich (1:10), and brings miseries to oppressors (5:1). If people imitate God, they will become merciful as God is merciful.

Fourth, God saves by giving the law (4:12). In James' view, the will of God is summarized by the command: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." This is the "perfect" law that "makes perfect" those who follow it. In this way, the law itself comes to maturity by creating maturity in righteousness. Unless people have the right interpretation of the law (2:8-13), they will not be able to fulfill it.

Finally, God is the only judge (4:12). There is only one judge, who will save the friends of God and who will destroy the friends of the world. Because God is the only judge, people are not to judge or speak evil of others or grumble against others. And this judge is coming soon to bring salvation and judgment. Therefore, believers are admonished to be patient (5:7-11).

The truth about Jesus. The word of truth involves the correct view about Jesus. The opening words depicting James as a "slave of God and of the Lord Jesus" (1:1) place God and Jesus in parallel. Therefore, believers are not only to imitate God as Father (3:9) but also to imitate Jesus as Lord. So the community is to imitate "the faith of our glorious Lord Jesus Christ" in honoring the poor (2:1-6). Jesus' faith, then, was that of someone who did not discriminate against the poor, but who chose the poor to be rich in faith, raised the lowly, and cared for orphans and widows.

In the same passage, James seems to imply that Jesus taught the kingdom of God and interpreted the "kingdom" law of freedom—"love your neighbor as yourself"—as the key to understanding God's will, for the mercy of this law is rooted in the mercy of God. James may have believed that Jesus' own life was a mature or perfect expression of this law. Other elements of Jesus' teaching that may be reflected in the wisdom of James include: healing, forgiveness, rescuing sinners, prohibiting oaths, a commitment to the poor, the encouragement that those who ask will receive, and the affirmation that God gives good gifts.

> The whole point of faith is that it should lead to works of speech and action that build up the community.

The truth about humans. The word of truth also involves the correct view of people as human creatures.

First, people are mortal. Humans are "a mist that appears for a little while and then disappears" (4:14), and "like the flower of the field they will disappear" (1:10-11). Remembering this should keep people from thinking that they have control of their lives. Arrogant people boast and make plans for the future in their pretensions (4:16). Rather, people should say, "If the Lord wishes, we will do this or that" (4:15).

Second, humans tend to look to the world to meet their needs. So people need to submit themselves to God (4:7) and lower themselves, even if it means that their joy will "be turned to sadness" and their "laughter be turned to mourning" (4:9). They need to "lament and mourn and weep" (4:9) over their failure to look to God for life. In this lowering, people are to "purify your hearts"

(4:8).

Third, as humans created by God, people will have their needs met only from God. This is expressed most fully in James' teaching on prayer. People are to pray to God when they are suffering misfortune (5:13). They are to pray in faith as Elijah prayed for rain (5:17), and the prayer of faith offered by righteous people will save those who are sick (5:15-16).

Fourth, as we have suggested, humans will thrive when they imitate God by living a life of mercy. And instead of reprimanding those who wander from the truth, they are to rescue them (5:19-20). However, they are not to imitate God in judging, for there is only one judge (4:12).

Finally, humans tend to be impatient in suffering. However, knowing that God is coming soon (4:12), people are to endure. They are to be patient for relief as the farmer "waits patiently for the early and the late rains" (5:7-8). The prophets are those who have suffered and yet endured, and as a result they are called blessed (5:10-11). God will bring a good outcome, just as God did for Job who endured (5:11).

Conclusion

The "word of truth" is equivalent to the "wisdom from above." The wisdom of God is a comprehensive concept that includes the right theology, the right christology, the right anthropology, and the right ethics. As a teacher (3:1), the author is bearing this wisdom in his letter.

The Letter of James may well be addressed to insiders who are in danger of wandering from the truth. As such, the letter leads the audience through all aspects of the true wisdom from above, so that by the end of the letter hearers will be able to return from wandering (5:19-20). As such, the word of truth of the letter rescues hearers from death, so that they can rescue others. And if the hearers are true "friends of God," they will be "quick to listen" (1:19).

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River of Life in God's New Jerusalem: An Ecological Vision for Earth's Future[1]

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A pillar on a bridge over the Charles River in Boston has become a favorite. It bears an inscription about the river of the water of life flowing through God's holy city, from the book of Revelation, chapter 22: "On either side of the river there was the tree of life which bare twelve manner of fruits... and the leaves of the tree of life were for the healing of the nations."

At first that bridge inscription seemed grandiose. How could Bostonians claim such an explicit link between their river and God's river? I have come to see the importance of such links for a Christian ecological vision and commitment. When we can glimpse in every river the river of life flowing from God's throne in the holy city, then we see ourselves as citizens of a holy city, as stewards or "priests" of earth's rivers and trees.

When I tell people I work on the book of Revelation I get odd responses, particularly among ecologists. Even theologically-minded environmentalists have said, "There's nothing helpful in the book of Revelation—nothing but destruction and mutant animals there." Vice President Al Gore compared South American animal deformities due to the ozone hole in earth's atmosphere to a "nature hike through the book of Revelation."

Part of the suspicion about Revelation may be due to its eschatological orientation. Like most New Testament books, Revelation was written in the expectation that Jesus would soon return and that heaven and earth would be transformed.

Some Christians such as former Interior Secretary James Watt have interpreted

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[1] Presented to the Chicago Center for Global Ministries' 1998 conference on "Global Eco-Justice: The Church's Mission in Urban Society. I am grateful to Ann Hafften, Tom Woxland, and Carol Birkland for support in finishing this article in Switzerland.

this eschatological belief as permission to cut down trees, to use up the world's resources before the Lord returns.[2]

Others, however, find an environmental mandate in the New Testament's eschatological worldview. Paul Santmire says the New Testament's theology is "thoroughly shaped by the ecological motif, albeit eschatologically construed."[3] David Rhoads, too, suggests that early Christians' responses to the eschatological expectation of the end to the world can inspire us today, as we face a possible ecological end to the world as we know it. "Early Christians did not abandon the present age. On the contrary, they prepared for the salvation of the new age as a means to avoid its judgment."[4]

I will argue that the most eschatological of New Testament texts, The Book of Revelation, is also profoundly ecological. Certainly there are a variety of ways to read Revelation. Revelation has been used to justify environmental destruction as well as intolerance, war and violence, specifically attacks against women. I seek to present a positive reading of this book as an environmentalist and as a feminist. This study is dedicated to Ed Krentz, with whom I taught a course on Revelation and New Testament Methods of Study.

This ecological reading will focus on Revelation's final two contrasting visions of πόλις or city, Babylon (Revelation 17-18) and New Jerusalem (Revelation 21-22). These two contrasting visions of political economy can be a resource for the ecological vision of the future that is urgently needed today. The Babylon vision offers a prophetic critique of environmental injustice—including global deforestation and ecological imperialism. New Jerusalem offers the promise of a totally renewed urban world, where God takes up residence on earth, in our midst. Revelation's visions of God's future home on earth can empower us to work to renew our cities and our world today.

It is generally understood that the book of Revelation was written by someone named John (not the same John who wrote the Gospel), around the year 96 C.E., at the end of the rule of the Emperor Domitian.[5] John writes an "apocalypse" (Rev 1:1), a favorite genre of writing in the ancient world, somewhat akin to our genre of science fiction.[6] John addresses this apocalypse to urban Christians in the prosperous port city of Ephesus and in other cities of Asia Minor.

John calls this work "prophecy" (Rev 1:3; 22:18-19). Given the tradition of the Hebrew prophets, this suggests that Revelation is not intended as prediction or a timetable of future or end-time events.

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[2] For a discussion of Watt's remarks at his Senate confirmation hearings see Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More. Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 141.

[3] Paul Santmire, *The Travail of Nature: The Ambiguous Ecological Promise of Christian Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 200. Santmire finds most promising Paul's vision of the reconciliation of "all things" in Christ (τὰ πάντα, Rom 11:36) and the continuation of this cosmic Christ theme in Colossians and Ephesians.

[4] David Rhoads, "Reading the New Testament in the Environmental Age," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 24 (1997): 259-66.

[5] For an overview of the scholarship on Revelation's authorship, date, and context, see Adela Yarbro Collins, "Revelation, Book of," *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (6 vols.; New York: Doubleday, 1992) 5:694-708.

[6] On the genre of apocalypses, see most recently Margaret Mitchell, "A Tale of Two Apocalypses," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 25 (1998): 200-09. Mitchell suggested at the conference at which she presented her paper that ancient apocalypses had an entertainment function similar to that of disaster movies today.

Rather, like other biblical prophecy, Revelation's purpose is to exhort and encourage people, to proclaim the judgment and the salvation of God, and to provide a vision of hope and justice.

Revelation as a critique of Roman "realized eschatology"

To understand the eschatological visions of Revelation it is helpful to situate the book alongside the first century Roman eschatological propaganda that John is implicitly critiquing.[7]

The first century was a time of dueling eschatologies—of Roman boasts of its imperial eternity ("Roma Aeterna") versus Christian hope for an end to oppression and a future in God's hands. Rome viewed itself as endless and eternal, politically and geographically as well as temporally. The victory of the future-emperor Augustus in 31 B.C.E. had brought about the "Pax Romana." Rome now laid claim to the whole inhabited world. The poet Virgil lauded emperor Augustus not only as a military hero but as an eschatological "son of a god [Julius Caesar], who shall again set up the Golden Age... and shall spread his empire... to a land that lies beyond the stars" (*Aeneid* 6.790-96).

A classic example of the type of Roman propaganda that the Apocalypse seeks to counter is the "Roman Oration" of Aelius Aristides, a second century orator who traveled to many of the same cities as the author of the Apocalypse. In Aristides' view, Rome was an empire without end: "The whole inhabited world (οἰκουμένη) speaks in greater harmony than a chorus, praying that this empire [will] last for all time" (*Or.* 26.29).

The backbone of Rome's global omnipotence was its maritime trade. Aristides praised the system by which subjugated nations supplied Rome with their products:

> The arrivals and departures of the ships never stop, so that one would express admiration not only for the harbor, but even for the sea.... So everything comes together here, trade, seafaring, farming... all the crafts that exist or have existed, all that is produced or grown. Whatever one does not see here, is not a thing which has existed or exists, so that it is not easy to decide which has the greater superiority, the city in regard to present day cities, or the empire in regard to the empires which have gone before. (Aelius Aristides *Or.* 26.13)[8]

The location of Roman trade was the Mediterranean Sea, lying as a "belt... through the middle of the inhabited world (οἰκουμένη) and your empire" (*Or.* 26.10). The sea is the "place where everything has been channeled into one beginning and end" (*Or.* 26.13). This is an example of an "eschatological" claim for the all-encompassing and eternal dimensions of Rome's sea-trade and economy.

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[7] See Dieter Georgi, "Who is the True Prophet?" (*Harvard Theological Review* 79 [1986]: 100-26) for this "eschatological" reading of Revelation 18 as countering Roman imperial propaganda of a utopic "golden age." In Georgi's view, "the power and persuasiveness of the Augustan religion finds an indirect testimony in John's polemics.... The seer sees himself in a dramatic competition with the prophet(s) of the Caesar religion, people like Horace and Virgil." On the Roman imperial poetry of Virgil and Horace as "eschatological," see also Helmut Koester, *Introduction to the New Testament* (2 vols; Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 1982) 1:340-41.

[8] Aelius Aristides *Orations* 26; trans. Charles A. Behr, *P. Aelius Aristides: The Complete Works* (2 vols; Leiden: Brill) 2:75-79. Klaus Wengst analyzes Revelation and other New Testament texts in light of this oration of Aelius Aristides in his *Pax Romana and the Peace of Jesus Christ* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987).

It is to such Roman visions of omnipotence and eternity that the book of Revelation says "no." Revelation counters the "already" of official imperial eschatology with the "not yet" of the reign of God. To the question of the duration of Roman rule ("How long, O Lord?" Rev 6:10), Revelation responds, "just a little longer" (6:11).

Revelation subverts Roman claims to eternity and ultimacy by personifying Rome not as the goddess Roma but as a prostitute. Revelation's visions offer an alternate vision of the ἔσχατα[9] (end) and of the βασιλεία (lordship) of Christ. Liturgies of praise for God and the lamb in the heavenly court room surpass and trump the grandest liturgies of Rome's imperial cult.[10] All of Revelation's visions aim to persuade the audience that God—not the emperor—is the true divine ruler seated on the throne; that the Roman imperial economy is coming to an end; and that any future "golden age" will be inaugurated not by Augustus' victory but by the Lamb's victory, in which God's saints will share in the future New Jerusalem.

Revelation's two contrasting cities

Revelation is a thoroughly urban book.[11] The principal strategy by which John critiques Rome is the image of two rival cities, Babylon and New Jerusalem. Both cities were familiar from the Hebrew Bible and from Jewish literature of the second temple period.[12] Unique to Revelation, however, is the juxtaposition of Jerusalem and Babylon as two contrasting political economies, with the appeal to the audience to "Come out" of the one city in order to participate in the other.

A number of features set the two city visions in contrasting literary parallelism. In both city visions the same angel of the bowl plagues issues the invitation, "Come, I will show you," and carries the author "in the spirit" to a location where he is shown a city (Rev 17:1; 21:9).

Both visions portray the city as a feminine figure. Issues of violence against women, often linked to ecological violence, make it imperative for us to seek a reading of Babylon and New Jerusalem that emphasizes their political characterization as πόλεις or cities, not as women. While the vision of Babylon has been used to vilify women, in my view its primary polemic is political and economic, not gendered.[13] The

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[9] See, for example, the reading of the ἔσχατα by Vítor Westhelle as geographical as well as temporal, and as encompassing marginalized peoples, "Crises of Society—Crises of the Church? Towards an Eschatological Reading of the *Saeculum,*" in *Communion, Community, and Society,* ed. Wolfgang Greive (Lutheran World Federation Studies 1, 1998), 97-109.

[10] See David Aune, "The Influence of Roman Imperial Cult Ceremonial on the Apocalypse of John," (*Biblical Research* 28 [1983]: 5-26) for the argument that the throne room scene of Revelation 4-5 is a deliberate "parody" of Roman imperial cult worship.

[11] See especially the commentary of M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation* (Interpretation Commentary; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1989) on the relevance of Revelation's urban vision for urban ministry today.

[12] For the image of a heavenly or new Jerusalem as a place of future blessing, see 4 Ezra 9-10; *2 Baruch* 4; *Sibylline Oracle* 5.420-27; Tobit 13-14; Galatians 4; Hebrews 12. For the label of Rome as "Babylon," see *4 Ezra* 3:1-2, 28-31; *2 Baruch* 10.1; 11.1; 67.7; *Sib. Or.* 5.143, 159; 1 Peter 5:13.

[13] See my "The Choice Between Two Cities: A Wisdom *Topos* in the Apocalypse" (Th.D. Diss., Harvard University, 1998) for the argument that the feminine personifications of the two cities functions in the book's argument to underscore the ethical "either/or" contrast between Babylon and New Jerusalem, calling on readers to make a choice.

author constructs Babylon predominantly as a city, in the tradition of classical and biblical city personifications. The Babylon critique can be a resource for critiquing injustice and ecological violence today, just as New Jerusalem can be a resource for ecological hope and justice. The political power of these visions is undercut if we read them primarily as a "harlot" and a "bride" rather than as political economies.

The parallel structure of the two city visions heightens the rhetorical impact of their contrasting imagery.[14] Babylon is an idolatrous city that seduces and oppresses nations and peoples with the wine of the wrath of its "prostitution." The audience must "come out" of this evil empire (Rev 18:4). As the contrast to Babylon (Rome), New Jerusalem is the city of justice and well-being coming down from heaven, with springs of living water flowing from God's throne. The holy city's radiant beauty and open gates invite readers' participation.

The political economy of Babylon

Babylon is the first of Revelation's two cities to come into view. John is brought to an ἔρημος ("wasteland," Rev 17:3) to view the judgment of the great prostitute city, Babylon. The urban "wasteland" setting for this vision foreshadows Babylon's ecological ruin. The connotation of the term ἔρημος in this context is of a landscape that has been ruined or devastated.[15] This desolate setting anticipates the "laying waste" (ἐρημόω) of Babylon which will unfold in Rev 17:16, 18:17 and 18:19.

Revelation 17-18 depicts the Roman empire as a powerful market economy, a great prostitute that has "seduced" and "intoxicated" rulers and nations with its trafficking.[16] The connection between the prostitute's expensive attire of "purple and scarlet... gold and jewels and pearls (Rev 17:4) and the imported cargo items in the merchants' lament (Rev 18:12,16) suggests that Revelation's critique of Babylon's prostitution is not sexual but is directed metaphorically against Rome's exploitative trade and economic domination. Babylon's boast that "I rule as a queen... I will never see grief" (Rev 18:7) reflects Rome's eschatological claims of dominance over the entire Mediterranean world.

Babylon is a world of buying and selling, of frenetic commerce and accumulation of wealth. Three groups who have profited from Babylon's wealth—kings, merchants, seafarers—lament the loss of the cargo they can no longer buy and sell. The cargo list of Rev 18:12-13 encompasses the span of Rome's extractions from

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[14] I follow Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's "rhetorical" approach to reading Revelation in terms of its argument and persuasive power, and its construction of an alternate "world of vision." See *Revelation: Vision of a Just World* (Proclamation Commentaries; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991).

[15] "Wasteland" is Behr's English translation for ἔρημος in Aelius Aristides' laments over Smyrna's devastation after the earthquake: "The most beautiful city to behold... has been made the most unpleasant of spectacles, a hill of ruins and corpses. The west wind blows through a waste land (ἔρημην)" (*Or.* 19.3). This usage of ἔρημος is seen also in Jesus' prophetic lament over Jerusalem's desolation: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem... Behold, your house is forsaken and desolate (ἔρημος)" (Mt 23:38 RSV).

[16] See Richard Bauckham, "Economic Critique of Rome in Revelation 18" in *Images of Empire*, ed. Loveday Alexander (Sheffield: JSOT, 1991), 47-90, for the argument that Babylon's intoxicating wine in Rev 17:2 and 18:3 refers to the seductive delusion of the *Pax Romana*: "Rome's subjects are... taken in by Roman Propaganda. They are dazzled by Rome's glory and seduced by the promised benefits of the *Pax Romana*" (p. 56).

the land and sea: gold, precious stones, pearls, exotic hardwoods and wooden products, ivory, metals, marble, luxury spices, food, armaments and war horses, and even "bodies, that is, human slaves" (Rev 18:13). These final two items in the cargo list of Revelation 18 furnish the most explicit critique of slavery and slave trade in the New Testament.

Revelation 18:4-6 calls on God's people to "come out" of Babylon and become a sign of prophetic judgment against the exploitative empire by handing back its "cup of wrath."[17] The vision culminates with a dramatization of Babylon's fall (Rev 18:21), modeled on Jer 51:63-64. An angel takes up a large millstone and throws it into the sea, proclaiming Babylon's destruction.

Deforestation: the landscape of Babylon as a "denuded wasteland," Rev 17:16

Ecological catastrophe such as the clearing and burning of rain forests can be seen in the vivid depiction of Babylon's ruin. Some feminist scholars have interpreted one such scene, Rev 17:16, as a gruesome scene of the torture and rape of a woman's body.[18] I suggest an English translation of the assault against Babylon that emphasizes the landscape or ecological elements of the destruction: "they will make it a wasteland (ἠρημωμένην) and denuded (γυμνὴν); they will devour its flesh and burn it up with fire" (Rev 17:16). In the multivalence of Revelation's vivid imagery, such a translation is based on the primary reading of Babylon as a πόλις, a city, not as a victimized woman.[19]

Support for such an ecological reading of the devastation of Babylon in Rev 17:16 can be found in other classical and biblical texts that use the same Greek words to describe deforestation and violence against the land.

The first action against Babylon in Rev 17:16, for example—"make a wasteland" (ἐρημόω)—employs a verb that is widely used by classical and biblical authors to describe the razing and depopulation of conquered landscapes and cities. In his description of the Jewish War of 68-70 C.E. the Jewish author Josephus employs the term ἐρημόω to lament the horror of destruction of the landscape of Jerusalem and the surrounding countryside by the Roman armies:

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[17] The imperatives of Rev 18:6-7 ("give back... double... and mix") are addressed to the same audience as Rev 18:4, "my people." See Pablo Richard, *Apocalypse: A People's Commentary* 135-36; and Dagoberto Ramirez Fernandez, "The Judgment of God on the Multinationals: Revelation 18" in Leif E. Vaage, ed., *Subversive Scriptures: Revolutionary Readings of the Christian Bible in Latin America* 88-89. For the text-critical argument for this reading of the audience of Rev 18:6-7 as "my people" see my "Repaying Babylon: The Imperatives of Rev 18:4-6" (Society of Biblical Literature, Philadelphia, 1995); a similar argument subsequently has been published by Susan Elliott ("Who Is Addressed in Revelation 18:6-7?" *BR* 40 (1995): 98-113.

[18] Marla Selvidge, ("Powerful and Powerless Women in the Apocalypse," *Neotestamentica* 26 [1992] 164) refers to Rev 17:16 as a "rape" scene. See especially the work of Tina Pippin (*Death and Desire: The Rhetoric of Gender in the Apocalypse of John* [Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992], 57-58) for the interpretation of Rev 17:16 as a "sexual murder" and as "the most vividly misogynist passage in the New Testament."

[19] Obviously, violence is equally prominent in my reading as in the gendered reading which Pippin and Selvidge find problematic. While not disagreeing that Revelation's violence poses ethical problems, I argue that the violence is directed primarily against a city's landscape, not against a woman. The ethical issues raised by the text thus lie primarily in the arena of war and the ecological catastrophes associated with war.

Rome's deforestation of conquered lands was notorious.

> Pitiful too was the aspect of the country, sites formerly beautified with trees and parks now *reduced to an utter desert* (ἠρήμωτο) and stripped bare of timber; and no stranger who had seen the old Judaea and the entrancingly beautiful suburbs of her capital, and now beheld her present *desolation* (ἐρημίαν), could have refrained from tears.... (Josephus *War* 6.6-7)

The verb ἐρημόω could also refer to the plundering of wealth or property, as in the lament of the merchants in Rev 18:17, "For in one hour all this wealth has been laid waste (ἠρημώθη)!" The semantic range of possible meanings for ἠρημόω does not encompass actions against people or their bodies, nor does it carry connotations of rape or sexual violence.[20]

The second action against Babylon in Rev 17:16, "they will make it denuded" (γυμνήν; usually translated as "they will make her naked") can carry similar ecological connotations of a landscape that has been stripped of its vegetation and forests.[21]

Rome's deforestation of conquered lands was notorious. Both Josephus and Aelius Aristides use the same Greek adjective, "naked" (γυμνός; verbal form, γυμνόω), to describe Rome's stripping of forests. Josephus laments the beautiful countryside around Jerusalem that was logged by the Romans to construct massive wooden siegeworks and embankments:

> [Caesar] at once gave the legions permission to lay waste the suburbs and issued orders to collect timber.... So the trees were felled and the suburbs rapidly stripped (γεγύμνωτο). (Josephus *War* 5.264)

Aelius Aristides admires Rome's power to strip distant forests "bare" (γυμνός). The huge logs he sees arriving on ships from Asia are evidence of Rome's global commercial hegemony:

> So many merchants' ships arrive here, conveying every kind of goods from every people every hour and every day, so that the city is like a factory common to the whole earth. It is possible to see so many cargoes from India and even from Arabia Felix, if you wish, that one imagines that for the future *the trees are left bare* (*γυμνά*) for the people there and that they must come here to beg for their own produce. (Aelius Aristides *Or.* 26.12)

In our world when global deforestation is an increasing problem, we can be attentive to Revelation's astute ecological critique of Rome, together with its critique of imperialism and injustice. Two items in the cargo list of Rev 18:12-13 are forest prod-

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[20] The standard New Testament lexicon, *BAG*, defines ἐρημόω as "lay waste, depopulate a city," and offers no possibility of the verb being used to describe an action against persons. The only personal definition for ἐρημόω furnished by the standard classical lexicon, *LSJ*, involves double accusative objects, "to bereave one of a thing." Otherwise the term always describes the destruction of cities, lands, or property. This is true of the usage of the term also in the Septuagint. See the LXX of Ezek 29:10-12 (against Egypt); Ezek 26:2,19 (against Tyre); Ezek 30:7 (against Egypt); and Ezek 33:24, 27 and 36:4, 10 (about Israel).

[21] This is true also of the Hebrew word for "naked," *arvah*, which is used to describe the nakedness of the land stripped of vegetation.

ucts: "all kinds of rare woods (ξύλον)" and "objects made of ivory and of expensive wood." Could it be that John, like Aelius Aristides, had watched so many ships unload logs from the forests of conquered nations that he would agree with Aristides' diagnosis: "one imagines that for the future the trees there are left bare"?

New Jerusalem as contrast to Babylon: no more sea (21:1)

God's New Jerusalem is the antithesis of the toxic Babylon with its ecological imperialism, violence, unfettered commerce, and injustice. The New Jerusalem is a city where life and its essentials are given "without money," as a gift, even to those who cannot pay for them. Babylon's idolatrous liturgy of buying and selling is replaced by the saints' hymns of praise in the New Jerusalem, where all God's people are priests and share in ruling with God and with the Lamb.[22]

The opening verses of Revelation 21 and 22 list a series of items that are "no more" (οὐκ ἔτι) in God's new city—no more sea (21:1), no more death, mourning, weeping, or pain (21:4), nothing accursed any more (22:3), and no more night (21:25; 22:5). These contrasts underscore the newness of Jerusalem in contrast to Babylon and all that has gone before.

The disappearance of the "sea" (θάλασσα) in Rev 21:1 is the perhaps the most pointed economic contrast between New Jerusalem and Babylon: New Jerusalem will have no sea, and therefore no shipping economy. Maritime trade in luxury goods, so prominent in Babylon's (Rome's) economy, will now come to an end.

It is in this sense of sharp contrast over against Babylon, rather than a Christian fear or hatred of oceans, that we should read Revelation's declaration that "the sea was no more" in Rev 21:1. While many scholars interpret the pronouncement about the disappearance of the sea in terms of biblical chaos traditions and fear of the sea,[23] such a mythological terror is not the principal critique of the sea for Revelation. Revelation portrays the sea politically—as well as mythologically—as a location of evil (13:1) and a place where commercial ships sail (8:9; 18:11-17).[24]

Such a commercial critique of sea trade appears already in Rev 8:9, after the third trumpet's blast turns one third of the sea to blood. In addition to the trumpet calamities that are nature-related and based on the Exodus plagues, the author adds the astute economic detail that "a third of the ships were destroyed" (Rev 8:9). The sea's commercial dimension becomes most central in Revelation 18, with the critique of Rome's rulers, merchants, and all those who "work the sea" (18:17). In the unjust economy of Rome "everyone who had ships at sea grew

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[22] On the priesthood of all in Revelation, see Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Priester für Gott: Studien zum Herrschafts- und Priestermotiv in der Apocalypse* (NTAbh. 7; Munster: Aschendorff, 1972).

[23] Catherine Keller, "No More Sea: The Lost Chaos of the Eschaton," forthcoming in *Christianity and Ecology* (Harvard University Press). See also Thomas Schmidt, "And the Sea Was No More: Water as People, Not Place," in *To Tell the Mystery: Essays on New Testament Eschatology in Honor of Robert H. Gundry*, ed. Thomas E. Schmidt and Moises Silva (JSNT Supp. 100; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 233-49. See also Georgi, "Visionen," 353.

[24] Additionally, the sea appears in formulaic constellations with other elements such as earth (Rev 10:2, 5; 13:1, 11), heaven and earth (10:6; 12:12), and rivers and fountains (14:7). See Adela Yarbro Collins, "The History-of-Religions Approach to Apocalypticism and the 'Angel of the Waters' (Rev 16:4-7)," *CBQ* 39 (1977) 376.

rich by its wealth" (18:19). As part of this polemic against sea-trade the sea becomes the location of the final symbolic action against Babylon, when the angel throws the millstone into the sea (18:21).[25]

The eschatological end to the sea is the sequel to the dramatic pronouncement of judgment on sea trade in the Babylon vision. Revelation 21:1 must be read as more economic than mythological, hailing the end of Rome's cargo ships and trade.[26] Such a harsh critique of Rome's seafaring economy and the proclamation of the end of the sea is a perspective shared with the Fifth Sibylline oracle, a Jewish text dated to the second century C.E.: "In the last time, one day the sea will be dry, and ships will then no longer sail to Italy. Great Asia then will be water, bearing all cargo..." (*Sib. Or.* 5.447-49).[27] In prophesying an end to the sea, both Revelation and the Fifth Sibylline promise an alternate economic vision of an eschatological city where trade in luxury goods will be supplanted by an economy that provides the essentials of life "without payment" (δωρεάν, Rev 21:6, 22:17). In God's New Jerusalem there will be no ships, no maritime commerce or traffic in cargo, for "the sea is no more."

New Jerusalem: city of life

The eschatological vision of God's radiant New Jerusalem is profoundly ecological. The powerful vision of the New Jerusalem—of a holy city with its gleaming golden street and twelve pearly gates, where death and tears are no more, on the banks of whose river of life grow luscious trees with nation-healing leaves—has given form and voice to the dreams of God's people.

From Augustine's "City of God" through William Blake's "Jerusalem," the holy city of Revelation has promised life and healing, reconciliation and justice.

The eschatological vision of God's radiant New Jerusalem is profoundly ecological.

Blake used an unforgettable image to judge the hideous factories and inhuman working conditions of England's industrial revolution: "Was Jerusalem builded here among these dark Satanic mills? ...I will not cease from mental fight...til we have built Jerusalem in England's green and pleasant land."

The vision fed early American visions of a "city on a hill" and a range of 19th century utopian experiments. African-American spirituals and gospel songs invoke the imagery of a holy city and the river of life. Carly Simon sings of New York City in light of the New Jerusalem vision in the opening scene of the movie "Working Girl," as the Staten Island ferry pulls into the lower end of Manhattan.

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[25] This is a change of location from Jeremiah 51, where the stone is thrown into the Euphrates River.

[26] Klaus Wengst suggests that the sea symbolizes the Roman empire. The Mediterranean has become the "Roman sea" (see Aelius Aristides *Or.* 26.28) and thus had to be destroyed (*Pax Romana and the Peace of Jesus Christ*, 130).

[27] "The Sibylline Oracles: A New Translation and Introduction," trans. John J. Collins, in James H. Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (2 vols.; Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, 1983-85) 1:393-405. Collins notes that the Fifth Sibylline "has its most significant contacts with the Revelation of John" (p. 392).

God's love for the earth and for nature is one aspect of the New Jerusalem that has received less attention in the history of interpretation. The text can inspire us to trust God in the midst our urban and ecological crises, the crisis of global market economy that marginalizes increasing millions of people, and the crises of loss of moral will as environmental problems become both more complex and more urgent.

God's home (σκηνή) on earth: a vision for urban life

Contrary to current popular apocalyptic thinking, there is no "rapture" in the book of Revelation, no vision of people snatched from the earth.[28] Instead God is "raptured" down to earth to take up residence and "tent" (σκηνή, σκηνόω) with us.

> And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride... And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the dwelling (σκηνή) of God is among mortals. God will dwell (σκηνόω) with them as their God; they will be his people, and God's very self will be with them. (Rev 21:2-3)

This is a distinctly earth-centered vision of our future with God. Heaven no longer exists after God descends to earth in Revelation 21. This is also a profoundly urban vision. The dwelling place of God and of God's people is a radiant, thriving urban environment. The "holy city" (πόλις) that descends in Revelation 21 is a splendid city whose architecture, beauty, precious stones, wondrous trees, waters and open gates invite entry and participation.

Revelation draws on rich biblical traditions in describing the wondrous landscape of Jerusalem.[29] The vision of Revelation 21-22 fulfills God's promises to the seven churches, including the promise to Philadelphians of citizenship in the "city (πόλις) of my God, the new Jerusalem which comes down from my God out of heaven"[30] (Rev 3:12). Dieter Georgi has demonstrated that Revelation's New Jerusalem vision also fulfills Greco-Roman utopian hopes about the ideal city, with its majestic processional street and abundant greenspace.[31] In our time, when so many people long to escape to the suburbs or the countryside to avoid the crises of American cities, Revelation's proclamation of God's future and of ours in the midst of a tree-filled city can renew our vision for urban ministry.

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[28] This idea of a rapture is found only in one biblical text, 1 Thess 4:16-17, the first of Paul's letters. Paul uses the promise that we who are living and those who have died will be snatched up to meet Christ in the air as a way of assuring Christians that their loved ones would not be forgotten. Paul does not return to this idea in his later letters.

[29] On the use of the Hebrew prophets in Revelation 21-22, see Matthias Rissi, *The Future of the World: An Exegetical Study of Revelation 19:11–22:15* (SBT 23; London: SCM Press, 1972); and Celia Deutsch, "Transformation of Symbols: The New Jerusalem in Rev 21:1–22:5," *ZNW* 78 (1987) 106-26.

[30] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza has identified the overall concentric structure of the book of Revelation in which the seven letters and the New Jerusalem vision are counterparts (B and B'). The promises to the "victor" (ὁ νικῶν) in Revelation 2-3 find their fulfillment in the New Jerusalem vision of Revelation 21-22. See "The Eschatology and Composition of the Apocalypse," *CBQ* 30 (1968) 537-69, reprinted in *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985).

[31] Dieter Georgi, "Die Visionen vom himmlischen Jerusalem in Apk 21 und 22," in *Kirche; Festschrift für Günther Bornkamm zum 75 Geburtstag*, ed. Dieter Lührmann and Georg Strecker (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1980), 351-72.

Water of life "as a gift" (δωρεάν) for everyone

The river or fountain of living water is one of the central images in the utopian New Jerusalem (Rev 21:6,22; 22:17; see also 7:17). Water, freely given by God, flows through this paradisiacal landscape. When God's own voice speaks from the throne for the first time in the book, it is to offer water to those who thirst. Twice God extends the invitation to come and receive the water of life "without cost" (δωρεάν): "To the one who is thirsty I will give to drink from the spring of the water of life as a gift (δωρεάν)" (21:6). This promise is reiterated in chapter 22: "Let everyone who is thirsty come. Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift (δωρεάν)" (22:17).

In the overall argument of Revelation, the invitation to drink from the "springs" (πηγαί) of the water of life in New Jerusalem functions as healing imagery, a contrast to the deadly "springs" of waters that turned to blood and became undrinkable (Rev 16:4).[32] As a healing contrast also to the exploitative economy of Babylon, New Jerusalem's offers a gift economy in which water and other essentials of life are available to everyone "without cost."

The motif of the well or fountain of living water holds great possibilities for ecological interpretation.[33] The "living waters" of Revelation's New Jerusalem vision are not just spiritual or theological waters. This vision can proclaim life for the real waters of our world, for rivers and groundwater sources, for endangered wetlands and estuaries. New Jerusalem's promise of access to pure, living water can offer a prophetic critique of our damage to ecosystems, of waters polluted by industrial and agricultural waste, and of the encroachment on wetlands by developers. At a time when waters of life on our planet are in danger of dying, the vision of the river of life can sustain our commitment to justice and healing for all creation.

Ezekiel's New Temple expanded and "democratized" to a city

The heavenly city's descent is narrated for a second time in Rev 21:9-27, as the angel guides the seer and the audience on a tour of the beautiful city. The tour and measuring of the city are modeled on Ezekiel's tour and measuring of the new temple in Ezekiel 40-48.

Revelation makes important modifications in Ezekiel's vision to open up the New Jerusalem to everyone. One of the most striking modifications is the statement that the city has "no temple" (21:22). God's

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[32] This is reminiscent of the Exodus plague that turned water to blood (Exod 7:18-24; see also Wis 11:5-7), making the water undrinkable. See the interpretation of the plagues of Egypt by Terrence Fretheim as both acts of judgment and as "ecological signs of historical disaster. They function in a way not unlike certain ecological events in contemporary society, portents of unmitigated historical disaster" ("The Plagues as Ecological Signs of Historical Disaster," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 110 [1991]:387.

[33] This image draws on Old Testament traditions including Jerusalem's "river whose streams make glad the city of God" (Ps 46:4), Sirach's offer of the water of wisdom to drink (Sir 15:3; 24:21), and Isaiah's invitation to everyone who thirsts to "come to the waters" (...and you that have no money, come, buy and eat," Isa 55:1). For an analysis of this motif in biblical and Jewish tradition, see Michael Fishbane, "The Well of Living Water: A Biblical Motif and its Ancient Transformations" in *Sha'arei Talmon: Studies in the Bible, Qumran, and the Ancient Near East Presented to Shemaryahu Talmon*, ed. Michael Fishbane and Emanuel Tove (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 3-16.

presence is not confined to a temple, but now extends to the entire city's landscape. Revelation further universalizes and "democratizes" Ezekiel's elite priestly vision by extending priestly status to all God's people (Rev 1:6; 5:10; 20:6).

New Jerusalem is a welcoming city, not a gated community. Whereas Ezekiel's gate was shut so that "no one shall enter by it" into the temple or its courtyards (Ezek 44:1-2), the twelve gates into New Jerusalem are perpetually open (the gates are "never shut by day, and there will be no night there," Rev 21:26). Even foreigners (ἔθνη) and those who have no money are invited to enter. The translucent wall of jasper that surrounds God's city seems to serve more for beauty and invitation than for protection.[34] The nations of the world will walk by the light of this radiant city, streaming into New Jerusalem (21:24, 26).

The city as paradise: the Tree of Life for the healing of the nations

God's water of life appears again in the concluding section of the New Jerusalem vision:

> Then [the angel] showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the lamb, through the center of the street. On either side of the river stood the tree of life, yielding fruit each month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. (Rev 22:1-2)

This imagery draws on the conclusion of Ezekiel's new temple description (Ezekiel 47), the wondrous river of ever-deepening fresh water flowing from the temple, sustaining aquatic life and watering fruit trees on the river's banks:

> Water was flowing out from under the entrance and flowing east, the direction the temple faced.... Where the river flows everything will live.... Fruit trees of all kinds will grow on both banks of the river... because the water from the sanctuary flows to them. Their fruit will serve for food and their leaves for healing. (Ezek 47:1, 9-12)

In Revelation the wondrous river of life flows not from the temple but from the throne of God, through the center of the city. One of the most beautiful ways Revelation universalizes the vision of Ezekiel is by adding the healing of the "nations" to the reference to the tree's healing leaves. Ezekiel's trees become the "tree of life" in Rev 22:2.[35] Revelation offers the fruit of the tree of life to everyone who is faithful (Rev 2:7), overcoming the prohibition of Gen 3:22.

In the New Jerusalem vision of Revelation 21-22, the trees and rivers of the landscape of Eden (Genesis 2) are recreated in an urban center. In this way, as Georgi notes, the New Jerusalem vision "fulfills the ideal that the Hellenistic city aspired to but never realized, the reconciliation of city and countryside."[36] The city of New Jerusa-

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[34] So Georgi ("Visionen," 363-64), who argues that the city wall itself has an invitational quality, as expressed by the transparent jasper construction which "awakens longing" in those who see it. Georgi notes that it is typical of Hellenistic cities that their walls serve not for protection against enemies but for beauty and integration. See also Matthias Rissi (*Future of the World*, 71) on the function of the wall.

[35] On the "tree of life" as an ecological image in Christianity and other religions, see Larry L. Rasmussen, *Earth Community Earth Ethics* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1996), especially pp. 195-208. Thomas Christiansen, *An African Tree of Life* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1990), describes Cameroon's *soré* tree as "an African tree of life," revered by the Gbaya people for its wondrous healing powers.

[36] So Georgi, "Visionen," 369.

lem is itself a paradise, integrating nature and urban life, bringing healing to the landscape as well as to the nations.

The New Jerusalem vision for today

As we face the upcoming millennium, Revelation's vision of green space in the city, of God's river of living water flowing through the center of our cities, can serve as a vision of eschatological renewal. We need the trees of life with their leaves "for the healing of nations."

New Jerusalem is a vision for the future. It is a vision we can glimpse even now: in the river flowing from the heart of God through the heart of Boston; in a tree nursery tended by low-income gardeners in the heart of Baltimore;[37] in the tree-planting eucharistic liturgies of Christian churches in Zimbabwe;[38] here in Chicago in the work of the LSTC Green Zone and the Interreligious Sustainability Project of Metropolitan Chicago; in the work of community-building, justice-seeking, bread-breaking, nation-healing. In every tree, every river, every city, we can glimpse God's holy city and life-giving rivers and trees, dawning in our midst.

A seminary intern from LSTC, Beth Utto-Galarneau, led Bible studies on Revelation 21-22 with the people of Our Saviour's Lutheran Church in a blighted neighborhood of East Boston. Her question "What might the new East Boston look like?" is one that all Christians can ask in envisioning renewal for our own cities. I quote at length from her reflection as an example of the kind of "imagining" of the New Jerusalem that can empower ecological ministry:[39]

> "What does our city look like?" I asked this question of our Bible study group one Wednesday evening.... I hardly had to wait for a response: stinky; scary; there are gangs... people are crying because they are hungry... there is poverty; people are homeless; it's unsafe.... It seems a far cry from the glorious, radiant new Jerusalem.
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> "Where is that holy city where God dwells among the people?" I asked. They replied: The promised city must be describing heaven. It's something we look forward to, in the future, after we die. It's impossible now, they said.
>
> Then I asked the group, "can we try to imagine what the holy city, what the new East Boston, might look like?" Then the people were quiet... and in the end this is what they said:
>
> "We saw the holy city, the new East Boston, coming down out of heaven from God.... It has clean streets in which people can walk in safety and with peace at any time. There are no drugs, no fire, no fighting; no one is hungry; everyone has a place to live. People are planting flowers and trees... and God is there.

During her internship Utto-Galarneau helped children in Maverick Housing Development draw pictures of their dreams. "These dreams, these hopes, are important," concludes Utto-Galarneau. "We have to keep hoping, imagining a better neighborhood, a holy city."

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[37] See the work of Gloria Luster and the "Power of Hope Garden," an ELCA-funded urban garden project in Baltimore. Luster presented an overview of her work at the Chicago Center for Global Ministries 1998 conference on urban eco-justice.

[38] See M. L. Daneel, "Church and Eco-Justice at the African Grassroots," forthcoming in *Christianity and Ecology*.

[39] Beth Utto-Galarneau, "The New Jerusalem in East Boston," *The New England Synod Lutheran*, Winter 1992. Used by permission.

"Worthy is the Lamb" and Other Songs of Revelation

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Hymns and doxologies are among the most attractive features of the Book of Revelation. In fact they often spring up as positive relief in the midst of scenes of terror, cries for vengeance, and threats of wrath.

It is not exactly news that Revelation contains many hymns. In fact the literature on the hymns and songs of Revelation is so large that another essay on them might even seem superfluous. And yet in other ways it seems that we have barely scratched the surface. That impression was borne home to me by a recent article of Edgar Krentz.

On the one hand his essay is a brilliant piece of research, ranging over the history of research on hymnody in the Greco-Roman world and in the New Testament in magisterial fashion, leading the reader relentlessly deeper into the primary texts themselves. And on the other hand it is a call for further research. What we need more than anything else, he says, if future writing on the hymns of the New Testament is to be grounded in ancient realities, is a critical collection of ancient texts. The collection

> should include all the theoretical discussions of the content, structure, and style [of hymnody] by ancient authors with good introductions and linguistic and exegetical comments. It should also include both metric and prose texts from the New Testament era that are identified as hymns by their authors or by ancients who cite them. This would form a counterpart to the much greater *Analecta hymnica medii aevi* edited by Drewes in fifty-five volumes. These hymns should be accompanied by commentary identifying *topoi*, recurring stylistic features, technical vocabulary, situations for which written, stimulus to writing, etc. Only after such analysis should one go on to identify other surviving texts as hymns.[1]

Ed never thinks small!

The task he outlines is daunting in the extreme, and who but Ed Krentz himself could do it or even act as ringmaster organizing it? And it is the kind of statement that makes one hesitate to say a single further word about the hymns of Revelation or any other part of the New Testament. Neverthe-

[1] Edgar Krentz, "Epideiktik and Hymnody: The New Testament and Its World" in *Biblical Research* 40 (1995): 50-97.

less, I venture to offer a few comments on the hymnody of the Apocalypse, as a very small tribute to a scholar who was first my mentor and then my friend and colleague.

Fifteen passages in Revelation are widely recognized as containing hymns or fragments of hymns. I simply list them here with a few words for the sake of easy reference. The classifications (doxology, acclamation, victory song) are by no means definitive. Ed Krentz makes clear how much work still needs to be done before we arrive at a commonly held terminology and typology. The terms I use are those employed by writers like David Aune and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, building on the prior work of Erik Peterson, Gerhard Delling, Reinhard Deichgraeber, and Klaus-Peter Jorns. These writers do not all agree with one another.[2]

1. The thrice-holy (tersanctus or trisagion) in 4:8, patterned after Isaiah 6:3.

2., 3., 4. Songs acclaiming God or the Lamb as "worthy" (ἄξιος, 4:11; 5:9-10; 5:12).

5. A doxology in 5:13 (cf. 1:6), "To the One seated on the throne and to the Lamb: Blessing...!"

6. A victory song in 7:10, "Salvation [or victory, σωτηρία] to our God seated on the throne and to the Lamb!"

7. A doxology in 7:12, "Blessing and glory...to our God forever and ever. Amen!"

8. A victory song in 11:15, "The kingdom of the world now belongs to our Lord...."

9. Another victory song in 11:17-18, "We thank you, Lord God Pantocrator...that you have exercised your power and established your reign...."

10. And another victory song in 12:10-12, "Now the salvation and power and kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have been established...."

11. Still another victory song in 15:3-4, which the author himself calls "the song of Moses and of the Lamb." It begins, "Great and astonishing are your deeds, Lord God Pantocrator."

12. A doxology in 16:5-7, "Just are you, O Holy One, who are and were...."

13. A victory song in 19:1-2, "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power to our God...."

14. An exhortation to praise God that is itself apparently a hymn in 19:5, "Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear God, both small and great!"

15. A victory song in 19:6-8, "Hallelujah! The Lord God Pantocrator has begun to reign...."

Where do all these songs come from? Back in 1970 Ed published an essay under the title, "The Early Dark Ages of the Church."[3] In it he notes that the twenty year period between the resurrection of Jesus and the first of the New Testament documents to be set down in writing (1 Thessalonians) "is in many ways the darkest in the history of the church." For this twenty year period we

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[2] David Aune, "The Influence of Roman Imperial Court Ceremonial on the Apocalypse of John" in *Biblical Research* 28 (1983): 5-26; Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1985), 164. Aune speaks of 5:9-10 as a victory song (following Peterson), but van Unnik calls it a "hero song." In addition to the fifteen passages listed in the text, Schüssler Fiorenza notes also these passages: 1:6 (a doxology), homage to the beast (13:4), and the lament or dirge over fallen Babylon (18:1-24). In his fine commentary on Revelation (1991), C.H. Giblin says that Jorns "seems to be somewhat over-precise in distinguishing between adoration hymns and proclamation hymns, rejecting the term 'acclamations.'" So the discussion of form will continue.

[3] *Concordia Theological Monthly* 41 (1970): 67-85.

have "no primary documentation." In that essay he writes about the search for earlier tradition, embedded in our later documents, noting that "the father of such studies in the New Testament is the great classicist Eduard Norden," referring to Norden's *Agnostos Theos* (1913). Norden is a name I first learned from Ed Krentz, and I note that he names him again in his more recent work on Greek hymnody, citing both *Agnostos Theos* and *Die Antike Kunstprosa (vom vi. Hahrhundert v.chr. bis in die Zeit der Renaissance* (1898/1958). In the latter, Norden has a section on "Predigt und Hymnus" which he begins by citing Eph 5:18f. and Col 3:16. But he does not analyze the hymns of Revelation.

Krentz' early essay was designed to introduce readers to the uses of form criticism. In typical style, Krentz surveys a large body of secondary literature, sorting it all out for the reader, and then concentrates on a pair of New Testament passages, one a confession (1 Cor 15:3-5) and the other a hymn (1 Tim 3:16). He shows how form criticism can illumine dark corners, bringing us into contact with the faith and witness of early believers, alive and well in that "early dark age" of the church.

Along the way in that early essay Krentz makes a few tantalizing comments about the source and life setting of hymnic material in Revelation. Some liturgical pieces seem obviously to have been borrowed from Jewish worship. He mentions words like "*amen*" and "*allelouia*," used eight times and four times respectively in Revelation. The cry "*maranatha*" ("Our Lord, come!) is an Aramaic acclamation which originated in the earliest Aramaic-speaking Christian communities and, whether in Aramaic or in translation, lived on in Greek-speaking Christian churches (see 1 Cor 16:22; Rev 22:20; Didache 10:6). He writes that doxologies (blessing the name of God) are analogous to the "Blessed be Thou, Yahweh" added at the end of petitions in the great synagogue prayer, The Eighteen Benedictions. But he says that the "worthy" (ἄξιος) passages in Rev 4:11; 5:9-10,12 are not derived from Judaism or Old Testament models. He notes almost in passing that the Septuagint contains no similar "worthy" passages, and with no further comment he concludes that the "worthy" passages of Revelation are probably derived from pagan life.

With that last brief tantalizing remark, Ed was swimming against the stream, and no one has better strokes in that direction. It was once widely thought that the hymnic passages of Revelation were lifted from early Christian liturgy, quotations out of an early Christian collection of hymns. Nowadays most researchers think that John himself authored them, using known forms as models and perhaps including some fragments of traditional Christian phrasing.[4]

Honoring the emperor

Researchers are beginning to entertain the notion that the pattern for the hymns in Revelation was indeed provided by "pagan life." But what particular arena of Greco-Roman society did John have in view? The very handy *Hellenistic Commentary to the*

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[4] Evelyn Underhill, *Worship* (New York: Harper, 1936), wrote that "the earliest picture we possess of Christian cultus is the ideal vision of the Apocalypse... astonishing in its liturgical richness." She concluded that "the sensible accompaniments of an ordered cultus—music, song, incense, ritual movements and prostrations—are all there and already taken for granted" (91f.). Massey Shepherd, *The Paschal Liturgy and the Apocalypse* (Richmond: John Knox, 1960) spoke as though the Apocalypse offered us a clear window onto early Christian liturgy.

New Testament offers the following first century inscription from Stratonikeia in Asia Minor as a parallel to the throneroom scene in Revelation 4-5. It pertains to benefactions of the gods Zeus and Hekate:

> Since to these gods who have thus revealed themselves the whole population brings sacrifices, burns incense in censers, prays to them and offers thanksgiving... and honors them by songs of praise during the procession and the worship services, the Council has decided as follows: henceforth thirty young men shall be chosen from the noble families, who shall be led into the Council Hall every day by the Paidonomos [protector of boys] along with the public guard of boys. They shall be clothed in white, crowned with olive branches, and bear olive branches in their hands. These boys shall be accompanied by a zither player and in the presence of a herald shall sing a hymn of praise determined by the secretary.[5]

In his recent essay, Krentz cites a similar passage which is even more illuminating. He writes that ancient texts speak of guilds of hymn singers whose job it was to hymn Roman emperors. He then cites texts from Pergamum and Ephesus, two of the seven cities of Revelation. At Pergamum such singers were paid from a fund into which Augustus himself arranged to have the cities of Asia Minor contribute. Ephesus set up its own guild of singers to honor Augustus, Livia and the imperial family. One text describes how on the birthday of Augustus Tiberius Caesar the hymn singers of all Asia gathered at the temple to praise the emperor's glorious deeds, ceaselessly extolling his household while sacrifices were offered together with banquetings and festivities. "The hymns," Krentz writes somewhat laconically, "are part of a ritual honoring Tiberias."[6]

In an important article and now in his commentary on the Apocalypse, David



Aune has advanced the thesis that "John's description of the heavenly ceremonial practiced in the throne room of God bears such a striking resemblance to the ceremonial of the imperial court and cult that the latter can only be a parody of the former."[7] He admits that he found it extraordinarily difficult to demonstrate his thesis. However, he writes, "I take no little comfort in the fact that the major competing view, namely that the heavenly liturgy of the Apocalypse is a projection of the liturgy of the Christian church on earth, is even more difficult to sustain."

Among many other insightful comments, Aune notes the effect of John's descriptions of the singers of hymns to God in

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[5] Klaus Berger, M.Eugene Boring, and Carsten Colpe, *Hellenistic Commentary to the New Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), #942.

[6] Krentz, "Epideiktik and Hymnody," 54.

[7] Aune, "The Influence of Roman Imperial Court Ceremonial," is the source of the quotes in this paragraph and the next. He has completed the first volume in a projected three-volume commentary on the Apocalypse. It is volume 52A in the Word Biblical Commentary series, published in 1997. He offers a helpful excursus with good bibliography on "Hymns in Revelation" on pp. 314-17.

Revelation. The Seer declares that hymns and acclamations are offered to God and the Lamb by the four living creatures (4:8; 5:8; 7:11), the twenty-four elders (4:10; 5:8; 7:11; 11:16; 16:5), myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands of angels (5:11), and finally by every creature in the universe (5:13). Aune comments that the result is to elevate "the sovereignty of God and the Lamb so far above all pretensions and claims of earthly rulers that the latter, upon comparison, become only pale, even diabolical imitations of the transcendent majesty of the King of kings and Lord of lords."

Krentz and Aune are suggesting that the hymns of Revelation (and other cultic material in the Apocalypse) owe their presence to the Seer's polemical position over against Rome. The Seer is possessed by a burning desire to show Christians that hymns and doxologies and obeisance are to be made only to God and the Lamb and never to the emperor or his agents. So the hymns of Revelation have not simply evolved gradually and peacefully out of temple and synagogue patterns. They are weapons in John's warfare against Rome and its claims.

Merkabah mysticism

Something similar seems to have been occurring in one particular segment of Judaism at the same time that John was putting his Revelation into writing. With the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 C.E. Jewish hopes for political independence all but died. But how could pious Jews, with their devotion to God and the sovereignty of God, live in an empire designed and controlled by pagans? Answers differed among Jews as among Christians.

Already before the year 70, while the Second Temple still stood, the first chapter of Ezekiel with its vision of God's throne-chariot (the Merkabah) had become a favorite subject of discussion in certain Jewish circles. Gershom Scholem writes that "the earliest Jewish mysticism is throne-mysticism," and he traces the roots of Merkabah mysticism back to circles around Johanan ben Zakkai in the days immediately after the destruction of the Temple.[8] Johanan and John were contemporaries.

The earliest writers in those Jewish circles speak of ascending to the Merkabah (ascending to the throne of God) in mystical trance. The mystical ascent was always preceded by ascetic practices, in some cases twelve or forty days in duration. Fasting was part of the preparation. And then the mystic must lay his head between his knees, imitating Elijah on Mount Carmel, and he must whisper many hymns and songs. Singing was an essential exercise on the part of the mystic who wished to achieve a state of ecstasy and begin his ascent to the throne of God. Books of hymns sung in Merkabah mystical circles have been preserved from the ancient world. Among all the hymns of Merkabah mysticism, none is more common or more important than the trisagion of Isaiah 6:3.[9]

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[8] The chapter on "Merkabah Mysticism and Jewish Gnosticism," pages 40-79 in Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1946), is the source of all the quotations ascribed to Scholem in the following paragraphs. A more recent introduction to Merkabah mysticism is provided by P. Alexander in his introduction to 3 Enoch in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James Charlesworth (Garden City: Doubleday, 1983), 1:223-56.

[9] Commenting on the trisagion in Rev 4:8, Leonard Thompson, *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), asserts that the trisagion is quite simply "the song *par excellence* of apocalyptic visionaries."

Basileomorphism

The goal of the mystical practices was nothing less and nothing more than ascent to heaven's innermost chamber, where a vision of God's war-chariot throne awaited the mystic. The way was long. Scholem writes, "The traveller in search of God, like the visitor at [an imperial earthly] Court, must pass through endless magnificent halls and chambers." Those heavenly halls are called in Hebrew "hekaloth," and the ancient tracts describing the journey are called Hekaloth Books. In his description of the experience of these Merkabah mystics, Scholem uses the language of court ceremonial deliberately. "We are dealing," he says, "with a Judaized form of cosmocratorial mysticism concerning the divine King or Emperor.... Not without good reason has H. Graetz called the religious belief of the Merkabah mystic 'Basileomorphism.'" That is to say, this mysticism does not feature anthropomorphism, picturing God as any human being, but basileomorphism. Exactly like the Book of Revelation, Merkabah mysticism pictures God as Basileus, that is, King or Emperor.

Scholem stresses the point in arresting fashion. In this Jewish mysticism, "God is above all King, to be precise, Holy King.... There is a complete absence of any sentiment of divine immanence.... Not only is there for the mystic no divine immanence, there is also almost no love of God.... Throughout there remained an almost exaggerated consciousness of God's otherness." The experience of the Merkabah mystic "is dominated by the attributes of power and sublimity, not love or tenderness." All of that sounds remarkably like the severe spirituality of John the Seer.

Scholem says little about what form critics call the "life setting" (or *Sitz im Leben*) and what others call the "rhetorical situation." Scholem simply suggests that "the depressing conditions of the period... directed the religious interests of the mystics towards the higher world of the Merkabah." But the fact that this mysticism is so singlemindedly oriented to God's throne indicates an essential political dimension in the situation. It is specifically the way the world is governed, the quality of the politics of the world, the evil and injustice of the world's empires and emperors which move the Merkabah mystic to seek a vision of God's throne.[10] John and the Merkabah mystics were trying to lift our earthbound hearts to the contemplation of a better form of governance than any founded on military might.

The hymns of Revelation are weapons in John's warfare against Rome and its claims.

Singing songs old and new

At least one thing unites temple and synagogue worship, early Aramaic-speaking and Greek-speaking Christian liturgies, ceremonials at Greek and Roman temples, local and imperial court ritual, and the practices of the Merkabah mystics. And that is singing. Aune says that ancient singing was

[10] Is it impious, ironic, or just silly that the premier armored tank of Israel's Defense Forces is called "the Merkavah" ("God's War Chariot")?

more like chanting than what we today regard as singing, but however it was performed, singing or chanting was an essential ingredient in the worship of gods and humans in the ancient world.

Evelyn Underhill writes that singing in worship seems to be "a universal religious instinct." She goes on to say that "the hymn enchants as well as informs." Hymns and poetry address their "rhythms and symbolic speech to regions of the mind which are inaccessible to argument, evoking movements of awe and love which no exhortation can obtain."[11]

Leonard Thompson devotes a marvelous chapter in his essays on the Apocalypse to the hymnic passages of Revelation, and he identifies, correctly I believe, the specific force and impact of those hymns. Thompson says that worship in the Book of Revelation establishes a nearly magical egalitarian community. John and all Christians (at least all true Christians!) on earth, together with myriads of angels throughout the cosmos, with the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures around heaven's throne, and with the martyred dead beneath heaven's altar, all together form one great egalitarian community. Whatever their status or place or function in the universe, they are one in their praise and worship of the One who sits upon the throne and of the Lamb. Besides establishing a worshiping community of humans and angels, the hymns of Revelation establish a clear boundary between Christians and non-Christians.[12]

In fact the Seer's strategy is to invite his readers to listen to heavenly singing in the expectation that they will be drawn, wooed, beguiled to join that cosmic chorus and so strengthen their connection with one another. And as they sing, with heaven's hosts, they will experience the severing of their connections not only from emperor worship but also from social and economic entanglements in the Roman system.

Revelation 4-5 contains five hymns which reach their climax when myriads upon myriads of angels around the throne break out in chanting, "Worthy is the slaughtered Lamb to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing!" (Rev 5:12) Giving God and the Lamb "honor and glory and blessing" sounds conventional enough. But two items in the song, "power and wealth," grate on the ears. However, they stand first in the list and are central to the thrust of the Apocalypse. The songs of Revelation 4 and 5 deliberately picture redemption in economic language and political imagery, because John rejects not just the cult of the emperor but the entire social world projected and celebrated by that cult. His Revelation will climax with a picture of a new city, and it is not Rome, where a new politics and a new economics are practiced.

Singing those songs, we succumb to the Seer's spell. Those songs still beguile and enchant, wooing us to enter into healthier relations to Creator and creation, to Redeemer and all the redeemed. And in the singing, we also begin to move at least tentatively toward exiting from our multiple idolatries and abuses of the things of creation.

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[11] *Worship* (New York: Harper, 1936), quotations from 103f. and 113.

[12] See Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 69-71.

Philippians 2:6-11— Paul's (Revised) Hymn to Jesus[1]

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Judging from how frequently Phil 2:6-11 occurs in the liturgical lectionary (every year on New Year's Day and on Passion Sunday, and once every three years on Proper 21), this pericope should be one of the best known and most appreciated passages in the Bible. However, judging by the amount of scholarly debate it has occasioned, Paul's so-called "Christ Hymn" must be one of the most difficult and provocative sections in the Christian Scriptures.

The questions which have been raised pose a bewildering array of issues: Is it poetic? Is it Pauline? If so, did Paul compose it specifically for this letter? If it is not Pauline, is it a Christian composition? Is its ideological background the Hebrew Scriptures, Greek philosophy, Hellenistic-Roman religion, a Gnostic redeemer myth, Jewish sophia speculation, apocalyptic, or what? Can it be scanned poetically, and if so, according to the psalm-like parallelism of biblical poems or according to the metrical and rhythmic patterns of Greek poetry? Did Paul add his own interpolations into the poem? Would its original *Sitz im Leben* have been the church's catechesis or its eucharistic or baptismal worship? Is its theological purpose ethical, christological, or soteriological? What is the precise meaning of such terms as μορφή, ἁρπαγμός, κενόω, ὁμοίωμα, σχῆμα, ταπεινόω, ὑπερυψόω, and ἐξομολογέω, to name some of the more conspicuous points of contention?

All these issues have been argued thoroughly. The purpose of this article is not to review those discussions in detail but to try to focus on the issues from a different angle. Much of the scholarly debate has centered on the pre-Pauline (or at least pre-Philippian) form and function of the hymn (which ac-

[1] This article began in 1984 as a project for a graduate seminar on "New Testament Hymns and Creeds" taught by my *Doktorvater* Edgar Krentz at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago; it was updated for presentation at the Upper-Midwest Regional Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature held at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota, in March 1989; and it has been revised again for inclusion in this *Festschrift*.

knowledges that most scholars are agreed that the passage is pre-Pauline and that it is poetic, even hymnic). The general consensus is that the hymn depicts Christ in successive stages of preexistence, earthly humiliation, and heavenly exaltation.

This article, however, will reassess the various poetic scansions of Phil 2:6-11 that have been offered to date, offer an alternative reconstruction of the original hymn by giving attention to the typical and nontypical terms which appear in the poem, and suggest an answer to the question of how Paul used the hymn within the rhetorical purpose of his letter to the Philippians.

Paul adopted a hymn which was current in Christian tradition and which depicted Christ as descending and re-ascending from a heavenly to an earthly and back to a heavenly status. He adapted that hymn by adding phrases at crucial points so that it could function within his appeal to the Philippian Christians, an appeal that they would treat each other in a spirit of mutual subservience, humbly and obediently. By refashioning the hymn for that purpose, Paul produced stanzas which picture Christ in his purely human (one might say, in his "authentic" human) condition, stanzas which show that Jesus did not—like the first Adam—succumb to the usual human temptation to be presumptuous. On the contrary, he made himself subservient, and consequently has been exalted and awarded divine honor and worship.

Previous poetic reconstructions

Ernst Lohmeyer's 1928 investigation was not the first to explore the poetic dimensions of Phil 2:5-11.[2] But he broke new ground by suggesting that one line, "even death on a cross," be omitted. Accordingly, he sees the hymn as composed of six strophes with three lines each, a formal analysis which continues to have adherents. However, his further conclusions that the hymn is a translation of an Aramaic *Vorlage* and that it originated in the eucharistic liturgy of the primitive Jerusalem church have not been widely accepted.

In 1953 Joachim Jeremias offered a significant modification of Lohmeyer's analysis.[3] Jeremias omits the phrases "even death on a cross," "in heaven and on earth and under the earth" and "to the glory of God the Father" as Paul's glosses, and reconstructs a hymn composed of three strophes with four lines each, each pair of lines being parallel. He further concludes that each of the strophes, in turn, described Christ's preexistence, his incarnation, and his exaltation. Furthermore, he identifies Isa 53:12 as the background of the "kenosis" phrase "but [he] emptied himself." Thus he equates Jesus with the Isaianic Suffering Servant whose "soul was given over into death." Consequently Jeremias reaches an unusual conclusion: Christ's "emptying" or "kenosis" refers to his crucifixion, not his incarnation, and the reference to his death is therefore included in the first strophe which ostensibly describes his preexistence!

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[2] E. Lohmeyer, *Kyrios Jesus: Eine Untersuchung zu Phil. 2, 5-11*, 2nd ed. (Sitzungsberichte der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften: Philosophisch-historische Klasse 4, 1927-1928; Heidelberg: Carl Winter, Universitätsverlag, 1961).

[3] J. Jeremias, "Zur Gedankenführung in den Paulinischer Briefen," *Studia Paulina: In Honorem Johannis de Zwaan Septuagenarii* (Haarlem: De Erven F. Bohn, 1953), 146-54; this all too brief study was further defined in his "Zu Phil ii 7: ΕΑΥΤΟΝ ΕΚΕΝΩΣΕΝ," *NovT* 6 (1963): 181-88.

[4] J. Schattenmann, *Studien zum neutestamentlichen Prosahymnus* (München: C. H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1965), 14-17.

In 1965 Johannes Schattenmann attempted to analyze the hymn in two stanzas with nine lines in each stanza.[4] According to his reconstruction, each stanza has exactly 90 syllables! He omits only the article τὸ in v. 9, which would change the English translation of that verse from "God gave him *the* name" to "God gave him *a* name." Schattenmann's lines, however, seem uneven and artificial. They range in length from 5 syllables to 18 syllables, and average 10 syllables each. This contrasts with lines that average only 4 or 5 syllables each in a hymnic passage in Jesus' so-called High Priestly Prayer in John 17:20-23 and in an invocation in a Mithra liturgy. Furthermore, the verse divisions seem to be divided arbitrarily. So, for example, the longest line, "and gave him a name that is above every name," could easily be divided in two, but another long phrase, "every knee should bend in heaven and on earth and under the earth," is divided into three lines.

Ralph Martin's 1967 study combines features of Lohmeyer's and Jeremias' analyses and remains the most thorough discussion of this passage to date in English.[5] He omits the same phrases as does Jeremias, and like Lohmeyer he puts the remaining lines in pairs, with one pair of lines in each of six strophes. Regrettably Martin does not clearly equate the stages of Christ's movement with his six strophes. He appears to work with this pattern: Christ's preexistent choice (st. 1), his incarnation (st. 2), his abasement (sts. 3 & 4), his exaltation (st. 5), and his universal homage (st. 6). This would produce a chiastic arrangement spatially and conceptually:

A^1—Heavenly realm (st. 1)	C^2—Earthly realm (st. 4)
B^1—Movement (st. 2)	B^2—Movement (st. 5)
C^1—Earthly realm (st. 3)	A^2—Heavenly realm (st. 6)

In terms of the hymn's ideological background, Martin carefully weighs both the Jewish and Hellenistic influences but tends to favor the scriptural antecedents. Furthermore, he would place the original hymn's *Sitz im Leben* within the church's baptismal liturgy.

About the same time Martin was summarizing the heavenly-earthly-heavenly understanding of the hymn, Charles Talbert was charting a different course.[6] In his 1967 article he insists that "a proper delineation of *form* leads to a correct interpretation of *meaning*," and then he analyzes the hymn in a series of four strophes of three lines each, omitting only "even death on a cross." His lines are strikingly unequal and uneven, and it is obviously that Talbert has organized them on the basis of their content rather than on the basis of strictly poetic considerations such as length. Furthermore, he concludes that the background of the hymn is the story of Adam in Genesis and that the first two strophes (that is, the first half of the poem) describe Jesus' earthly career, not his preexistence. "Parallel struc-

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[5] R. P. Martin, *Carmen Christi: Philippians 2:5-11 in Recent Interpretation and in the Setting of Early Christian Worship*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 36-38; recently reissued with an update on developments since 1983 as *Hymn to Christ* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1997). See also *Where Christology Began: Essays on Philippians 2*, ed. R. P. Martin (Atlanta: Westminster John Knox, 1998).

[6] C. H. Talbert, "The Problem of Pre-Existence in Philippians 2:6-11," *JBL* 86 (1967): 141-53.



ture points to parallel meanings," he argues. If the second half of the poem unquestionably pictures Jesus' human existence, this implies that the first half likewise is about his earthly life. Unlike Adam who tried to be "more than human," Jesus surrendered his life to God and determined to live and die as God's servant.

In his 1968 commentary, Joachim Gnilka treats Phil 2:6-11 under the broad categories of "the humiliation" and "the exaltation" of Christ.[7] Of special interest is his analysis of the pre-Pauline form of the hymn. Like Jeremias and others, he omits "even death on a cross," "in heaven and on earth and under the earth" and "to the glory of God the Father." Then he treats the opening line "who, though he was in the form of God" as an introductory verse and positions the remainder in five strophes of two lines each. Gnilka concludes that the *religionsgeschichtliche* background is a synthesis of Hellenistic and Jewish motifs, including the Hercules myth, the Danielic Son of Man, the Isaianic Servant of Yahweh, the OT Righteous Man, Wisdom speculation, and the oriental Anthropos myth! Whether the hymn's liturgical setting was baptismal or eucharistic must remain undecided, he says.

Klaus Wengst's 1973 treatment of the hymn as a celebration of "the way of Christ," rather than as a creation-enthronement song or a reconciliation hymn or even an incarnation hymn, is surprising.[8] Equally as surprising is his analysis of the hymn into six strophes of unequal length; the first three strophes have three lines each, the last three have two lines each, omitting only "even death on a cross." Wengst locates the hymn in a gentile Christian community and feels that Gnostic motifs account for its emphasis on the preexistence of Christ.

George Strecker's 1974 reevaluation of the evidence concludes that the hymn reflects a combination of Hellenistic and Jewish influences.[9] The first stanza of the hymn is based on Hellenistic religious and philosophical motifs; the second stanza on OT Jewish liturgical formula. Thus the hymn is an example of syncretistic Hellenistic-Jewish early Christian tradition. Strecker omits the entire section "he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross" in order to produce two stanzas with three couplets each. His reconstruction does not admit of a three-stage Christology because the alleged preexistence is confined to a single participle (ὑπάρχων) in the opening line. One must recognize ethical, christological, and soteriological themes in order to appreciate the hymn's entire intended effect, he maintains.

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[7] J. Gnilka, *Der Philipperbrief* (HTKNT 10/3; Freiburg: Herder, 1968), 111-47.

[8] K. Wengst, *Christologische Formeln und Lieder des Urchristentums* (SNT 7; Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1972), 144-56.

[9] G. Strecker, "Redaktion und Tradition in Christushymnus Phil. 2, 6-11," *ZNW* 55 (1974): 63-78; reprinted in *Eschaton und Historie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979), 142-57.

In 1975 Morna Hooker concluded that all previous attempts to reconstruct a pre-Pauline form of the hymn are failures.[10] She holds that the only alternative is to interpret the hymn in its present form, in essence to treat it as a Pauline construct. Consequently she analyzes the hymn in four strophes, with the first and last having six lines each and the middle two having only four lines each. According to Hooker, the Isaianic Servant of Yahweh motif has influenced the hymn not at the point of Christ's kenosis (where he "emptied himself") but at the point of his obedience (where he "became obedient to the point of death").

Otfried Hofius' 1976 treatment of the Christ hymn is unimpressive in terms of its analysis of the hymn's poetic structure.[11] He maintains that "even death on a cross" is an integral part of the hymn, and so divides it into two strophes of unequal length. The first strophe has eight lines plus one; the second has six lines plus one. More helpful is Hofius' emphasis on the place of the OT background in understanding the hymn. He seems to be the first to take seriously the fact that Isa 45:23 is quoted in the phrases "every knee shall bend" and "every tongue confess." Just as Deutero-Isaiah together with some of the historical psalms praise Yahweh for his saving acts, maintains Hofius, the Christ Hymn in Philippians concludes with praise to God ("to the glory of God the Father") for the salvation effected through Jesus' crucifixion ("even death on a cross").

Charles Robbins, like Hooker and Hofius, tries to analyze the hymn in its Pauline form.[12] His 1980 study concludes that the hymn consists of two sentences; each sentence contains a four-cola unit followed by a two-cola unit. The first sentence speaks of Christ's self-abasement, the second of his glorification by God. Robbins attempts to show that the hymn is modeled on the pattern of classical Greek epic poetry, that each line or cola is roughly the length of a dactylic hexameter, and that they are grouped in two sentences or periods short enough to be spoken in one breath. It is difficult, however, to convince oneself that these verses in Philippians scan like Attic poetry.

This review of previous reconstructions of the Christ Hymn in Phil 2:6-11 yields several conclusions: (1) No reconstruction can claim to have been demonstrated successfully or conclusively; all seem to be vulnerable at some point. (2) Likewise, no analysis of the hymn's ideological background has satisfied even the majority of scholars. (3) Recent years have seen a tendency to treat the hymn in its Pauline form, without resorting to excising supposed glosses or interpolations. More importantly, (4) the trend has been to downplay the "preexistence" motif and to interpret the hymn in terms of Christ's earthly history. In fact, during the past two decades a handful of studies in addition to Talbert's have probed in this direction.

It is interesting to watch the progress of the argument that the Philippian hymn is to be interpreted apart from the doctrinal category of the "preexistence" of Christ. Those who opt for this alternative argue from a variety of stances. Thus Norman Bakken,

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[10] M. D. Hooker, "Philippians 2.6-11," *Jesus und Paulus: Festschrift für Werner G. Kümmel* (ed. E. E. Ellis and E. Grässer; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975), 151-64.

[11] O. Hofius, *Der Christushymnus Philipper 2, 6-11: Untersuchungen zu Gestalt und Aussage eines urchristlichen Psalms* (WUNT 17; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck] 1976).

[12] C. J. Robbins, "Rhetorical Structure of Philippians 2:6-11," *CBQ* 42 (1980): 73-82.

for example, maintains that the hymn does not represent a three-stage Christology patterned after the Sophia Redeemer myth.[13] Rather, its background is Genesis 1-3, and it is of a piece with Paul's "first Adam *versus* last Adam" typology outlined in Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15. He concludes that Phil 2:6-11 reaffirms the flesh-and-blood existence of Jesus of Nazareth, with the result that in his refusal to abandon his truly human function Jesus has become exalted as the hope of all creation.

Similarly John Gibbs argues that the phrase "in the form (μορφῇ) of God" is equivalent to the phrase "let us make *adam* in our image (κατ' εἰκόνα) according to our likeness (καθ' ὁμοίωσιν)" in Gen 1:26.[14] The contrast, then, is between Jesus and Adam, who *did* "snatch" (ἁρπαγμός) after being "like God." Gibbs agrees with Jeremias that the kenosis refers to Jesus' emptying of himself in the crucifixion, not God's emptying of Godself in the incarnation.

Jerome Murphy-O'Connor reaches similar conclusions. However, he finds the background to the hymn not in Genesis but in Wis 2:23 and Isa 44:16.[15] According to him, Wisdom anthropology provides the thematic background which allows one to explain all the otherwise disparate elements in the original Philippian hymn. Murphy-O'Connor adopts Jeremias' three-part structural analysis, but he interprets the first strophe as a description of Christ as the Righteous Man *par excellence*. As such, Jesus had a right to be treated as if he were a god, but chose to accept the condition of a slave, which involved suffering and death. As a consequence of his obedience (pictured in the second strophe), he was exalted above all the other Just Ones and given the divine title and authority of Kyrios (according to the third strophe).

George Howard takes the argument one step farther and insists that the entire hymn speaks only of the human Christ.[16] He agrees with Talbert and Murphy-O'Connor. But he also maintains that the second half deals solely with Christ's earthly veneration; it does not refer to his heavenly exaltation. Howard argues that the phrase "God also highly exalted (ὑπερυψόω) him" refers to Christ's earthly post-resurrection exaltation, not to an "ascension into heaven." He further maintains that the name which God gave Jesus was the name "Yahweh," which he received not as a new name or title but as a possession to pass on. Accordingly the hymn does not mention any heavenly preexistence nor any heavenly coronation; it speaks only of Christ's human life of humility and his earthly exaltation to a position of authority in which he was given the name Yahweh to use as an instrument of his power.

The trend to interpret Phil 2:6-11 as though it depicts in its present Pauline form a thoroughly, authentically human Christ has not gone unchallenged, of course, although the evidence and arguments are beyond the purview of this article.[17] The ques-

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[13] N. Bakken, "The New Humanity: Christ and the Modern Age—A Study Centering in the Christ-Hymn: Philippians 2:6-11," *Int* 22 (1968): 71-82.

[14] J. G. Gibbs, "The Relation between Creation and Redemption according to Phil. II 5-11," *NovT* 12 (1970): 270-83.

[15] J. Murphy O'Connor, "Christological Anthropology in Phil. II, 6-11," *RB* 83 (1976): 25-50.

[16] G. Howard, "Phil 2:6-11 and the Human Christ," *CBQ* 40 (1978): 368-87.

[17] E.g. H. Binder, "Erwägunzen zu Phil 2 6-7b," *ZNW* 78 (1987): 230-243; C. A. Wanamaker, "Philippians 2.6-11: Son of God or Adamic Christology?" *NTS* 33 (1987): 179-93; N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 56-98.

tion remains whether any new light can be shined on the poetic structure of the Christ Hymn, whether the result will picture a heavenly or earthly Jesus, and whether the outcome will impact one's appreciation of Paul's rhetorical argument in Philippians.

Reconstructing Paul's poem

One of the standard clues for identifying creedal and hymnic passages in the Bible is the presence of vocabulary which is otherwise not characteristic of the document in question. Other clues are an opening relative clause, continued use of participles, metrical patterns, parallel members positioned to form lines and strophes, and an introductory formula. Although the latter are all apparent in Phil 2:5-11, only the issue of vocabulary will be considered here, for the passage contains numerous terms which are not typical of Paul's writings, including four NT *hapax legomena.*

In the following reproduction of the Nestle-Aland text (27th edition), the punctuation has been omitted and the nineteen lines have been lettered A through S. For convenience throughout the remainder of the article the lines of the hymn will be referred to by these letters, rather than by the standard verse numbers. Words which are not typical Pauline terms, according to the ensuing discussion, are underscored; those which *are* characteristic of Paul's vocabulary are printed in bold-face type.

A—ὃς ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὑπάρχων
B—οὐχ ἁρπαγμὸν ἡγήσατο
C—τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ,
D—ἀλλὰ ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν
E—μορφὴν δούλου λαβών,
F—ἐν **ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων** γενόμενος·
G—καὶ σχήματι εὑρεθεὶς ὡς **ἄνθρωπος**
H—**ἐταπείνωσεν** ἑαυτὸν
I—γενόμενος **ὑπήκοος** μέχρι **θανάτου,**
J—**θανάτου** δὲ **σταυροῦ.**
K—διὸ καὶ ὁ θεὸς αὐτὸν ὑπερύψωσεν
L—καὶ **ἐχαρίσατο** αὐτῷ τὸ **ὄνομα**
M—τὸ ὑπὲρ πᾶν **ὄνομα,**
N—ἵνα ἐν τῷ **ὀνόματι** Ἰησοῦ
O—πᾶν γόνυ κάμψῃ
P—ἐπουρανίων καὶ ἐπιγείων καὶ καταχθονίων
Q—καὶ πᾶσα γλῶσσα ἐξομολογήσηται
R—ὅτι **κύριος** Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς
S—εἰς **δόξαν** θεοῦ **πατρός.**

The first five lines contain *hapax legomena.* Μορφῇ in lines A & E and ἁρπαγμὸς in line B occur nowhere else in the NT. Furthermore, ἴσος in line C is not found elsewhere in Paul. While κενόω and δοῦλος in lines D & E are found elsewhere in Paul's writings, only here are they applied to Christ. Elsewhere what is "emptied" is the cross (1 Cor 1:17) or one's boasting (2 Cor 9:30) or the promise (Rom 4:14), and "slave" is a title for Paul and his companions (e.g. Phil 1:1), not a title for Christ. Similarly, σχῆμα in line G occurs elsewhere in Paul only at 1 Cor 7:31, where it refers to the "shape" of the world, not to Christ.

In contrast to these six lines which contain non-Pauline terms and terms used in a non-Pauline fashion, lines F, H, I & J contain typically Pauline vocabulary. Thus ὁμοίωμα in line F, ἄνθρωπος in lines F& G, θάνατος in lines I & J, and σταυρός in line J are found frequently in Paul's writings. The same can be said for ταπεινόω in line H and ὑπήκοος in line I. In their case, however, it is unusual for Paul to describe Christ as the one who is "humble" and "obedient"; normally these are attributes

of Christians.

The conjunctive phrase διὸ καὶ in line K marks the turning point in the hymn. The second half also contains a mixture of Pauline and non-Pauline terms. Thus

> Unlike Adam, Jesus did not try to be more than human and grasp at divinity... he was content to remain in his human shape and likeness.

ὑπερυψόω in line K is another NT *hapax legomenon*. Of the three chief terms in line P the first two, ἐπουράνιος and ἐπίγειος, are used elsewhere by Paul. But the third term, καταχθόνιος, is the final *hapax* in the hymn. This suggests that the three-member phrase in its entirety is not Pauline.

The phrases γόνυ κάμψῃ in line O and γλῶσσα ἐξομολογήσηται in line Q both occur elsewhere in Paul, but only in OT quotations. The former is found in Rom 11:4 & 14:11, which quote 1 Kgs 19:18 and Isa 45:23; the latter is found in Rom 14:11 & 15:19, which quote Isa 45:23 and Ps 17:50. (In 1 Cor 12-14 Paul does use the plural γλῶσσαι to refer to "speaking in tongues.") The implications are twofold: first, that γόνυ κάμψῃ and γλῶσσα ἐξομολογήσηται are not Pauline terms; second, that the hymn at this point has been influenced by Isa 45:23.

On the other hand, χαρίζομαι in line L and ὄνομα in lines L, M & N are typically Pauline, as are κύριος in line R and δόξα and πατήρ in line S.

To summarize, in the first half of the hymn lines A through E and G are marked by non-Pauline terms, as are lines K, O, P, and Q in the second half. With only minor adjustments, these can be pieced together to form a pair of stanzas which are complete and understandable on their own terms. The remaining lines, with two exceptions, can be interpreted as Paul's additions to the hymn. The two exceptions are lines N & R, which must be included with the original hymn for it to make sense. The result would be a hymn of two strophes with six lines each. The first strophe is a description of Christ's self-humiliation, and the second a description of his exaltation by God. Unlike many previous poetic analyses, this reconstruction has two advantages: it is based on some objective criterion, namely the occurrence of Pauline and non-Pauline vocabulary, and it results in a symmetrical pair of stanzas with roughly equal lines. The following overly-literal translation excludes the putative Pauline interpolations.

A—Existing in the form of God
B—he did not regard it a prize
C—to be equal with God;
D—rather, he emptied himself
E—taking the form of a slave
G—and was found in shape as a human.
K—Therefore God also hyper-exalted him
N—that at the name of Jesus
O—every knee should bow,
P—of the supernals and the terrestrials and the subterraneans
Q—and every tongue should acknowledge,
R—"Lord Jesus Christ!"

This reconstruction of the pre-Pauline hymn has much in common with those interpretations which find a "Gnostic redeemer myth" behind it.[18] Such interpretations hold that the myth, as adapted to Jesus, dramatized the Redeemer as a "heavenly being" who came down to earth and was obedient to God's mission and who was therefore exalted precisely because of that act of free will. The descending and ascending Redeemer stands in contrast with other semi-divine figures who were not obedient to "the High God," dissidents who left heaven and descended to the earth in order to lead people astray. Such, for example, were the fallen angels described in 1 Enoch 64:

> Then I [Enoch] saw in that place other mysterious faces. And I heard the voice of an angel saying, "These are the angels who descended upon the earth and revealed what was hidden to the children of the people, and led the people astray to commit sin."[19]

However, when Phil 2:6-11 is read with Paul's adaptations inserted (in italics below), two things happen: first, the hymn loses its symmetry, although it remains poetic in tone; second, its "preexistence" motif largely disappears under the weight of Christ's truly human characteristics.

A—Existing in the form of God
B—he did not regard it a prize
C—to be equal with God;
D—rather, he emptied himself
E—taking the form of a slave.
F—*Being in the likeness of humans*
G—and found in shape as a human,
H—*he humiliated himself,*
I—*being obedient unto death,*
J—*death on a cross.*
K—Therefore God also hyper-exalted him
L—*and granted him the name,*
M—*the one above every name,*
N—that at the name of Jesus
O—every knee should bow,
P—of the supernals and the terrestrials and the subterraneans
Q—and every tongue should acknowledge,
R—"Lord Jesus Christ!"
S—*to the glory of God the Father.*

Accordingly, those analyses which emphasize the true humanity of Jesus in the first half of the hymn and which interpret it against the background of Genesis 1-3 seem closest to the mark, at least insofar as Paul's adaptation of the hymn functions in this letter. Although the pre-Pauline version may have pictured a divine man who descended to the earthly realms, suffered crucifixion, and was then subsequently exalted to the heavens, the final Pauline version starts not with a preexistent Christ but with an earthly Jesus. This Jesus, like Adam before him, did exist in the form or likeness of God, but unlike Adam he did not try to be more than human and grasp at divinity. Instead he was content to remain in his human shape and likeness, and submitted totally to the human condition, embracing death itself, even the worst form of death by crucifixion. Consequently God has now exalted him to the point where all peoples and powers— whether chthonic, earthly or

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[18] E.g. E. Käsemann, "Kritische Analyse von Phil. 2, 5-11," *Exegetische Versuche und Besinnungen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1960) 1:51-95; orig. pub. *ZthK* 47 (1950): 313-60; J. A. Sanders, "Dissenting Deities and Philippians 2 1-11," *JBL* 88 (1969): 279-90.

[19] "1 [Ethiopic Apocalypse of] Enoch," trans. E. Isaac, in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, *Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments*, ed. J. H. Charlesworth (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983), 44.

heavenly—do obeisance to his name and honor his lordship.

Rhetoric that promotes friendship

One of the most promising developments of Philippian scholarship in recent years has been the trend to view this epistle as an example of a letter of friendship.[20] According to this view, Paul followed the conventions of the Greco-Roman world when he sent a hortatory letter of friendship to his supporters at Philippi. In the ancient world this sort of friendship (φιλία) was not so much an emotional bond as it was a kind of calculated reciprocity between individuals, whether related as equals or as patrons and clients.

Several thematics in Philippians correspond to conventional φιλία. To some extent the actual sending of this letter substitutes for the requirement that friends spend time together, and Paul's desire that he himself (Phil 1:8, 26) visit the Philippians, as well as his companions Timothy (2:19-24) and Epaphroditus (2:25-30, 3:18), cements their friendship. The assertion that Paul and the Philippians share a common struggle against enemies (1:15-18, 27-30; 2:14-15; 3:2, 18-19) is another aspect of their friendship. And the fact that the Philippians sent the apostle financial support during his imprisonment (4:15-18) is ample evidence of their relationship as friends.

Specific terminology also supports the φιλία motif. First is the term (συγ)κοινωνία, which denotes partnership or fellowship or reciprocal sharing. Thus in five instances Paul refers to their mutual partnership in the gospel (1:5) and in the Spirit (2:1), to his own sharing in Christ's sufferings (3:10) and to the Philippians' sharing in his distress (4:14), and of course to their financial support (4:15). Second is the term πολίτευμα/πολιτεύομαι, signifying citizenship or living one's life as a responsible citizen, in other words, letting the virtue of friendship play out in the formation of an ideal society. Although the term appears only twice in Philippians, its conceptual importance is clear from the fact that Paul initially uses this otherwise unusual term when he enjoins his readers to "live your life" in a worthy manner (1:27) and ultimately when he urges them to imitate himself because "our citizenship [or commonwealth] is in heaven" (3:20).

Third is the term φρονέω, especially in the phrase τὸ αὐτὸ φρονεῖν, meaning to be in friendly agreement by thinking the same way. Paul uses the expression ten times, to refer to how he thinks about the Philippians (1:7), how they think about each other (2:2), and how they think about him (4:10). The term indicates in general how

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[20] L. M. White, "Morality Between Two Worlds: A Paradigm of Friendship in Philippians," *Greeks, Romans, and Christians: Essays in Honor of Abraham J. Malherbe*, ed. D. L. Balch, E. Ferguson, W. A. Meeks (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 201-15; W. A. Meeks, "The Man from Heaven in Paul's Letter to the Philippians," *The Future of Early Christianity: Essays in Honor of Helmut Koester*, ed. B. A. Pearson (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 329-36; S. K. Stowers, "Friends and Enemies in the Politics of Heaven: Reading Theology in Philippians," *Pauline Theology*, ed. J. M. Bassler (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 1. 105-21; B. Witherington, *Friendship and Finances in Philippi: The Letter of Paul to the Philippians* (NT in Context; Valley Forge, PA: Trinity, 1994); T. Engberg-Pedersen, "Stoicism in Philippians," *Paul in His Hellenistic Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 256-90; N. A. Dahl, "Euodia and Syntyche and Paul's Letter to the Philippians," *The Social World of the First Christians: Essays in Honor of Wayne A. Meeks*, ed. L. M. White and O. L. Yarbrough (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 3-15.

mature people think about each other (3:15) and how Christ's enemies think about earthly things (3:19), and more specifically how Euodia and Syntyche are to agree in their thinking (4:2). Most importantly, φρονεῖν is the term that conceptualizes how the Philippians are to be like Christ Jesus (2:5), whose example is then recounted in the hymn.

When extracted from its setting, Phil 2:6-11 is clearly christological in nature, depicting Jesus either in its pre-Pauline form as a descending and re-ascending heavenly being, or with its Pauline additions as truly human and therefore divinely exalted. But within the context of the letter itself, it functions as the basis for the apostle's hortatory appeal that his auditors treat each other with an attitude of mutual subservience. In the verses immediately preceding (2:1-4) and following (2:12-13) Paul focuses on the need for the Philippians to practice humility (ταπεινοφοσύνη, 2:3) and obedience (ὑποκοή, 2:12). But these are precisely the virtues which he introduced into the middle of the Christ hymn in lines H & J!

In other words, Paul seized on the first half of the hymn, which stressed Christ's self-abnegation, and added those references which stress Christ's identification with humanity (line F) and which emphasize his humiliation and death by crucifixion (lines H, I & J). Similarly, in the second half of the hymn, in order to avoid the impression that what Christ did he did for his own benefit and glory, Paul stresses that Jesus' exalted name *was given him* by God (lines l-M) and that his universal worship redounds to *God's* glory (line S).

The result is a striking rhetorical strategy. By grounding his ethical appeal in such a hymnic depiction, the apostle enables his auditors to imagine a truly human Jesus who was content to embrace that status, to renounce the temptation to try to become divine, and on the contrary to submit to the servile humiliation of an ignominious execution. The divine reward is that his reputation has been exalted throughout the universe and his dominion acknowledged by all. In this way the Philippians—together with all who audit Paul's letter—are moved to imitate Jesus' style and thereby defer to each other within the pattern of genuine friendship.

Book Reviews

The Emergence of the Christian Religion: Essays on Early Christianity. By Birger A. Pearson. Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1997. xiv and 241 pages. Paper. $19.00.

These essays, originally published over decades, demonstrate the value of the historical study of early Christianity. Pearson writes about the New Testament in its historical context and Gnosticism (on which he is a leading authority).

The first essay, "The Emergence of the Christian Religion," also provides the title for the book. Here Pearson argues as a historian that Christianity is a religion among the world religions, whose emergence is the result of many factors. Thus any claims to Christian exclusiveness is historically false. Theologians must take account of this today. This is supported by his article "Unity and Diversity in the Early Church."

The longest article is the most immediately relevant today. Pearson criticizes the methods and results of the Jesus Seminar in "The Gospel According to the 'Jesus Seminar': On Some Recent Trends in Gospel Research" (23-57). He argues that the seminar used a faulty historical method when it evaluated the sayings of Jesus apart from a consideration of his life and death, that the premises on which the work proceeded was wrong, that the early dating of sources or reconstructed sources is subject to historical criticism and gave priority to the wrong sources, that the reconstruction of post-Easter Christianity is flawed, and that the results (an essentially non-apocalyptic, non-Jewish Jesus) are historically incredible. It is, in my opinion, the most severe historical critique so far made.

His article arguing that 1 Thess 2:13-16 is a non-Pauline interpolation has been the starting point for the discussion of this passage since 1971, while the article holding that 2 Peter's use of the term ταρταρόω reflects a knowledge of Greek myth is relatively unknown. An interesting article is a discussion of philanthropy in the Greco-Roman world and early Christianity.

The articles on Gnosticism set forth a rich feast. The first demonstrates that 2 Peter is a source of the gnostic Apocalypse of Peter. Three essays discuss aspects of Gnosticism: "Old Testament Interpretation in Gnostic Literature," "The Problem of 'Jewish Gnostic' Literature," and "Eusebius and Gnosticism."

The introduction details the origins of each essay, while the epilogue, "Some Personal Observations on Scholarly Method," is a sober reflection back on the essays reprinted here. Pearson calls for historical research that integrates social analysis, recognizes diversity in the sources, and does not use personal faith as an historian's methodological filter. The epilogue shows how the Emeritus Professor of Religious Studies at the University of California–Santa Barbara carried on his work as a Lutheran scholar in a university context. And it was worth the doing.

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Scripture and Ethics. By Jeffrey S. Siker. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997. 294 pages. Paper. $16.95.

This superb book is the fruit of considerable research and thoughtful analysis by Jeffrey Siker, Associate Professor of Theology at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles. His goal is to do what has not been done often—analyze how twentieth-century theologians and ethicists have actually used the Bible in constructing their theological ethics.

The core of the book includes successive chapters examining the writings of eight major figures: Reinhold Niebuhr, H. Richard Niebuhr, Bernard Häring, Paul Ramsay, Stanley Hauerwas, Gustavo Gutiérrez, James Cone, and Rosemary Radford Ruether. The book also contains a brief introduction and an eight-page conclusion plus a bibliography and indices of subjects, modern authors, and scriptural texts.

In the introduction, Siker states and explains the "five guiding questions" he employs to assess the ways in which these theologians actually approached and used the Bible. These questions provide a consistent structure for each chapter. First, by answering the question "What biblical texts does the theologian actually use in his or her work?" Siker is able to isolate the theologian's "working biblical canon." His response to the second question, "How does the author use the Scripture?" results in the longest and most developed section in each chapter since he is attempting to analyze not simply *which* biblical texts are used but *how*. Third, Siker asks "How the theologian-ethicist envisions the authority of the Scripture," and fourth, "What is the theologian's hermeneutic in approaching the Bible?" Surprisingly, certain of the eight theologians have actually reflected very little, at least in writing, on these two questions. The fifth and final question posed by Siker, "What is the relationship between the Bible and the actual Christian ethic worked out by the theologian?" seeks to uncover the practical importance of Scripture for responding to specific issues in theological ethics.

I learned a great deal from this book about the theological and ethical thought of the theologians and a variety of methods and pitfalls in employing the Bible in theological-ethical construction.

Siker has read and analyzed carefully. He has sympathetically approached each body of work, sensitive to the distinctive context and experience of the author. With few exceptions, Siker's brief "critical evaluation" at the end of each chapter is insightful and constructive. He, of course, does his analysis as a knowledgeable biblical scholar who has the advantage of hindsight and the advances in biblical scholarship. He also understands the limits of academic biblical scholars and is particularly alert to James Cone's critique that scholars have professionalized Bible study and most often discuss biblical texts without "a consideration of concrete social conditions of oppression and poverty" (163).

In the book's conclusion, Siker does not attempt to reduce his findings to abstracted "lessons." Rather he undertakes a concise comparison of how the eight theologians have interpreted the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7.

Finally Siker notes "patterns," among which is his contention that there appears to be surprisingly little interaction between these theologians and the professional guild of biblical scholarship. Thus, there remains the immense task of the integration of the best of biblical scholarship into theological projects that seek to serve the life and mission of the church.

This book should be of special interest to seminary professors, parish pastors, and indeed all who reflect on use of Scripture in construing contemporary ethical visions.

James L. Bailey
Wartburg Theological Seminary

Paul's Early Period: Chronology, Mission Strategy, Theology. By Rainer Riesner. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998. xvi and 535 pages. Paper. $50.00.

Riesner has written a massive yet readable study of the chronology of Paul's early and middle career. The book thus stands in tension with its title and sub-title: it studies not only the beginning of Paul's ministry but the middle portion as well. The focus is on chronology, with much less attention to mission strategy and theology.

Riesner has produced a magisterial examination of the chronology of Jesus, Stephen, and Paul through Paul's appearance before Gallio in Corinth. At every point he carefully sifts and compares both the New Testament and the extra-canonical sources (Roman historians, inscriptions, archaeology, coins). The reader learns most from discussions on the crucifixion of Jesus, Paul's escape from Damascus, Emperor Claudius' edict against Jews in Rome, and Gallio.

The chronology Riesner develops is similar to that of many earlier scholars: crucifixion in 30, Paul's conversion in 32, Apostolic Council in 48, the Ephesian ministry from 52-55, taken to Rome in 59, held prisoner from 60-62. Nor is that similarity accidental. In a way Riesner's slogan is "back to the future." The future, he argues, is a return to the consensus from earlier in this century (ca. 1905-1980) that understood

Luke as a reliable historian whose outline of Paul's ministry in Acts provides a solid foundation for determining Paul's chronology.

Riesner's book is a fascinating study of chronological issues and would be fine preparation for teaching on the passion of Jesus, the life of Paul, or the book of Acts. It also provides basic material on 1 Thessalonians. Most problematic is Riesner's thesis that Paul plotted his geographical moves with Isa 66:18-21 as his map. Riesner is out-of-date regarding social status in antiquity (he repeatedly talks about upper, middle, and lower classes). But as a study of chronology—and one written with measured assertions and even some humor—Riesner's book is a major contribution.

Walter F. Taylor, Jr.
Trinity Lutheran Seminary
Columbus, Ohio

The Truth about Jesus. Edited by Donald Armstrong. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998. viii and 160 pages. Cloth. $22.00.

The title belies this collection of eight essays. They are not exercises in historical Jesus research; rather, they are primarily reactions (and objections) to the kind of conclusions reached by participants in the Jesus Seminar in California. Phrases like these signal the bias of the essayists vis-à-vis the "new quest for the historical Jesus": "occasioned considerable unease among Christians," "latest deconstructionist interpretation," "a low-demand, non-judgmental gospel," "clever but faulty interpretations," "lazy minds grasping for a synthetic faith," "feeble theological thinking" (1-2). In short, says one author, "They have lost Jesus" (68).

At their best, the essayists offer an apologetic for an appropriately high Christology and a high ecclesiology from an Anglican perspective. Each title takes a "Jesus and..." format; thus, "Jesus and the Quest," "...and Religious Pluralism," "...and His Atoning Work," "...and Culture," "...and His Church," "...and the Eucharist," "...and Vocations," "...and Human Experience." The opening essay by N. T. Wright sets the tone for the entire collection. While he regards "the continuing historical quest for Jesus as a necessary part of ongoing Christian discipleship," he also maintains that Robert Funk, John Dominic Crossan, Marcus Borg, and others are tripping down the wrong path.

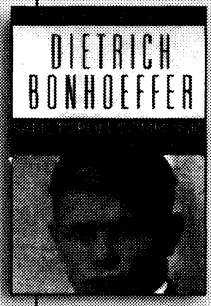
Wright's essay is a helpful summary of his earlier and lengthier volumes. He maintains that Jesus self-consciously adopted the paradigm of Israel's prophetic tradition, that his proclamation of the kingdom of God was based on the Jewish hope for liberation from exile, and that he fully believed he was Israel's "Messiah." But with this caveat: "That word does not, of course, denote a divine incarnate being. It denotes, rather, Israel's anointed king, the one in whose fate Israel's own fate reaches its climax" (18).

One other essay makes a serious and sustained contribution to historical Jesus research. John Koenig argues that "we can demonstrate, in at least a plausible manner, a straight-line development from the words and actions of Jesus Christ at the Last Supper to the Eucharist" (103). Contrary to those who maintain that the synoptic meal in the upper room was not a true Passover Seder nor the start of a memorial meal, Koenig maintains that Paul's Corinthian correspondence shows the bread and cup *verba* were part of established tradition already in the early 50s C.E., that Paul likely learned the tradition from Peter during his first trip to Jerusalem in the late 30s, that Jews would have interpreted Jesus' words not as "cannibalistic" but as a reinterpretation of the Passover ritual, and that Jesus' otherwise unfulfilled prophecy about "eating and drinking anew in the kingdom" anticipate the continuation of this celebration. Thus, concludes Koenig, "the central message of the Last Supper, which persists into our own Eucharists, is one of promise" (119).

In sum, those who read this volume anticipating insight into historical Jesus research will be disappointed. But those who are concerned about the reaction to such research will find these essays a revealing glimpse into tradition-oriented Episcopalian thinking.

Dr. Mark I. Wegener
Woodlake Lutheran Church
Richfield, Minnesota

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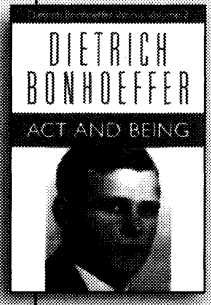
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The God We Never Knew: Beyond Dogmatic Religion to a More Authentic Contemporary Faith. By Marcus J. Borg. San Francisco: Harper, 1997. ix and 182 pages. Cloth. $18.00.

Scholars in the Jesus Seminar have a bad reputation among many in the church for undermining basic Christian teaching. Although a member of this notorious seminar, Marcus Borg has written a number of books that aim directly at reinvigorating thoughtful Christian faith. In this clearly-written volume, Borg begins with an account of his own childhood impressions about God, the God of what he calls "supernatural theism." This God is separated from the world and holds us accountable for our sins. Faith in this God meant holding correct beliefs to guarantee otherworldly salvation.

Borg contrasts this view with what he names "panentheism," a God who is not only transcendent but immanent. He offers several biblical texts to clarify how panentheism is grounded in the Scriptures. Because of God's immanence, God is not only a matter of correct belief but a reality to be experienced. This is key to his entire argument: the sacred is immediate to human experience.

While numerous images of God coexist in the Bible, Borg contrasts two primary models that have influenced the course of history: the monarchical model (God as king) and the Spirit model (God as Spirit). The latter is defended for a more dynamic understanding of creation, a more relational view of sin, and leading to a more liberating praxis. The pre-Easter Jesus, whose reconstructed practices and teachings Borg holds as normative, himself operated with a vivid awareness of the Spirit's involvement in the world. Here Borg revisits and further elaborates his portrait of Jesus presented in his earlier book, *Jesus: A New Vision.* This Jesus, Borg acknowledges as a "disclosure of God," particularly as he "was killed by the domination system because of what he stood for" (102). Nevertheless, Borg claims he wants to close the gap between the pre-Easter and canonical Jesus (i.e., "what Jesus became in the experience and life of early Christian communities," 103).

It is at this point that Borg needs to be challenged to take more seriously not only the canonical Jesus but also fundamental doctrines of Christian orthodoxy. While he demonstrates a deep desire to make Christianity relevant to a new generation, Borg remains limited in effectiveness by his reluctance to also engage the positive significance of the doctrinal beliefs under which he suffered as a child. For example, the doctrine of the Trinity, the cross as atonement, and the idea of heaven are more than oppressive and unreasonable dogmas that the church forces believers to accept. Each of these doctrines seeks to elaborate the surplus of meaning contained in the biblical accounts (Ricouer). It is time for Borg to cultivate a "second naivete" toward Christian doctrine and thereby provide an even fuller apologetic for intelligent Christian faith.

The closing chapters of *The God We Never Knew* develop approaches to spirituality and politics that would be splendid resources in congregations for building a deeper awareness of the meaning of Christian discipleship. Especially moving is Borg's description of "the dream of God," a vision of *shalom* in which "well-being belongs to everybody" (134). The material in these chapters combines biblical wisdom with practical implications for the ministry of the church today. The book concludes with a chapter exploring various meanings of salvation that have relevance for life now and not only for an afterlife.

This book can be useful as a resource in small group ministry and adult education in the congregation. It also could be beneficial as devotional reading for pastors. Borg points his readers toward the experiential dimension of biblical faith. This is a tremendous gain. My primary reservation is his need also to reclaim the meaning of those doctrines once dismissed as oppressive. How can these also be interpreted in the service of a yet fuller appropriation of meaningful faith in God?

Craig L. Nessan
Wartburg Theological Seminary

Jesus and Judgment: The Eschatological Proclamation in Its Jewish Context. By Marius Reiser. Translated by Linda Maloney. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997. x and 398 pages. Paper. $29.00.

In the plethora of historical Jesus studies that have appeared recently the single most controversial issue has been the Nazarene's perspective on the future. Those involved in this fray will welcome the present volume, a translation by Linda Maloney of a 1990 work by Tübingen scholar Marius Reiser. It delivers what it promises: a fairly thorough examination of the Jesus tradition against the background of the eschatological perspectives of Second Temple Judaism, particularly with regard to the theme of judgment.

In the first part of his book, Reiser surveys the literature of Second Temple Judaism and details the dominant characteristics of eschatology evident there. The second part offers a brief discussion of John the Baptist, and the third is devoted to the eschatological views of Jesus regarding "the Judgment of Israel" and "the Judgment of Individuals."

Although Reiser notes numerous parallels between what he ascribes to Jesus and what he believes was current for this period, readers may be most interested in the points where Jesus' proclamation appears to have been divergent or unique. He claimed that the imminent eschatological work had already begun in his own ministry, to the point of maintaining that what would determine salvation or destruction was not obedience to Torah, but acceptance of him and his message. He also gave greater prominence to the theme of "salvation of the faithful" than to "condemnation of the wicked," such that his views appear free of the revenge motif so common elsewhere. Basically, he redefined judgment such that it was "not only the precondition for the final coming of salvation" (as was traditional) but also "the necessary consequence of salvation rejected or despised" (323).

The book has been updated with a fourteen-page introduction for English readers in which the author states his opposition to scholars (Marcus Borg, John Dominic Crossan, the Jesus Seminar) who would produce a non-eschatological Jesus: "a phantom and a product of wishful thinking" (6). Unfortunately, he does not dialogue at all with the different views of English writers for whom eschatology has been important (John Meier, E. P. Sanders, Ben Witherington, N. T. Wright).

Mark Allan Powell
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Columbus, Ohio

The Strange Woman: Power and Sex in the Bible. By Gail Corrington Streete. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1997. x and 219 pages. Paper. $19.00.

Gail Streete's study argues that the biblical depiction of women as adulterers reflects an exclusively male worldview and the interests of a male dominated society where the control by men of women's reproductive power is essential for its very survival. In such a world a damning double standard easily "forgives" male promiscuity but judges as reprehensible the very women who serve their "needs" as prostitutes.

With broad brush strokes, Streete first surveys the way biblical tradition depicts women as social deviants who challenge the norms of male control. She then shows how the category 'adultery/ prostitution' attempts both to define and confine women, and how it represents women's resistance to such boundaries. She argues further that the term 'adultery' is often applied to any independent female behavior that rejects male control. Her examples draw on the "endangered ancestress" stories in Genesis, the legal material in the Torah related to sexuality, the women "on the boundary," like Tamar and Rahab, Potiphar's wife and Delilah, Jael, Jezebel and Ruth, and the erotic woman figure of the Song of Songs, whom Streete sees as the "exception that proves the rule."

She studies the symbolic construction of "Israel as wife" and the degree to which the metaphor of "harlotry" functions to equate idolatry with uncontrolled female sexual power. Streete sees in the Israelite Wisdom tradition the gradual "domestication" of the strange, initially wild figure of Lady Wisdom and shows the continuation of this domestication, especially in the Pauline writings of early Christianity.

Streete retraces much familiar ground in citing the exemplary women of the Johannine Gospel but concludes that the Book of Revelation gives the final word in the Scriptures, one that demonizes the great whore of Babylon and celebrates those who have "not defiled themselves with women" as deserving of God's blessings (Rev 14:4).

A final chapter considers the "Humiliation of Wisdom" in the rabbinic legend of Beruriah and in the gradual marginalization of Mary Magdalene in Christian tradition, while gnostic writings by contrast are shown to embrace an openness to female wisdom.

Streete has really presented nothing new in these pages but has gathered and restated a now familiar feminist theme. She has argued her case well and given her audience much to ponder in a readable, clear format.

Barbara E. Bowe
Catholic Theological Union
Chicago, Illinois

Apocalyptic Eschatology in the Gospel of Matthew. By David C. Sim. SNTS MS 88. Cambridge University Press, 1996. xvii and 282 pages. Cloth. $54.95.

A revised dissertation written under Graham Stanton at King's College in London, Sim's book has three parts: a discussion of methodological issues ("apocalyptic eschatology and apocalypticism"), a redaction-critical study of Matthew's eschatological passages, and the implications for defining "the social setting of the Matthean community." His thesis is that, compared with Mark and Q, Matthew's greater emphasis on apocalyptic eschatology points to a social setting after the fall of Jerusalem (70 C.E.) in which the Matthean community experienced greater conflict with Jews, Gentiles, and other Christians. The author is critical of G. Bornkamm and D. Marguerat who explore only the paraenetic functions of Matthew's "judgemental material." Building on the shorter studies of D. A. Hagner, O. L. Cope, and G. N. Stanton, Sim treats Matthew's eschatology and social setting in a more comprehensive monograph (p. 14).

Sim defines eight characteristics of apocalyptic eschatology: dualism, determinism, eschatological woes, the arrival of the savior figure, the judgment, the fate of the wicked, the fate of the righteous, and the imminence of the end. The five chapters of part two offer a detailed analysis of these eight features in Matthew which are more prominent than in the other NT Gospels. Despite numerous stimulating insights, Sim's redactional analysis overestimates these characteristics' significance for understanding the whole of Matthew. For example, an author who had adopted "a completely dualistic perspective" analogous to that of the Qumran community or John's Gospel (p. 91; cf. pp. 84-85) would never have included a passage like Mt 5:43-48 (esp. 45b).

Two points neglected by Sim call for caution and further reflection regarding what eschatological passages may reveal about Matthew's social setting. First, numerous minor Matthean adaptations of and additions to Mark do not significantly change the eschatological legacy left by Mark. Second, since Conzelmann's classic study of Luke (ET: *The Theology of Saint Luke*, 1960; not listed in Sim's select bibliography), scholars have recognized that Luke toned down Mark's more imminent eschatology. The only basis for comparing the use of Q in Matthew is Q/Luke. It is thus far from certain that Matthew's more eschatological Q passages stem from the experiences of a post-70 community and not earlier traditions closer to those found in Mark.

James A. Kelhoffer
The University of Chicago

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Preaching Helps

Ash Wednesday—Good Friday
Series A

No Hater

I still remember the prayer for Ash Wednesday in its Old English form, addressing God in the words, "Thou hatest nothing that Thou hast made." I am not sure why that strikes me as a more forceful expression than something like the positive flip side, "You love all that you have made." Maybe Cranmer (was it Cranmer who wrote this collect in the 1500s?) did not want to rush too quickly to the "L" word. Perhaps he thought we too easily, too glibly speak of God's love. Maybe this is his version of Bonhoeffer's protest against cheap grace.

If God is no hater, it is still sadly true that humans are haters, not at all times and in all places, but in too many places and too much of the time. The news this morning (pick a morning) was freighted yet again with stories, terrible and juicy stories, stories that sell newspapers and attract TV viewers, of humans hating other humans.

God is no hater, but does God love us human haters? Cranmer slows us down. Not so fast. Maybe he had in mind the repentance with which the prayer continues. "Thou hatest nothing that Thou hast made and dost forgive the sins of all those who are penitent." Between hate and love are tears and wooing. God hates nothing in creation, but God does weep. I think of those awesome depictions of the triumphant Christ in the mosaic domes of Greek Orthodox churches. No Mona Lisa smile. No grin or laughter. Some see in those faces a fierce judgement or at least a stern disapproval. But perhaps it is a terrible sadness. And it is sadness both at sinners sinning and at the awful hurt which sin inflicts upon its victims.

God weeps and woos and summons to repentance. What a word that is. "Repentance." It is almost as old-fashioned as those old pronouns and those old verb forms: "Thou art, thou hast, thou hatest." I suppose we don't like to think of repentance, or at least do not like being called to repentance. But there is something in the air that makes many of us think of repentance as belonging to a

bygone era. Repentance is passé, belonging to an earlier time, a more naive moment in the history of the human imagination. We once thought of ourselves as autonomous centers of willing and thinking and doing. But now many of us prefer to think that when things go wrong, when we ourselves are caught misbehaving, it is a matter of some chemical imbalance or some program enscripted in our psyches by our genetic inheritance. Or instead of pointing to our nature we may accuse our nurture.

But "repentance" appeals to our self, whatever that is. God addresses us, and the call to repentance is not merely a moment of dressing down, like the principal summoning the sixth grader to the office for a verbal lashing. God speaks to us. "Adam, Eve! Where are you?" It is the voice of loving father, loving mother, speaking to the newborn, waiting for the first time the child will respond with any sign of recognition.

"Create and make us new and contrite hearts." Or, if we think Cranmer is just too dense, "Create in us new and honest hearts." I really think some third word, neither "contrite" nor "honest," would help. What is the newness we genuinely seek? To join God in not hating. To weep when God weeps, to woo as God woos. To forgive as God forgives.

That is a tough and demanding agenda. But it is the Lenten Way. God's path and our paths intersect in the path of Jesus of Nazareth. And the stories of Jesus have the mysterious energy at work in them to draw us onto his path and therefore onto God's own way, into his fellowship and into the presence of God.

Reflecting on all the passages of Lent for us in this issue is the Rev. **Janet Hansted Meadors**, Associate Pastor at Holy Trinity Church in Thousand Oaks, California. Thousand Oaks, by the way, is the home of California Lutheran University. Janet did her undergraduate study in International Relations at the University of California at Davis and earned her M.Div. at the Claremont School of Theology in Claremont, California. Janet is working on a D.Min. in the area of Pastoral Care at Claremont. Schools are "educational institutions," but so is married life. Janet enjoys being married to the Rev. Stephen Hansted Meadors and says she is "learning the lessons of life from my three year-old daughter Ranzie."

I welcome Janet to these pages as the most recent in a long line of preachers-pastors-writers to share with all the rest of us some of the products of sermon preparation. I hear in her words the heart of the pastor attuned to the cries, spoken and unspoken, rising up in the hearts of the people among whom she moves day by day. She avoids easy solutions and glib talk, which God also avoided in the gift of the crucified Christ. I am grateful to Janet. And I am

grateful to all of you preachers out there for helping people to enter into the healing of the Lenten prayer, "Thou hatest nothing that Thou hast made!"

Blessings!

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

Ash Wednesday
February 17, 1999

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

First Reading

The passage from Joel depicts a powerful moment of existential angst for the historic people of Yahweh. With urgency and frightful images of destruction the words of the prophet bring home the theme of impending destruction. All is not well. We must gather and pray and seek God. All must gather. Not just leaders or decision makers, but all ages and stages of life. The threat at hand requires the prayerful presence of the entire community. With allusions to the power of prayer and repentance not unlike those illustrated in Jonah's story, the author wonders aloud if maybe there is still some chance that the anticipated demise can be averted. But it is hard to be hopeful when God is the commander in chief of the approaching army.

The image of being overrun by a foreign army suggests that the covenant people stand at risk for their survival. Their current status is that of a community being considered enemies of Yahweh. This warrants the trumpet blast. This is the source of the call, "Return to me with all your heart." And then, with an ironic twist, comes the comforting description of the character and heart of God: gracious, merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, one who will leave a blessing where the struggle has been purposeful, where the fire of judgment has been averted.

Remember Nineveh? Remember Jacob? The clergy speaking for the community are instructed to pray "between the vestibule and the altar," a large space where literally dozens of priests could turn together, fortified in numbers, toward the sanctuary and toward God. The priests of the people are to pray for the community to be spared the impending doom; pray that they not become the last of the covenant community, a shame and a symbol of derision among the nations. The work of the priests was to remind Yahweh that as the "inheritance" of Yahweh, *their* demise is also Yahweh's loss.

Isaiah announces a four-alarm fire: *"Shout out, do not hold back!"* The urgency in this passage is more an expression of the offensive nature of the sin of God's people than it is a warning about an external threat. Here the danger is clearly from within. The people are taking lightly the life-giving disciplines of the practice of faith, and in so doing they are bewildered about their lack

of fruit.

Their sacrifices and piety should bespeak an un-bifurcated faith, a whole, life-giving discipleship. The prescription for the poverty of spirit described in the early verses is the character and spirit of one who cannot abide the destructive powers of poverty and still look God in the eye. Intimate relationship with God is the possibility opened up to those who understand the inseparable essence of justice and righteousness, both in the character of God as well as in faithful living.

Usually the Psalm 51 is heard as the voice of David, speaking from a powerfully repentant heart after having heard the trumpet loud and clear, thanks to Nathan. The language utilizes the images of purity and cleanliness so integral to daily life in ancient Hebrew culture.

Beginning with verse 6, the focus shifts from the sin to the standard and vision set forth by God. By lifting up what *God* wants, namely "truth in the inward being," the psalmist pours out the desire to *have* what God would *give*, to be what God would desire. Unspoken is the author's awareness of the powerful truth that when everything is lost, including one's integrity, the only loss more devastating would be the loss of a connection to the God who can redeem and transform. "Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me." If God will restore, the natural extension of thanksgiving is a clear connection to a new and different life. A life of service and praise is envisioned. The indivisible nature of righteousness and justice is not lost on David. He offers outreach and instruction to the lost, and praise, as a sign of the genuine nature of his repentance. A "truly contrite and willing spirit" looks for opportunities for repair and restitution for offenses.

In 2 Corinthians it is God's work, and the task of embodying that effectively, which is being addressed, rather than the sin or condition of the believing community. While the psalmist has "hit bottom" emotionally and psychologically as a result of some compelling encounter with himself, his neighbor, and God, the Pauline call to renewal and action is motivated by no such crisis.

The standard Paul is setting is an issue of community identity. A collective sense of duty, and appeal for collaboration in "the ministry of reconciliation," is what Paul is arguing as an expectation of faithful disciples. Ambassadors and agents have a job to do—the exhortation is to rise to the call of that position as it comes directly from God, through Christ (and communicated and distinguished from others through the apostle's own ministry which has a "proven track record").

His listing of the traumas endured in these effort (vv. 4-10) serves as corporate credentialing, a testimony to the commitment and seriousness brought to bear on the import of the message. The whole of creation has changed due to the love of God for the world, demonstrated in Christ. Therefore, responding to the new world is imperative. The day of salvation has come, and the day of responding to it has as well.

In Matthew again the warning comes, not so much about not doing what's right but doing it rightly. "When you do what you do," do it for real, is the message. It is a thoroughly realistic and honest insight to suggest that the temptation to distortion, to doing the things of faith for all the wrong reasons, for the wrong audience and the wrong ends, is a formidable pressure for God's people. The language assumes believers are already in the practice of sharing their wealth and are already praying for God's people, publicly and privately. The instruction is not for the new believer, but for the seasoned follower whose discipleship

may become quietly and unwittingly sabotaged without care and humility in the routines of practicing faith.

Pastoral Reflections

In the age of throw-away contact lenses, disposable cameras, and "Spin City" ethics, the very fact that the historic rhythms of the season of Lent are widely acknowledged in the church is itself a sign of grace. What strikes me most at the heart of the lessons appointed for Ash Wednesday is the urgency of the scripture message. *Now* is the time for communities of believers to find or reacquaint themselves with a path of life which includes God's steady, even, loving presence. The very thought may bring a comfort which is unknown to long-time Christians and spiritual seekers alike: permanence, peacefulness, staying power for the sake of believing community and its wholeness, its intimacy with God.

Speaking of God's lasting, steady love may be an illusive, if not surreal, notion for many a modern soul. How does one proclaim a gospel worthy of lifelong attention, yea, care-full and wholehearted, even costly devotion, to a people who may not drive the same car, have the same friends, attend the same church, or live or work in the same communities this time next year?

In communities which are affected by what Whitehead called the pressures of "perpetual perishing," one task of the preacher is first to imagine—hopefully with some clarity and compassion—and then to speak to the deep hunger in God's people for the experience of profound, lasting truthfulness and steadfast love. That hunger can lead to a more satisfying living in relationship to God, a God who is both fiercely unrelenting in getting our attention and gently, radically involved in our becoming.

The lessons get us underway, setting a tone of urgency, even crisis, for the beginning of the season. As I recall my experiences of Ash Wednesday gone by, I am aware that the voice of urgency has rarely been invoked. But this urgency cannot be denied. It is written in the Bible and in our current state of affairs. There does seem to be an outpouring of interest in and articulation of spiritual hungers across the country. We see and hear a variety of heightened interests in things religious in every form of media. Things spiritual may be in vogue just now, but few trends can "deliver the goods" of depth and steadfast character of God. Fast food spirituality can't satisfy for the long haul. Neither can simplistic pieties or a weekly trip to the rubric museum. The harvest is ready; we have our work cut out for us.

With much of life moving fast, changing in meaning and value more quickly than ever before in human experience, there is a great underlying anxiety in our culture. Each reading boldly announces that God is looking for our honest, reflective, sincere turning away from that which harms in order to turn more fully toward that which gives life, permanently, deeply, lovingly. The fasting and praying called for in our texts is not a simple fast or a rote petition, but a life-giving experience that will touch us as deep and even deeper than our hungers and our fears.

Joel would have us call God's people together, not with a demure social invitation, but with a bold announcement, a trumpeted alert. What we are about to do in this Ash Wednesday worship setting is herald a reality (coming and present) that holds in it the potential for the crisis of transformation. This reality comes clashing into the norms of our day as loudly as the swords of the early armies of Israel. We are a community put on notice that the character of God and the hopes of God for us combine to form divine standards of faithfulness for the covenant people of God.

All are essential in the spiritual reformation of the community—the movers and shakers, the moved and shaken. To plumb the depths of life and spirit to find a reality that goes more deeply than our hunger is not a solitary task. To dare a journey, alongside others, with God in the hopes of discovering truly a steadfast love, a power that is greater than our most desperate and private hopes, is a tall order, not one to be taken lightly or alone.

Lent opens up a place and time in the midst of the tyranny of the mundane and deceptive. It is a time for holy, honest reflection, for God's perspective to be powerfully brought to bear on the wayward leanings and machinations of God's people. For this inaugural worship service, sound the trumpet, proclaim the themes of the season: seriousness of purpose as disciples, forthrightness— inviting each believer to act with the courage and humility required of truly fruitful self-reflection, and finally, corporate identity as God's people. Feed the hunger.

First Sunday in Lent
February 21, 1999

Psalm 32
Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7
Romans 5:12-19
Matthew 4:1-11

First Reading

It's an interesting circumstance to imagine. God has created the human creatures (Genesis 2) and has now decided to put them to work caring for a garden. (Perhaps this suggests that paradise more closely resembles a place of meaningful, productive work than some idyllic indulgence in extreme leisure!) The instructions for behavior in the garden are clear: "enjoy eating what you will from the variety of plants, but don't touch or eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil—that will cause you to die."

The snake, craftier than the average animal in the garden, inquires of the woman, "Did God say?"—a rhetorical question, we may presume, otherwise how does the snake know to inquire about this? Has the snake somehow already seen this episode? Hmmm. The snake offers the information that the humans will not die, but rather have their eyes "opened," thus helping them to know good and evil. So the woman takes and eats the fruit with the hope of becoming wise and shares it with the man, and they become wise...about their nakedness. Why?

The story is full of food for thought. God said if they ate they would die. What, if anything, in them died, since obviously it wasn't their actual physical death that was the immediate result? Many people have traditionally suggested it was their "innocence," a philosophical perspective which has led American Christian piety to embrace an uninvolved posture toward the corporate concerns and issues of the human community. On the other hand, it has at times served to encourage believers to be suspicious of knowledge, even going so far as to imply that to be hungry to learn may carry with it an inherently evil component. To take from the story, consciously or unconsciously, the implication that there is virtue in being unaware of the world which we have been commissioned to care for as stewards would be a tragedy.

The role of the snake is a juicy one to explore. In ancient Hebrew thought, the images of evil or craftiness were usually understood as subordinates to God, not competing powers. If that be the case, to what end has God sent this snake to entice the human creatures to be disobedient? And as we listen to the voices in the passage, how should we "weigh" the voice of the snake? Is

it a voice of authority telling the truth or should we listen more closely to the words spoken by God and return to ponder the question, what, if anything died with the defiance of God's wisdom?

What connection, if any, is there between knowing good and evil and being aware of/ ashamed of one's physical body, and sexuality in particular?

Finally, it seems that God, desiring good for the creatures, would want them to have "open" eyes, would want them to have the ability to discern good from evil. If that were not the case, what was God doing for us that our disobedience undermined?

Is it possible that being out of step with God causes the death of our freedom and takes away our ability to trust, leaving us feeling the compunction to fend for ourselves in ways that in a world of complete reliance on God would not exist?

Both Genesis 2 and Psalm 32 have much to say about the connection between bodily health and psycho-spiritual health. The psalmist describes the freedom from and restoration from the effects of our sin, our disobedience, as being forgiven, having the sin covered, having been graced with no imputation, no assigning of the weight of the offense. Without confession, denial of or apathy toward the reality of our brokenness brings dis-ease, then disease, and the body wastes away from the toxin that goes unacknowledged. Amazing that the psalmist could describe metaphorically a process we know today is true spiritually, psychologically, and physiologically. But confession, open assessment that ends the futility of hiding, makes way for the forgiveness of the guilt associated with the sin. Interesting: the guilt of the sin is forgiven.

The image of peanuts comes to mind. Like a peanut, sin has a kind of meat and a shell. Once the heart of the matter is removed (i.e. once sin is forgiven), the believer is left with shells to deal with, hopefully minus most of the heartache and spiritual pain. Now the shells can either be strewn on the floor to make a festive environment for dancing and conversation, or they can just be the mess left over from sin.

It seems as the voice of God responds to the cries of the repentant sinner, that the instruction and counsel may help lead to the creative and enlightening power of the residue of the experience of sin. The suggestions of horses and mules lead me to imagine learning from one's gentle guidance of the bridle. If we haven't already, we in the church may want to take in a 12-step meeting or two, just to learn about the ways the fullness of life described so beautifully in this psalm is embodied in the practice of people living that journey. In 12-step programs participants learn a lifestyle of acknowledging and not hiding shortfalls; strong value is placed on learning from one another's sin so as to take in the wisdom that is shared (and not be so mulish as to need to repeat other's mistakes). Finally, the simplicity and clarity of the program helps people learn the fine art of making something beautiful with all those leftover shells.

The humor packed into the opening line of the Romans text is hard to pass by: "Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man...." Was the woman's eating of the fruit of the tree not counted, not "imputed" to her as sin? If so, we have a good bit of historical art depicting the wrong culprit in the garden, and we'll need to look into updating our Sunday School curriculum. Or, another approach to understanding this take on the Genesis story would be to ask the question, "Is the woman somehow not considered part of the world?" Her invisibility in the foundation of Paul's philosophical schema is striking. The woman in the Genesis story has carried the burden of the "temptress" title for centuries; so why is she

here not responsible for her behavior? Her disobedience was her first and primary sin, was it not? Is it simply that Paul's one-man-to-one-man theory wouldn't work, so we need to have the focus on the male creature, or is there more going on here?

I have to say this passage raises so many more questions than answers or convictions for me that my only contribution may be to follow the poet Rilke's advice and "live the questions" in the hope of some day living into their answers. Living the questions begins the musing process.

It seems likely that sin or at the very least potential for sin, especially disobedience, was present in the garden at the time in question. It seems arguable that the potential for human death was, as well—being made of dust, of the earth, would at least suggest mortality.

And then there's the polar opposite/paralleling process imagery of the "two men" theory. One chose a path that led to death which was destructive, the other a path that led to a death that was life-giving. One disobeyed God, the other by all indications did not. Why is the pairing important? Does it provide a kind of redemption of the Genesis story from Paul's perspective to link the two as firstborn of a new creation? Does the chiastic quality of the theory somehow add to the weight of the christological claims, to the philosophical mind of antiquity? And if so, why not Noah, or Moses?

The free gift of life in Jesus seems to stand on its own theologically, philosophically, and spiritually without comparison to the story and symbolism of the would-be initiation of human sinfulness, be the guilty party Adam or Eve. This believer is still befuddled in knowing what hope Paul had for strengthening the proclamation of the gospel in creating this package of images. I can only pray the reader will tread lightly in judgment should you have already lived into the answers while I'm still trudging barefoot among the questions.

The most difficult aspect of hearing Matthew's story of Jesus' time of temptation in the wilderness is not that he emerged "victorious," that is, did not give in to the trade options of the voice of Satan. It is the suggestion that Jesus struggled at all with full and immediate obedience to the ways of God. Even the scholarly commentaries often find the creative semantics to somehow make temptation a theoretical concept rather than an actual experience in the repertoire of Jesus the human.

Complicating the picture even further is that it is hard to deny God's involvement in creating that experience. Led up by the Spirit, tested by the voice of one who is subordinate to God, the stories of Job and of the watery escape of the Israelites should loom large in the backstage of our minds. Who is this God that frees and then tests, baptizes and then sends, saves and then leads into places of vulnerability?

One of the most critical questions for believers who walk a path of serious struggle with pain, inner wounding, illness, or traumatic losses is the question of how to trust a God who will not *always* protect and defend us from times of extreme vulnerability. We pray regularly, "Lead us not into temptation." It is an existential awareness we rarely choose to acknowledge; it takes too much energy, if nothing else, this awe-full and frightening reality that God may not only be at work in the struggles of our lives, but may have a hand in their appearance. Fortunately, if we do dare delve into the depths of that awareness, the scriptures once again sound the theme of safety in steady, if not blind, obedience and trust. Jesus' choices prove he will not do whatever is necessary in the short run (claim the power to do "magic" on his own behalf) in order to prove something to someone to whom he holds no alle-

giance. There's a modern temptation if ever there was one. The younger brother in the prodigal son story couldn't resist that temptation, to grab what was his to have. However, chances are the voice to which he was responding came from within, rather than from without. Only the awareness of the historic, essential question of faith and life—"Do you love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and strength and being?"—keeps Jesus in the path of obedience. Maybe it was easy for him to see beyond the promptings of other questions and paths, maybe it wasn't. Either way it can be a story that helps us to find our bearings and keep what is essential before us in times of testing, temptation, transition, or trials, however they emerge in our lives.

Pastoral Reflections

In the garden, awareness was a problem, and the losses of disobedience are somewhat muted as well. In the throes of human struggle depicted by the psalmist, awareness is key to understanding our sin, confessing it, and finding the health and freedom that comes with forgiveness. The losses of an unaware life are real, physically, emotionally, spiritually. Death comes with keeping our eyes closed, not with having them opened. And finally with Matthew's temptation story, the depths of our relationship to God are plumbed as we grow in awareness of God's sovereignty and wisdom and compassion, sometimes played out in ways we'd rather not be aware of, or tempted to re-configure.

Perhaps a homiletic direction is suggested in thinking about what value awareness plays in the life of the community. How do questions of awareness, sin and forgiveness interplay in the life of the community, awareness of the temptations and voices that would give us "gifts" of knowledge or power and unwittingly set us at odds with God's guidance and life-giving paths. Is it a virtue to "check out" when issues of hunger, domestic violence and intentional peace are raised? Are those who call for greater clarity in your practices or traditions heard through a haze of suspicion? Are there ways that women and their experiences are made to be invisible in the sacred story telling of the congregation, the community, the gospel? The scriptures suggest that Lent may be a good season to live the questions, together, boldly.

Second Sunday in Lent
February 28, 1999

Psalm 121
Genesis 12:1-4a
Romans 4:1-5, 13-17
John 3:1-17

First Reading

The beginning of the second half of Genesis marks the shift from stories of origin and creation to the stories recounting the history of God's saving actions toward the people with whom God has taken the initiative and intentional, covenant relationship. The shift from last week's focus is striking. The spotlight here is God and what God intends, rather than human abilities to act or follow or choose what is right or good. God has chosen Abram out of Godly prerogative, not because of Abram's pedigree, or drive, or proven track record, or good looks. Abram did not qualify for the job of "father of the nations." He was simply and mysteriously appointed. Generations since have celebrated his willingness to listen and respond, even beyond his comprehension.

In Psalm 121, the voices of those taking on the rather risky business of travel to Jerusalem for sacred devotion are heard, clearly naming the experience of embarking

on such a journey. The ancient world's pantheon of influence is reflected; without shelter, the travelers reveal a sense of vulnerability to the potentially destructive powers of the gods of the sun and of the moon. Perhaps those staying home or leading the band answer the fears with words of assurance, words of confidence in the one God, God of the entire created order. In stark contrast to last week's images of temptation, here God is revealed to the people as one who has both the power and the heart to protect and comfort and defend. The second voice speaks a reminder of consolation of monotheism.

Romans 4. Out of void and creative chaos comes life. Out of bodies too old to become parents come a family of thousands. Out of lives marred with deceit and despair comes a reason to hope. God's promise of love isn't the prize of the perfect or the trophy of those whose works are beyond blemish. If it were, it would be a natural reward for a particular accomplishment, payment for services rendered. Again, the reorientation to God's ways as distinctive: God initiates out of love what we cannot create or earn, but what we can gratefully receive, and grow into our ability to trust. This God behaves in ways that fly in the face of dominant cultural values of Paul's time, as well as ours. Retributive justice is turned on its ear; juridical language is turned inside out. Trusting in this God is the door to relationship with God and opens the believer to God's wonder and grace, to an identity that is given without regard for the identity previously earned.

There is no ladder, no check stub, no credential behind one's name that can assure us access to a place of understanding the ways of the Spirit of God (John 3). Somehow being "born from above" brings the insight to us, or re-shapes us, or re-arranges our spirit such that we "see" from a new vantage point. Jesus' words baffle his religious colleague, and, as is true so often in life, we are given the opportunity to learn from the conversation by overhearing the struggles of the speakers. Jesus is perhaps not at his most patient best. His responses seem to indicate a bit of exasperation—perhaps it was at times tiresome for him to work so hard to paint a picture of the world as it looks through the eyes of grace. One can imagine that Jesus had to be, in a sense, bilingual, able to speak and translate meanings into the language of various levels and kinds of faith. As any translator will attest, it's exhausting work. Like trying to share an awe-inspiring moment in nature with someone who wasn't there, Jesus uses his birth imagery in a desperate attempt to help Nicodemus broaden and deepen his understanding of Jesus' work, to move from the milk of "signs and wonders" to the solid food of a new inner vision. As any good instructor would, Jesus moves to an image that he knew speaks volumes to his Pharisee friend—the image of the serpent lifted high by Moses, the serpent with the power to save all who look at it. In summary format, we are given the editor's personal "Cliffs Notes" in what has emerged for many as the gospel in shorthand (vv. 16 and 17); direct, didactic instruction, just in case we, too, have not gotten the message.

Pastoral Reflections

The theme that runs through the scriptures for the day and cries out for treatment is that of promise, the promise of God's love and initiative toward us, urging us to cling to it, to live in it, to become it. It's a good long walk in the promise of God that helps believers imagine that God is concerned about the present realities of their life. It is only such journeying that makes an incarnate God real in a world still full of competing powers.

The promise of a future envisioned by

God, the promise of community and the richness of lives lived in risky devotion, the promise of a God who will persevere in meeting us wherever we are, striving to bring us closer to our rightful place as faithful servants and growing disciples, all are rich terrain to be explored.

The texts beg for a spiritual excursion into promise-land: perhaps a review of the kinds of promises God makes, a time to question the trustworthiness of God's promises and our ability to be sustained when it appears they have not come to fruition, a time to savor the utter disregard of the gospel for the promised rewards we imagine we've earned and the ultimate promise of a love and acceptance we know we can never earn.

While the focus is clearly on God, it may be worthwhile to consider the question, "Are there promises we as Christians are making to the world inherent in our weekly claiming of God's love and forgiveness in worship?" And what of the promises we have made to one another? Promises we made at the big times in our lives (marriages, baptisms, confirmations) as well as the everyday promises—promises that loom large in the hearts and minds of those who wait for us to fulfill them?

Regardless of which passage the preacher chooses to draw upon most heavily, I can imagine a sermon entitled "Regardless." God seems to show utter disregard for character in choosing disciples. And regardless of our abilities, God is present and luring us toward a promised future. What good news that can mean for us!

Third Sunday in Lent
March 7, 1999

Psalm 95
Exodus 17:1-7
Romans 5:1-11
John 4:5-42

First Reading

Few circumstances can bring out our full human potential for griping like those of being tired, feeling lost *and* hungry *and* thirsty. Once adjusted to the context of slavery, the Hebrew identities were built around that experience. Now, without the stabilizing factor of the known, however destructive that might be, the people of Yahweh are adrift. There is little anchor to compensate for the tidal wave of transition; they are on their way to forging a new identity, but they aren't there yet—and it is miserable.

Ask anyone traveling the path of major life transition (death of a spouse or child, divorce, chronic illness, surviving the trauma of violence or war, displacement for any reason) and you will hear how difficult it is to carve out a new sense of self when the old one is no longer. In the wilderness, literally and figuratively, the raw emotions of human experience are like oversized shadows on the walls of our collective psyches. No wonder the finger of blame was turned toward Moses, and then toward God. Someone needs to hold our terrors of abandonment and contain our anxiety. Leadership in the church means helping members in times of transition to ask the question, "Is our God with us, or not?" and if so, "How?" without murdering the very one to whom they are looking for reassurance.

It doesn't get any more basic than water. God deigns to respond when challenged and proves God's care for the people, once again,

through water. Sad, but true, the mighty acts of God yesterday were little comfort for people facing death tomorrow. It is significant that the sense of victimization is so strong that the places are names not for God's awesome abilities and acts, but for the testing of the people. How is it that we come to understand that we are somehow entitled to life without hardship, exempt by virtue of carrying God's name in our communities? How is it that this experience is so ancient and yet so modern, this process of being stricken with amnesia when it comes to trusting God? We often don't even stop to ask the lyrical question, "What have you done for me lately?" If we did, we'd most likely find ourselves encouraged beyond our circumstances. Water from nowhere is big—water from a rock is a quintessential image of the power to provide, and even so, the consolation is only temporary. How timeless is this picture of our human hearts!

The connection of the Romans passage to the passages from Exodus and Psalms is powerful. Paul's theology paints a picture of the wilderness of suffering as a place not of abandonment, but as ripe for the unfolding of God's future. Where looking back in time to see God's actions couldn't keep the people of the exodus in peace and security, Paul suggests that God's future handiwork is the appropriate frame of meaning and context for today's trials. Like James' "count it all joy," Paul's words echo his letter to the Galatians where "long suffering" is included in his enumeration of the gifts of the Spirit.

Suffering is as real to Paul as it was to his Hebrew ancestors. Rather than submit to the would-be pop cultural theology of the day, which suggested that human trials were the boxing ring of the forces of good and evil, Paul argues that vision can do what memory has failed to accomplish. Suffering in the wilderness created isolation, a fracturing of the community. Suffering, from Paul's perspective, connects, empowers, and sustains. The community finds reconciliation. While few of us volunteer for the life experiences that develop character and endurance and hope deep within our souls, we don't have to look beyond the experiences of women around the world, African Americans, Jews, immigrants, and our homosexual brothers and sisters to see the community-forging truth of his words.

In John 4 Jesus finds himself once again misunderstood as he attempts to communicate the ineffable by using concrete, everyday images. The Samaritan woman at the historic well of Jacob grasps the issues about as quickly as did Nicodemus. Using water as a central image, Jesus proves the power of his identity and directly discloses his mission. Did the testimony of one woman really bring an entire Samaritan community to faith in the God to whom Jesus points? Perhaps it was the power of raising the question that compelled them to seek an answer for themselves, which had the dramatic effect of such a "harvest." Once again, character and social status has little to do with God's ability to work wonders through people of every nation.

Pastoral Reflections

Using the image of water and its connection to the power of God in baptism, I recently asked a group of Sunday church school leaders to name as many of the characteristics or capacities of water as they could imagine. We came up with thirty-three things that water does. Then we went around the room and each of us shared how God's love finds a way to work in our lives in one or more of these capacities. In that simple exchange, the power of God's love was seen in the light of significant transformations in the past, current movements and the sense of being a part of an historic stream which flows to the future which is already alive in the wisdom

of God.

The preacher may want to consider finding avenues to bring to life the diversity of ways that water serves as metaphor for God's presence in our lives. To plumb the depths of isolation and the riches of hope in these passages without sacrificing one for the other will go a long way in honoring the struggles and questions of those who fill the pews. If we're asking the question, "Is God among us, or not?" we're already engaged in a struggle which is of "spirit and truth," and we enter carefully into sacred space.

If the vagaries of life are such that we are not in the midst of such a journey, perhaps a question that tickles our souls and whets our appetite for discovery is in order. Given what we know and experience as we go about our daily tasks, he cannot be the Messiah for us, can he?

Fourth Sunday in Lent
March 4, 1999

Psalm 23
1 Samuel 16:1-13
Ephesians 5:8-14
John 9:1-41

First Reading

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me down to lie in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters, he restores my soul.

The boy is too young to be included in the ceremonial encounter with Samuel, yet he is called from the tending of sheep to the service of God and history, with a touch of oil and the marking of the Spirit.

You anoint my head with oil. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.

Like a diviner with a branch making his way to hidden water, Samuel follows the direction of the voice of God and ultimately presides over one of the crucial turning points in the history of the Hebrew people. Like John the Baptist, chosen to point to the one who is coming, the aged Samuel stands before the child anointed to lead the people.

Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff—they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.

Did anointing this child put him at mortal risk?

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.

How differently we might think of our acolytes, our Sunday School children, our junior and senior high youth, if we saw among them one who was, even now, being chosen to provide spiritual leadership to the body of Christ.

Ephesians 5. It is potentially very destructive, in a country rampant with racism, to equate light with good and dark with evil and call it the way God sees the world. It may be true that human experiences of being lost or depressed, wicked or hiding, are often named in terms of darkness. And our experiences of liberation, joy, redemption and clarity often speak to the power of light. However, when the writer says, "now in the Lord you are light," the reference isn't to inherent goodness, but rather to the clear contrast of a life "enlightened" by the love and Spirit of God. Let the preacher be reminded that with every allusion to goodness that is exclusively light, gendered male, or associated with believers of a certain age or status, the lights in many hearts and spirits are dimmed. The season of Lent is a fruitful time to speak to the process of intentionally exploring not only the grave sins from which we turn away, but also the socially acceptable sins in which we may persist, unchal-

lenged. The collateral damage of our comfortable sinning may be that we are unwittingly extinguishing over time the very light of God's love in those around us.

John paints an unsettling image for us: the spiritual leaders of Jesus' day so threatened by an act of healing that they (1) badger the blind man now healed; (2) intimidate his family and friends; (3) debate his worthiness to receive God's care; (4) cast aspersions on his character when he gives testimony to the new life that Jesus gave him; and ultimately (5) cast him out of the community.

What synod is this, anyway? These religious leaders preferred the loss of the now-whole man and the splitting of a family over acknowledging the wonder of healing, because it occurred outside their influence and without their consent. It's unsettling but it shouldn't sound alien. Isn't it a scenario with strong parallels to how we, too, as the institutional church, have historically responded to those that announce God's blessing and affirmation beyond or before the dominant culture would offer its "amen?"

African Americans and Hispanic Americans and Asian Americans and gay and lesbian people have often encountered pressure and intimidations. Women, in the church and outside it, are still required to endure the hazing of peers and colleagues, often masked in humor, requiring them to justify carrying themselves in the posture of a whole person. Many who experience this learn early in life to hide the light of their sight and insight, lest the endless demands for explanation exhaust their ability to serve willingly. Gay and lesbian people who have, through long journeys of inner desolation and social ostracizing, found the peace of Christ, may be among the most poignant example today of those whose healing puts the blindness of the church in sharp relief.

For the bold and courageous, some questions worthy of our consideration this 4th Sunday of Lent:

What are the places in our lives where we are saying, with our theology and our attitudes, "We see"? Are we sure?

Are there signs of God's healing power in places that we'd prefer not to know about?

If we discover a "blind spot," do we dare ask what is causing our blindness? The sin of our parents? Our sin? The corporate sin of society or the church?

What would it cost us to lose our blindness, to align with the truth?

Pastoral Reflections

The reading from John helps flesh out the many and varied ways we come to know who is suffering in our midst, where God is at work and why. Like the Israelites, we sometimes prefer fleshpots and blindness to God's touch and renewal. Life is difficult. Even *receiving* the blessing of God can be so costly; some of us would prefer simply to remain ignorant or to forego the blessing altogether. The images of guidance and comfort in today's readings are honest about the ambiguity and shadows of life. Sometimes even the good things come in difficult packages, or with challenges to our inner character and spiritual maturity.

Vision is a theme that runs through each lesson: future vision for well-being for all people on the part of an active and caring God; a vision of being connected enough with the source of all light to actually become of that same light; and finally, the gift of vision, like 3-D glasses, that would enable us to see God's activity in the world and share in it, rather than oppose it out of our ignorance or self-sufficiency.

Fifth Sunday in Lent
March 21, 1999

Psalm 130
Ezekiel 37:1-14
Romans 8:6-11
John 11:1-45

First Reading

Into the scene of overwhelming death comes the imagery of life re-created with the lushness of flesh and spirit. To a people defeated, transported, and utterly destroyed in hope and spirit comes the nourishment of God via the words of the prophet.

The image of the valley of bones dried out from the desert sun is inviting only in that the believer is given the awareness that whatever their own desert looks like, it will be no shock to God or God's people. In a paradoxical way, there is a kind of encouragement for the believer to risk facing the many deaths of our lives and spirits. To do so is to walk hand in hand not only with the prophet and with God's people throughout the ages, but also with God as God restores life. Once again, God breathes life into humanity.

Taken together, this lesson from Ezekiel and Psalm 130 draw us to the innermost places of human desperation to hear the voices of human hearts crying out in ways most of us have heard in the depths of our spirits. They also take us from the very real experience of reaching for a sign of reconnection to God, to a place where God has bridged the gap with gracious tender care.

Paul, freed from the limits of a life that can *only* be understood from the perspective of the obviously material, the tyranny of the tangible, announces the parameters of the world shaped by the Spirit and resurrection power (Romans 8). As with the images from the John stories of the last few weeks, Paul is here bringing home the mystery of a gospel perspective on the world. The futility of the ordinary cause/effect, reward/punishment understanding of the world is left behind as lifeless, hollow, a path leading nowhere. For Paul, the Spirit breathes the life, the perspective, the wisdom of God into the believer. Paul sees our lives as defined by that Spirit rather than by the dictates of sin.

Rich with foreshadowing of Jesus' impeding experiences of death and resurrection, John 11 is also a story of trust, of waiting for the Lord, of souls that cry out. Pastorally, it presents a teachable moment, a chance to address the natural human experience of tears and of anger with God when what we might expect from a God of compassion is not what comes to pass.

Two sisters come wanting their brother back, wanting the power of God to be brought to bear on their crisis. We all do. What is set in motion is not one resurrection, but two; not one person snatched back from the abyss of death, but resurrected life for all families.

Martha embodies for us movement, learning. Eventually, she hears the words, "I am the resurrection and the life," and she comprehends, answering Jesus' question correctly. This and the newfound faith in Jesus among the Jews are signs, within a gospel of signs, that we are closer to the completion of the journey than we may know.

Pastoral Reflections

John's Gospel has given us situation after situation portraying our *illness that leads to death*, promising that it can be cracked open, treated and transformed so that it might instead lead "to God's glory." Today's lessons offer a prime opportunity to begin to weave together the various strands of our pilgrimage experience of Lent. We seek to integrate with poetry or pictures, humor or dialogue, how our journey inward, solitary and yet corporate, is changing the landscape of our inner spirits, nurturing the very life on our

bones. This week may be a *kairos* time to find images that assist the congregation to name for themselves how the journey has refreshed their identity as people standing in the historic stream of believers. In what ways might it be important to aid the reflection and repentance, so that the soul-searching and silence of the people come to fruition?

The changes of Lent, internal or external, are never meant to be an end in themselves. This is not the winding down session of a six-week self-help workshop. However, spiritual leadership means helping people understand the terrain of their faith journey. And this journey will encounter dramatic episodes in the scriptural events played out in the corporate worship life of the community over the next two weeks.

Sunday of the Passion
Palm Sunday
March 28, 1999

Psalm 31:9-16
Isaiah 50:4-9a
Philippians 2:5-11
Matthew 26:14–27:66

First Reading

It's almost impossible to read the Isaiah passage and not hear the words of Romans 8:31-39. Who can possibly present an obstacle that God cannot overcome? Speaking as one anointed to offer a healing word to a broken and exiled people, the message is simple and direct. No matter how it hurts, no matter the embarrassment or public humiliation, no matter what the personal cost with regard to what life throws at us, the ultimate reality is that, finally, God can deal with it all in ways we can't begin to imagine. God is our refuge and strength, our defender and rock, and there is no power greater in heaven or earth. It feels good to soak in the image of God as our advocate and defender.

It may be helpful to imagine the message directed to the people of other nations, people who have been destroyed in this decade, exiled and enslaved. How differently we might understand God's activity in the world, and our role in it, if we were to overhear today's word as it is given to the peoples of Bosnia or Baghdad. One nation's word of corporate comfort is another nation's indictment and call to repentance. On this Sunday the church typically reads the story of Jesus' persecution at the hands of the civil and religious leaders of the time. Perhaps we would be well-served to focus first on the standard the prophet set for himself as an instrument of God, and evaluate our sense of identification there, before we look to be included in community lifting up the claim of vindication.

Psalm 31. Developmental psychologist Erik Erickson has suggested that we humans have a need to complete a final integrative task at the end of our lives. This task has to do with a need to develop a cohesive frame of meaning as we look back on who we've been or not been, what we've done or not done. At some point we begin to wrestle with a kind of integrity to hold our being together with richness. Failing that, we drift in pieces toward despair.

The psalmist looks back and sees waste, physical, emotional and spiritual ruin, including the utter destruction of her or his place in the community. The description is of a life in shambles.

Yet, in powerful contrast, in verses 9 and 14 there emerges a tenacious "Yes, but." Instead of the familiar "Yes, but" that usually precedes excuses and rationalizations, the psalmist's "Yes, but" is followed by deeply-held wisdom, "what I also know is

that God is not just another voice in the crowd."

"I trust in you, God. My times are in your hand. Deliver me. Let your face shine upon me. Save me in your love."

The psalmist, with his or her honest confession of brokenness, together with the "Yes, but" of faith in God's grace, is a model of the integration of the self. The psalm displays a state of health beyond self-deception or despair.

The Philippians hymn begins with exhortation to the individual believer, offers theological commentary on the whole of the Christ event, and locates the relationship of Jesus to God, reflecting on the cosmic order of things—all in seven short verses.

No doubt this hymn has been chosen for this day as it lifts up the theme of Jesus' obedience, the centerpiece to the events and practices of Palm/ Passion Sunday observances. It lends itself to spirited, triumphant anthems and bold proclamations of imitation. However, perhaps a word of caution is in order. Any one of the phrases of this passage, taken alone without further treatment, could well distort the wholeness of the gospel; could well be something other than good news to those gathered for a day of historically rooted and distinctly meaningful worship. It may be that this pericope is well suited to support the events and themes of the day, especially as a way to theologically summarize the more detailed account of the passion. Taken by itself, however, the passage could unwittingly derail the powerful witness of the Passion story, leading us to assent too readily to a christological destination of belief without experiencing the rough road of experience through which faith is forged.

So often on Palm or Passion Sunday the reading of the today's lengthy Gospel comprises the bulk of the entire worship service. Finally we the people hear the story in its entirety, without interruption or commercial break. The story tells itself, and needs no commentary. And yet I worry that reading too quickly passes over rough places that call for comment. For example, do we hear the harshness or the warning in Jesus' outburst, "Woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born"?

What new accents do we hear about the meal, when the words are part of this story and not spoken at the altar over bread and wine? Do we take this story so seriously that we need Jesus' exhortation to pray lest we fail in "the time of trial"? What is that time of trial for us, anyway?

How are we part of the crowds that scream "Crucify him!" in our lives today? Do we ever have the courage to listen to our dreams (like Pilate's wife) and suggest ways of standing up to the tide of public opinion or dominant culture currents?

The story itself is powerful. There are a myriad of methods available for telling the story that may help to unleash that power in new and relevant ways for a crowd of folks hungry for the richness of the human/ divine drama. If the methods are chosen well, it's a day that has particular potential for speaking effectively to a great diversity of the gathered, from school-aged children to those who have not tired of hearing the story over many years.

Maundy Thursday
April 1, 1999

Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19
Exodus 12:1-4 (5-10) 11-14
1 Corinthians 11:23-26
John 13:1-17, 31b-35

First Reading

The ancient and sacred motifs of God's arm stretched out to save undergirds each heartfelt refrain in this psalm. A pilgrimage people who have arrived at Jerusalem to say "Thank you," formally, corporately, ritually, and personally, sing this song. It's no wonder it forms the basis of the offertory response.

"This day shall be a day of remembrance for you. You shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord; throughout your generations you shall observe it as a perpetual ordinance." (Exodus 12)

Every year, on the anniversary of my involvement in a serious car accident, the phone rings and the voice of my sister, Kathy, says, "It's December 7th, I'm just calling to say how glad I am that you're here, that you're my sister and that I remember." As the distance of time increases from that experience, the flood of memory is now as much about how it triggers this act of love as it is about the trauma of a life-threatening experience. No doubt many such calls go out on that date (Pearl Harbor Day) every year, to offer a similar message. Remembering and acting go together. Out of the mix of what was and what it takes to give birth to remembering comes the power to create something altogether new.

Lent is about immersing ourselves in the stories that help us remember God's saving activity in the world, but there is something about Maundy Thursday that sparks a heightened awareness for the gathered believers. Today we remember not only that we too were once slaves, who have God to thank for every ounce of our freedom, but also that we serve the One who shows us the way to become instruments of freedom through intentional service.

Maundy Thursday is rooted in the Passover, which has sustained our Jewish friends and neighbors over the centuries. It also names in words and ritual the distinctly Christian hope of living in a renewed promise, a renewed covenant of God's love. "Blessed to be a blessing" takes the shape of "served to be of service," "empowered to be empowerment," "fed to become nourishment."

By sharing in the ceremonies of Maundy Thursday we locate ourselves in the stream of history and add our own "Amen!" to this historic chorus, clearly affirming that the God who did save and free, saves and frees still.

Paul cannot fathom how the remembrance and the act have become so distorted in the Corinthian church. "What! Do you not have homes to party in if that's what you're going to do?" There is no place in sacred remembering for leaving out the poor or for gluttony. Can you imagine? A people who come to the table and take quantity but no quality, a people who casually overeat even knowing that some are not getting their hunger satiated? Can you imagine?

The practice of foot washing helps provide a vivid corrective to our proclivity for spiritual greed. We love to hear the words, "given for you," "shed for you." Do we love just as deeply the call to humble service that marks us just as powerfully as people included in God's embrace? The full pericope invites some serious reflection on the meaning of "discerning the body" and finding news that is good for us and for all people on this day of celebration and remembrance.

John 13. All of us want our children and our neighbor's children to grow up with

healthy self-esteem. We pray for our own development and the growth and maturity of others so that we may know the peace of feeling appropriate, healthy security in who we are, in our value and worth.

The scene as John narrates it suggests that it was Jesus' sense of security that enabled him to let go of any desire to control the events and outcomes of the last days of his human life. Jesus, "knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself" (vv. 3-4). How was it that Jesus could cultivate an inner clarity so powerful as to enable him to experience himself as having all the power and the support he needed, even against the backdrop of circumstances which would have labeled him vulnerable, victimized, even doomed? With great tenderness the care of Jesus comes through the lesson.

Recently I saw a lapel button: "If you think education is expensive, try ignorance." Jesus may well have been saying, "If you think servant leadership is costly, try the alternatives." We need not look far to find examples of the high prices we have paid as a global family when we have lifted up leadership which is dominating, abusive, disrespectful of life, and arrogant.

We have been given a place in the cosmos which has been secured by the love of God, and we have an invitation to frame our circumstances according to the divine reality of our lives. We are graced, then, to give away what is ours to give, and to let loose of the desires or needs that clamor to define us.

The footwashing offers a picture of great love. Hearing the story, having the experience of warm water poured gently over smelly, tired feet, may help us to become aware of where our security lies. If we know these things, we are blessed if we do them.

Good Friday
April 2, 1999

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

First Reading

Going the distance. The psalmist cries out, and through the centuries we recognize the voice of one speaking from the innermost part of the human spirit. *Where did you go, God?* When life takes us to the point of this kind of outpouring, we are surely at the edge where human need and divine love touch one another. Such a question is more familiar to many of us than we'd like to admit. It's the silent scream of refugees and rape victims, parents whose children were not protected from harm, and the whispered prayer of the very elderly who watch for death "more than watchers for the morning." It's bridging the distance, climbing, clawing, scratching and rocking ourselves to somehow find or be found by the God who alone can make a difference.

We desperately need to feel a level of intimacy with God that is commensurate with the level of spiritual pain: "Something more" for the days and circumstances that take "something more" from us, more than we can even begin to name or know. *Don't be far away, God, not now.* The detail of the suffering suggests a protracted misery and then a resounding acclamation at the point of rescue. As this psalm is familiar enough to Jesus for him to quote at the hour of his greatest anguish, we can hear our way to a place of connection with God. Reflected in Jesus' cry is the reality that he has shared with us the same experience of abandonment, of railing at the divine silence, of

feeling alone with our projections and our fears.

Jesus may have reminded himself of the latter verses, "For he did not despise or abhor the affliction of the afflicted; he did not hide his face from me, but heard when I cried to him." Perhaps the very nearness of the one who penned the psalm in the words themselves was comfort enough to imagine a place to move on to beyond the trauma of the moment. Perhaps the movement of the psalm from suffering to praise provided a flash of hope for deliverance, an eventual reprieve.

To be rejected (Isaiah) is to discover that as we look into the mirrors of life we find a red diagonal line crossing out our form and beauty. It's hard to stand near one who is publicly rejected, shamed, or outcast. We want to keep our distance. But we cannot. The prophet's message forces us to be party to this scene.

"Surely he has borne *our* infirmities and carried *our* diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God and afflicted," only to discover in the suffering and the silence, it is our guilt and shame which is reflected back.

The song of Isaiah is so full of foreshadowing imagery that one cannot help but fast-forward to the time and circumstance of Good Friday. However, the prophet's work is not merely to draw in the hearer and assign guilt. It is, like the psalmist's words, a no-holds-barred way of calling for a theological hermeneutic in which God is seen alive and well and working on behalf of the one rejected. This is underscored by the silence of the primary figure, throughout the dramatic movement of the passage. God is the actor, source, the one who will exalt and be exalted.

The age of paper and stone is over (Hebrews 10). No longer the written covenant, no longer a code that requires mediation or, for that matter, updating. Is it possible that the law of life is simply e-mailed to our hearts and minds directly because Jesus has become, in effect, the living modem through which we gain access to God? God has wiped our file clean; where there is forgiveness, there is no need to be at the temple on the outside, offering sacrifice. We are implored to act as one who has received the message: approach with a heart full of assurance in faith, hold fast to the confession of hope, consider "provoking" one another to love and good deeds and getting together regularly to do these things.

Jesus has entered and passed beyond the Holy of Holies (Hebrews 4-5), going farther than any Levitical priest, and stands now in the sacred space where God lives. This is the very highest of priests doing the most intimate work on behalf of humanity. This is the work of Christ, bridging what the psalmist could only plead for but not fully imagine coming to fruition.

So often we shun our most vulnerable moments, attempt to restrict the memory of the times we are laid open (our deeply receptive moments), thinking they are signs of failure. Note that Jesus, having experienced the anguish and crying out on the cross, is described as having been tested as we are and responding without sin. This is a ripe moment to help the people of God understand that there is no shame in our need to bridge the space between our souls and God. We cannot accomplish that task for ourselves, but we can take our cues from Jesus who boldly approached the throne of grace with his broken heart and—dare we say?—fear. For Christians, deep vulnerability is not only not "bad"; it may prove to be holy ground.

Modern media offer well-developed images of what constitutes "perfect." Generally speaking, the characters of perfection have already "arrived"; they are finished learning. Modern American Christians may find themselves challenged to truly see and hear this Jesus who, while sinless, that is,

"perfect," is learning through his experience on the cross (5:8). Can we handle that?

If Jesus was both gift of God from heaven and fully human in experience, we may take comfort in knowing that God has little need of our perfection but a great desire for our learning, learning that leads to obedience.

Lutherans love to "get it right," whether in theological statements or liturgical drama. The passage calls us away from setting our sights on perfection. And it challenges us to embark upon a life-long journey of learning what obedience might be in our time.

Lanterns, torches and weapons fill the scene in the garden (John 18), with Jesus ironically very willing to say who he is when asked. What follows involves assault with a deadly weapon, and a treatment of the detained which is not uncommon even today, namely, taking folks "around the block." Jesus is first taken to Annas, then to Caiaphas, then to Pilate, then to a place to be physically "roughed up." Then he's required to participate in the work of his own death, that is, to carry his own cross.

This pattern has parallels in the "justice" systems of every nation still today. Given this backdrop of violence, the stoic figure of Jesus stands out in his straightforward, busy-being-about-the-task style. There is little emotion in the story, except the misguided enthusiasm of Peter and, later, the crowds and officials.

John gives us a sense of the intentionality of Jesus; we are not left feeling insecure about what might happen. Jesus is clearly deliberate in his willingness to walk through these events. All the actions of the characters in this saga serve a purpose; everything is done to fulfill the purposes of God, from the garden scene to the words inscribed over Jesus' head. Each of the scenes leading up to the crucifixion is full of lies, social and individual lies.

• "Whom are you seeking?" Jesus approaches the soldiers. No hiding, no fleeing, no weapons in his hands. Verse 20, "I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret." This is no conspirator threatening the authority of the emperor.

• "Put your sword back in its sheath." Jesus rejects the kind of power wielded by the soldiers.

• Peter has his own lies, as does Pilate. The truth is told with irony when Pilate insists that the title on the cross be, in three languages: "The King of the Jews."

Two unusual details punctuate John's story. First, we have an unnamed disciple "known to the high priest" who goes into the courtyard with Jesus and speaks to a woman guarding the gate who lets Peter in. Chances are, a male Jew would not have risked speaking to a woman on the eve of the Passover, so perhaps this other disciple is a woman herself. If so, the question is not so much, "Who is she?" as it is, "What is the significance of her role in this story?" Secondly, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus prepare Jesus' body for burial, a task usually performed by women. Why are the women missing here and why are these two men named for their efforts?

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