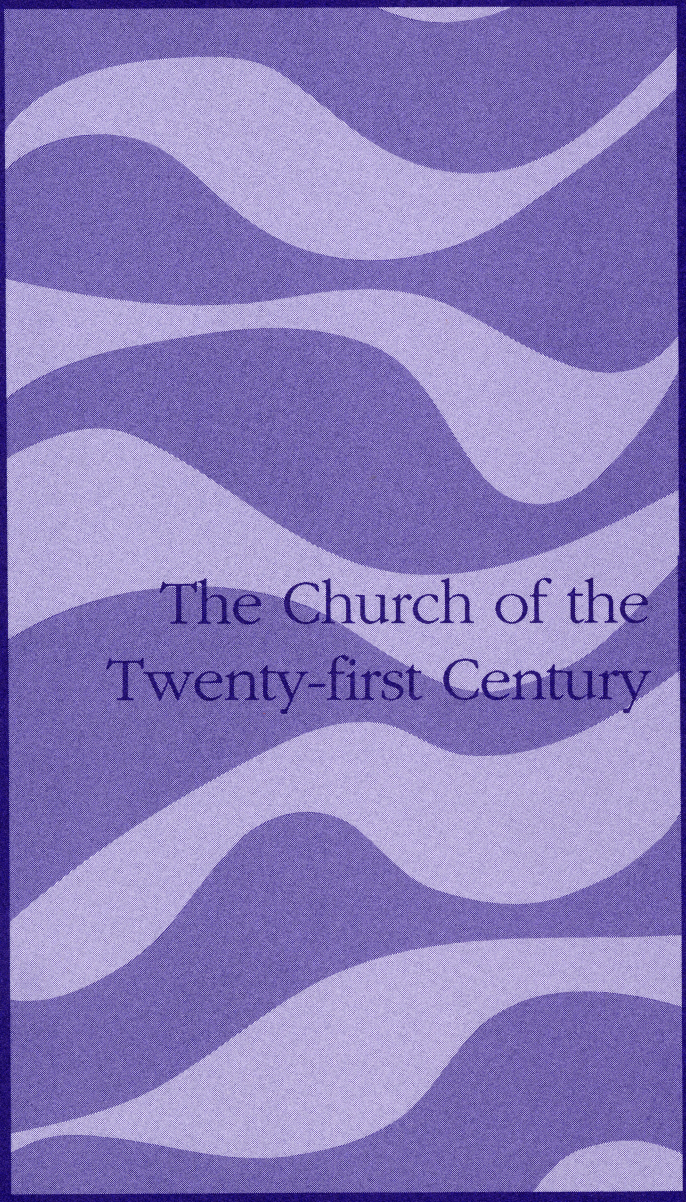
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Editor: **Ralph W. Klein**
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago
rklein@lstc.edu
Associate Editor: **Norma Cook Everist**
Wartburg Theological Seminary
Assistant Editor: **Peggy B. Eldredge**
currents@lstc.edu
Editor of Preaching Helps: **Robert H. Smith**
Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary
duensmith@aol.com
Editors of Book Reviews:
Edgar Krentz
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (773/256-0752)
ekrentz@lstc.edu
Kathleen Billman
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (773/256-0778)
kbillman@lstc.edu
Craig Nessan
Wartburg Theological Seminary (319/589-0212)

Editorial Board: **Mary R. Bischoff, Reinhard Hütter, Connie Kleingartner, Robert Klonowski, Randall R. Lee, Ruth Manz, Richard L. Ramirez, Vicki Watkins, Mary Vance-Welsh, Fritz Wehrenberg.**

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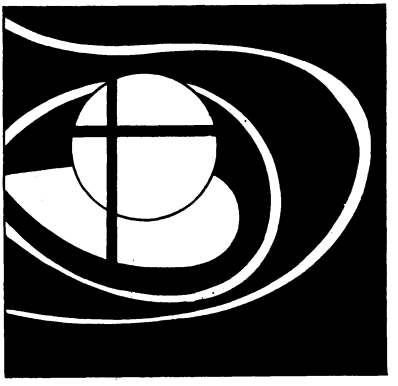
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The Church of the Twenty-first Century

I was recently invited by two separate congregations to lead an adult forum on the church of the twenty-first century. Who would have guessed a century ago where we are now? Two World Wars, the Holocaust, the sexual revolution, and the downsizing of mainline denominations are the more or less unexpected realities of our century. For that matter, who would have guessed in 1962, when I graduated from the seminary, what would happen even in theological education in the ensuing thirty-five years? There were no women ordination candidates back in the 50s and 60s, and almost all of us went straight from college to seminary. At LSTC today, a slight majority of our candidates are women, and the average age at entrance is about thirty-four.

So we who extrapolate from the present into the future are playing a risky game. Chances are the two adult forums will little note nor long remember what I said to them, and none of us will be around to face the consequences of our foolish predictions in 2098. Whatever the future will look like, there will still be need for preaching, for ecumenism, for Bible study, for baptism, for spirituality, and for facing up to social and political issues—even if our numbers will be smaller, our worship more diverse, our clergy even more stressed and increasingly part-time, and our mission more local. In other words, read this issue to get ready for that twenty-first century church.

Eduard R. Riegert believes that authority for preachers in this post-modern period lies in the "narrativities" of the preaching event and in audacious dependence on the Holy Spirit. The post-modern listener expects to play a vital role in sermon making. Fred Craddock warned us years ago that we need to listen as hard to our hearers as we do to the Scriptures. Each component of the communication process is a narrativity: the teller who unrolls the plot, the hearers who are gathered into the plot, the story which begins here and promises an intelligible end, and the occasion in which this communication process takes place. The Christian preacher obstinately tells the church's story.

John Reumann weighs the fallout from the Lutheran Episcopal Concordat, which was almost passed at last summer's ELCA churchwide assembly. He identifies areas of consensus, areas of considerable agreement, and abiding concerns with the 1997 Concordat. He compares the recent American document with the Niagara Report, the Porvoo Common Statement, and the Meissen Declaration. He laments the fact that the "historic episcopate" was not defined in the failed document and asks whether the historic episcopate of Anglicanism should be the position Lutherans pursue ecumenically. Is the historic episcopate a matter of the *esse* or the *bene esse* of the church? Perhaps further study and discussion will clarify whether there are in fact two different 'confessional' positions, historic episcopate (Anglicans) and presbyterate-episcopate (Lutherans). [What will the topics of ecumenism be a century from now?—ed.]

When I went to seminary, we read the Psalms according to their various genres and never imagined that their location within the Psalter had any importance whatsoever. Now **William J. Urbrock** notes that Psalm 89 ends Book III of the Psalter by describing the ruin of the Davidic dynasty and Psalm 90, by way of contrast, takes us back to the days before the entry into the land, when only Yahweh was king. Psalm 90 acts if Moses was still interceding for us, much as in Exodus 33. Additional contrasts are noted between the eternal God and short-lived humankind and between feminine and masculine images of God. Moses calls on God to turn (repent) and restore Israel, and thereby to show his truly proper work, his work of compassion.

Andrew M. Weyermann affirms that preaching becomes contextual when the word of God's judgment and grace addresses the hearers in their context. The starting point of contextual preaching is to define the goal of the sermon. The task of the preacher then is to proclaim the power of God's suffering love in Christ through that metaphor or image which correlates to the particular need of the hearer in a specific situation in life. The challenge of preaching the gospel in a diverse or conflicted context is not to eliminate the real scandal and foolishness of the gospel, but to transcend the many natural barriers to communication.

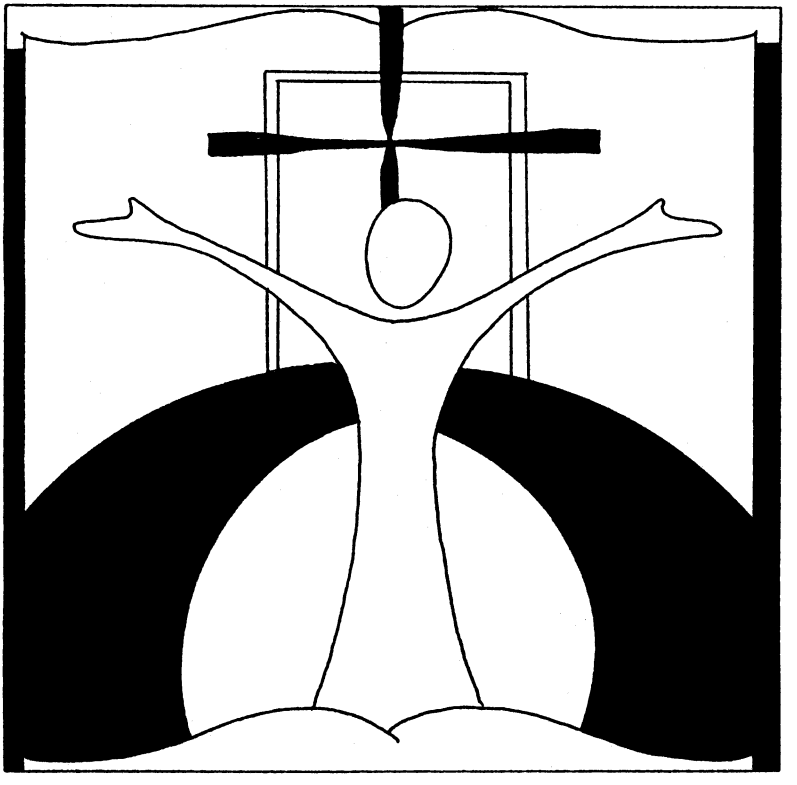
Shorter pieces begin with a letter by **S. Anita Stauffer** to the parents of a child about the significance of baptism itself and the several parts of the baptismal ceremony. **Richard L. Swenson** writes of a "bottom of the bottle" theology, which can only see through the glass darkly. Those afflicted with addictions, like all the rest of us, need to hear "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." **Bucky Brown-Beach** contributes an imaginative piece on the passing of the seasons, death, and other events in our

lives. **Fred Strickert** reviews and responds to a recent book by Pastor Mitri Raheb, on the significance of being a Palestinian Christian.

The church of the twenty-first century will still be a "mouth house," where we speak and hear the living word. In that perhaps smaller, multicultural church, which will have finally embraced both the farm and the city, where laity will be empowered for their own ministry in daily life, and where theological education will be as close as the nearest Internet address—in that church one generation will tell the most incredible story to the next so that "they" might believe. Will it be a welcoming place, or will it put a stress on decision? Will it try to serve or to convert the world?

Yes, I predict.

Ralph W. Klein
Editor



What is Authoritative for the "Post-modern" Listener?

Eduard R. Riegert
Professor of Homiletics, Emeritus
Waterloo Lutheran Seminary
Waterloo, Ontario, Canada

Contemporary homileticians are preoccupied with the equally contemporary notion that homiletics, like every other discipline, has entered the "post-modern" era.[1] Certainly every preacher is aware that we are post-something-or-other, for one cannot escape the signposts: post-Christendom, post-literate, post-liberal, post-industrial, post-rational, post-scientific, post-Enlightenment, post-Protestant Era, post-Freud, post-feminist, and, most recently, post-market. While "post-modern" seems to be the term which captures all of these nuances (it has already become an 'ism and thus something of a philosophy or at least an ideology[2]), it does also—particularly when hyphenated—carry with it the profound sense that we have moved, or are moving, from "modern times" (i.e., the historical era dating from the Renaissance-Reformation) into a new era. So I am using it here.

Alvin Toffler warned us, in the early 1980s, that we were riding the third "wave" of human cultural development. The first two he called the agricultural and the standardized industrial waves, noting that the transition from one to the other was messy; he took pains to show that the messiness of riding the third, the electronic informational, wave, was already upon us, mocking the societal institutions built in the industrial era.[3] Walter Ong, riding the same waves but

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[1] For example, the theme of the 1994 meeting of the Academy of Homiletics was "Preaching in a Postmodern World" (*Papers of the Annual Meeting of the Academy of Homiletics*, 1-3 December 1994, Durham, North Carolina).

[2] See, for example, John McGowan, *Postmodernism and Its Critics* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991); Steven Connor, *Postmodernist Culture: An Introduction to Theories of the Contemporary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989). For a sharply critical assessment of postmodernism from a theological point of view see Paul S. Wilson, "Postmodernism, Theology, and Preaching," *Papers of the Academy of Homiletics*, 1994, pp. 149-58.

[3] Alvin Toffler, "The Third Wave" (1983 video based on his earlier book).

perceiving them from the perspective of communication, named them oral, print, and media.[4]

Congregations and pastors are floundering in this new wave. Robert Wuthnow's *Christianity in the 21st Century* sets out the challenges the church faces; [5] Loren Mead calls for the reinvention of the congregation.[6] Willimon and Hauerwas capture the poignancy of the preaching situation: we are preaching to strangers.[7] How this is to be done is, of course, the question. Willimon himself contends for an evangelism that confronts the dominant secular and civil-religious worldviews with the worldview of the gospel;[8] Peter C. Moore calls for apologetics: the secular gods must be disarmed by convincing talk to the skeptics.[9]

The most radical homiletical proposal of all comes from Robin Meyers. Writing from a communicational perspective, he argues that since contemporary social-scientific research demonstrates that "the self is the highest seat of authority," preachers cannot really set out to persuade anyone at all; rather, the preacher provides the stimulus for hearers to persuade themselves. "The self-persuading sermon," he writes, "is almost like a soliloquy, when private thoughts given public utterance spark the same dialectic in the listener." As the preacher "soliloquizes" her or his way through a text, seeking to be (self-) persuaded, the listeners, vicariously, enter into the persuasion: "...the operating principle is that the self is the highest seat of authority, and that hearing ourselves talk about important and intimate things cannot help but produce change if the process is the least bit self-conscious."[10]

The claim that preaching is "self-persuasion" because "the self is the highest seat of authority" is an astonishing remove from traditional and even recent homiletics, which have typically professed, as primary, the authorities of Scripture-tradition, church, and ordination-call, and, as secondary, the authority of personhood.[11] Nevertheless, Meyers is attempting to take with utter seriousness the "post-modern" preaching situation. Therefore, in what follows I wish, first, to trace some of the route that has led to Meyers' conclusion, and to offer a brief disclaimer, and, second, by noting the role that narrative has played in this history, to locate preaching's authority not in the "self" but in the "narrativities" of the preaching event, and, beyond that, in audacious dependence on the Holy Spirit.

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[4] Walter Ong, *The Presence of the Word* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1967); *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (New York: Methuen, 1982). See also the works of Marshall McLuhan.

[5] Robert Wuthnow, *Christianity in the 21st Century: Reflections on the Challenges Ahead* (New York: Oxford, 1993).

[6] Loren Mead, *The Once and Future Church: Reinventing the Congregation for a New Mission Frontier* (Washington, D.C.: The Alban Institute, 1991).

[7] William H. Willimon and Stanley Hauerwas, *Preaching to Strangers* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992).

[8] William H. Willimon, *The Intrusive Word: Preaching to the Unbaptized* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994). See his companion volume, *Peculiar Speech: Preaching to the Baptized* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992).

[9] Peter C. Moore, *Disarming the Secular Gods: How To Talk So Skeptics Will Listen* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1989). See also Eduard R. Riegert, "The Revival of Apologetics," *Academy Accents* 10/4 (Winter 1995).

[10] Robin R. Meyers, *With Ears to Hear: Preaching as Self-Persuasion* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 1993), 22, 51-52.

[11] Note, in Lutheran discussion of the office of the ordained ministry, the emphasis has been on the authority of the *office* as over against personal authority. This is an extension of the more ancient insistence that the character of the officiant has no bearing on the efficacy of the sacraments.

The move to listener participation

Most homileticians and, I am sure, most parish preachers, would agree that the listener has a definite role in preaching. At the very least, we recognize that sermons must be relevant and helpful, engaged with people's needs, seeking to bring the gospel to bear on actual human situations. Even compulsively Lutheran preaching knows that judgment probes the hidden and open places of the heart and of society, while gospel frees not only from eternal death but also from the fetters of fears, guilt, and doubts, and thus empowers persons and faith communities. In a word, we are concerned to speak to real persons about a real God in real life in a real way. Laudable as is this concern, it nevertheless places the hearer in the place of a recipient. In the post-modern world, this will no longer do; the post-modern listener—and others, I'm sure—expects to play a vital role in sermon making.

For the Western world, Aristotle's definition of rhetoric has, with some intermissions, held sway: discover what needs to be said in a particular case, and then work out how to say it in order to persuade the hearer.[12] This rather mechanical definition was broadened by Cicero (ca. 106-43 B.C.) and Quintilian (ca. 40-95 C.E.) to include instruction and the giving of pleasure, and so found its way to St. Augustine, the first Christian rhetorician. What is to be noted here is that the *what* of discourse is separated from the *how*, the content from the form. The focus thus is on the message, the content; the speaker is merely a vehicle or medium for the message, and so long as care is taken to articulate the message as understandably as possible, no further concern need be expended either on the speaker or the hearer. This remains a pervasive conviction, especially in confessional churches whose creeds and confessions define the content of "the faith once delivered," but also in biblicistic churches in which "eternal truths of the Bible" define the content. The content thus being given, it remains only to work out the how of its deliverance. Homiletically, this is captured in the popular image of the preacher as herald.

But good preachers down the centuries instinctively knew communication was more complex. While there is not space for more than a few references,[13] we may note the creative inventiveness of the Franciscans (St. Francis himself danced while preaching before the pope) and Luther who worked strenuously to address the masses with earthy and vital metaphors and images. In the 18th century, Craig Loscalzo points out, three British clerics and rhetoricians took a scholarly interest in the audience, recognizing that speaker, hearer, and subject matter are interrelated,[14] a recognition which clearly broke the confining dichotomy of "form and content." More recently, one very influential preacher who not only took the audience seriously but also his own role was Harry Emerson Fosdick (1878-1969). He advocated a "life-situational" style and method of preaching which, by focussing on "a vital, important problem, puzzling minds, burdening consciences, distracting lives," engaged the

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[12] Craig A. Loscalzo, "Rhetoric," *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*, ed. William H. Willimon and Richard Lischer (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995).

[13] Paul Scott Wilson presents studies of formative preachers in his *A Concise History of Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1992).

[14] Loscalzo, "Rhetoric." Three rhetoricians of the 18th century are cited, all British clerics: George Campbell (1709-96), Hugh Blair (1718-1800), and Richard Whately (1787-1863).

interests and mobilized the resources of listeners.[15] Another was Edmund Steimle (1907-1988), an enormously influential Lutheran radio preacher from the 1950s into the 1970s, who preached in a dialogical and conversational style which he felt was true to the dialogical nature of the gospel and of revelation.[16] He articulated the stance of the preacher as being "simply one member of the community of faith" who by virtue of training and call interprets the biblical story in terms of the community's world and their stories. "The preacher does not preach at them but talks with them."[17] Finally, mention must be made of Henry Grady Davis (1890-1975) whose poetic conception of "organic forms" merged content and form inseparably: "The sermon should be like a tree / It should be a living organism."[18]

Starting in the 1950s, communications theory clearly shifted from message-centered models to increasingly holistic models. For example, Clyde Reid in 1967 asserted that "We live in a New Age,"[19] taking his authority for that from the *Saturday's Review* (23 July 1967) special issue on "The New Computerized Age." Reid contended that a "new authority structure" had arrived, marked by several realities: pastors are no longer accorded the authority once invested in them; parishioners are learning that their own authority is worth something; the advent of electronic media which change how people learn, think, and feel. Reid suggested five implications for preaching: means of communication must be found to reach people through all the senses; a variety of communication methods needs to be used; teaching must be done through involvement in action rather than "talking at" because truth, for the modern person, "is much more a matter of total awareness than clear, logical ideas"; actions and deeds must show a high correlation; the listener does not want to be only a passive spectator but a partner. In the same year Reuel Howe published his conclusions about just that partnership: communication is a "meeting of meanings," thus preaching is a dialogical process in which "the purpose of [the] sermon is to activate a partnership with the hearer that will produce the church's sermon which, in turn, will become an orbiting message in the world."[20] These authors reflected not only their own research in communication, but drew on the research of social-scientific studies which multiplied from the 1960s on.[21] The result is that contemporary communication models recognize four ingredients in the communication process: the message, the source,

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[15] See especially Fosdick's pivotal article, "What is the Matter With Preaching?" *Harper's Magazine*, Vol. 157, July 1928.

[16] Thomas G. Long, "Steimle, Edmund A." *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*.

[17] Edmund A. Steimle, "By What Authority?" in Edmund A. Steimle, Morris J. Niedenthal, and Charles L. Rice, *Preaching the Story* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 38. See also Charles Rice, "Theology, Liturgy, and the Popular Preacher: Edmund A. Steimle on 'The Protestant Hour', 1963-1974," *Papers of the Annual Meeting of the Academy of Homiletics*, 1994, p. 123; and Thomas G. Long, "Edmund Steimle and the Shape of Contemporary Homiletics," *Princeton Seminary Bulletin*, Vol. XI, No. 3, New Series, 1990.

[18] Henry Grady Davis, *Design for Preaching* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg/ Fortress, 1958). See Morris J. Niedenthal, "Davis, Henry Grady," *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*.

[19] Clyde Reid, *The Empty Pulpit: A Study of Preaching as Communication* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 50.

[20] Reuel L. Howe, *Partners in Preaching: Clergy and Laity in Dialogue* (New York: Seabury, 1967). See his earlier study, *The Miracle of Dialogue* (Greenwich, CT: Seabury, 1963).

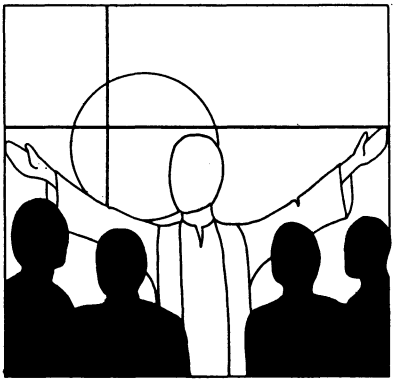
[21] See the "Selected Bibliography" supplied by Robin Meyers, *Ears to Hear, 147-62*.

the receiver, and the context/occasion.

An early homiletical attempt to put all this together theoretically and methodologically was Fred Craddock in *As One Without Authority* (1971). The hearer, he insisted, must be deliberately included in the whole preaching process, and to accomplish this he put forward an inductive method. He recognized that inclusion of the listener meant the surrendering of the preacher's authority; therefore the preacher stands before the congregation as one without authority, having to listen as hard to the hearers as to the Scripture.[22] The book jolted the homiletical community as earlier works such as Reid's had not done. In effect, Craddock pulled homiletics into the post-modern era.[23] The shift from preacher-oriented to listener-oriented homiletics, as Thomas Long calls it, was complete.[24]

Craddock's bold stroke dislocated authority in preaching. It now lay (if it lay anywhere at all) in the nexus of message, preacher, hearer, and context, or in any one of these components at any given time. Thus it is that Robin Meyers can take an equally bold—though singular—stroke and locate authority in the self.

What leads him to do this, I believe, is his presupposition of the "post-modern mindset." By this term I mean something quite informal; it is my attempt to catch up something of today's *Zeitgeist*. Let me set out a few easily recognized characteristics. First is surely the expectation of change. In a word, things are not what they used to be, and commonly held stabilities, even cherished values, cannot be depended upon. Second is a conviction, or at least the suspicion, that ideas, and particularly ideational systems, are tyrannous. Thus a "hermeneutics of suspicion" must constantly be employed not only with respect to texts but to theories, philosophies, and ideologies. The most serious instance of this, for preachers,



is what Jean-Francois Lyotard described as "incredulity toward metanarratives" (this was in fact his definition of postmodernity).[25] This means that the Bible, as well as any other "big story" which rationalizes and legitimates knowledge, is incredible, or at the least warrants skepticism. Third, and closely associated with the foregoing, is the loss of a common worldview. For centuries the Western world shared the church's worldview which was drawn from the Bible.

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[22] Fred Craddock, *As One Without Authority* (Enid, OK: Phillips University, 1971. Reprint, Nashville: Abingdon, 1979).

[23] See the essays in *Listening to the Word: Studies in Honor of Fred B. Craddock*, ed. Gail R. O'Day and Thomas G. Long (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993).

[24] Thomas G. Long, "And How Shall They Hear? The Listener in Contemporary Preaching," in *Listening to the Word*, 167-88.

[25] Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Theory and History of Literature, Vol. 10, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (1979, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, English: 1984) xxiv, quoted by Robert Stephen Reid, "Postmodernism and the Function of the New Homiletic in Post-Christendom Congregations," *Homiletic* XX/2 (Winter 1995), 5.

For some time this has been in competition with the scientific worldview which seriously eclipsed it; latterly, the immense interest in "spirituality" is sign of discontent with the scientific worldview, too. So we

> Things are not what they used to be, and commonly held stabilities, even cherished values, cannot be depended upon.

are post-Christendom and post-Enlightenment. For our investigation of authority, this "post-modern mindset" means that all authorities are relative, and if so, then final authority devolves upon the self or the self-in-a-particular-community (which can as easily be a single-issue group as a congregation). Thus Alyce McKenzie proposes that the slogan, "Different strokes for different folks," is America's "quintessential postmodern proverb"; it acknowledges the diverse experiences of human beings and human communities, and accepts the appropriateness of moral relativism: choices are "equally valid, because they boil down to individual preference."[26] Authority becomes what is authoritative-for-me, or, as Robin Meyers expresses it, "...there exists a substantial body of research to back up the claim that when it comes to authority, the holiest of trinities is Me, Myself, and I."[27]

While Meyers may very well be describing the mindset of (some?) post-modern listeners, I part company with him theologically. In accepting the shift from the message to the listener, he seems also to have accepted the listener and the listener's response as the prime criteria of preaching. William Willimon accuses him of falling prey to the "church marketers" of the church growth movement.[28] Preaching, we remind ourselves, takes place within a mindset and a worldview (the gospel) that though they may be rejected or treated skeptically by the post-modern world, are nevertheless incumbent upon the preacher, determinative of the message, and definitive of the context/occasion. In this setting we believe, as Andrew Weyermann asserts, "the Spirit of God is the persuader in preaching."[29] Luther's *Small Catechism* expresses a conviction of Reformation theology, "I believe that I cannot by my own understanding or effort believe in Jesus Christ my Lord, or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with gifts, and sanctified and kept me in true

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[26]Alyce M. McKenzie, "'Different Strokes for Different Folks': America's Quintessential Postmodern Proverb," *Papers of the Annual Meeting of the Academy of Homiletics*, 1994, pp. 159, 167. She explains, "The consensus among proverb scholars is that 'different strokes' originated about 40 years ago, in the early 1950s in the southern United States among the African American population of the South" (164). It was incorporated into a song in 1968 ("Everyday People") and made into an NBC comedy show in 1978 ("Different Strokes"). Air Canada used it to advertise ski vacations in 1977 ("Different Slopes for Different Folks"), while Volkswagen offered "Different Volks for Different Folks" in 1974 (165ff.).

[27]Meyers, *Ears to Hear*, 49.

[28]William H. Willimon, *The Intrusive Word: Preaching to the Unbaptized*, 20-25.

[29]Andrew M. Weyermann, "Preacher Preparation," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 23/1 (February 1996), 38.

faith. In the same way the Spirit calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it united with Jesus Christ in the one true faith." This moves us a world away from Meyers' trinity to the Trinity.

Yet this must not be a retreat from engagement with post-modern listeners. They are as near as the woman who one Sunday discovers she cannot say the Creed or sing male-language hymns. Indeed, Meyers implies that the preacher is one of them!

Before going on it is necessary to express a qualifier. As pervasive as some aspects of what I am calling the "post-modern mindset" may be, it is an exaggeration to make it universal. Not all of the worshippers who gather are post-modernists through and through, are not moral relativists, are not suspicious or skeptical of "the grand narrative" of the Bible and of the derivative formulations of doctrine and creed. As Toffler took pains to point out, we are riding all three waves at one time, and so there remains room for didactic and expository and other more traditional pulpit discourses.

Narrativity

One of the primary ways in which preachers have consciously or unconsciously attempted to take the post-modern mindset seriously is narrative. Perhaps the earliest deliberate attempt at narrative preaching was the inclusion of the "preacher's story," recapturing, at its best, the power of first-hand witness[30] and at the same time evoking the "listener's story," both of which could then be challenged, transformed, and subsumed in "God's story."[31]

Narrative, of course, is certainly one form—perhaps even *the* form or dynamic—of the so-called "new homiletic" in that it seeks to create an *experience* rather than marshal information in order to create a persuasive argument.[32] Let us examine the nature of this narrative-induced experience, utilizing the four components of communication theory to do so.

If we imagine a storytelling scene—perhaps a campfire circle or a semicircle of children before a storyteller—we note at once that here is a unique community. Though it inhabits this particular space at a particular time, it is in fact occupying an imaginative space and time, a narrative space and time. It takes very little to create this community in—let us use a cumbersome shorthand word—narrativity: a phrase such as "Let me tell you a story...," or "Once upon a time...," or even one word, "Suppose...," is sufficient. This phenomenon is called the suspension of disbelief. Both storyteller and storyhearer are now in a

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[30] See Richard A. Thulin, *The "I" of the Sermon: Autobiography in the Pulpit* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989).

[31] See Steimle, *et al.*, *Preaching the Story*; Wayne Bradley Robinson (ed.), *Journeys Toward Narrative Preaching* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 1990).

[32] "The paradigm shift in homiletics, known as the New Homiletic, has been occurring during the past two decades primarily in Protestant homiletical theory. The shape of the new paradigm has now been well defined. It represents a radical shift away from the rationalistic and propositional logics of argumentation as the basis of sermon invention and arrangement. A variety of new compositional logics have been offered as an alternative (e.g., inductive, narrative, story, imaging), but they all appear to have two features: a common consensus that the old rationalistic paradigm is no longer effective and a serious attention to the creation of an effective experience for the audience of a sermon." Robert S. Reid, "Postmodernism and the Function of the New Homiletic in Post-Christendom Congregations," *Homiletic* 20/2 (Winter 1995), 7.

peculiar state in which even what is "normally" impossible is possible.

As the story proceeds another phenomenon occurs, identification. Through the effect of details (someone has ringlets of red hair), emotions (someone is angry, depressed, grieving, exuberant), conflict (someone is thwarted), aspirations (someone is bent on a goal), character traits (someone is dashing), particular circumstances (someone is unemployed, sick, about to be married), actions taken (someone hires a lawyer), motives at work (someone is jealous, despises an ethnic group), and so on, hearers (and teller, too) identify, that is, make personal connection: "That's me!" "That's like me!" "I know about that!" Sometimes the identification comes as a result of enlightenment: "So that's what was happening to me when..."; "Now I understand why...."

Being now "hooked," as it were, the hearer is driven by two narrativities, as Thomas Leitch calls them.[33] The basic one is the urge to know "what happens next." This extends to the ending, where a closure is expected which will render the series of episodes not only intelligible but give them meaning. "The audience wants to know not only what happens next but what this is all leading to, what it all means."[34] A second narrativity is the ability to *fill in* "the connections required to make sense of agents and incidents by establishing the relations and imputing the motives which give them significance."[35] A mystery novel is an immediate example of both narrativities; while the listener or viewer or reader may be able to connect a certain number of episodes, it is the investigating detective who finally puts all the pieces together. The first narrativity is primarily the province of the teller, the second that of the hearer. They are *interdependent*. One cannot exist apart from the other. Thus at once a powerful bond is forged between teller and hearer, as well as between hearer and hearer, because hearers will cry out, or groan, or laugh, or gnash their teeth, or protest, or voice approval or satisfaction (as when a villain's plot is thwarted). This is, I repeat, a community.

There is one more component to be described, the occasion. The occasion is whatever has brought these people here at this time. It may be the reputation of the storyteller and the knowledge of the storyteller's presence in this place that have drawn hearers. It may be a planned gathering. It may be that this is the place for storytelling, even the place for specific kinds of storytelling. It may be also that this is the right time for telling the right stories in the right place by the right teller to the right hearers. If so, then place and occasion are already "storied": "we" are now in Egypt and it is the night in which the angel of death will pass over our marked doorways...; "we" are now in the upper room and the master is taking the bread....

When the story is ended, the listeners, usually reluctantly (if it has been a good story!), make a slow return to "normal" space and time. But it is no longer the same as it was before. For there is, now, a community of those who have heard the story, and when members meet tomorrow or even next week they begin on a common footing. Depending on the nature of the story some degree of change will have occurred in the hearers. They may now be more sensitive to old people, or question

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[33] Thomas M. Leitch, *What Stories Are: Narrative Theory and Interpretation* (University Park and London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1986). I am adapting material presented pp. 34-44.

[34] Leitch, 44.

[35] Leitch, 40.

some value, or perceive some injustice or stereotype, or correct some misinformation, or be confirmed in an attitude. It is even possible (once again depending on the nature of the story) that they have gained some painful self-realization or gained a profounder self-awareness-in-community or seen an alternative way to live.

What I have described here is essentially a metaphoric process. Metaphor, we have learned from Paul Ricoeur, is able to redescribe reality.[36] By placing two dissimilarities alongside each other and saying "This is that," a cognitive dissonance is aroused which seeks resolution in different dimensions. The experience of identification creates a metaphor: "I am this character"; "This is my conflict," and the metaphor drives to a redescription of myself and/or of my world. If the story told is "big" enough and "true" enough it discloses a new world of possibilities, becoming a story "to live by."[37] We are able to imagine ourselves forward as different people in a different context toward different ends with different values. By providing a beginning, a middle, and an end which is large enough to encompass some vital dimension of our existence, it affords some measure of pleasure, intelligibility, order, and identity. And if it is truly big enough, it constitutes our communal identity, history, and destiny. The biblical story is of such cosmic proportions that it is large enough to encompass not only every dimension of existence but also "every tribe and language and people and nation" (Rev 5:9; 6:9) and indeed the entire earth, moon, sun, and stars (21:1). It is able to do this because it begins in Creation, has a vital middle in Christ, and especially because it ends eschatologically: it has a *telos*. Since an audience wants to know "what happens next," as well as "what it all means," a story must have closure: this is the teleological principle of stories.[38] The biblical story, by positing an ultimate End, is able always to infuse the fragmented and often tortured present with "eternity" (the ultimate Future) and to transform the past by giving it a teleological thrust. Nothing, then, can ever be meaningless or purposeless, or beyond redemption.

In any communication, and especially in any narrative communication, authority is everywhere at once.

It must be clear now that in any communication, and especially in any narrative communication, authority is everywhere at once. Robin Meyers' seemingly autonomous and authoritarian self is in fact only one component among several, and self-persuasion is only one dynamic among a

[36] Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language*, trans. Robert Czerny (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977). See also Eduard R. Riegert, *Imaginative Shock: Preaching and Metaphor* (Burlington, ON: Trinity Press, 1990).

[37] We must recognize that there are also "negative" stories and pernicious storytellers, that is, stories which and tellers who are harmful, malicious, evil, and perverse. This is one of the primary reasons for the church's insistence that its story is the story of Jesus, and that every additional or corollary story told (e.g., a denominational story) must be subject to the story of Jesus, and that every official teller be held accountable.

[38] Leitch, *What Stories Are*, 42, 44.

plethora of dynamics. Indeed, the self may be so incorporated into the community that it becomes an expression of the community.[39]

It would be truer to the situation, therefore, to locate authority in the web of narrativities. Each component of the communication process is a narrativity: the teller who unrolls the plot, the hearers who are gathered into the plot, the story which begins here and promises an intelligible end, the occasion which occasions the entire event, the place which constitutes just these imaginative possibilities. In the end we have all participated in the metaphoric process which has taken us from "orientation" to "disorientation" to "reorientation"; our "reality" has been redescribed, and we have been re-imagined.

It remains only to make one final observation. "Post-modern" listeners are by definition suspicious of all stories that presume to legitimate knowledge and systems. Perhaps they are specially suspicious of great religious narratives. They have been—or claim to have been—too frequently disappointed and disillusioned by them and the communities which tell them and purport to live by them. Instead of liberation, religion has brought strife and oppression. The Holocaust is the paradigmatic example. The irony, however, is that many of these same "post-modernites" seem pathetically vulnerable to various tellers and tales, and even to "holy" or "sacred" places and like-minded "seeker" groups.[40]

The Christian preacher has no choice, here, but to be obstinate, and to persist in telling the church's story, the story of Jesus. It is a large enough story to promise ultimate closure; it is a story of salvation—thus intending goodness, wholeness, and healing; it is a true story—that is, it corresponds with reality yet transforms it. While obstinate about telling this particular story, the preacher will nevertheless recognize that, communicationally, what becomes authoritative cannot be controlled nor manipulated. And so here the preacher makes a great act of faith: Because this story is being told here on this occasion in this assembly, and this story is being told in the Name of the Triune God, the convicting and convincing authority is the Holy Spirit. That is, in the end *everything* is offered up to God.

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[39] We in the liberal West have such an abiding fear of losing individuality (and of course there are dangers) that we find it almost impossible to contemplate corporate identity. Consequently, we are at a considerable loss to allow ourselves to be "in Christ" or to be situated in the "body of Christ," much less to imagine the Pauline conception of "one body and one Spirit... one hope... one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all..." (Eph 4:4-6).

[40] See, for example, "The New Spirituality," *Maclean's* 107/41 (10 October 1994); and "The Search for the Sacred: America's Quest for Spiritual meaning," *Newsweek* 28 (November 1994).

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Toward a New Lutheran-Episcopal Proposal: Consensus and Concerns

John Reumann
Professor of New Testament, Emeritus
Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia

On Tuesday, August 19, 1997, at about 3:00 p.m., the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's Churchwide Assembly, after failing to approve a *Concordat of Agreement* with The Episcopal Church by a narrow margin, overwhelmingly voted for "opportunities for dialogue and teaching" and discussion within the ELCA, and "a revised proposal for full communion" with The Episcopal Church by 1999-2000. Conversations are to build on "the degree of consensus achieved at this assembly" and address "concerns that emerged during consideration of the *Concordat*...." An immediate task is to take inventory of consensus and concerns, plus a category of factors in between the two.

Consensus areas

It should be affirmed that (1) voting members at the Lutheran Churchwide Assembly do want full communion with The Episcopal Church. (The same thing was apparent at the Episcopal Convention in Philadelphia.) For Lutherans this is true as a step in its own right and also as a step in parity to *A Formula of Agreement* that was approved with three Reformed/Presbyterian churches.

(2) The failure to approve the *Concordat* did not stem from a dislike for Episcopalians. Story after story, anecdotally, in hearings and plenary, brought out a genuine liking for sisters and brothers in The Episcopal Church, and numerous examples of local cooperation, even by persons who opposed the *Concordat* as unnecessary. The negative vote cannot be attributed solely either to "perverse anti-institutionalism" in the upper Midwest. My own, rather long since "institutionalized" Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod, at its Assembly May 3, in a machine-tallied vote on a Reference and Counsel item, came to a response remarkably similar to that in the Churchwide Assembly, in that votes for the *Concordat* did

not amount to quite two-thirds. Nonetheless, Lutherans generally like Episcopalians and feel at home with their church, for example liturgically.

(3) The action before both The Episcopal Church and the ELCA was on the Official Text of the *Concordat*, "as a matter of verbal content as well as in principle," together with "those legislative, constitutional, and liturgical changes necessary to implement full communion." Behind the *Concordat* were a host of dialogue reports from 1972 and 1981 (LED I and II) and especially LED III 1988 and 1991 and *The Niagara Report* (1988). Volumes had been published by the two churches of *Supporting Essays* (1995) and *A Commentary on "Concordat of Agreement"* (1995). Cf. also the comments in the margin of the *1997 Pre-Assembly Report* for voting members of the Churchwide Assembly (Section IV, pp. 54-64). People did not lack data. Admittedly, it was sometimes hard to tell exactly what texts meant, given all the interpretative material. The *Concordat* itself seemed to have a juridical, legal tone ("a text that only a canon lawyer could love"), compared with *"Toward Full Communion"* and other documents. But it was on the *Concordat* that the vote was taken.

(4) Lutherans and Episcopalians agree on "apostolic succession" as desirable and necessary and that both churches, as presently constituted, possess it. One could not always perceive this from what many speakers said at the ELCA Assembly. The term was often confused or conflated with "the historic episcopate," and the impression given that Lutherans would gain (or didn't want) apostolic succession through adopting the *Concordat*'s way to sharing the historic episcopate with the ELCA. Confusion may have come about because the *Concordat* was less clear on the point than foundational documents had been. *Concordat* section #2 stated simply, "The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and The Episcopal Church hereby recognize in each other the essentials of the one catholic and apostolic faith...." Earlier dialogue had distinguished explicitly between "apostolic succession and the institution of the historic episcopate" (see *"Toward Full Communion"* ##19-24). Lutherans and Episcopalians both claim the former, succession in the faith held by the apostles; only Episcopalians, the latter.

(5) "Deacons" were not at issue in the *Concordat*. According to footnote 7 (on #3), the ELCA was to recognize "the ministries of ordained deacons in the Episcopal Church," presumably both types ("transitionary," as a step toward ordination to the priesthood, and "permanent," unsalaried persons generally in local congregations). The further comment has always seemed to me correct, that the ELCA is not required by the *Concordat* "to ordain its diaconal ministers." In fact, I doubt that it could do so on the basis of the *Concordat*, because neither ELCA Diaconal Ministers nor Associates in Ministry nor Deaconesses fit with either type of Anglican deacon. Doubtless some Lutherans will find themselves disappointed here, but the whole area remains one to be sorted out later, along with Reformed praxis and the rest of Christendom (cf. *Concordat* #8).

(6) "The priesthood of all baptized believers"—both "baptism" and "faith" are prominent in 1 Peter where the term "holy [or royal] priesthood" comes to the fore for the whole New Testament people of God, 1 Peter 2:5,9—should not be an issue, although some (Lutherans) played it off against "episcopacy." Luther's emphasis on this priesthood is not directly found in the Confessions. Anglicans would be aware of, and congenial to, "the Calling of the Whole People of God," to quote *Baptism,*

Eucharist and Ministry, as setting for the ordained ministry. The Precis of *The Ministry of Bishops: A Study Document* (1991) of the House of Bishops of the Episcopal Church, clearly speaks of "The church, the people of God" as "a community," of which the bishop "is a member" and whose role "grows out of, not apart from, the community" (p. viii). The *Concordat*, perhaps unwisely, did not really go into this area, except in the "doctrinal consensus" added in #2:

> We believe that all members of the church are called to participate in its apostolic mission. They are therefore given various ministries by the Holy Spirit. Within the community of the church the ordained ministry exists to serve the ministry of the whole people of God. We hold the ordained ministry of Word and Sacrament to be a gift of God to his church and therefore an office of divine institution.

But the ministry of the whole people of God should be an area of consensus.

(7) The issue posed in the *Concordat* was "the historic episcopate." Not "bishops" in general, but a particular view of episcopacy, raised by Anglicans as the fourth and final point in the Quadrilateral of 1886 (Chicago) and 1888 (Lambeth). This item will affect how the office of pastor/presbyter/priest is understood; see below, "Concerns" (1) and (2). Actual references to the historic episcopate are few in the *Concordat* (e.g., ##6, 7; but cf. *"Toward Full Communion"* pp. 19-23, "The Historic Impasse"). As will be seen, it emerges as *the* issue in Anglican identity and so for a Lutheran view on ministry.

Some of these suggested areas of consensus are put negatively, it will be noted, "this or that is *not* at issue." Such propositions are necessary to "clear the ground" and reflect the fact that ecumenical dialogue is usually about what has divided churches, not what they agree upon or points where they show similar patterns of varying opinions today within each church. They are all areas that derive from the *Concordat* text.

It was sometimes hard to tell exactly what texts meant, given all the interpretative material.

I write this analysis in light of experiencing the deep exhaustion, disappointments, and yet joyous euphoria that marked the ELCA Churchwide Assembly on August 19 when it voted the two positive resolutions about Episcopal dialogue. But for the many Lutherans (and others) who were not a part of that emotional roller-coaster, it is only realistic to add a category *between* "consensus" and "concerns," the specific terms used in a resolution overwhelmingly voted, a category within which, indeed, some of the above seven points might belong, instead of under what I have taken to be "consensus."

Areas of considerable agreement

There are a series of topics on which a number of Lutherans, if not all or most, would agree. Episcopalians, too. The list needs testing, if only to see whether there might be "consensus" or whether an item needs discussion in coming years. Items will be enumerated here quite briefly. More

One looks in vain for "sign, not guarantee" language in the *Concordat*...

could be said. People must consider what may prove an asset for conversations ahead, and what needs work in moving toward full communion.

(1) The gospel was the starting point in LED I and II, as in most dialogues where Lutherans are involved. The *Concordat* includes in its #2 just one paragraph on the gospel, from the international Anglican-Lutheran doctrinal consensus. The shared "common understanding of God's justifying grace" is briefly put, and could be at points interestingly critiqued ("grace" is always easier to agree on than "faith"). Attention was not, at any point in Lutheran-Anglican discussion, given to justification the way it has been in Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue. But while Lutherans and Episcopalians can constantly explore "gospel" (and "law") to their mutual benefit and learning (one facet of which might be that Lutherans seem to Anglicans terribly confident that they know what the gospel is), there appears to be no need to call for redoing this area as the basis toward full communion. The agreement suffices.

(2) The move in LED III was to take up, in *Implications of the Gospel* (1988), such themes as eschatology (and gospel), God, church, world, and mission. There are strengths and weaknesses in any such volume. Criticism has been leveled at its claim that "the church is the principal implication of the gospel in human history" (#36), especially when compared with #93, "Mission is the implication of the gospel *par excellence*." Something for everyone? There are revealing statements in the 100 pages about what the dialogue team that produced the *Concordat* thought ten years ago. Seemingly never much discussed or widely challenged, the *Implications* volume has experienced a sort of benign neglect. Need any parts be redone in 1997-99?

(3) *The Niagara Report*, completed in 1987 at an Anglican-Lutheran international consultation, proved foundational for the *Concordat*. It seems less rigid and juridical than the *Concordat*, perhaps because of the presence of more European, Third World, and lay people. This *Report* is quite aware of how both Anglicans and Lutherans in the sixteenth century continued and reformed ministry (## 55-58). That Lutherans maintained "the original unity of the office of bishop and presbyter," following St. Jerome's view, is clearly stated, so that the office of pastor has for Lutherans an "episcopal structure"—pastors ordain pastors (##56-57). Thus, "...neither tradition can... reject the apostolic nature of the other.... [T]he ordained ministry is no longer an issue which need divide our two Churches" (#59). Is there more agreement on *The Niagara Report* than over the later *Concordat*? Was it possible to be for the former but not the latter? If so, why? Or was the *Report* generally ignored? Does it help today? Is there material in *The Niagara Report* pertinent to issues not yet resolved?

(4) "The Porvoo Common Statement" came in 1993, after the *Concordat* was completed. The 1997 text of the *Concordat*, in its Introduction, refers to Porvoo in a single sentence in a paragraph about Anglicans and Lutherans entering into closer relations throughout the world: "In 1996,

the Nordic and Baltic Lutheran and the British and Irish Anglican churches entered communion on the basis of agreement" at Porvoo (in Finland). The tone of Porvoo and how it goes about simply declaring fellowship without elaborate canonical machinery is different from that in the *Concordat*.

When mentioned in the United States, Porvoo has often been set aside as any sort of model for North America because (a) the national churches of Northern Europe do not have Lutherans and Anglicans living side by side, as in the U.S.A. and Canada, and (b) (some of) the Lutheran churches involved there already have the claim of continuing episcopacy since earliest times (e.g., Sweden). The ELCA lacks both such episcopacy and, to date, the intent to introduce it. But Porvoo could stand in relation to U.S. Lutheran-Episcopal plans in much the same way as the Leuenberg Concordat did to the 1997 *Formula of Agreement*, namely as an international or at least European model in contrast to a distinctive "made in the U.S.A." plan. As a general principle, an ecumenical agreement that is more widely adopted in several countries or continents is to be preferred to an idiosyncratic one in a single place.

If the ELCA opted for episcopacy via Porvoo, would that suffice for The Episcopal Church? (Here, just as with the *Concordat*, a 15-20 year period of implementation must be envisioned.) Or is the route which seemingly the Church of Norway is going so remote to ELCA minds, and the means (but not the result) so alien to the intent of the *Concordat*, that Porvoo offers nothing but an illustration of how others in a different setting ("locally adapted") went about the task? Or could this different path to the same goal which the *Concordat* held aloft be helpful now in the U.S.A.?

(5) "The Meissen Declaration" is also mentioned in the Introduction to the 1997 *Concordat. Die Meissner Erklärung* (dated to 1988 in the *Concordat*; to 1991 in *A Commentary on "Concordat of Agreement"* p. 138) grew out of earlier dialogue between the Church of England and the Evangelical Church in Germany. It can be labeled as merely a relationship similar to "Interim Eucharistic Hospitality" (1982) between U.S. Lutherans and Episcopalians and therefore far behind "full communion"; or it may be a reflection of German Lutheran unwillingness to adopt so readily Anglican episcopacy. What we can agree on is that German Lutheran attitudes toward the *Concordat* have scarcely been heard in the ELCA discussion. Should they not be, as part of the world Lutheran picture?

(6) A phrase the significance of which not always been appreciated, yet on which presumably Episcopalians and Lutherans agree, concerns episcopacy, indeed the historic episcopate, "as a sign, though not a guarantee, of the continuity and unity of the Church" (*BEM* Ministry #38). There was a time when some Anglicans would have stressed "guarantee." The wide use of this "sign, not guarantee" phrase is already a concession and indication of good will—though "sign" in some understandings is still a very powerful thing (*Concordat* #2, under doctrinal consensus, the church sent into the world is a "sign"). One looks in vain for "sign, not guarantee" language in the *Concordat*, but note "Toward Full Communion" #11 (it was a "major catalyst," a point specifically endorsed by the 1985 General Convention of the Episcopal Church for ecumenical discussions).

(7) The *Concordat* was not designed to lead either The Episcopal or the Evangelical Lutheran Church into the Church of Christ Uniting (COCU). Even though such a direction might someday result (even as it could from ELCA-UCC ties), the *Concor-*

dat was more likely envisioned, at least by some, as an alternative rather than a stepping stone to COCU.

Whatever degree of unanimity we assign to these fourteen (or other) points, as "agreed" or irrelevant for discussion in connection with a revised Lutheran-Episcopal proposal, areas of difficulty within the *Concordat* must now be considered.

Concerns with the 1997 *Concordat*

(1) The "historic episcopate," the impasse area in ministry, was nowhere defined in the Official Text or in the considerable background literature from the dialogue. Why is this important? Because only when Lutherans understand the claims can they make intelligent decisions on what is being offered. The difficulty lies in the fact that more than one understanding of the historic episcopate have been advanced in Anglicanism since the Quadrilateral made this a *sine qua non* for church reunion. Over the other three points—Scripture, Creeds, two divinely instituted sacraments—few churches would differ. But the historic episcopate became, from 1886 on, the Anglican confessional distinctive in a church increasingly (as the Thirty-Nine Articles were accorded only historical, not normative, status) without a confession.

If the historic episcopate means nothing more than what some have taken the *Concordat* to imply, it is difficult not to accept it. For example, the Faculty Statement of the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia (*Dialog* 36, Summer 1997: 218-19), after speaking of ELCA agreements simultaneously with "churches founded on episcopal, presbyteral, and congregational principles of polity," all a "secondary" matter, refers to "ordering of the church" as a matter of "well-being." That is, *bene esse*, not the very *esse* of the church. Then it states the sense in which the *Concordat* can be endorsed:

> ...the ELCA can acknowledge the historic necessity among our Episcopal brothers and sisters to insist upon a particular understanding of the historic episcopate. We trust that the Episcopal Church will equally acknowledge the centrality of our church's confessions to our own identity. Both episcopal succession and confessional subscription—or for that matter congregational autonomy—can harm the church if and when allowed a power or force apart from the gospel itself. When bishops and pastors serve the gospel and when confessions of the church witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ, they contribute to the church's well-being.

Here historic episcopate (for Anglicans) and confessions (for Lutherans) mark each group's identity and well-being. But the *Concordat* seems to call for more. Here one must note what some Anglicans have said about the historic episcopate. It has been regarded as existing *jure divino*, by divine right, not human authority; "not a doctrine but a fact"; "what might be described as a fact of revelation." Hence, "a ministry acknowledged by every part of the Church can only be attained through the historic episcopate." Cf. for these and other sentiments and official statements, *Quadrilateral at One Hundred*, pp. 8-46, an overview; and *Episcopal Ministry*, a Church of England report, pp. 131-32.

The historic episcopate is, at least for some Anglicans, a matter of the *esse* of the Church. Such language seldom breaks surface in the *Concordat*, but cf. #3, paragraph one on the "future pattern" within the two churches, and the occasional references to "authenticity" of ministers (#14; the talk in less ecumenical times would have been of "deficiency" or "inauthenticity" in non-his-

toric-episcopate ministers, something to be remedied; Lutherans scarcely grasp the radical nature of what the Episcopal Church was offering in #4; #9 represents less a stretch by Lutherans). That Anglican teaching holds to a hierarchical view of grace—the bishop possesses by office something priests/pastors do not—is reflected in the practice that only bishops ordain, and in the practice of the bishop, not the parish clergyperson, administering confirmation. The *Concordat* is canonically precise about ensuring that future Lutheran bishops will be placed into the historic episcopate (## 3, 8) and through their hands, whatever the episcopate transmits, is passed on to all clergy by their ordination (#8). The procedures must be precise because a lot is at stake in Anglican doctrine and polity and the administration of grace.

It seems clear that the *Concordat* has more than a "functional" view of episcopacy. Words like "ontological" or "hierarchical" are not employed in the *Concordat*, but I believe there is, for some Anglicans at least, a vital and "confessional" view of episcopacy at stake. I respect their position as such, until it is shown that the *Concordat* means something less for Episcopalians and Lutherans as the future pattern. Once when I asked why the *Concordat* documents never define "historic episcopate," the answer from an Episcopalian was that the Lutherans in the dialogue never asked! It is time to find out just what this key phrase, historic episcopate, means.

When I asked why the *Concordat* documents never define "historic episcopate," the answer from an Episcopalian was that the Lutherans in the dialogue never asked!

(2) A Lutheran confessional view of ordained ministry never came out very fully in the *Concordat* or in most discussion over it. As found in the *Augsburg Confession*, Articles 5, 14, and 28, *Apology* 13, 14, and 28, and elsewhere, this position holds that the office of ministry has a unitary character as the presbyterate-episcopate of the New Testament. All ordained clergy have the same basic authority to preach, teach, administer the sacraments, forgive sins, etc., *jure divino*; bishops do these same things in a geographical area larger than a parish. Ranks within an ecclesiastical hierarchy are "created by *human* authority"—so *Apology* 14.1, italics added, cited in n. 7 of the *Concordat*; but in the marginal comment in the *1997 Pre-Assembly Report* (IV: p. 60), to help readers, the phrase became, somewhat misleadingly, "the office and ministry of bishops is by divine institution...." No, only as a bishop does the tasks of the gospel that the presbyter/pastor also does. The clear and strong position articulated by Arthur Carl Piepkorn, in Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue IV: *Eucharist and Ministry* (1970)—in his two essays, "The Sacred Ministry and Holy Ordination in the Symbolical Books of the Lutheran Church," pp. 101-19, and "A Lutheran View of the Validity of Lutheran Orders," pp. 209-26—went by and large unheard and unheeded. *The Niagara Report* ##56-57 did reflect this view in the Confessions that appealed to St.

Jerome's interpretation of the Pastoral Epistles. Cf. also "Toward Full Communion" ##25-27, 45-46, 48-50. But in all the affirmations and defenses of the *Concordat*, by Lutheran theologians and statements by bishops and others, one looks in vain for an explanation of how the Lutheran confessional position, staunchly argued in dialogue with Roman Catholics, was to be reconciled with what seems the Anglican position (1, above), on historic episcopate.

There are probably resources in both Anglican and Lutheran traditions for correcting caricatures and giving a more balanced picture...

(3) Fuller treatment of the New Testament evidence on bishops is a necessity. The Bible, of course, can provide what Lutherans and other Christians have often regarded as teachings *jure divino*. Such exegetical treatment is also called for by the claim in the Preface to the Ordinal in the Book of Common Prayer that it is apparent "unto all men diligently reading the Holy Scripture and ancient Authors, from the Apostles' time there have been these Orders of Ministers in Christ's Church: Bishops, Priests and Deacons." That claim, of course, has been modified or eroded away by historical study of the early church. Chief among the New Testament writings to which one must turn for some light are 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus. One should not be put off by the likelihood (with which I agree) that Paul himself did not write these documents, for they are still in the Pauline corpus and are canonical Scripture; nor by perceived anti-feminism, for they do provide data on what may earlier have been and what was then happening in one area of early Christianity. Jerome's position, espoused by Melanchthon in the Lutheran Confessions, that presbyter-bishops were one group, and that the "overseer" arose here out of the *presbyterion*, today has good support in New Testament scholarship. This, and Anglican claims about threefold ministry, biblically, deserve more discussion than LED III provided.

(4) Such concerns about the *Concordat* suggest that attention need be given to what can be termed a "theory of authority or the basis and availability of grace" in the church. Is authority and grace, at least the grace of ordination, to be found at its fullest only in the bishop? Or in presbyters? More is involved than just a historical question of whether *episkopoi* arose out of the college of presbyters or presbyters devolved from the bishop and, to this day, receive their authority through ordination by such a bishop. Or do authority and grace involve the whole people of God? There are probably resources in both Anglican and Lutheran traditions for correcting caricatures and giving a more balanced picture than some readers found in the *Concordat*.

(5) The ecumenical future for both The Episcopal Church and the ELCA (now in full communion with three Reformed bodies) calls for clarification and elaboration. The *Concordat* spoke well on some aspects in ##13 and 14. But important questions remain (besides a possible relationship with COCU) that bothered some ecumenists within Lutheranism. One need not now ask whether, if the *Concordat* had been in place

earlier, the ELCA could have framed *A Formula of Agreement* without posing to Presbyterians, e.g., the historic episcopate as a new Lutheran commitment. (Definition of what the historic episcopate means would in such a case be of great importance!) What of Moravian bishops (in the results of a dialogue that lies ahead for consideration)? The matter becomes more crucial for dialogue with Roman Catholics. For shortly after the historic episcopate was articulated in the Lambeth Quadrilateral (1888), Anglican inquiry of Rome resulted in the now infamous encyclical of Pope Leo XIII in 1896, *Apostolicae Curae*: Anglican ordinations are "absolutely null and utterly void." If the *Concordat* were in place, would Lutherans be obliged, morally, if not now confessionally, to argue along lines of (Anglican) "historic episcopate" rather than as Piepkorn and others did in the U.S. dialogue? Since the merger into the Church of South India fifty years ago (of which Lutherans were not a part), Anglican ecumenical proposals involving the historic episcopate have not met with much success, in Britain (with Methodists or the Church of Scotland) or in the U.S.A. with COCU. That is one reason why the *Concordat* with the ELCA was so significant for The Episcopal Church. (Were I an Episcopalian, I would have strongly supported the *Concordat.*) But would—should—the historic episcopate of Anglicanism be the new position Lutherans would want to pursue ecumenically? I read the *Concordat*, in all honesty, as committing the ELCA to something of the sort. If that is so, it is best to know exactly what is involved. If it is not so, then this is seemingly not a problem area.

(6) Sometimes comparison was made between a temporary Episcopalian concession (the suspension for a time of the restriction that only those ordained by duly qualified bishops can exercise ministerial offices, *Concordat* #5) and a permanent one by Lutherans (to dispense ordained Episcopal ministers from being required to accept the Lutheran Confessions, #9). This latter concession would, over time, it was feared, affect the confessional commitment of those at pulpit, altar, and font of Lutheran churches. At the Assembly little was heard about the "dispensation" by Lutherans in this area. Much more was said about interchangeability of clergy for "mission." The *Concordat* could have stated more clearly that non-subscription by Episcopalians should apply only to occasional interchange in temporary situations; that, when clergy from one church move to serve a congregation of the other body, they would join the other church, meeting the confessional subscription and other requirements—if such was the intent in what became #9.

(7) "Mission" needs definition. The mere phrase became an unexamined selling point for the *Concordat* on the part of some. Others pointed to all that was already happening without the machinery envisioned under the proposal. For some, "mission" meant (dynamic) evangelism and church growth; for others, (correct) social positions and advocacy. A starting point for clarification should be constitutional and other statements about aims and purposes in each church; then, specific examples, showing to what extent a new agreement is needed to work cooperatively. To craft a revised proposal to meet mission needs might be a refreshing approach, but it would run the danger of minimizing crucial doctrinal points, like "historic episcopate" for Episcopalians.

A reality check

The twenty-one categories above (are there more?) need to be sifted, so as to separate out areas where enough agreement exists or

the matter is irrelevant for what is to be proposed. Then concentrate on real areas of concern. A Lutheran inevitably sees concerns of Lutherans, but reality demands keeping in mind that any revised or new proposal must pass the test of whether it presents a genuine possibility of agreement in The Episcopal Church. What were once called "High Church, Low Church, and Broad Church" parties—or Anglo-Catholics and Modern Churchmen, or whatever interest groups are now in the picture—may have somewhat different views on "historic episcopate," threefold ministry, deacons, mission, ecumenical desiderata, and other topics. Any proposal must command broad assent, neither excluding or catering to, e.g., Anglo-Catholics (who sometimes in my experience come closer to a "confessional position" on certain issues than do other strands within Anglicanism; ditto for some Evangelical Anglicans). (In saying this, I do not imply acceding to the group within Anglicanism still fervently opposed to the ordination of women.)

But are there, perhaps, two (or more) really different "confessional" positions, historic episcopate (Anglican) and presbyterate-episcopate (Lutheran)? Two to three years may prove all too short a time to discuss, dialogue, and teach, to frame a revised or new proposal and develop better consensus than came about between 1991 and 1997, in matters of such gravity. Not everything need be done by the crack of dawn at a new millennium. For if the work between 1997 and 2000—or whatever date emerges as wise—is well done, it will be part of an all-important reception process, crucial to the future of this proposal, as with all ecumenical agreements.

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Psalm 90: Moses, Mortality, and... the Morning

William J. Urbrock
University of Wisconsin Oshkosh
Oshkosh, Wisconsin

Psalm 90 stands at a critical juncture in the overall scheme of the Psalter. It is the first psalm of the small collection 90-106 which constitutes Book IV of the Psalter. As such it follows right on the heels of Psalm 89, which closes Books I-III with a climactic lament on the failure of the Davidic kingship and a poignant plea in v. 49 for YHWH to remember his covenant loyalty (*ḥesed*; NRSV "steadfast love") and faithfulness (*'emûnah*).

What a powerful juxtaposition these two psalms make! Psalm 89 climaxes with a lament in vv. 38-51 over YHWH's wrathful rejection of his "messiah," the anointed king (vv. 38, 46), and over the early demise of the youthful ruler, whose life, like that of all mortals, is bounded by sure death in any event (vv. 45-48). Psalm 90 expands on and extends this picture to include all of Israel (and, by extension, all humankind) in a sweeping portrait of how even those who reach a ripe old age (the well-known "four-score years" of the KJV) nevertheless spend it all under the anger, wrath and fury of God, so that their entire life-span is but toil and trouble (vv. 7-10). The two psalms even share a common vocabulary of wrath and fury.

Recent studies, moreover, have called attention to another striking juxtaposition, this one a contrast, between these two psalms. It is signalled by the heading of Psalm 90, "A prayer for Moses, the man of God," the psalm's opening verse in Hebrew. While Psalm 89 recalls the covenant of YHWH with David, laments over the rejection of the Davidic dynasty, and closes with a plea for its restoration, there is not a word about David in Psalm 90. Rather, attention shifts to Moses. It's a significant shift on at least two counts. First, it sets a focus for all of Book IV, which contains a concentration of references to Moses found nowhere else in the Psalter.[1] Next, it recalls a time when Israel did not yet have kings, or rather, a time when Israel escaped from a

[1] References to Moses in Book IV of the Psalter appear here in the opening verse of Psalm 90 and in Psalms 99:6, 103:7, 105:26, and three times in the closing psalm of Book IV, 106:16, 23, 32. Elsewhere in the Psalter, Moses is mentioned only in 77:20.

tyrannical kingship in Egypt and, with Moses as mediator, pledged allegiance to the Kingship of YHWH at Sinai. Thus, if Psalm 89 brings Book III to a close on a note of despair over the ruin of the Davidic dynasty, Psalm 90 opens Book IV by inviting readers to meditate on the days of Israel before David had ever come on the scene—or Israel had yet entered Canaan—, days when YHWH alone was Israel's King.[2]

In those days, as remembered for example in Exodus 32:1–34:8 and much of Numbers, Israel is portrayed as experiencing Divine wrath and fury much as it did during the later time of the monarchy. Indeed, as often noted, the stories of Israel in the wilderness are arranged on a four-part pattern such that (1) the Israelites anger YHWH by complaining about one thing or another, (2) YHWH responds by sending a retaliatory punishment, (3) Moses intercedes for mercy, and (4) YHWH relents and continues to lead the chastened community on its journey.

It is precisely in such a context that readers are invited to hear Psalm 90. We are invited to hear this psalm as if Moses were still interceding with YHWH as he did in Exodus 33, after the plague YHWH had inflicted on the people because of the golden calf. The story reminds us that YHWH would converse with Moses as if speaking to a friend (Exod 33:11). For his part, Moses asks that the Divine presence accompany Israel (Exod 33:12-16), despite their iniquity and sin (Exod 34:9), while, on this particular occasion, YHWH proclaims his Name, which shows him as one who is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in covenant loyalty (*ḥesed*) and faithfulness (*'emûnah*). While he may punish for three and four generations, his covenant loyalty (*ḥesed*) nevertheless remains for a thousand generations (Exod 33:6-7).

The associations with Psalm 90 are remarkable. In the psalm, Moses, the intercessor *par excellence*, is presented as again admitting the iniquities and sins of Israel and all humankind (v. 8) which have elicited Divine anger and affliction (vv. 7-11, 15). But, precisely here he calls on God's reputation for compassion (v. 13) and covenant loyalty (*ḥesed*, v. 14) in his intercession for a change of fortunes (vv. 15-17).

At the center of these associations is the Divine Name. After all, it is the revelation of the Divine Name, YHWH (translated in most English translations by the capitalized letters LORD), at the burning bush that introduces Moses to his mission in the first place (Exodus 3). And the significance of that same Divine Name is what YHWH proclaims to Moses in the climactic scene in Exod 34:5-7. How striking then to note the interplay of Divine titles and epithets in Psalm 90. The psalm is bounded by appeals to the sovereign Master or Lord (a title), who is God (a generic designation): "Lord (*'adonay*)... from aeon to aeon you [are] God (*'el*)" (vv. 1-2); "Let the favor of the Lord our God (*'adonay 'elohênû*) be upon us" (v. 17). But precisely at the point of intercession, Moses has recourse to the special Name, the Name revealed in the Exodus stories, the personal Name of the One who conversed with him as with a friend: "Turn, LORD (YHWH)! How long? Take pity on your servants! Satisfy us in the morning with your covenant

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[2]The theme of Divine Kingship predominates in Book IV, as in, for example, Psalms 93, 97, and 99, which begin with an acclamation to YHWH as King, and in the royal references in Psalms 95:3, 96:10, 98:6. James L. Mays has identified the confession of YHWH's kingly rule as the organizing theological principle of the entire Psalter: J. L. Mays, *Psalms* (Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching; Louisville: John Knox Press, 1994), 32.

loyalty (*ḥesed*)!" (vv. 13, 14a).

The powerful effect, then, of Psalm 90 is a result, I feel, of the strong contrasts it presents in such creative interplay. Standing next to Psalm 89, it evokes a contrast between the era of the monarchy in Israel and the much earlier time of Moses. But look again at the stark contrasts drawn within the psalm itself. There is the eternal God, to whom a thousand years are like a day or even just a few hours of the night just passed, placed over against short-lived humankind, whose seventy or eighty years must then count as mere seconds or split-seconds on the Divine scale. There is the sovereign Master, filled with wrath and fury, who is appealed to nevertheless as the revealed Friend, YHWH, reaching out in compassion and covenant faithfulness.

There are other contrasts, just as powerful but somewhat more subtle. The sovereign Master, who is addressed here as throughout the Bible in masculine terms, is nevertheless also portrayed in feminizing language as the one who was there when the mountains were born (*yuladû*) and who labored to bring forth (*tehôlel*) the earth (v. 2). The parental image surfaces again at the close of the psalm in the appeal that YHWH manifest his power on behalf of his servants and their children (v. 16).

There is also a subtle contrast at work in the way the psalm appeals for Divine intervention and aid. On the one hand, the opening reference to Moses, who mediated the Torah to Israel, and the admission of iniquity in v. 8, appear to add up to an admission of covenant-breaking, disloyalty and guilt. The appeal then is to YHWH to remember his compassion after he has completed his justly-deserved punishment of the Davidic dynasty and the Israelite people. But the portrayal of ephemeral human beings, who are little more than a dream or a sleep (v. 5), who flourish like quickly-withering grass (vv. 5-6), and who vanish after their miserable seventy or eighty years (if they live that long!)—this portrayal bespeaks an appeal of another sort. Neither an admission of guilt nor an admission of innocence is at the heart of such an appeal. Rather, it is an appeal to YHWH to consider whether it wouldn't be fair to just give some relief to these puny creatures of his. "Haven't we suffered long enough?" seems to be the underlying appeal here, and "Since a thousand years are like a day or less to you, why do the offenses of our tiny life-span catch your eye and make you so angry?" It is an appeal similar to Job's complaint that, even if he had sinned, why should it matter when he will soon disappear to Sheol anyway while God will simply go on and on forever.[3] The appeal is echoed in Psalm 103 of this Book IV, which, also in reference to Moses and the revelation of the Divine Name, asserts that YHWH is fully aware that he has created mortal humankind as mere dust or grass (vv. 14-16). Like a father who pities his children, this psalm asserts, he simply has compassion and does not repay our iniquities (vv. 10, 12-13).

Another contrast is suggested in 90:11, a contrast between the experiences of those who fear God and those who do not. But it is not the sort of contrast one might expect, the sort drawn, for instance, in Psalm 1 or in the Book of Proverbs between the happy and flourishing lot of the God-fearers and the misfortunes of those who ignore God's

[3] Variations on Job's complaint about mortal and miserable humankind appear in Job 7, 10 and 14. In each instance the theme is developed along similar lines: humanity is portrayed as ephemeral and miserable; the eternal God hounds these poor mortals by looking for offenses and piling up difficulties; so couldn't there be some respite? Psalm 90 displays a similar pattern of motifs and composition, as does Psalm 39.

way. In the NRSV verse 11 reads, "Who considers the power of your anger? Your wrath is as great as the fear that is due you." Mitchell Dahood suggested that we read, "Who can understand the violence of your wrath, or that those who fear you can be the object of your fury?"[4] Elsewhere, I have argued for yet a third reading of this verse: "Who experiences the brunt of your anger, And your fury like those who fear you?!"[5] If we stay with the literary conceit of the opening verse, Moses, speaking through this psalm, asserts by this rhetorical question that, in contrast to those who are not God-fearers, precisely those who fear YHWH, who count themselves as his "servants" (vv. 13, 16) and who are mindful of their covenant-relationship and duties—precisely they are the ones who most experience the Divine Hand behind human misery and suffering and who therefore hurt most! Yet, he also seems to be saying that only such people, who are mindful that even the pious and God-fearing share in the universal fate of misery and mortality, may attain to a "heart of wisdom" (v. 12) that understands how life really is. Ignorance, this psalm seems to proclaim, is not bliss.

This is a somber psalm, but it ends on a note of hope. We have looked at some of the ways Psalm 90 puts a spotlight on Moses the intercessor and on the mortality of human beings over against the eternal dominion of God. In closing, we might note how this psalm makes a surprising move from somber reflection on the misery of Israel and of humanity in general to a sense of hope for the future. The move is accomplished through a daring call for YHWH to repent and an expression of hope for the morning.

The Hebrew verb turn/return (*shûv*) occurs three times in Psalm 90. It is the verb used in the prophetic literature to call on the people to return (in repentance) to their God. Here, in 90:3, God is pictured as (re)turning (*tashev*) humans to dust whence they came, by ordering, "Return (*shûvû*), children of mankind!" That's straightforward enough, it seems. But how surprising to picture Moses calling on YHWH to turn (*shûvah*) in v. 13, itself the turning-point of the entire psalm. Moses asks for God to "repent," to show a change of heart. And he asks that such a turning be reflected in a different kind of morning for Israel and for humankind. For while, in vv. 5-6, the psalm reminded God that humans flourish for but a morning before fading by evening, now Moses asks that the covenant loyalty (*ḥesed*) of YHWH might satisfy us, "your servants," in the morning so that rejoicing and gladness may follow for a new lifetime. In this context, the references to God's "work" and to his "glorious power" (v. 16) seem to take on a double meaning. The appeal is not only for a restoration of the nation of Israel by powerful acts of Divine intervention as in the days of the Exodus when Moses worked great signs and wonders. The appeal is, perhaps even more, for YHWH to show his truly proper work, his work of compassion (v. 13), and to make his power known by his covenant loyalty (v. 14) and favor (v. 17).

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[4] M. Dahood, *Psalms II: 51-100* (Anchor Bible, vol. 17; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1968), 321.

[5] W. J. Urbrock, "Mortal and Miserable Man: A Form-Critical Investigation of Psalm 90," in *Society of Biblical Literature 1974 Seminar Papers*, ed. G. MacRae (Cambridge, MA: Society of Biblical Literature, 1974), 12-13.

Proclaiming the Gospel Contextually

Andrew M. Weyermann
Whitefish Bay, Wisconsin

Thirty years ago I was talking with a seminary faculty colleague who had just completed his doctorate work in New Testament interpretation. Forgiveness, I indicated, played a central role in my preaching. He challenged me: "You know the New Testament doesn't talk about forgiveness all that much." I defended myself, saying that I associated the term "forgiveness" with other terms—mercy, reconciliation, justification—and reminded him of the statement in Luther's catechism: "Where there is the forgiveness of sins there is also life and salvation."

Unimpressed, he retorted: "Why make the word *forgiveness* cover everything? The New Testament is more diverse and so are the needs of the people." He had a point. I have been working on preaching the gospel message in a more inclusive and contextual way ever since.

Interestingly, the same colleague also had a canon within the canon when he preached in a seminary chapel. His basic message always seemed the same—regardless of the text. He was intensely involved in such 1960s social issues as racial discrimination, the Vietnam War, and economic justice in America. In place of a Pauline bias his inspiration seemed most often to come from Luke-Acts. Luke's narrative focuses on the Spirit creating a new eschatological order based on mercy and in conflict with inequities in the world. Certainly a Lutheran seminary community needed to hear that message. But it, too, can become a form of gospel reductionism.

All preachers face this dilemma. On the one hand, preaching with passion is preaching from a personal commitment to that gospel of God that has captured the heart and soul of the preacher in a particular way. But on the other hand, the preacher is called to proclaim the full meaning of the gospel of God to all people across a spectrum of life situations.

Preaching is application. By this definition preaching always is contextual. Preaching is essentially not words about God and the world, but God's address to the hearers by which God acts on the hearers. Preaching contextually is not as self evident or easy as it sounds. The first part of this article is a reminder of some of the skills needed to proclaim the gospel contextually. The second part addresses the challenge of preaching the gospel in a diverse or conflicted context.

Preaching God's address

Transposing general words *about* God and the world into God's address *to* hearers is the first skill needed to preach contextually.

The first axiom is "Keep the hearer on the hook." The preacher is an authorized herald, proclaiming God's judgment and grace in a way that maximizes the hearer's responsibility and freedom in faith in the particular situation.

Sermons inevitably will contain some exposition of a text: theological reflection, social analysis, psychological insight, moral instruction, programmatic information.

None of these by themselves constitutes contextual preaching. Preaching becomes contextual when the word of God's judgment and grace addresses the hearers in their context. When this does not happen the sermons become exegesis, theological discourse, political ideology, religious psycho-babble, moralism, or institutional propaganda. The question for the preacher is not simply: "Is this a relevant issue or a powerful narrative?" It must become: "What is God saying to us and doing for us in our situation?"

There is no more "relevant" question believers ask in time of personal tragedy than "Why do bad things happen to good people?" The question is understandable. Their tragic experience seems to contradict their confession that God is both a gracious Father and the Almighty Lord of history at the same time.

The preacher is tempted to provide answers to the "why" question the hearers are asking. But it is a misplaced question. Its "answers" actually rob the hearers of God's consolation in their tragic situation. The question assumes a theo-logic by which we can reflect about God in relation to God and the whole creation in a way that justifies God to the hearers. The apparent "answers" offer either a god who is no longer a gracious Father or no longer the Almighty Lord of history. How can the hearer love and trust such a god with their whole being?

The preacher has to help the hearer move from the "Why?" which seeks to justify God to the "When?" which seeks to be God's address to the hearer in a tragic situation. "When bad things happen to you, what is God saying to you and doing for you in Christ?" The sermon becomes God's address in which both the truth and grace of God are maximized for the hearers. Whenever the hearer is let off the hook of God's address, the word of God is distorted.

The people who ask our Lord "why" the Tower of Siloam fell and killed 16 people want an answer in which God judges other people. The hearer goes home self justified and authorized to judge others (Lk 13:4-5). Our Lord changes the question to "when" and calls for the hearers to repent. In a context where Christians fear they will not keep the faith under the trial of persecution, Paul proclaims what God is saying to them through the death and resurrection of Christ. "In Christ God promises you are always in God's hands no matter what the future brings. No destructive power can separate you from the love of God in Christ. God will work out God's good purpose for you. Remember God has chosen you in Christ from eternity to eternity" (Rom 8:28-39).

The supreme consolation of the gospel is lost when this address of God is taken out of context and turned into talk about God in general. The question "Why does God choose some and not others?" leads to dead ends. Either the hearers are asked to love and trust a god who creates some people only to condemn them in advance, or a god who chooses some because they will keep the faith—which is precisely what the hearers fear they cannot do. God can address the hearers through many forms: the exposition of a text, the telling of a story, the explanation of a teaching of the church, a falling of an autumn leaf, an exchange of gifts. It is the preacher's task to let every

form serve the function of the word of God by which God criticizes, consoles, justifies and sanctifies the hearers.

Confine the goal

People at worship want to hear sermons that connect the word of God with their daily life. They long for concrete, contextual preaching. That connection is more apt to be made when the preacher says *more* about *less*. When asked "What was the sermon about?" the drowsy hearer responded, "The preacher was against sin." Hearers had been put to sleep under the drone of a thousand generalizations, and, when they awakened, they had missed nothing. Everyone already knew the preacher was against sin! The starting point of contextual preaching is defining and confining the goal of the sermon: "What specifically do you hope the hearers will be and do in response to the gospel you are proclaiming today?"

When the goal is clearly defined the need of the hearer implied by the goal is also clearly defined. The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant (Mt 18:23-25) is not about sin in general. It is about the sin of not forgiving a person in debt to you. More precisely it is about wanting to know when you no longer need to forgive someone.

The unique character of the text lies in Peter's question to our Lord, "How often shall I forgive?" The goal is not simply to let God free the hearers to forgive but to forgive 70 times 7. The subject is not "forgiveness" but "unlimited forgiveness." Now things become more interesting: Why unlimited? How is this possible? What does it mean for a woman continually abused by her husband? By defining and confining the goal the preacher has time to tell stories that capture the hearer experientially. She has time to deal with the complexity of the call to forgive 70 times 7. By the preacher's saying less the hearer actually is grasped by more.

Almost all biblical texts contain words packed with many meanings. "If you continue in my Word... you will know the truth and the truth will make you free" (Jn 8:32). The rhetoric of this verse includes *remain* or *abide*, *word*, *truth* and *free*.

Novice preachers tend to flatten texts by forsaking the specific language and reverting either to generalizations or their own favorite rhetoric. One can spend a lifetime growing in the skill of defining and confining the goal. The Parable of the Prodigal Son (Lk 15:11-32) originally focused on the elder brother, then the focus became the younger son and, more recently, the father. The recent discussion of the distinction between "guilt" and "shame" has added another possible dimension to this ageless story. The parable usually is told with the focus on the younger son's guilt and the father's forgiveness. It could be told from the standpoint of the son's shame and the father's acceptance and reintegration of the prodigal into the family he disgraced. Usually we mix shame and guilt together. Why not define and confine shame and give the sermon a new and perhaps more specific empirical fit?

Correlate the gospel metaphor

What preachers say about the goals and needs of the hearers is often more dynamic, real, interesting and beautiful than what they say about God acting in Christ for and in the hearer's life. We learn to define and confine the goal so it is concrete, but the gospel proclamation remains a generalization. It appears as a reductionist formula, "Jesus died for our sins." Repeated over and over it becomes a vague shibboleth and magical incantation.

In the New Testament there are many metaphors or images used to convey the power of God's passion in Christ for the world. The meaning for faith of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus is evoked in these metaphors—Sacrifice, Word, Lord, Friend, Victor, Reconciler, Redeemer. The various portraits of Christ and gospel metaphors are neither mutually exclusive nor logically consistent in their literal form. They are meaningful for faith when proclaimed as a facet of God's suffering love in Christ which can heal and liberate a person in a specific situation in life.

The task of the preacher is to proclaim the power of God's suffering love in Christ through that metaphor or image which correlates to the particular need of the hearer in a specific situation in life. This is not an invitation to relativize the gospel. Every gospel metaphor in the New Testament conveys the meaning of one event: God raising the crucified Christ from the dead and the outpouring of the Spirit of Christ in the world. All the metaphors work toward one goal or response from the hearers: To fear, love and trust a gracious God with their whole being and to have agape love for their neighbors. All the metaphors are necessitated by one human problem—the inability to completely trust God.

Jesus the Friend of Sinners and Jesus the Revealing Word are one and the same Christ. The "word" Jesus reveals is "full of grace and truth." Grace is God's unmotivated love, and truth is God's reliability and faithfulness in spite of our unfaithfulness and the power of darkness in the world. God's light shines in the hour when Jesus is lifted up on the cross, which is simultaneously the hour of resurrection glory. This is a different way of seeing God in Christ, the Friend of Sinners.

Why then use both metaphors and not just one? Because Christ the Revealing Word speaks more directly to the experience of the "dark night of the soul"—the darkness of the Holocaust, the loss of meaning, the fear of the truth. Christ the Justifier (whom we meet in Paul's letters) speaks more directly to guilt for past sin, fear of judgment, dying from the consequence of past downfalls. Christ the friend of Sinners (whom Luke introduces) speaks more directly to living with the mark of Cain, exclusion from the family of God, realizing one new humanity.

Christian artists have not pictured Christ as a timeless spirit, but as an Italian bambino, a noble African, an oppressed South American peasant. The Greek icon, the Latin crucifix, the "Tortured Christ" of political prisoner Guido Rocha convey both the presence and power of God in Christ in a specific context. Preachers also paint with words the portrait of Christ that identifies with and conveys the power of God's grace to the hearers in their context.

The complex context

The greatest challenge of contextual preaching is that every context contains diversity, conflict, and ambiguity. The most homogeneous congregation is pluralistic in many ways. The hearers come with differing and sometimes conflicting agendas, needs, goals and faith perspectives. The preacher serves as both a prophet and pastor for this diverse group in the same moment. The challenge is enormous.

There is no way to be all things to all people in the same moment. There are aspects of the diversity in a given context which cannot be fully resolved. An honest recognition of inevitable diversity and personal limitations is the preacher's best starting point, but then he must do what can be done to offer a sermon that is open to dialogue with hearers and multidimensional in

gospel content.

The diversity of the biblical texts is an aid for achieving more inclusive sermons. Many biblical scholars contend that in Galatians, at least Paul, abolishes the law and righteousness is provided by God through Christ's death. By contrast Matthew intensifies the law and exhorts a greater righteousness which is possible through the spirit of Christ in the world. The preacher will have to hold these diverse views together in a gospel center. If a preacher is to become more inclusive, she will have to make the most of the diversity in the biblical texts.

Two aspects of pluralistic context—diversity in faith perspective and difference in gender—are particularly significant because a preacher finds them in almost all groups of hearers.

Thanks to developmental psychology, we now better understand what we have all experienced as preachers. People don't hear what you say. They hear what they hear. They hear what they are able and ready to hear. Even if the preacher takes great pains to preach one coherent sermon, in fact, many sermons are heard at once.

"All things work together for good to those who love God" (Rom 8:28a). This statement means one thing for a child and another for Paul speaking from a mature faith perspective. A child believes what she wants is what she needs now. Defenseless in a hostile world, the child is totally dependent on the care she receives from parents. Father and Mother are perceived as omnipotent caregivers whom the child learns to please and tries to control. In her mind "God" is the ultimate provider who will see to it that only good comes to pass if she does the right thing.

Paul's view of providence is light years away from that view. God offers no guarantee that the trials that come in life will not also come to a believer. Nor is there any way to control God. In Christ you live with this promise: "Nothing will separate you from the love of God. God's grace will prevail in your life." That promise is all you really need, and you already have it as a gift (Rom 8:24-39).

The truth is that we often live between these two worlds. Like the child we still try to control God's care for us and ask "Why?" when disaster strikes us. Yet like Paul, we struggle in the crisis to hold to the promise: "My grace is sufficient for you" (2 Cor 12:9).

Many persons of faith live a good part of their lives under serious moral contract with God. Matthew's view of the law and striving for the greater righteousness is easily accepted as supporting in this way of life. Paul's transmoral talk of "freedom from the law" strikes one as strange and even subversive. Faith in forgiveness, yes, but "faith alone"? It is only when the person of faith is actually crushed by the accusation of law that Paul's words can really be heard and embraced. The hearers actually move between these two faith perspectives often without resolving the tensions that exist between them.

There is no way to change the reality that people hear what they are able and ready to hear. Accepting this fact will shape both the preacher's attitude toward the hearers and the strategy for preaching the gospel. His attitude will be one of patient understanding of the specific need of the hearer to hear what she hears and an openness to let the Spirit transpose the gospel into a key the hearer can sing. At the same time, the strategy is to proclaim to the gospel of the truth of God's faithfulness in Christ so that the hearer might be free to confront greater ambiguity and adversity in the real world. The preacher who seeks to live by "faith alone" stands ready to be there

for the hearer when nothing else makes sense, given the judgment and/or absence of God she now must face in her life.

A more visible and politically charged contextual factor involves the gender gap. How does a male preacher preach to modern females in the congregation? How does a woman preach to traditional males?

Several years ago I participated in a course entitled "Cross Cultural Preaching." Half the students were black, half white. After 30 hours of sharing and building trust each student was asked to preach a sermon "cross culturally." An African American pastor of a large city congregation spoke to the white participants on the Christian family, using Ephesians 6:1-4 as text. The pastor focused on the need for children to honor and obey their parents. What he said was in general true, and he said it with verve and conviction.

The first person to respond was a white woman in her last quarter at the seminary. She stunned us all by saying, "I am angry and I am devastated by what you said." Hardly able to maintain her composure, she proceeded to give witness to how children can be abused by their parents. She asserted that the authoritarian stance the preacher took was insensitive to the needs of children today.

This kind of miscommunication was not uncommon as we preached "cross culturally." It illustrated how complex and conflicted a cross cultural situation can be. Not only were there ethnic, sociological, and political barriers to communication, but there was also a gender gap. The presenting pastor was a strong male presence seeking family and social cohesion by asserting parental authority calling for obedience from children. The woman was sensitive to the abuses of patriarchy and the way in which females, in particular, can be abused as children by authoritarian parents.

> People don't hear what you say. They hear what they hear.

No one can anticipate all the possible ways a sermon will be heard. A male preacher who centers his person in the gospel will be formed by the Spirit as an instrument of God's grace for all God's people. By faith the male preacher will take a stand in solidarity with women in the quest for justice and kindness. He will speak *to* and not *at* them. He will be sensitive to the unevenness of the playing field established by male patriarchy in the past. The preparation of the person of the preacher by the gospel through the trust of faith is especially important in a conflicted context.

But what about the gospel the preacher proclaimed? I have two concerns. First, male preachers need to set the present conflict regarding authority in the home in a christological, eschatological, and ecclesiological context as well as a sensitized cultural context.

Ephesians 6:1-4 is a *Haustafel*, or table of duties. It represented the best insight of the contemporary world of the writer. But this common wisdom of the world is placed in a christological context: "Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Eph 5:21). This faith perspective changed everything—in spite of the fact that there was no way to replace patriarchy at that time. What could be done was to criticize and transform the way authority functions in the family.

The Christian family should function

at least as well as other families in our present context. But in the Christian family each member should act out of reverence for the Lordship of Christ and engage in the politics of grace. The criticism and transformation of abusive patriarchy already is signaled: "And, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath" (Eph. 6:4).

In other words, the preacher needs to meditate to and from the gospel center in shaping the need and goal of the sermon. The issue of disobedience or abuse in the home must be driven toward Christ, and the goal must be grounded and empowered in Christ. This leads to preaching the gospel contextually in a way sensitive to the ambiguity and diversity of the context.

A second consideration involves the use of appropriate gospel metaphors in a conflicted context. When a text is marked by diverse needs and goals, then the preacher needs to acknowledge those multiple goals and utilize appropriate gospel metaphors that correlate with them. In the case of the gender gap, the male preacher needs to be sensitive to the interaction between "Christ the Friend of Sinners" and "Christ the Liberator." Both images are at the heart of the gospel for *all* the people of God.

Christ's death and resurrection have meaning for the hearers both as atonement for sin and as victory over evil. "Christ the Sacrifice" metaphors focus on the hearer as responsible, sin as transgression, God as just and justifier in Christ. "Christ the Victor" metaphors focus on the hearer as oppressed, sin as forced slavery, God as victor through suffering love in Christ.

There are essentially two stories the preacher tells on Sunday morning—"lost and found" and "conflict and vindication." In the first the hearer is lost in sin and made alive by the forgiveness of the waiting God of grace in Christ. In the other the hearer is overwhelmed by systemic powers and comes to share the victory of God's pathos for the world. One has the judgment of God as the focus, the other the apparent absence of God as the focus.

What complicates matters is that every man and woman in a congregation is simultaneously both oppressor and oppressed. Everyone needs to be forgiven for oppressing others *and* for not trusting God's promise of victory in Christ over the oppressive powers in life. A male preacher is not likely to be heard by a female suffering under male oppression when he says to her, "Repent. Jesus died for your sins." The woman needs to hear the promise again, "God in Christ is Victor over all the powers of evil in the world. Accept your acceptance and your freedom from the false gods that oppress you."

From the male preacher, women also need to hear: "I repent, of any wrong known or unknown, and I will do everything I can to see justice is done." Eventually the call to radical discipleship might be appropriately sounded: "Take up the cross and follow in Christ's suffering love by which God saves the world."

The complexity of this single factor in every context illustrates why the Spirit has to guide us to say the right word at the right time. The Spirit leads us to be all things for all people as best we are able. The intention is not to eliminate the real scandal and foolishness of the gospel, but to transcend the many natural barriers to communication.

Other articles on preaching by Dr. Weyermann have appeared in Currents*: "What Makes Good Preaching Good?" (February 1995); "The Rhetoric of the Gospel" (April 1995); "Preaching To and From the Center" (June 1995); "Preaching To and From the Center, Continued" (October 1995); and "Preacher Preparation" (February 1996).—ed.*

A Letter to Parents about Baptism

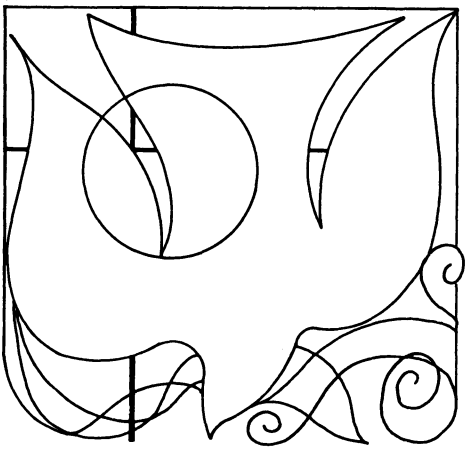
S. Anita Stauffer
Study Secretary for Worship and Congregational Life
Lutheran World Federation, Geneva, Switzerland

In preparing recently to baptize a new family member, it was a challenge to decide how to do the normal pre-baptismal instruction, because I live in Switzerland while the baby and his parents are in the United States. Among other things, I wrote the following letter. While the letter of course did not contain any footnotes, a few have been provided here.

Dear [parents of a child to be baptized],

I've been wanting to write you about the Baptism, which you have set up with [the local pastor], and at which you've asked me to preside. What follows is not intended to "preach" to you, but a pastor (even when she is your relative) has certain responsibilities when agreeing to baptize someone, and I take them very seriously. If we were not separated by a large ocean, I would sit down and talk with you about what Baptism means. But since we can't do that, I will try to write here some thoughts about what we will do.

What does Baptism mean? For one thing, it is entrance into God's family, the church. Baptism marks the threshold between death and life, sin and salvation, between being totally alone in the world and being with God in life and in death.



When one is baptized, one is never alone, for we are given both life with God, and life in the church community. Baptism is an action by God to take [Chris] to Himself and give him all the love that only God can give, which is love for eternity. Think of it: eternity, forever and ever! No one in the whole universe can give Chris that kind of love and belonging, only God. Baptism is the most important event in a person's whole life, and the greatest gift a person can receive.

Because Baptism means being made a member of the church, several promises are asked of parents and sponsors during the

rite. First, though, about sponsors: they are Christian people who take responsibility (along with you) for the baby to be baptized. Having sponsors emphasizes that Baptism is closely tied to the community which is called the church. You need to identify a man and a woman (they need not be a couple, but they must be active church members), who will help you carry out the responsibility to raise Chris as a Christian:

—to love and enjoy him and communicate to him what it means to be loved by God
—to teach him about his Baptism and what it means in daily life
—to bring him to worship and Sunday church school
—to teach him the Lord's Prayer and how to pray
—to provide him, when he is old enough, with a Bible and teach him how to read it
—to provide for his instruction in the Christian faith
—to help him develop good values in life
—to support him in life's inevitable crises.

These are promises you and sponsors will be asked to make during the Baptism. So you see that sponsors (or godparents, as they're often called) may not necessarily be your best friends or favorite relatives. They must be active church members. They are asked to make serious vows during the Baptism, and must be prepared to carry them out as Chris grows up.

At the focal moment of the Baptism, I will wash Chris three times with water in the name of the Holy Trinity: God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.[1] Ideally I would immerse Chris in a very large amount of water, but that is not possible at your parish. So I will pour water abundantly over his head. The water and its symbolism are very important, for at least three reasons.[2] First and most importantly, it symbolizes being drowned, buried, and raised with Christ[3] (that's why immersion is a better way to do it: the drowning and burial aspect are more apparent: one goes down into the water and is raised up out of it[4]). It is being with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection; Chris will be given the new everlasting life which only Christ can give, meaning that earthly death will not really matter, because we are in the hands of God forever. We die, in a sense, in the waters of Baptism, and are raised to new life in Christ. Second, the water symbolizes being washed,[5] but this is ever so much more than the simple bath you give the baby every day. In Baptism, God washes the person clean from sin—this is the kind of total and perfect cleansing that only God can do. The waters of Baptism are like a flood which washes away all the badness[6] of our selfishness (though it is not something magical; we strive our whole lives to be faithful to our Baptism). Third, the water symbolizes

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[1] For a defense of the Trinitarian baptismal formula, see my "In Whose Name?" in *Lutheran Forum*, Lent 1993 (27:1), 4-6.

[2] See my *On Baptismal Fonts: Ancient and Modern*, Alcuin/GROW Liturgical Studies 29-30 (Bramford, Notts., England: Grove Books, 1994), especially chapter 1, "Water and Baptism."

[3] Romans 6:3-11; Colossians 2:12-13.

[4] This was a key thought of Martin Luther. See "The Holy and Blessed Sacrament of Baptism" (1519) in *Luther's Works* 35:29; and "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church" (1520) in *LW* 36:67-68. Luther repeatedly advocated Baptism by immersion. In addition to the two works just cited, see also "The Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body of Christ, and the Brotherhoods" (1519), *LW* 35:50; and Luther's 1523 baptismal order in *LW* 53:100.

[5] 1 Corinthians 6:11; 2 Peter 1:9.

[6] Elaine Ramshaw, *The Godparent Book* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1993), 15.

the birth waters of God's womb; in Baptism the birth (sometimes call a second birth, or being born again) is new birth as a child of God.[7] In presenting Chris for Baptism, you are commending him to God's care for eternity. After Chris is baptized, no matter what may happen to him at any point in his life, you will know that he is God's child for whom suffering and death will never be final. What is final is eternal life in the loving arms of Christ in heaven. So... the water which I will pour over him is overflowing with meaning! It is infinitely more than mere water, because the water of the font is life-giving water by the power of the Holy Spirit.[8]

Do you rub baby oil on Chris after you bathe him? The church does a similar thing after the "bath" of Baptism: I will apply oil to his forehead and say, "Christopher, child of God, you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever." It's just one sentence, but a very significant action. In fact, the name for the oil is similar to Chris' own name: the oil is called chrism. Both words, *chrism* and *Chris*, come from the Greek word which means "Anointed One," a biblical title for *Christ*. Applying the oil in Baptism is known as anointing or *chris*mation, and it is a sign that God "owns" Chris. Another thing: I will apply the oil by tracing the sign of the cross on his forehead, a reminder that Chris is forever united with the crucified and risen Christ. This action "seals" the Baptism. Though the analogy is not the best, think of this oily cross on Chris' forehead as a tattoo or a brand (yes, like a brand given by a rancher to his cattle): it is a mark of belonging to Christ; people who are baptized are adopted into the family of God. It is a permanent, indelible mark, though you won't be able to see it. God can and does see it.

Then, a lighted candle is presented to the parents or sponsors, to serve as a reminder of the Baptism. The candle is lighted from the large Easter (or paschal) candle in the church, to emphasize the connections between Easter and Baptism: to be baptized is to be joined to Christ's death and resurrection, that is, the baptized person is promised the power of Easter which is everlasting life in the Risen One, Christ. Often this candle is lighted in the home on the baptismal anniversary of the child. It is just as important to remember this date each year as to remember Chris' birthday... in fact, this is his "second" birth-day. First he was born from your womb, and second he was born from the womb of the church (which is often what the baptismal font, which holds the water, is called). Baptismal sponsors are important on the baptismal anniversary—either to be present and do something together with Chris which reminds him of his Baptism and helps him gradually to understand what it means to be baptized, or

Sponsors may not necessarily be your best friends or favorite relatives. They must be active church members. They are asked to make serious vows....

[7] John 3:5; Titus 3:5b.

[8] *Small Catechism* IV:3.

You see, it is the most important thing in life, not just some sweet ceremony with an adorable baby.

to send a card or other reminder of the Baptism and stress how much it means. Sponsors are so named because they have re*spons*ibilities.

Let me just add one other thing about the baptismal ceremony. Near the end of it, I will pray this prayer for you as parents:

"O God, the giver of all life, look with kindness upon the parents of this child. Let them ever rejoice in the gift you have given them. Make them teachers and examples of righteousness for their child. Strengthen them in their own Baptism so that they may share eternally with their child the salvation you have given them, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

This is a prayer of blessing for you, and a reminder to be joyful about the three wonderful gifts you have been given: your own life, Chris' life, and the new eternal life which God gives you all in Holy Baptism.[9]

Well, this has turned out to be a long letter, but it really only touches the surface of the important meanings of Baptism. You see, it is the most important thing in life, not just some sweet ceremony with an adorable baby. I take it very seriously, and pray that you do, too.

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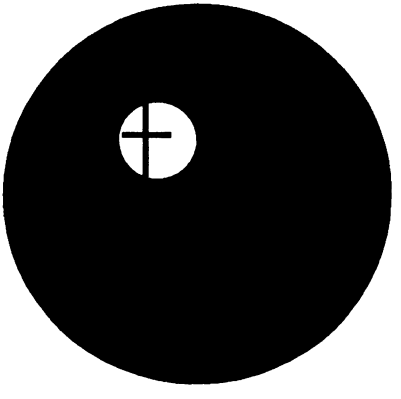
[9] Philip H. Pfatteicher, *Commentary on the Lutheran Book of Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1990), p. 59.

For further information, also see the pre-baptismal instruction guides written by Eugene L. Brand and me, *By Water and the Spirit: Preparing for Holy Baptism* and the accompanying pastor's guide (Philadelphia: Parish Life Press, 1979); Elaine Ramshaw, *The Godparent Book* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1993); my "Holy Baptism in the *Lutheran Book of Worship*," in *Currents in Theology and Mission* 13:6 (December 1986), 339-45; and Martin E. Marty, *Baptism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1962 and 1977).

A Bottom of the Bottle Theology

Richard L. Swenson
Central Lutheran Church
Morton, Washington

I remember with searing and painful memory the weeks I voluntarily entered an alcohol rehabilitation program some years ago. Among the residents there was a sort of gallows humor that found people who could and would leave their drinks half finished to be "disgusting." How could they just leave it?



For any pastor or parishioner who experiences alcohol/drug use, this is no joking matter. Nor is this a matter that affects families in all kinds of ways something to either moralize about or trivialize.

I have just recently begun to incorporate a "bottom of the bottle" theology. It begins with the Apostle Paul's humble admission, "...to keep me from being too

elated, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, to keep me from being too elated. Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me..." (2 Cor 12:7-8 NRSV). I don't know of any alcohol/drug abuser who wants their thorn in the flesh, and I'll leave it up to the scholars to debate what Paul's particular thorn in the flesh was. Paul was left having to live with something he did not want, did not ask for, and could not pray away. That is a "bottom of the bottle" situation I can relate to. And that is where my "bottom of the bottle" theology begins.

There is nowhere else to look but up through the empty bottle or empty glass or half-snorted line of coke.

This "bottom of the bottle" theology is descriptive in terms of life bottoming out, and the ongoing struggles, temptations, relapses, and death, thorns in the flesh that will not go away. There is no eternal victory to proclaim or any reason to point to one's own willpower or strength. There is no skill-building course, magic pill, sophisticated pastoral care course or new computer that will change it. It is life viewed from the bottom of the bottle. There is nowhere else to look but up through the empty bottle or empty glass or half-snorted line of coke. It's right here that Paul's beseeching the Lord to remove his thorn in the flesh becomes an internal scream for deliverance from bondage. For temporary relief, pass the Excedrin. But deliverance is another matter.

Maybe the answer is to believe in Christ more powerfully. The only problem is that Luther had it right (join in, you old Confirmation students) when he said in his definition of the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed, "I believe that I cannot by my own understanding or effort believe in Jesus Christ my Lord, or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, and sanctified and kept me in true faith." If it is the Holy Spirit alone that creates faith in Christ, is there a power for us to call upon that we are not fully using? If the most important thing there is—our faith in God through our Lord Jesus Christ—is only possible through the work of the Holy Spirit, are there other areas in our life where we are neglecting to call upon the power of God's Holy Spirit?

As I read the Pentecost story from the perspective of a "bottom of the bottle" theology, I am very aware of the relationship between alcoholic spirits and the Holy Spirit. "All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, 'What does this mean?' But others sneered and said, 'They are filled with new wine'" (Acts 2:12-13 NRSV). But then Peter sets the record straight: "Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning" (2:15). Peter goes on to cite the Joel prophecy where God pours out God's Spirit on all flesh. In both verses 17 and 18, the word "pour" is used. When God does the pouring, it gives life; when the bartender or host or "consumer" (literally interpreted) does the pouring, it may bring death.

Whether one views alcohol/drug dependency as a disease, or the way one is genetically "wired" (which I do) or sin

(which some do), or demonic (as in "demon rum"), or death-dealing in all kinds of ways, there is no doubt the effects are pervasive. Some of you reading this are dealing with it in your own lives. As you know, Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, and Al Anon have been around for a long time and helped many. Others find different paths. In your parish and pastoral lives, you have experienced or met people living desperate lives. Some addictions are obvious, some are concealed. You could even be reading this in an impaired condition. Perhaps you think no one knows. My roommate at my particular alcohol rehabilitation (or treatment, if you prefer that wording) was a nice fellow in his mid-sixties. He was mentally gone. A lifetime of alcoholic spirits had taken his human spirit on its deadly course. It was pathetic to watch him try to comprehend his workbook or write an assignment. It was as if the "nobody's home" sign went on above his head. He was a nice fellow with little left upstairs. Some might say this was just another no-good drunk who paid the price for his alcoholic misdeeds. I look at old Albert as a fellow traveller who, like the Apostle Paul, had a thorn in the flesh that never went away.

What I am humbly suggesting is that the Holy Spirit who saves us by creating faith in Christ within us is also the Spirit to call upon in our sin, death, and dependency battles. Luther concluded that we are all beggars, as he headed towards death, and he was right. Profoundly right. A theology from the "bottom of the bottle" can only look up through the glass darkly. (Good old Paul talked about looking through the glass darkly in another context, but it fits here too).

Left to ourselves, we are defeated. Left to our own strength, the thorn prevails. Left to the machinations of our own intellect, we end up lost. Left to our self-motivated faith, we fail. But in the midst of these "sobering" realities, perhaps we begin to hear not a triumphant voice of deliverance but the answer to Paul's and our thorns in the flesh. It may come in a whisper, or a gently blowing Spirit: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor 12:9 NRSV).

I just received an "out of the blue" phone call from a young man crying because he was at the bottom and needed help with his addictive drinking, and I am again reminded how every day—every hour—of sobriety is a gift of God. Some are addicted to substances, others to work or power or control or food. Whatever it is, we all have our "thorns in the flesh." None of us dare be smug or self-righteous, lest we fall. We *all* have blind spots within ourselves.

And when/if we fall, God's grace in Christ is there. After all, isn't Christ's body broken and blood shed for us in an invitation to all broken people, whatever their addition, to come just as we are—with our "thorns in the flesh?" Amen

Reflections on Reflections

Bucky Brown-Beach
Chaplain, Suomi College
Hancock, Michigan

He said therefore, "What is the kingdom of God like? And to what should I compare it? It is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in the garden; it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches." (Luke 13:18-19)

November 16

Leaves are falling today. Each year at this time they fall. And each year at this time I begin to feel again. And to remember. I don't know which comes first. Memories or feelings. Maybe they come at the same time. It doesn't matter. I only know the memories are not without the feelings. And the feelings brought on by the crisp air and brilliantly colored leaves stir the memories into being once again, like calling forth the ghosts, the dead from time past. Funny that something so alive as a leaf could bring forth something so dead. But maybe it's the death of the leaf that does it. Or maybe it's that memories aren't really dead. Leaves don't really die. So why should memories? They are part of me as I live. Just as leaves are part of new life.

I remember watching the leaves blow to the ground on a windy fall day. Falling to the earth. Sometimes, if you watched closely, you could see one right at the moment it detached from the tree, finding its freedom on the wind until it landed. I must have done that a million times when I was a child.

Fall in a small town is beautiful. It seemed like everyone came out in the fall. They came out for the raking of the leaves. It was a ritual. Everyone came out to say good-bye to the old and greet the new. One by one the lawns would empty of leaves. If someone was late you called to see if they were okay. Adults and the older kids raked the leaves into huge piles while the younger ones jumped into them. Raking leaves was for kids. So the kids thought.

It was like the town was saying its last farewell to summer and getting ready to dig in for winter. But no one was thinking that. No one thought that soon winter would come and bury them under a blanket of snow. Fall held them captives. They disappeared in its beauty... its life.

That was the kind of place to grow up in. The kind of place you could raise a child in.

November 23

Fall was more than that. Fall had its secrets, which only I knew of. Fall always takes me back there. To the kind of place I grew up in. To the kind of place you could raise a child in. To the kind of place a child could be a king. A secret king in a private world. King of the abandoned farmhouses which became his palace. King of the surrounding fields which became his realm to rule over. King of the river valley and the creek beds where his imagination started its

journey downstream to other lands. It's all his. Fall held the keys to his realm.

Fall makes the heart run wild. The leaves are just beginning to fertilize the ground, but growth is already present. It is understood. Expected... known. The birth of a new season and the death of another. It was a constant. Yet a ritual is always changing, always new. And in fall there was always something new. Something being born.

A child could own that town in the fall. Fall created kings. Falling leaves do that to me. They take me there. To the kind of place you could raise a child in.

November 25

And then they die. They leave me in sadness. Sometimes I wish the memories would die. Just be gone. I moved here after it happened, hoping. But the memories have not disappeared like I hoped they would. Even though the seasons don't change much here, I guess they still change inside. Like an alarm that goes off, that you can't shut off, no matter how hard you try.

There are no leaves in the city. Not really. There are trees, sure. And they have leaves. And they turn colors in the fall. But they are not real leaves. Not really. Real leaves go somewhere. They go into the ground and turn into trees. But where do leaves in the city go? They just fall off the trees and blow around in the streets until they disintegrate. They just disappear. They have nothing to hold onto. They can't get back into the ground. They are dead. This is a bad thing.

I saw a tree that looked like a man standing alone in a crowded place. On a little patch of dirt. And I wondered what would happen to him if he died. If he just fell over and died. There is not enough space for him to get back into the ground. He would just break up and fall into the cracks in the cement. He wouldn't really die. He'd just kind of disintegrate. And disappear.

It's easy to disappear in the country. It's easier in the city.

There are no seasons here. Not really. There is no fall. Not really. I know this as I see leaves starting to change. And remember when I knew real fall. When I owned fall. When he owned fall. And remember why I came here. This is no place to raise a child.

November 28

I have this job offer. I would have to move to a small town. Back there. I see the leaves falling and I don't know if I can. If I can move to that kind of place.

November 29

It was on a fall day like today that we buried him. I remember the leaves blew into his small grave and landed on his pine box. He would take fall with him.

December 1

Now I am lost. I don't know what to do. The choice seems obvious. But I am not sure I can rake leaves anymore. I am not sure I can watch the leaves melt into the ground. Like he did. I know leaves turn into trees. But the winter is long. So long. I can't decide what to do. I am afraid.

— — — — —

As I read through these reflections in a friend's journal late one evening, I was forced to my own son's bedside to reassure myself in the rhythm of his breathing. But if I take my friend's writings seriously, I wonder if I too am missing something.

A Book Worth Discussing: *I Am a Palestinian Christian* by Mitri Raheb

Fred Strickert
Wartburg College

I am a Palestinian Christian. By Mitri Raheb. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995. Paper. $16.00.

When one mentions the name "Bethlehem" today there are primarily three different views that may come to mind:

There is the *romantic view* of an idyllic hillside village with shepherds roaming about and visiting the silent streets in search of the newborn Savior. The picture is frozen in time from Sunday School stories, Christmas cards, and carols.

There is the *tourist view* of a hectic and troubled West Bank site. The bus stops in manger square and visitors are herded quickly through the ancient Church of the Nativity where darkness, the smell of incense, stone and marble, and signs of eastern piety disturb the mind. As if Herod's soldiers lurked outside, visitors rush back to the bus followed by postcard and souvenir hustlers and drive off with a final glimpse of armed border police implanting a snapshot memory of a scene of terror and confusion—rarely the highlight of a middle east trip.

There is the *resident view* of 30,000 inhabitants who carry out a daily pilgrimage of life going to school, earning a living, feeding families, and worshipping God. It is a day to day economic and political struggle averting arrest, tear gas, even bullets, and seeking a word of hope from the Prince of Peace born two millennia earlier somewhere close by.

This third view—a rare glimpse for most American Christians—is shared with us by Pastor Mitri Raheb in his book, *I Am a Palestinian Christian*. There are more than a few stereotypes that come to mind when one mentions the word *Palestinian*. For some, *Palestinian* raises images of terrorists. For others, the *Palestinians* are veiled in a shroud of the mystery of Islam. For a few, there is an awareness that 10% of *Palestinians* are Christian, but even then the assumption is that they are Greek or Syrian Orthodox.

Palestinian Lutherans? How few real-

ize that there are Palestinian Christians singing "A Mighty Fortress" and daily reciting Luther's "Morning Prayer"! 1994 marked the 100th anniversary in the present beautiful stone sanctuary—built by Queen Augusta Victoria of Prussia—for the congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Christmas Church of Bethlehem—a quarter mile walk up from manger square in the heart of the city. The origins of Lutheranism in Bethlehem go back to 1819 from efforts of the "American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Mission" and the "Jerusalem Missionary Society" of Berlin. The first Lutheran congregation was formed in Bethlehem in 1854—well before most congregations of the ELCA.

Growth and expansion led to further congregations in Beit-Jala (1879), Hebron (1884), Beit-Sahour (1900), Ramallah, and Jerusalem (1902)—some readers may be familiar with and may have even worshipped at the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer located in the Muristan section of the heart of the Old City Jerusalem, near the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. Today these West Bank congregations—along with a congregation in Amman—make up the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan.

Pastor Mitri Raheb reminds us in his book that the Lutheran chapter is recent in comparison with Christianity's long history in Bethlehem, that Palestinian Christians have their roots in the early church at Pentecost and expanded greatly through the contributions of the Emperor Constantine (whose mother Helena is responsible for the Church of Nativity) and through migrations of westerners like Jerome—who translated the Bible into the Latin Vulgate in Bethlehem.

Pastor Raheb notes that his first name "Mitri" shows his family roots in the Orthodox tradition and that his last name "Raheb" is Arabic for "monk," suggesting that one of his ancestors was part of the fourth to sixth century movement to monasticism when over 130 monastic communities were established in the vicinity of Bethlehem. When his grandfather was accepted into a German Protestant orphanage in 1868, the family took a turn to Lutheranism. Thus was added a middle name "Bishara" meaning "evangelical." Palestinian Christian blood runs deeply in his veins.

Pastor Raheb himself is a symbol of a remnant of Christianity which has a long history of struggle and faith in the holy land. Today that remnant is concentrated only near the important historic sites: 100,000 in Nazareth; 20,000 in Jerusalem; and 30,000 in the vicinity of Bethlehem. Pastor Raheb recounts his own participation in a life of struggle beginning as a five-year old boy, when he was taken by his mother to the Church of the Nativity for shelter during the 1967 war. After completing seminary education in Germany and a doctorate at Marburg, he returned just in time to lead his congregation in the midst of the Intifada—the uprising against Israeli occupation which eventually led to the Madrid Peace accord and the establishment of Palestinian autonomy.

A major part of Raheb's book is a sociological, political, and historical study of developments leading to the recent political accords. An enlightening chapter discusses what it is like to be a minority: as an Arab Palestinian when the land is controlled by Israelis; as a Christian when the majority of Palestinians are Muslims; as a Lutheran when the majority of Christians are Orthodox and Roman Catholic. Perhaps we could add one other minority category for Raheb: as one who sees the role of religion in this politically troubled region from a Law/Gospel, historical-critical perspective. This is especially significant at a time when religion is often applied from a

fundamentalist approach—whether Muslim fundamentalists, fanatic Jewish settlers, or American television evangelists.

The minority status of Palestinian Christians becomes increasingly more disheartening as their numbers are rapidly diminishing. In the mid-1800s Bethlehem was divided into eight districts, seven of which were Christian and one Muslim. Today only 30% of the population of Bethlehem remains Christian. While about 30,000 Christians today live in the vicinity of Bethlehem, a number five times greater has emigrated from Bethlehem to Central and South America since World War I and the rise of Jewish immigration to Palestine. In the 1948 war of Israeli Independence, more than one third of all Palestinian Christians lost all their possessions and land, leading to an exodus to other Middle Eastern countries as well as North America and Europe. The relatively large Lutheran congregation in Bethlehem of 500 members in 1948 has today shrunk to 200 members.

What is especially disheartening about Raheb's figures on emigration is that connection with the West. Many Palestinians are heading to the West because of a long history of positive involvement with Christians who have contributed hospitals, schools, and other social programs. Palestinians are often considered among the best educated groups of people in the world today. Yet they are heading west because recent western political decisions (at least prior to Madrid) have all but ignored the Palestinians and have offered support to an Israeli government which is perceived as one-sided and verging on neo-colonialism to their detriment. The message that seems to be coming across is that it is all right to be a Palestinian Christian in the West, but not in Palestine itself. The relative silence on the part of the American church—in contrast to the European Lutheran community—has added no solace for Palestinian Christians.

In a survey of Bethlehem Christians carried out in 1990 by the Al-Liqa center, 22.3% of the families expressed an intention of emigrating in the near future. This survey, of course, took place in the midst of the Intifada; but it says something about an absence of hope for the church in Bethlehem. Pastor Mitri Raheb, however, is a messenger of hope, and his book details his method of reading the Bible that gives good news in what often appears to be a hopeless situation.

In his final chapter, Pastor Raheb takes a cue from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and articulates his dream for this ancient land. He dreams of a peaceful coexistence of two peoples sharing one land; working to heal wounds left from the Jewish Holocaust and the Palestinian refugee situation; and contributing together toward the common good of their region. He dreams also of Jerusalem as a place where three monotheistic religions come together to worship a common God, and where the people themselves are viewed as sacred as the ancient stones. He dreams of a time not unlike that envisioned by the psalmists and Third Isaiah when Zion will be "the mountain of God" and Jerusalem "the city of peace." It is all the more striking that Pastor Raheb first shared this vision in 1988 in the midst of the Intifada, when armed soldiers roamed the streets of Bethlehem, its residents were under house arrest, its children were teargassed and shot at, and the street lights were turned out. "The attempt," he said, "is to take two steps into the daylight of the future even though we are still standing in the darkness of the present" (p. 112).

When Martin Luther was asked what he would do if he learned that the world would end tomorrow, he said that he would plant a tree. Pastor Raheb's theology is

based on planting trees—both literally and figuratively. At the center of the book is the story of Daher's vineyard, a story much like Nabaoth's vineyard in 1 Kings 21.[1] When the Israeli government issued orders in 1991 to confiscate the Daher farm south of Bethlehem for use by expanding Israeli settlement villages, this pastor put his theology to work in support of this well-respected family in his congregation. Not only did he help to organize a court challenge, but he also organized a community effort to plant trees—along with grape vines, tomatoes, and other crops—on this "lost" piece of land.

Olive trees take years and years to mature and generations to establish the best product. That is why the Israeli military forces have often bulldozed through olive groves "to teach Palestinians a lesson." To plant annual crops such as tomatoes is admirable, a way of saying that the farmers are not easily giving up and holding on to the land for another year. To plant olive trees is a statement of true hope, that they are still staking their claim to the future and the future of their children on this land. It also sends a message that must be demoralizing to the "Ahabs" who wish to expand their boundaries.

The statement of hope is possible because it is carried out in solidarity with the Christian community. Not only has the whole congregation in Bethlehem rallied around Daher's family, but Pastor Raheb has also enlisted Christian visitors from around the world to expand their visit to Bethlehem by inviting them to include a day on the farm weeding tomatoes, clearing rocks, and most importantly planting trees. Part of the vision of Pastor Raheb upon taking up this parish after his return from Germany was to build a guest house next door to the church. That vision has become a reality thanks to contributions from congregations in Colorado and Germany and by the hard work of members of the Bethlehem congregation. Over the past five years the guest house has been used primarily by European Christians, but also by a few American groups who want to extend their visit beyond manger square to experience life amid fellow Christians in Bethlehem.

Pastor Raheb's theology is based on planting trees—both literally and figuratively.

This kind of vision is similar to that of the Old Testament prophets in that it requires a sense of calling and a heart of courage. Pastor Raheb of Bethlehem is a slightly-built and soft-spoken man, but he stands tall and courageous. During one of many visits that I have made to Daher's farm over the past few years, our group found itself surrounded by angry settlers and armed border police—a terrifying, once-in-a-lifetime experience for a western visitor, yet routine for our Palestinian Christian brothers and sisters. In response to the settlers' angry questions was a calm, but firm reply: "I am Pastor Raheb of Bethlehem and we have come to work the land! You better get used to seeing me!" How like the picture of Elijah confronting Ahab—confidence and courage fueled by faith in the promises of God.

[1] Fred Strickert, "In the Shadow of the Settlements: A Farm in Palestine," *Christian Century* (April 9, 1997), 356-7.

True faith directs one "to the helplessness and suffering of God; only the suffering God can help."

This kind of faith is a model for the young people in the Bethlehem congregation. While discouragement often comes easiest to the young—and frustration leads to rock throwing and violence—the nucleus of the Bethlehem congregation is composed not only of the elderly, but also of youth. Sunday nights are usually marked by a gathering of 20-25 young people ages 15 to 25. The tone of these gatherings may at times be surprising. There are games, laughter, and singing that witness to a lifted spirit in difficult times. It might be noted here that a positive hopeful tone is also one of the features evident in the elementary school operated by the Lutheran congregation—a school where 40% of the students are in fact Muslims from the Bethlehem community. While government schools have cut back to the basics in curriculum because of frequent interruptions and school closures, the Lutheran schools alone purposefully continue to offer music, art, and sports because they add to the quality of life and give hope in troubled times.

The gatherings for Bible study, however, cannot be understood as escapism. Pastor Raheb writes:

> God's name is also misused when God is used as a surrogate, as, for example, when people who live in politically unstable and socially weak circumstances are driven to God as the last resort. In that event, religion becomes an escape in imagination out of the real world into a better, quieter, and more peaceful world. Fear, hopelessness, and frustration are used as whips to drive people to God—which really means to a particular political option, even if it appears in "nonpolitical" lamb's clothes.... Religion, incorrectly understood, directs the human being "in need to the power of God in the world," whereas true faith directs one "to the helplessness and suffering of God; only the suffering God can help." Thus a contextual theology can only be a theology of the cross. (44)

During Bible study gatherings, the young people take time to share their experiences. Their stories are at the same time fascinating and haunting: one out of work because his pass to Jerusalem was revoked; another recently released from a year's solitary confinement (without a day in court) for being in the wrong place at the wrong time; another (a sixteen year old girl) detained by police on her way to the dentist; others in mourning over a friend shot dead for resisting arrest—all stories from day to day living in Bethlehem under occupation. These sessions for sharing and reflection are important. The real life situation provides the setting. The Bible provides the focus for seeing the suffering God active in their world.

Pastor Raheb's approach to Bible study—made clear in the second half of his book—is a model for contextual theology. At the beginning of the Gulf War, the students came with the request to study the Book of Revelation, as they had heard the fundamentalist churches were doing. These churches saw this was a more or less just war willed by God and predicted by Revelation. Yet how could the Bible be divorced from its historical context? A historical-

critical reading of Revelation demonstrates that it was written to provide comfort for the victims of persecution. How could it be twisted to defend the deeds of the powerful? The message would no longer be gospel and it would not give comfort in a troubling situation. Raheb decided to focus on the story of Jonah because it contained a call to go to Nineveh with a word which would bring peace and the acceptance of a God who acts out of mercy and forgiveness. Proper Bible study requires attention both to the historical context of the word and to the application of that word to one's own situation in life.

Pastor Raheb deals carefully with tough issues like election, the promise of land, and the Exodus. However, he notes that these can never "be considered law or the possession of either side; they must always be seen as promise and gift" (p. 64). These concepts are not seen as "timeless truths" or "abstract ideas," but his historical-critical analysis of the biblical record notes how many of these concepts derived from the period of the sixth-century B.C.E. exile, when a powerless Israel had lost the land and lived without hope. These words are today heard properly as words of good news to those beginning to despair, not as a claim by the powerful to oppress the weak. Nevertheless throughout this study there is an amazing appreciation for Israel's long history of relationship to God. It is something to be respected and honored, especially as it has served to give comfort in the shadow of the Holocaust. Yet there is also a caution, for election must not be viewed as unique or exclusive. There is a warning that the change of context from weakness to strength, from a people without land to a powerful nation, does not lead to privilege, but to a call to service and justice. "Law and Gospel are two sides of the one righteous God. The God of the Bible is simultaneously the God demanding justice and the God promising it" (page 63).

For many of us the Exodus story has become symbolic for the rescue of Holocaust survivors and the establishment of modern Israel. Thus Exodus became the name of the important rescue ship, a novel by Leon Uris, and the Paul Newman award-winning film. Raheb acknowledges the validity of this application of the Exodus story to give hope to the Jewish people in the context of their powerlessness in the post-Holocaust era. Yet what happens when the powerless become the powerful? Does this word any longer apply to the powerful, military state of modern Israel? In answering this Raheb notes ironically how Palestinians now resonate with the Exodus story, not because they are like the Canaanites who lost their land because of the Exodus, but because they have become the main characters of a new Exodus who live in hope of deliverance.

In a similar way the modern circumstances of these Bethlehem Christians take us back to the biblical story of a young couple in search of shelter and a baby born in a manger. Pastor Raheb relates the story of the most meaningful Bethlehem Christmas celebration held in recent years—one not of pomp and circumstance with visitors from around the world, television cameras, and the appearance of ecclesiastical dignitaries, let alone the appearance of Santa Claus and gifts. Rather it came in 1987 at the beginning of the Intifada when no one was in the mood for celebrating. Raheb relates part of his Christmas sermon:

> Holy Scripture relates the story of a refugee child who has nowhere to lay his head. It is a truly human child, one who was not born into a beautiful, rosy, peaceful world but into a cruel world like ours. The biblical Christmas story tells the birth of a child who was denied

> life too and who was forced to fear for his life. A child born at the time of Herod the Great who had ordered the slaying of all the children in the vicinity of Bethlehem. A child who became a refugee very early in his life.... There is one who went down this road before us so that we should not have to go alone. God enters this world as a very small and powerless baby; but just so he overcomes this world. (p. 106)

Earlier that week someone had written graffiti on their building: "Excuse us, dear Christ, unfortunately we cannot celebrate your birthday this year, for we are an occupied people whose children are denied life" (p. 106). How true this sentiment must have been. The idea of celebration and struggle don't fit well together. Then why commemorate Christmas? Pastor Raheb's answer:

> Christmas is nothing but the prologue of the crucified one.... Because God appeared in the depth of night, our night cannot be sad. That is why we can and indeed must celebrate Christmas, albeit not as usual. Not with splendor but with the Refugee child of Bethlehem. (pp. 106-7)

For the Bethlehem Christians, it was their own experience of the occupation which unlocked "the mystery of the child driven out of Bethlehem."

Western Christians who seek to find the meaning of Christmas in a modern and commercialized world may wish to turn once again to Bethlehem and their elder brothers and sisters in the faith.

Postscript

Life changes quickly in the Middle East. Since this article was written in the fall of 1995, the Bethlehem community has experienced the coming of Palestinian autonomy on Dec. 21, 1995; the Rabin assassination; a change in Israeli government; continued violence; and political maneuvering and negotiations. Many suggest that the situation for the church in Bethlehem has turned for the worse, not better, with severe unemployment, the difficulty of travel, and the expansion of settlements.[2]

The following episode may illustrate the obstacles before the Palestinian Christian community: In April, 1995, Pastor Raheb placed an order with Augsburg-Fortress for one hundred copies of his own book, *I Am a Palestinian Christian*, for distribution in Bethlehem. At special author's discount, his bill was to have been $700 plus shipping. When he did not receive the shipment after six months, a tracer discovered that the books had been placed in storage by the Israeli customs office although they had never seriously attempted to contact the church. They announced that his bill for storage and taxes was $800. Because he did not have permission to travel out of the West Bank, he had to procure an agent as well as a lawyer to challenge the tax on books. It was a losing cause. By the time he finally received the books in April of 1996, the total costs were well over $ 3,000.

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[2] Fred Strickert, "Candles of Peace: In Shepherds' Fields," *Christian Century* (Dec. 24-31, 1997), 1212-3 and "Religious Coexistence in a Town of Three Faces," *The Christian Science Monitor* (Dec. 24, 1996), 19.

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Book Reviews

Compelling Knowledge: A Feminist Proposal for an Epistemology of the Cross. By Mary Solberg. Albany: State University of New York, 1997. xv and 226 pages. Paper. $18.95.

Many are the topics that occupy scholars. "Compelling knowledge" is that knowledge which compels the knower into commitment and action. For Mary Solberg, Assistant Professor of Religion at Gustavus Adolphus College, such knowledge forever changed her during three years of involvement in El Salvador during its civil war. She returned to the U.S. with the conviction that the knowledge of Salvadoran suffering and injustice must above all transform how we in North America understand the world.

The theme of her doctoral thesis, from which this book derives, therefore was intentionally developed with an interest in advocacy, not neutral investigation. In a creative and jarring pairing, Solberg juxtaposes recent scholarship in feminist epistemology with Luther's theology of the cross. In Chapter One, Solberg articulates several criticisms and concerns raised of epistemology by feminist thought. Appealing to "lived experience," feminist epistemology questions the alleged objectivity of standard scholarship which tends to disguise its values and bias. Only an epistemology which acknowledges its partisanship can be held accountable for its conclusions.

Luther's theology of the cross is examined in Chapter Two, beginning with a discussion of several theses from the 1518 Heidelberg disputation. Using well-selected quotations from Luther and Luther scholarship, Solberg describes the central features of the theology of the cross. As in feminist thought, Luther made an appeal to lived experience and employed the *theologia crucis* in critique of false epistemologies of glory. The theology of the cross calls one to participate in the actual suffering of Christ, moving in faith beyond the neutral status of spectator.

In Chapter Three, "Drafting an Epistemology of the Cross," Solberg offers her constructive proposal in which Luther's theology of the cross informs and transforms feminist epistemology. The emerging epistemology operates with a suspicion of abusive power, is grounded in lived experience, postures itself not in objectivity but from the perspective of victims, and is accountable to the transformation of oppressive reality. An epistemology of compelling knowledge "involves three parts: (1) seeing or coming to know what is going on (or *that* something is going on); (2) recognizing and comprehending one's own relation to or involvement in what is going on; and (3) doing something about what is going on" (p. 125). The pages which elaborate this constructive epistemology are some of the most powerful of the book.

Chapter Four responds to two central objections to be raised against her proposal: (1) can a privileged church claim an epistemology of the cross? and (2) does such an epistemology glorify suffering? In solidarity with the suffering and in repentance, a privileged church can be transformed by an epistemology of the cross. Such an epistemology does not glorify suffering insofar as it is exercised in resistance, commitment, and action to end suffering. The book concludes with a short reflection on the difference made by an epistemology based on compelling knowledge.

One shortcoming of Solberg's approach is the shift from a focus on the particularity of Jesus' suffering and cross to development of epistemological principles which derive from it. At the same time, her exposition brings Luther's theology strikingly alive for the mission of the church today. This book offers the documentation (43 pages of footnotes) and bibliography (8 pages) of a major research project, yet is written with an amazing clarity and directness of expression. It is an exceptional contribution to the contemporary appropriation of Luther's theology.

Craig L. Nessan
Wartburg Theological Seminary

Ancient Inscriptions. Voices from the Biblical World. By P. Kyle McCarter, Jr. Washington, DC: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1996. xii and 180 pages. Cloth. $39.95. Slide set and book, $139.95.

McCarter, one of the world's leading epigraphers, presents a masterful survey of inscriptions from the ancient Near East that shed light on the text and the world of the Old and New Testaments, with primary attention to the Hebrew Bible. The book, which contains 97 drawings, was written to accompany an impressive collection of 140 slides, though the book can be understood and enjoyed on its own.

The first section deals with cuneiform writing in Mesopotamia (25 slides) and describes the decipherment of these wedge-shaped characters and their evolution from the fourth millennium B.C. until nearly the time of Christ. McCarter's discussions of the inscriptions are always clear, judicious, and well balanced, noting the historical significance of the inscription and providing the necessary background for understanding it. Highlights include the Code of Hammurapi, the Amarna letters (14th century), the Babylonian creation and flood stories, and royal Assyrian inscriptions describing interactions with Israel.

The second section focuses on hieroglyphic writing in Egypt (28 slides), a writing system attested from the end of the fourth millennium to the beginning of the fourth century B.C. The later hieratic and demotic scripts are also briefly described. Again McCarter provides accessible information on the decipherment of the script in the 19th century, as well as on its evolution over the centuries. Highlights of the collection include Hyksos scarabs, the Israel stela of Merneptah (first mention of Israel outside the Bible), the Book of the Dead, and a list of the cities conquered by Shishak in Palestine in the tenth century (cf. 1 Kgs 14:25 and 2 Chr 12:4).

The third and longest section discusses alphabetic inscriptions (87 slides), most of which are in Semitic languages (Phoenician, Hebrew, Ugaritic, Aramaic, etc.) though a few are in Greek. The first alphabetic writing appeared in the first half of the second millennium B.C., and it is in the history and the dating of alphabetic inscriptions that McCarter has gained his primary scholarly fame. He explains the acrophonic principle (letters developed from pictorial signs that represented the initial sounds of the objects depicted) and how the alphabet gradually developed into several national scripts. At Ugarit the alphabet was written with cuneiform signs. About 800 B.C. the alphabet was taken over by the Greeks to write their language. McCarter's discussion again is masterful, including his treatment of the Kuntillet 'Ajrud inscription (mentioning Yahweh and his Asherah) and the Tel Dan inscription (the first extrabiblical reference to the House of David). He includes treatments of seals, coins, and such manuscripts as the Dead Sea Scrolls and early biblical codices.

Throughout the book and the slide set one learns an enormous amount about the ancient world and biblical religion that was totally unknown 150 years ago. New discoveries continue until today. In 1997 a Hebrew inscription was published from a London collection that mentions a donation of three shekels to the temple during the reign of Joash. McCarter has suggested that this inscription also refers to Zechariah, whom Joash executed according to 2 Chr 24:22.

This book and its slide set are classics.

Ralph W. Klein

Telling God's Story: Bible, Church and Narrative Theology. By Gerard Loughlin. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. xv and 266 pages. Cloth. $54.95.

Loughlin, lecturer at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne, England, shows how narrative theology illumines the message of Scripture. He titles the first of his three major sections, "Consuming Text," and the second, "Reading and Writing." He modestly describes his book as scribbling between the lines of the essays of Hans Frei. Actually he gives an extended discussion of Frei, and he integrates Frei's thought into what other key contributors have had to say about narrative theology. They include Lindbeck, Ricoeur, Lyotard, MacIntyre, and Milbank. The third major section deals with "Linkages," in which he relates narrative theology to an understanding

of the Trinity and the Resurrection. In the Trinity, the church performs stories in three ways, telling and re-telling the continuous event of God. Here, as in other places, the Bible provides appropriate illustrations. The resurrection is perceived and believed in love, when Christ, narrative, and faith are folded into one another in the church's performance of the story. An epilogue on the Eucharist is entitled, "Eating the Word." The Eucharistic meal enfolds the participants within the Biblical story. The meaning of this "impossible gift" is described with reverence, leading to a view that transubstantiation takes place. Among writers on the New Testament, Loughlin is attracted particularly to the imaginative interpretations of Austin Farrer. Each section of the book is superscribed with lines from the Revelation to John, whose vision inspires the last pages of the book.

Otto Reimherr, Emeritus
Susquehanna University
Selinsgrove, Pennsylvania

The Church for Others: Protestant Theology in Communist East Germany. By Gregory Baum. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996. xvii and 156 pages. Paper. $15.00.

The role of the East German Protestant church was initially hailed for creating the space in which the freedom movement could operate prior to the end of Communist rule in 1989. The praises soon turned to suspicion, however, as reports of collaboration of church officials with the Communist government spread in the early 90s. Gregory Baum has made a great contribution toward overcoming any facile judgements with this study of the theological themes which guided the development of a "contextual theology" appropriate to the East German reality.

Baum, emeritus professor in the Faculty of Religious Studies at McGill University in Montreal, devoted the fall semester 1992 to studying the Protestant theology of the former German Democratic Republic. This book summarizes his insights into the witness of a church virtually hidden from Western examination for nearly fifty years. The East German church conscientiously adopted an identity of "the church in socialism," precariously balancing the givenness of its location under Communist rule with criticism of the officially atheist state. While Baum devotes detailed attention to the unfolding of the historical events which impacted the East German church, he is particularly interested in describing how the church formulated a contextual theology in response to its historical situation.

The writings and actions of three theologians, whose names have been up to now virtually unknown in the West, are sketched by Baum as having particular significance: Bishop Albrecht Schoenherr, Heino Falcke, and Bishop Werner Krusche. Schoenherr drew significantly on both Bonhoeffer and dialogue with Marxists in stressing the church as a learning community, sojourning a path between total assimilation and total rejection of the state. Falcke became a particular thorn in the side of East German officials by drawing on the themes of liberation and Christ's kingship in proposing the church's mission to the marginal and disenfranchised of the world, including those in the GDR. Krusche articulated an ecumenical theology of the church that moved dynamically between assembly (for worship, teaching, and pastoral care) and mission (participation in the divine activity in the world). It was striking to note the positive effect which the programs of the World Council of Churches had upon the operative theology of these theologians.

Baum whets the appetite for learning more about the positions of these theologians whose thought was formative for the ministry and witness of the East German church. Their contribution is particularly instructive for its ability to maintain a critical posture under conditions of extreme oppression. Those who operate under a very different model of church-state interaction yet have much to learn from their courageous witness and theological discernment. Examining the contextuality of this theology serves to remind us of the contextuality of our own theology, especially by raising questions about how we relate to the state. Baum deserves our appreciation for bringing details of this little known story to our attention as a challenge to our theological business-as-usual.

Craig L. Nessan

The Mystery of Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul's Letter. By Mark D. Nanos. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996. 435 pages. Paper. $18.00.

Nanos' massive book will modify any reader's perspective on Romans. He challenges the typical interpretation of the Jews in Romans, suggesting that the "weak" in Romans are non-Christian Jews and the "strong" are Christian Gentiles. Paul writes to urge respect for and interest in non-Christian Jews. In discussing the historical background Nanos suggests a foundational principle: while modern research focuses on the makeup of the congregations in Rome, one should focus on Paul's intended audience, in this case Gentiles who should be concerned about Jews. His book is at times overwhelming, slow reading, with long chapters and extensive footnotes, dense writing, compelling close attention. He presents interpretations he rejects fairly, then refutes carefully.

Nanos holds that Paul agreed with the apostolic decree of Acts 15 and presents a detailed discussion of the phrase "obedience of faith" (Rom 1:5) and of the significance of the phrase "Jew first." In discussing Rom 13:1-7 he argues that the authorities to obey are the temple authorities of synagogue rulers. Nanos thus urges a strongly Jewish reading of both situation and addressees.

Two appendixes argue that the thesis of Paul's concentration of interest on non-Christian Jews is applicable to other letters. He also includes an extensive bibliography that is indexed to call attention to key concepts (weak, identity of, etc.).

Because it holds an unusual position, students of Romans, especially, should pay close attention to this book. It also has implications for Paul's theology and his other letters. It presents a healthy perspective on Judaism for Christians today based on an extensive study of Romans and the modern literature on Paul. Reading Nanos will compel a reevaluation of Romans, even if one does not accept Nanos' theories totally.

Bradford B. Taliaferro
Rosendale, Missouri

The Epistle to the Romans. By Douglas Moo. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1996. xxv and 1012 pages. Cloth. $50.00.

Moo's commentary is in The New International Commentary on the New Testament series (the material on chapters 1-8 is an updating of a commentary published in 1991 in another series). So many major commentaries on Romans have appeared in recent years that it seems helpful to compare Moo with some of the others.

This semester I am reading Moo while teaching a Romans course in which the students use the commentary by James Dunn (2 vols., Word, 1988)—three years earlier as my supplement to Dunn I used the outstanding commentary on Romans in the Anchor Bible series by Roman Catholic exegete Joseph Fitzmyer (Doubleday, 1993). I have found Moo very useful. While it is always clear what his own view is on a controverted issue, he always lists and dialogues with a wide range of alternative views (in this respect his commentary resembles Cranfield's comprehensive work [2 vols., ICC, new series, T and T Clark, 1975, 1979], which I had used in an earlier Romans course to supplement the students' reading of Ernst Käsemann's monumental commentary, with its strong Lutheran focus—Eerdmans, 1980). How comprehensive is Moo's interaction with other commentaries? In the index I counted 321 references to Käsemann, and there were many more than that to Dunn and Cranfield!

Reference to an excursus in Moo on "Paul, 'works of the law,' and first-century Judaism" (211-217) can illustrate the value of the book as a resource for various views and for Moo's own stance on the issue of why "no one will be justified by works of the law" (Rom 3:20). What, asks Moo, was Paul opposing here? The usual view (which some label the "Lutheran orthodox" interpretation) is that Paul was opposing Jews who believed they "could get into relationship with God by obedience to the law" (212). The counterview (the "new perspective on Paul"), held by E. P. Sanders, Krister Stendahl and James Dunn, among others, is that Jews at that time generally did not believe they attained righteousness by good works (they lived in a covenantal relationship based on God's grace),

and that "works of the law" were primarily the boundary issues (circumcision, food laws, sabbath observance) which some Jews saw as marks of their special status before God (this is especially Dunn's view). These scholars see boundary issues between Jews and Gentiles as a primary focus in Romans, in which Paul stresses that the God who is one offers equal access to all (that is, Jew and Greek). Moo challenges several of Dunn's conclusions on this issue and believes that "the traditional view remains the best explanation of the Pauline polemic" (212)—a status I would confer on the "new perspective on Paul."

If you would buy one recent major commentary on Romans, should it be Moo's? It would be a fine choice. My own preference would be Dunn's, or perhaps Fitzmyer's (or, to introduce yet one more, a person interested in the important literary-rhetorical approach now receiving major stress might enjoy the fine new commentary by Brendan Byrne in the Sacra Pagina series [Liturgical Press, 1996]). What a blessed embarrassment of riches!

Everett Kalin
Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary

Readings in Modern Theology: Britain & America. Edited by Robin Gill. Nashville: Abingdon, 1995. 396 pages. Paper. $26.95.

"This Reader attempts to give a snapshot of some of the best modern theology to emerge from British and United States academies over the last decade" (1). And a snapshot it is. Gill divides this anthology into three sections: God and Creation, Christ and Plurality, and Spirit and Community. Within each section, the articles deal with contemporary critical issues within academic theology.

Essays by Rosemary Radford Ruether, David Tracy, Gordon Kaufman and others comprise a conversation surrounding Sallie McFague's text *Models of God* under the subheading "God as Mother." Both appreciation and critique characterize these, as well as other, essays, modeling effective academic and pastoral techniques.

Postmodernity and pluralistic challenges to Christianity characterize essays by George Lindbeck and others responding to his text *The Nature of Doctrine*. Gavin D'Costa's article maps out potential for Jewish-Christian dialogue. The combination of Christ and the academy forms a challenge for, among others, Edward Farley and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. Under the concept of the Christian life, the editor places articles dealing with resurrection, Easter meaning, peace, and creaturehood.

Many of the articles in this creatively structured anthology have been previously published, but this collection breathes new life into the dialogues among the theologians present. While lacking in voices from other contexts, the reader illumines themes in British and North American theology in recent years: post-modernity, religious pluralism, images of God, incarnation and resurrection, and concepts of community.

This volume provides an excellent resource for occasional reading. One could read the essays selectively , or use them as materials for an adult forum. Each is relatively accessible to the eager reader, some relying more heavily on "technical terms" than others. This would be a good addition to a personal library or an education curriculum.

Caryn Riswold
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

Logos Bible Software 2.0c, The Logos Library System. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

This Windows-based concordance does the usual, lightning-fast searches of English, Greek, and Hebrew texts and prints out the results—on screen or on paper—in beautiful fonts. When a user clicks with the right button on the mouse, words are parsed instantaneously and the root (or lemma) is identified. In the 1990s, that's what one expects from an electronic concordance. What sets Logos apart from the rest is that one can purchase with the concordance not only multiple modern English translations and the original Hebrew and Greek texts (all morphologically tagged), but also a large—and growing—library of reference works, that can them-

selves be searched for individual words or concepts.

Logos sells its products currently on two CDs, with more to come. Prices range from $119.95 for Level 1 to $599.95 for Level 4 (These prices are often discounted at religious book stores). Level 1 gives you three English texts (KJV, NIV, and ASV), the New Bible Dictionary, Strong's concordance numbers, a set of maps, and some second rate (old or quite conservative) reference works, plus 100 Logos hymns, complete with text and sound (13 books in all). Level 4 gives the user 39 books, including seven English translations, the Hebrew Bible, the Septuagint, several Greek New Testaments, and some really first rate reference works: Kittel's one volume Theological Dictionary, the Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, Danker Lexicon to the NT, Liddell/Scott Intermediate Greek Lexicon, the Harper's one volume dictionary, and the Harper's and Jerome one volume biblical commentaries. Level 3 costs $100 less, but comes without the NRSV and the Jerome Biblical Commentary.

Soon to be part of the Logos package, and possibly available by the time this review is published, will be the complete six volume Anchor Bible Dictionary, and the whole Word Biblical Commentary on both testaments. This will be especially valuable for those who use a laptop and travel a lot, or for many pastors who study both at the church and in their home. Now you can take it with you!

In my judgment, Logos is not as easy to use for original language concordance study as Bible Works (see my reviews in February, 1994, and June, 1996) although the ability to search out a word not only in the biblical text, but in reference works is a nifty feature. With multiple windows open, one can view Hebrew, Greek, and English side by side, but there is no current way to make the texts truly interlinear, as in Bible Works. Some of the extra books may be superfluous—Matthew Henry's commentary, Vine's Expository Dictionary, the text of Pilgrim's Progress, devotions by Spurgeon, and Augustine's Confessions.

If you are looking only for a superior concordance of the Greek, Hebrew, and English texts, I would buy Bible Works. If you would like to buy with your concordance a biblical reference library that can go with you from office to home or on the road, Logos is the best option.

Ralph W. Klein

For Our Salvation: Two Approaches to the Work of Christ. By Geoffrey Wainwright. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997. xi and 186 pages. Paper. $18.00.

In this book, Duke theologian Geoffrey Wainwright combines his expertise in both liturgics and theology in order to explain the significance of Christ for our lives. The two sections of the book, "Senses of the Word" and "The Threefold Office," were originally two separate sets of lectures given before different groups. The first set of lectures looks at the significance of Christ from the perspective of liturgics, focusing specifically on how the material creation can serve as the vehicle of God's self-communication. The second set retrieves the classic Reformed christological distinction of the three-fold office of Christ as prophet, priest, and king as a basis for understanding soteriology. Wainwright examines each of Christ's offices in terms of its christological, baptismal, soteriological, ministerial, and ecclesiological import. Wainwright believes that the context of each set of essays complements the other. One set looks at soteriology from the perspective of liturgical theology; the other from the perspective of dogmatics. In both sections of the book, Wainwright's theological method consistently affirms that the greatest need of North American mainline Protestant churches is to reappropriate evangelical, catholic, and orthodox Christianity (119). He believes that only by being reimmersed in this tradition can Christianity be revitalized.

In the first section of the book Wainwright argues that since we as humans are embodied, God chooses to be self-revealing by means of our senses. Hence, in these chapters he identifies how hearing, tasting, smelling, touching, and speaking channel God's grace in the liturgy. He appeals to the Thomistic dictum that God's revelation is always received "after the manner of the receiving" (15). God's coming to us in the liturgy through the vehicle of our senses allows

for our sanctification and prepares us for the "final resurrection when we shall start to enjoy those things which, even now, our eyes have not seen, our ears not heard, nor our hearts conceived, but which God has in store for those who love him" (18). Wainwright's thinking is driven by a consistent anti-gnosticism which refuses to see the reality of life and self as exclusively immaterial; rather, God's reality is sacramentally conveyed through the material creation and we receive this grace by means of our senses. The salvific import of the liturgy is its ability to convey the divine grace which makes us to a be a new creation by means of union with God (96).

In the second section of the book, Wainwright unfolds how the three-fold office of Christ addresses the quest for human salvation. In so doing he, along with J. A. Moehler, sees the church as an "extension of the Incarnation" (115). Wainwright masterfully shows how each of the offices of Christ bears on ecumenics, secularism, and social justice.

Wainwright's approach, building on his earlier work in *Doxology* (1980), can be seen as a kind of liturgical theology. As such, doing theology itself is a kind of act of worship. His concern is not primarily how theology transforms the social dynamics of the world, nor the import of the historical roots behind the liturgy. Rather, his perspective focuses on the dynamics of the world as transformed by the liturgy, i.e., how the liturgy helps to infuse us with the life of God and beautify all of our experiences in the light of God's transforming grace. This book is close to the rhythm of the liturgical life of the parish, a fine resource for worship leaders and parish pastors.

Mark C. Mattes
Grand View College
Des Moines, Iowa

The Second Epistle to the Corinthians. By Paul Barnett. The New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1997. xxx and 662 pages. Cloth. $45.00.

"Traditional, scholarly, and pastoral" describe Barnett's commentary on 2 Corinthians.

The work is traditional in its historical-critical methodology, its view that Paul wrote every New Testament letter associated with his name, and its understanding that Paul composed 2 Corinthians as a unified apologetic letter. Paul wrote to bolster his authority, re-start the collection for Jerusalem, address the Corinthians' bitterness over his unwillingness to accept financial support from them, and deal with newly arrived false apostles (identified as Greek-speaking Jews from Judea).

The work is scholarly but accessible to a wide range of readers. Barnett places most technical discussions, including Greek and the opinions of other scholars, in his extensive footnotes. The result is a commentary narrative that flows well. The non-Greek reader can utilize his major insights, while the notes permit the Greek reader to enter into the more detailed discussion.

Barnett, Anglican Bishop of North Sydney, writes a manifestly pastoral commentary. Each section begins with the NIV, followed by a brief overview of the passage which also sets it within the letter's larger framework. Last comes Barnett's verse-by-verse exposition, which usually includes reprinting the text in schematic fashion. Throughout, he is attentive to the implications of 2 Corinthians for ministry today.

Barnett has written a fine commentary. Unfortunately, his work evidences only scattered knowledge of social dynamics. Thus he anachronistically refers to people who belonged to the middle class. In his discussion of Paul's "thorn in the flesh" he lists "eye trouble" as a potential explanation but knows nothing about the cultural concept of the evil eye and how that might help us understand the thorn. And he allows the Acts' Damascus Road accounts to affect too much his understanding of Paul.

Overall, however, Barnett has provided the church a solid resource that ranks with Furnish, Martin, and Thrall.

Walter F. Taylor, Jr.
Trinity Lutheran Seminary

New Testament Ethics: The Legacies of Jesus and Paul. By Frank J. Matera. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996. vii and 325 pages. Cloth. $30.00.

In this book Frank J. Matera, Professor of New Testament at Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., undertakes the very demanding task of writing about New Testament ethics. Employing primarily literary and rhetorical methods, he investigates the moral themes of the four Gospels and the writings in the Pauline corpus (not only the seven undisputed letters of Paul but also 2 Thessalonians, Colossians, Ephesians, and the Pastorals). By focusing on the final form of the writings themselves and not attempting to reconstruct their pre-history, Matera intends to describe "The Legacies of Jesus and Paul," the subtitle for the book.

After a brief introduction, the book is divided into two major parts. Part one considers "The Legacy of Jesus" and includes four chapters treating the ethics of the Gospels of Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John. Part two explores "The Legacy of Paul" and includes seven chapters on the ethics of the following Letters: 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, Romans, Colossians and Ephesians, and the Pastorals. The book ends with an eight-page conclusion that offers seven theses which begin the process of synthesizing the themes mentioned in the eleven chapters.

This volume includes a great amount of helpful information, revealing that Matera is well schooled in the critical exegesis and vast secondary literature for the biblical writings under consideration. Yet the book reads more like an introduction to these New Testament writings, with a particular interest in their moral themes, than a volume that significantly advances our understanding of the ethics of the New Testament. I would insist that the scholarly task termed "descriptive" involves far more creative analysis and synthesis.

Regarding methodology, a number of important questions must be posed and answered. For example, how is one to select and categorize the ethical content of a writing? In this regard Matera's selection of a title for each chapter (and thus each writing or set of writings) promises more than it can deliver. Why characterize the ethics of the two Thessalonian letters as "An Ethic of Election" rather than highlighting the theme of suffering? Why describe the ethics of the Corinthians as "Ethics for the Sanctified Community" with little focus on the theology of the cross and resurrection so central to 1 Corinthians? Moreover, does this title fit both 1 and 2 Corinthians? After characterizing the ethic of Galatians as "Walking by the Spirit," Matera categorizes Romans as "An Ethic of Obedience" but in his discussion fails to say anything about Paul's talk of the Spirit in Romans 8. It appears that Matera's selection of chapter titles was more important as an attempt to categorize than he realized.

Many other questions need more systematic attention than Matera gives them. For example, is it not important to describe both the *content* of the ethical sections and the *process* of the moral reasoning itself undertaken in a specific writing? In his discussion of Corinthians (regarding 1 Corinthians) Matera promises to "illuminate the process of Paul's moral reasoning" (141) but does not follow through on this clearly. Can one adequately understand the ethical counsel of a given writing without risking a rather concrete reconstruction of its historical context and problematic situations? Matera attempts this imaginative reconstruction for some writings (e.g., Romans) but not most. How is the description of ethics different from tracing the theme of discipleship for a specific writing? How does one consider more fully the communal character of ethics in the New Testament?

Matera understands his task as descriptive, not hermeneutical. This is fair enough since he is not attempting to assess the normative value of all aspects of the moral vision(s) or exhortations discussed. Nonetheless, in my judgment, far more is involved in undertaking this "descriptive" task than Matera acknowledges. All sorts of interpretive choices are being made. Had Matera pursued the answers to these and other questions he himself raised, his work would have made a larger contribution to New Testament ethics, a subject critically important to both church and society today.

Having said all this, I still recommend reading this book as a means of becoming ac-

quainted with many helpful exegetical conclusions and much secondary literature.

James L. Bailey
Wartburg Theological Seminary

From Christ to the World: Introductory Readings in Christian Ethics. Edited by Wayne G. Boulton, Thomas D. Kennedy, and Allen Verhey. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994. ix and 542 pages. Paper. $25.00.

Those whose office it is to teach courses in Christian ethics in seminary and undergraduate contexts face a common dilemma: how can we provide a wide range of quality readings for our students while keeping the cost of books for our courses reasonable and at the same time avoid the legal and moral conflicts resulting from technical violations of existing copyright laws? The editors of this collection of introductory readings in Christian ethics have performed a great service to teachers by producing this collection.

Like its sister collection, *On Moral Medicine* (Eerdmans, 1987), this reader is divided into three sections: Sources, Features, and Issues. An introductory essay provides a very useful orientation to the discipline of ethics, and in particular to the field of Christian theological ethics. The authors seek a middle course in displaying the diversity of the field while at the same time refusing to concede that the conversation lacks coherence. Indeed, the collection displays the contested nature of the field of Christian ethics in such a way as to invite the student to join the "conversation" between historical and contemporary perspectives on Christian ethics.

Some of the groupings in the section on Issues seem overly neat. For example, the section on "Christian Political Ethics" appears to group too many diverse things together under one heading, quite possibly in such a way as to obscure historical debates about the interpretation of Scripture (Romans 13) related to ethical stances on war and peace. Granted that a such a reader can never exhaustively explore such topics, students and instructors can expect that the selections should be representative. In this respect, this collection succeeds more often than not, although perhaps it would have been better to group topics in such a way that essays exploring "Just War" and Christian pacifism in different sections could have been cross-referenced by readers.

Given the inherent difficulty of selection involved in putting together a reader, the editors are to be commended for the wisdom displayed in the choices they have made. Some instructors will no doubt question whether some perspectives are adequately represented. However, each section appears to have achieved the desideratum of putting together a set of readings that reflects the 'state of the conversation' in the field of Christian ethics. In many instances, particular readings can be found that contrast with one another in creative ways. One thinks for instance of the pairing of Chrestos Yannaros' essay "The Challenge of the Fools for Christ" or Stanley Hauerwas' essay "On Keeping Theological Ethics Theological" in the section on Philosophy and Christian Ethics. These juxtapositions display evidence of the wisdom of experienced pedagogy on the part of the editors.

This reader will no doubt be very useful for seminary students. However, this instructor's experience of using the text revealed that it is quite challenging for most undergraduates, despite the fact that most of the essays are fairly accessible. The one feature of the collection that I would criticize is the eight "Try it Yourself" case studies. These really do not add significantly to the collection, and arguably can be said to detract from it. Still, they appeal to popular interests of the current generation of college students and seminarians, if not to the constructive interests of instructors. This reservation having been noted, *From Christ to the World* is among the best collections of readings on Christian Ethics available today at an affordable cost. And that is no small thing to say at a time when publishers are bringing books in and out of print in ever more expensive ways.

Michael G. Cartwright
University of Indianapolis

The Challenge of Diversity: The Witness of Paul and the Gospels. By David Rhoads. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996. x and 172 pages. Paper. $12.00.

Professor Rhoads worked on *The Challenge of Diversity* for a long time. In 1985 he shared a paper on "Biblical Pluralism" at a conference in Wisconsin for theologians who were soon to be amalgamated in the fledgling Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. He focused on the Gospels and compared their theologies with that of Paul's doctrine of justification by grace through faith as it is commonly understood in Lutheran circles. For the present volume he has expanded this work to include a separate chapter on Paul's letter to the Galatians, and he has broadened its scope to include an ecumenical variety of churchly traditions. The book can be read in conjunction with the video, *Dramatic Presentations from the New Testament* (videotape of Galatians, Mark, Matthew, Luke, John. Columbus: Select, 1996), where Rhoads dramatizes key sections from Galatians and each of the New Testament Gospels.

One could read the book simply as a helpful introduction to five major New Testament perspectives. But Rhoads has a fuller agenda. He wants church people from differing backgrounds to study the Bible in order to renew their own life and worship and community, and he wants them to do this by recognizing and then embracing the diverse, sometimes contradictory perspectives they can find in the New Testament. "This book addresses Christian individuals and communities in the hope that experiencing the diversity of the New Testament will help to revitalize the church, he says.

In Galatians St. Paul handles the question of how one can be both "right" in relation to God and "just" in relation to one's neighbors (both concepts are included in dikaiosunh). It depends, says Paul, on whether one trusts in (or "believes in" or "has faith in"—alternative renderings of pisteuw) one's own performance as judged by a legal standard, or in the grace of a God who freely gives good things to people. A church that modeled Paul's ideals would be open and accepting of all and would cherish and celebrate every individual's special gifts.

Mark's Gospel deals with a different problem: how to handle the fear of loss and death. The solution is to have the courage to adopt Jesus' agenda and give up status and power in suffering service to others. A church operating in Mark's style would be intent on welcoming society's marginalized people.

Matthew addresses the issue of how to interpret and live out God's will as expressed in the Law of Israel. The choice is between rabbinic Judaism which leads to hypocrisy (symbolized in Matthew by the Pharisees) and the Christian community which leads to righteous integrity (symbolized by Jesus and his disciples). A Matthean church would focus on discipling its members in God-pleasing ethics and morals.

Luke's Gospel confronts an inhumane, oppressive society with this alternative: Repentance in the name of Jesus results in mercy, compassion, forgiveness and liberation. A Lukan community would feel itself empowered by God's Spirit to oppose social injustice and advocate on behalf of the vulnerable members of society.

John presents the sharpest dualism: the way of death, darkness and falsehood that results from not knowing God *versus* the way of life, light and truth that comes from knowing Jesus as God's Son. The members of a Johannine community might feel estranged from the rest of society, but they would experience the Spirit's ecstasy and mutual love that makes eternal life a present reality.

Rhoads's conclusions represent a clear synthesis of much current social and literary analysis. There are few surprises of occasions to quibble (although one could argue that Mark's narrative leads a reader to identify with the disciples, not with Jesus, as Rhoads suggests). It could be read with greatest profit, I believe, in an ecumenical study group of adult lay people; they would be in the best position to test the thesis that diversity within the Bible and within the Christian community can be embraced and cherished and finally experienced in reconciliation.

Mark I. Wegener
Woodlake Lutheran Church
Richfield, Minnesota

Liberating Words. Paul's Use of Rhetorical Maxims in 1 Corinthians 1-10. By Rollin A. Ramsaran. Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1996. vii and 168 pages. Paper. $17.00.

In *Liberating Words*, Rollin Ramsaran maintains that Greco-Roman rhetorical conventions regarding the maxim illuminate both the argument of 1 Corinthians 1-10 and Paul's pastoral practice. According to the rhetorical handbooks, the maxim in its various forms is a proverb-like expression of recognized wisdom focused on moral conduct and applied to particular circumstances. Concomitant with the moral guidance promoted by the maxim was the speaker's own moral character, which served as an evaluative factor in its acceptance as truth. Although these maxims were essential to Greco-Roman education, not least for their moral value, Ramsaran presumes that this rhetorical form had filtered down to all levels of society.

In his examination of the function of maxims in 1 Corinthians 1-10, Ramsaran suggests that the divisions in the community and the specific problems Paul addresses are the consequence of the attachment of certain members to leaders who are identified by moral positions advanced with maxims (see 6:12; 7:1; 8:1, 4; 10:23). Hence, by characterizing the Corinthians' slogans as maxims, he is able to elucidate Paul's approach to moral reasoning. For example, 1 Cor 8:1 and 8:4 allude to maxims used by some strong Corinthians to support their position of unrestrained freedom. Rather than deny the strong their freedom, Paul offers his own maxims in 8:1b and 8:8 as a more appropriate guide to moral conduct in the community.

This incisive little book does not so much advance a new understanding of 1 Corinthians as show how Paul adapts certain cultural and rhetorical conventions to restore concord in the community. Ramsaran provides a glimpse of Paul the pastor who uses a rhetorical form prized by some Corinthians to point behavior in a certain direction, while allowing each person a freedom for reflection, responsibility, and a choice of actions. Pastors especially could benefit from observing how Paul employs and even transforms a particular cultural tradition in a way that commends, rather than compromises, the gospel which he preaches and embodies.

Ray Pickett
Lutheran Seminary Program of the Southwest
Austin, Texas

The Character and Purpose of Luke's Christology. By H. Douglas Buckwalter. Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 89. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. xxii and 342 pages. Cloth. $59.95.

This monograph originated as a thesis at the University of Aberdeen, under the direction of I. Howard Marshall. The author is currently Assistant Professor of New Testament at the Evangelical School of Theology in Myerstown, Pennsylvania.

Its central thesis is that the controlling concern for Luke's Christology is "the servanthood of the Lord Jesus." Luke presents Jesus as one who is co-equal in being and status with the Father, but whose earthly life and death represent a voluntary humiliation in deliberate service to the Father's will. Luke accentuates this theme to provoke readers to image such servanthood in their own lives. Indeed, presenting the servanthood of the Lord Jesus as the ethical model for Christian living is the primary purpose ("concrete occasion") for his two-volume book.

Demonstration of the essentially high Christology of Luke-Acts rests principally on redaction study of three themes: resurrection, Spirit, and salvation history. Compared to Mark, Luke portrays the exalted Jesus in terms similar to those describing Yahweh in the Old Testament. For example, Jesus remains present on earth while also in heaven, is able to bestow the Spirit, and is expected to judge the world. Development of the humiliation theme allows Buckwalter to deal with those texts that seem to present Jesus as subordinate to God.

The nearest NT parallel for such a scheme is Philippians, especially the Christ hymn of chapter two. This is a happy analogy for conservative evangelical scholarship, for it serves to connect Lukan Christology with Pauline tradition and increase the likelihood of the third evangelist's association with Paul.

The central thesis is sound and well-argued; other points, less so. There is marked concern to undermine Lukan originality (all significant ideas are traditional) and to suggest that other christological themes in Paul (pre-existence, atoning death, union with believers) are *presupposed* for Luke without being explicitly developed. With regard to the latter point, the comparison with Philippians is not helpful, for Luke-Acts is much longer and clearly less of an "occasional" composition.

Mark Allan Powell
Trinity Lutheran Seminary

The Church as Polis. By Arne Rasmusson. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995. 418 pages. Cloth. $34.95.

The subtitle of Arne Rasmusson's book—"From Political Theology to Theological Politics as Exemplified by Jürgen Moltmann and Stanley Hauerwas"—provides an effective summary of this very carefully wrought study, which originated as a doctoral dissertation at the University of Lund. There are several senses in which this is the case. First, it is a thorough study of the two theologians in question, both of whom have published prolifically, with each displaying strikingly different methodological orientations to the task of contemporary theological engagement with a wide range of issues. Rasmusson clearly admires Moltmann and Hauerwas for the uncommon creativity of their work, not only because they resist the narrow instrumental rationality that constitutes most universities, but also because of their mutual interest in the praxis of the Christian faith. At the same time, he is most acutely interested in the ways their conceptions of Christian practices (e. g. peacemaking) do and do not cohere with their theoretical accounts of Christian political engagement, and what these accounts can be said to indicate about the agenda of contemporary Christian theology.

Rasmusson presents a very persuasive analysis of what he regards to be the "impasse" of political theology, an intellectual movement which has been strongly associated with Moltmann's work (Part Two), and he provides a thorough explanation how this impasse has come about as well as the possibility (Part Three) that contemporary Radical Reformation Theology might constitute a constructive "alternative," one in which the church—understood as a "contrast society" (to borrow the phrase of Gerhard Lohfink)—becomes joined with God as the active subject of theology. Thus, Rasmusson argues, theology should be understood as "ecclesial discourse," while remaining fully engaged with a wide range of intellectual challenges.

The net result of the book is an extended argument (recapitulated in Part Four) about the significance of the striking shift in the location of the substance of theology from a "mediating political theology" which is largely apologetic in nature to a new conception of Christian political engagement, which the author prefers to think of as "ecclesial theological politics."

Conceptually speaking, then, Rasmusson's study explores two competing paradigms of the ways the spheres of theology and politics can and should relate to one another in North Atlantic cultural contexts, and argues for the superiority of one over the other in relation to a specific set of (nonfoundationalist) criteria, which include consistency, coherence, Christian authenticity, aptness or faithfulness, and applicability. This set of criteria for holistic justification displays the author's indebtedness to contemporary theologian George Lindbeck, among others. *The Church as Polis* perhaps can best be described as an essay in critical ecclesiology for Christians living in the North Atlantic culture, particularly insofar as it engages contemporary Radical Reformation theology, which the author understands as a tradition which "gives primacy not to politics understood as the struggle for control over the processes of social change (the politics of the world), but to the politics of the church as an alternative *polis*." If Rasmusson's study provides the occasion for the heirs of Luther in America to rethink their age-old ambivalences about Radical Reformation theology, then we will all owe him a great debt. Regardless, this study not only provides a thorough critique of the flaws of Moltmann's theology, but also provides a fresh appraisal of the significance of the challenge that Stanley Hauerwas' work continues to provide for Christians in North Atlantic contexts.

Michael G. Cartwright

Briefly Noted

The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew. Volume III. ז–ם. Edited by David J. A. Clines (Sheffield Academic Press, $100). This dictionary will eventually extend to ten volumes, with the present volume limited to three letters of the Hebrew alphabet or 1134 words. The lexicographers typeset the articles on computers themselves, which increases accuracy and, especially, the speed of production. The dictionary covers words appearing in ancient inscriptions and the Dead Sea Scrolls, in addition to the complete vocabulary of the Hebrew Bible. The lexicographers do not appeal to cognates in other Semitic languages, but they pay special attention to how words are used in specific contexts (e.g. subject, direct object, object of prepositions, or as collectives). A 26-page bibliography cites secondary studies of many words. There is even an English to Hebrew index. Another index lists words beginning with each of the three letters in the order of their frequency. A welcome reference tool! *RWK*

The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament. By Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner. Subsequently revised by Walter Baumgartner and Johann Jakob Stamm and others. **III. ס–ת.** Translated and edited under the supervision of M. E. J. Richardson (Brill, $154.50). This is a translation of the recently completed, classic German lexicon of the Old Testament, supplemented with references to the NEB and NRSV and with fuller Akkadian references than in the original. The authors cite cognates from other Semitic languages (including Ugaritic, which had not been unearthed when BDB was published, and a much more sophisticated use of Akkadian [after all, Assyriology was in its infancy when BDB was written]), list definitions by categories (meaning 1, 2, etc.), and cite secondary literature within each article. Words are listed alphabetically and not under roots as in Brown-Driver-Briggs. A final volume will include the last two letters of the Hebrew alphabet and the Aramaic portion of the lexicon. Potential purchasers may wince at the price of the four volume set, but given the care with which the work has been done and the problems created by including pointed Hebrew and many other exotic scripts, the price is understandable. This will be *the* standard reference work in English for many decades. *RWK*

A Grammar for Biblical Hebrew. By C. L. Seow (Abingdon, $29.95). For several years we have used this text for our introductory courses in biblical Hebrew at LSTC. Standing in the Lambdin tradition, one of its most endearing features is that all of the exercises are taken directly from the biblical text. This second edition introduces the use of the lexicon already in lesson V and expands the text of the grammar by almost sixty pages. *RWK*

Davidson's Introductory Hebrew Grammar. Edited by James D. Martin (T & T Clark, $29.95). This is the 27th edition of a grammar first published in 1874 by A. B. Davidson. An original 166-page book bulked up to 319 in the 26th edition, only to be pared down to 225 pages now so that it can be mastered in one semester. 49 chapters have become 25. M. has jettisoned the old Greek and Latin terminology and, in fact, has written a new textbook, but given it an honored and honorable name from the 19th century. *RWK*

Davidson's Introductory Hebrew Grammar—Syntax. Edited by J. C. L. Gibson (T & T Clark, $39.95). This fourth edition revises the third that was published in 1901 and incorporates much of this century's gains. G. keeps more of the Davidson's structure than Martin did in his revision of Davidson's introductory textbook, and even the appearance of the pages reflects older standards of typesetting. Thirty-six pages of indexes, with three columns per page, refer the reader to discussions of specific passages in the Hebrew Bible. *RWK*

Reading the Fractures of Genesis. Historical and Literary Approaches. By David M. Carr (Westminster John Knox, $39). This fresh approach to Genesis combines diachronic (source critical) and synchronic (final shape of the text) methods and shows how the two methods enlighten the findings of each other. The "fractures" in the title refer to phenomena like the ordered world of Genesis 1 followed by the "creation crime narrative" in Genesis 2-3, or the orderliness of the genealogies set alongside the untidy economy of the ancestral narratives, or the tension between the divergent reasons given for Jacob's trip to Mesopotamia. These are explained by the hypothesis that a final redactor combined the non-P document (roughly JE) and the P document, which had originally been written to replace its "non-P" predecessor. The combination produced the cross currents and fractures in the present text of Genesis. Given the text's history and present shape, we should not expect a unified synchronic interpretation of the text or one authoritative reading. C. is quite well read in current Pentateuchal studies and presents a convincing case for the combining of P and non-P, in the Persian period and even with Persian encouragement, into a unity that brought together the post-exilic college of priests and the council of lay elders. His reconstructions of the history of the non-P materials are quite speculative and not always convincing to me in identifying political issues in the Northern or Southern kingdoms to which they were addressed. Nevertheless, C. is clearly a major player in the current discussion and presents a synthesis that is quite plausible in its broader strokes. *RWK*

Genesis. By Hermann Gunkel. Translated by Mark E. Biddle (Mercer, $60). This is a translation of the third edition of Gunkel's famous commentary, published in 1910. While Gunkel wrote much about J, E, D, and P in this commentary, his focus was more on the religious history of mythical materials in pre-Israelite times and within the religion of Israel itself. He also attempted to write a literary history of the text, including its oral transmission, and he carefully analyzed the literary genres of the passages, a method that would come to be called form criticism today. He was more interested in analyzing literary types than the personality of the biblical authors. Hence many of the methods he pioneered in this commentary have become common coin today. Biddle omits a translation for Gunkel's translation of the Hebrew and makes no attempt to make Gunkel write inclusively. Scholars will welcome easy access to this classic work though there is no mistaking that it comes from another era (the first edition was in 1901). In an otherwise excellent and enlightening forward, Ernest W. Nicholson has Abraham commanded to sacrifice Jacob rather than Isaac! *RWK*

Leviticus. A Commentary. By Erhard S. Gerstenberger (Westminster John Knox $42). This welcome addition to the Old Testament Library commentary series is a translation from the German series Das Alte Testament Deutsch. G. holds to a traditio-historical theory of origins, meaning that items labelled "P" in the Old Testament grew like the annual rings of a tree. He also believes the texts in Leviticus reflect the life of many postexilic congregational groups, and not merely the organizational elements of the Jerusalem temple. In each section of the commentary G. translates and explains the individual subsections in Leviticus and then discusses their sociotheological significance. He questions whether a separate "Holiness Code" (Leviticus 17-26) ever existed and is quite sensitive to relationships between Jews and Christians, and women and men. Instead of trying to make the dietary laws relevant to modern times, G. notes how they helped solidify the ancient community and suggests that preachers find and discuss analogies in our own time. He also points out the disastrous consequences of distinguishing between "usable" and "abominable" living creatures. This is clearly the best available commentary on a book that is often viewed as somewhat barren for Christian proclamation (only a few verses from chapter 19 appear in the three-year Revised Common Lectionary). On p. 119 he confuses Samuel with Elijah. *RWK*

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Preaching Helps

The Resurrection of Our Lord—The Day of Pentecost, Series C

Thunder and Trumpet, Shofar and a Still Small Voice

Amy Schifrin has been pastor of Hope Lutheran Church in Fresno, California, for the past three years. When I asked her to give me something I might use in this introduction, she sent some paragraphs and said I might recreate her life out of them! But her own words are so compelling, I think it best that I quote her here a bit.

Amy writes that she was born in Queens, New York, to a family of Orthodox Jews who soon became Conservative as they moved out into the suburbs of Long Island. "I grew up learning to pray in that strange mixture of Yiddish, Hebrew, and English that is common among first and second generation U.S.-born Jews." And then she says, "Although religious education was discouraged among girls and women, when I heard the sound of the shofar, I heard a call to lead a holy life. It led me on a path far different from one any of my relatives would have expected. I often joke that someday I'm going to write a book and call it 'Baptized in Babylon,' because I was baptized in West Babylon, New York, shortly after graduating from high school there."

Amy studied music at Arizona State University as an undergraduate and took her Masters in Music at Northwestern. Then she taught music and served as a lay professional in Lutheran Campus Ministry before earning her M.Div. at LNTS. Ordained in 1984, her first call was to a three point parish in Central Saskatchewan 200 miles north of the Montana line. My comment, not Amy's, is that theologically inclined women are regularly sent to the margins, and not only in Orthodox Judaism! She subsequently served a parish in Badger, South Dakota, and was campus pastor at North Dakota State University in Fargo.

Amy is divorced and has been a single parent for seven years. She says, "I have two of the most wonderful sons imaginable: Hans (13) and Nils (11) who keep me on my toes." Also, as if that were not enough, she is a composer, a dancer, and a martial artist. She loves to hike and read, and since arriving in Fresno she has spent many of her Mondays in the Sierras.

So I asked her to fill in her spare time by writing about the Easter texts. She has heard the sounds of thunder and trumpet, of shofar and the still small voice. And those sounds and voices have led her to cross over borders and boundaries, and have caused her to look hard into the bright space beyond illness and dying, and have helped her stop and listen in to the heartbeat of transcendence pulsing in all our "ordinary" experiences. Out of her own unique experience she speaks to all the rest of us in our uniqueness about the Uncommon Wonder we all have in common: the *Ruaḥ*, the Breath, the Life that springs up surprisingly from the wounds of Jesus Christ.

If I am not mistaken, the prayers with which she concludes each reflection are her own composition. Her meditations and her prayers are windows into the texts and into her own soul. I hope you will hear in her words the sound of the trumpet-shofar, and I pray that your words in this Easter season will be a bright summons, a gracious invitation, to new life for all your hearers. Whether your voice is small or large, I wish you Good Preaching!

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

The Resurrection of Our Lord April 12, 1998

Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24
Acts 10:34-43 or Isaiah 65:17-25
1 Corinthians 15:19-26 or Acts 10:34-43
John 20:1-18 or Luke 24:1-12

Reflections

It's not often that we preachers get to "choose" the lectionary, but there are enough alternatives today that we can weave the texts together in a variety of ways. And while very few of us would preach on an Old Testament lesson on the festival of the Resurrection, it's worth thinking about in terms of our own preparation. Because it may be chosen to be read in our congregations on this day, the speaking of it alone will accomplish its purpose (and even prosper in the thing for which God sent it!). Actually the questions it addresses may be closer to our consciousness than the questions concerning some other-worldly resurrection.

Here is the faithful (remnant) community still struggling. Here are God's people still struggling. What does the promise of God mean to us in an imperfect and broken world when children fall into drugs and mothers have mastectomies, when the workers in the rust-belt lose their jobs and maquilliadoras add more pollution than money to the borderlands of our nation, when a war is won and utopia hasn't come?

Go ahead, tell me about resurrection. Go ahead, tell me then, early in the morning... and then in the telling of the story we find our only hope. For in this ordinary time, this life, the darkness will always be around us, but the one whose incarnation causes a bright light to shine, the one whose very word causes light to be, this one has not abandoned us. The one who promised a new heaven and new earth has promised it to me (1 Cor 15:20-23). And in every generation which at one and the same time carries exilic and post-exilic experiences within it, in every generation granted life on this earth, our hope to taste the resurrection is now (Isaiah 65:19).

If you move in/through the direction of Corinthians to either of the Gospel texts you may want to connect thoughts about the Jewish importance of a proper place for burial (the woman, especially Mary Magdalene at the tomb) and how the last enemy to be destroyed is death. In death we see and eventually smell the futility of it all. In death we all see ourselves. No wonder Jews and others have been so concerned about what to do with a corpse. (In fact, in the Jewish community providing burial for another has been seen as an act of virtue.) Mary, do you think you could have lifted the corpse alone if you had found it? (John 20:13) What corpses of our lives are we dragging around?

The last enemy to be destroyed is death. Stay away from the seed sprouted and the butterfly winging its pastel wings heavenward today. Our culture and church-culture have abused these images to the point of cliché in this generation. My pain, like the pain of my sisters and brothers who awaited the fall of Babylon, is real, too real. And most days all I need is a sign, a sign, an infinitesimally small sign of an eternal hope, if my faith is to have some content. That's your job, preachers. Mary is weeping, Jesus calls her *by name*. The resurrected one addresses her pain specifically (John 20:15-16). Her heart has heard, her very being has heard, and she can live yet another day.

If our preaching is to go beyond Sunday morning, empowering our people to live and spread the word (Acts 10:42a), it is imperative that they experience some sort of healing for some specific brokenness. That is, the word must have their name on it. Other-

wise, what do they have to say to their co-workers, their neighbors, their children, their aging parents, their government leaders?

When they hear their name in their innermost being, when they hear their name in a way that restores the original intent of the creator with regard to their identity, then real changes will occur in their lives. Then the scales will fall from their eyes... oh, but I am getting a few weeks ahead of myself....

A prayer of preparation
"I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the Lord." (Ps 118:17)

God of all grace and all glory, on this the most brilliant of all days, help me to speak into the darkness of death, into the stifled cries, the gasping for air, the trembling in the legs of one who can run no further. Help me Lord, to believe, and to speak, so that each one who hears may see a light shining back to them giving them one more breath. Amen

A hymn to sing together
"Christ Has Arisen, Alleluia"
(*With One Voice* #678)

Second Sunday of Easter
April 19, 1998

Psalm 118:14-29 or Psalm 150
Acts 5:27-32
Revelation 1:4-8
John 20:19-31

Reflections
This week I want to start with the Gospel and work back to the first lesson. Between Mary Magdalene and Thomas, we have a continuum of responses to the risen Lord. There is no one right place to be, for even our weekly lectionary offers us more than one response. Thomas wants to see the mark of the nails, he wants to touch the scars. His encounter with Jesus is just the opposite from the one I often encounter when I visit in the hospitals. Everyone wants to show me their scars. They volunteer such visual offerings in ways that used to surprise me. Not so anymore, for they are the flip side of Thomas' demand. My folks want me to know their suffering. Thomas wants to know if this risen Jesus is the one who suffered, because if he isn't, what does he have to say of value to all of us whose bodies and spirits have been pierced?

I carry a few ugly scars on the limbs of my body, the result of my sport utility vehicle rolling and burning on a California highway, but like most of humanity I have wounds in my heart that go far beneath the surface. "Can our scars be healed?" is the question behind Thomas' utterance. "What are your credentials, O Risen One, as the healer of our ills?" Henri Nouwen's little classic *The Wounded Healer* comes to mind when I listen to Thomas. "What are your credentials?" he asks Jesus. My parishioners show me theirs, at least the ones on the outside, to let me know that there is far more going on inside.

We are never told if Thomas actually touched Jesus. Mary Magdalene was told not to hold him. And we have simply been breathed upon or into (John 20:22). God is the source of that breath which never ceases. "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." The spirit, once given, is still alive.

On this, one of the traditional "low Sundays" of the church year, there will still be present among our folks a wide variety of responses to the Risen Lord. Like a composer who writes a song cycle on a given theme, this latter chapter of John's Gospel gives us multiple insights into the lives of individual believers: their doubts, struggles, contexts, and finally their faith. "My Lord and my God" (only in John's Gospel is Jesus called God).

As you approach the pulpit this week, think of those hearers not as the faithful few whose faith is monolithic, but as individuals on a wide spectrum. The big crowds may have disappeared, but that does not necessarily mean that those who return are already seeing/believing. It just means that they are seeking. Help them to confess their faith with the clarity of Thomas. Don't doubt this text! It thankfully does not reveal the fullness of the resurrection (as much as we will it to be so), but it proclaims the clear mystery (do you like that paradox?) of faith. For without such mystery, faith would be impossible to even imagine.

Now, the cosmological dimension of such resurrection faith comes to us in the book of Revelation. In this opening passage not only does John on Patmos tell us what God has done (Rev 1:6a) and what he intends to do (1:7a) but what God is doing right now-continuously (1:5, "to him who *loves* us"). What paradox, what holy tension. "Every eye will see him." "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." Let the scales fall! Do we have to wait until next week?! Is faith the belief that we will see? LOOK! He is coming with the clouds.

Don't leave the preaching on these revelatory texts to the crazies out there. There is much to be gained if we begin at the end and then look in. For all his comments that distanced us from this book, it was a technique that Luther himself used theologically (see James Arne Nestigen's article on "The End of the End: the Role of Apocalyptic in the Lutheran Reform," *Word and World*, Spring, 1995).

Check out those seven churches. Who's who and what's what? Know their context, so that you can look at John's paintings of words not as prediction but as a portrait of our destination, filled with all the subtleties of a true work of art. There you will be drawn in and ahead, which is what he really intends.

If you happen to move into the direction of Acts, keep John 20:23 at your fingertips, for the issue of forgiveness is always related to authority. Δοῦναι μετάνοιαν = to *give* repentance (Acts 5:31). Do we speak that way? More often than not we demand it and condemn those who don't.

My oldest son was in trouble recently at school. He was scared and he lied. For over two hours the school authorities demanded the truth from him and finally sent him home without any answers. The next day I sat with my son in the principal's office, letting her know that I usually believe what my son says. I'd prefer that he tell me the truth, but it's really a secondary issue. Whether or not I know what's going on isn't as important as his relationship with God. If he lies, let him sit in the lie and see its consequences. God knows the truth. He has to answer to God, not to me. I watched the principal's eyes get very wide. "I can't do that," she said; "I have to know." And I responded, "But I can." And from the corner of my eye I saw a boy become a man as he wept and said, "I'm sorry I lied."

Oh, the *gift* of repentance, the gift of the future, the gift of the One who loves us and freed us from our sins! Human authorities have their place, but even at their best, they will never be God.

A prayer of preparation
"The Lord has punished me severely, but he did not give me over to death. Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord." (Ps 118:18-19)

For every commandment I break, for every lie I make, for every glance, every gesture, every word that hurts, let me hear your breathing in me that I might let go of my foolish pride, that the battle scars might be softened, that I might look to the day when I will see you face to face, so that today I may simply be able to live faithfully. Amen

A hymn (or two) to sing together
"Healer of our Every Ill"
(*With One Voice* #738)
"We Walk by Faith"
(*Gather*, a GIA Publication)

Third Sunday of Easter
April 26, 1998

Psalm 30
Acts 9:1-6 (7-20)
Revelation 5:11-14
John 21:1-19

Reflections
Oh, to have one's sight *restored!* Like the restoration of all Israel in a microcosm, Paul proclaims, "He is the Son of God."

Was Paul's experience, which the church for so long has called a conversion, a change of religion or a change of direction? Was it something new or an intensification of an ongoing experience? We preachers often examine the Gospel texts in light of issues of continuity versus discontinuity, and here we see the same questions played out in the life of an individual person of faith. "Saul, Saul, why do you...?" Like Mary Magdalene at the tomb, dear Saul doesn't recognize the Lord until he *hears* his name. Can anyone "see" without "hearing?" What had Paul been "seeing" in the eyes of those whom he persecuted (think Matthew 25)? Could not God have spoken (quietly, steadily) to Paul in this way? We pray occasionally as a church, that we might hear God's voice in the cries of the suffering ("I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting"). Why should we be surprised that one whose hands have been pierced will work in such a way?

As one who grew up as a Jew and who now has experienced God's love through the cross, I have spent my life listening for God's voice. The greatest of all the "aha" moments in my life came as a teenager when the scales fell from my heart as I was reading in the Gospel of Luke. (To this day I still have a hard time not weeping tears of joy when I read these texts publicly.) And while in my former life I was not out on the road

persecuting Christians (it was in the reverse order for me and my family from eastern Europe), I do know that it has taken me over twenty years to understand how my life as a Jew is reflected in my life as a Christian. Paul has left us a powerful legacy in his letters, and this text, among all the texts that offer us a modicum of insight into his experience, has been the most illuminating for me, so that I may hear—and see.

When one wakes from a Triduum (Acts 9:9) there is a dimension of life available to us that was previously unknown. All that comes before, however, is the context within which to live it out (Acts 9:20-22).

And let us not forget the suffering ones, the slaughtered ones who now sing in full voice. In their voices the lamb who was slain has begun his reign. If we continue to read back from an apocalyptic confession, we know that Saul indeed heard the voice of God in their cries.

Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Nero, Vespasian, Titus, and Domitian heard God, too, but they heard his wrath. Now the martyrs' song is heard, thousand upon thousand. Do you hear their voices now in Sao Paulo, Chaletanango, Mesquital, and San Salvador (what a name for a city!)? John on Patmos refers to "the Lamb who was slaughtered" twenty-eight times in his Revelation. It is our turn now to listen to the Lamb's song.

P.S. Here's a story for the Gospel of the day, which, by the way, looks very much like a later addition:

Angel Serrano left his briefs on, tattered as they were. He was teaching a few of us North Americans visiting with a Sister Parish delegation to fish with nets in the Sumpul River on the border between El Salvador and Honduras. It was the river where the blood of the massacred had flowed bright red in 1980. We all had on swimsuits for the occasion, something an El Salvadoran campesino would have no need of. (Like Peter, Angel usually fished naked in the "sea.") Like children (παιδία, John 21:5), we caught nothing on our own. But we listened to Angel's voice and each of us held the net between our teeth and our outstretched hands, and threw it wide. We had little luck, but back in the village the women were preparing a feast of telapia for us, caught earlier in the day.

"Feed my lambs," Jesus says. They who had nothing sang the lamb's song that day as they placed the food before us. They, whose families had been slaughtered, called us to join them at the table.

It was the Lord's voice we heard.

A prayer of preparation

"You have turned my mourning into dancing; You have taken off my sackcloth and clothed me with joy." (Psalm 30:11)

God in heaven, You live in me, even in the worst of my moments. When I am far away, You call me back. When I am hungry, You feed me. Tear the hardened scales from my heart, that I might recognize You when we meet again on the road. And in that moment, may I know nothing but Your joy. Amen

A hymn to sing together

" Alabaré" (*WOV* #791)

Another Hymn for Easter II or III depending upon which text is preached on is:
"By all Your Saints in Warfare" (*LBW* #177), stanzas 1, 3 (use 4, 6, 8, or 11 to suit your needs)

Fourth Sunday of Easter
May 3, 1998

Psalm 23
Acts 9:36-43
Revelation 7:9-17
John 10:22-30

Reflections

How many hymns do you know that come from the Book of Revelation? More than you may realize. If what is prayed is what is believed (*lex orandi, lex credendi*), then we Lutherans need to give far more credence to the Book of Revelation than we have in the past.

We know parts of the Apocalypse as well as we know the twenty-third psalm, but we may not know that's where they're from. Some teaching could occur in our parishes this season in this arena to help people proclaim the faith they believe. Unlike other parts of the New Testament they may not be able to interpret these passages neatly and concretely, but through their raised voices they may experience a hope that has previously eluded them.

It is precisely for these reasons that the destructive groups on the edges of our religious expressions spend so much time in the Apocalypse. They can bend their interpretation any way they choose to without losing the power of the text; unfortunately they make the text point to themselves, a blasphemy of disastrous magnitude.

Two of the most important questions we have as human beings are these: (1) Who are we? and (2) Where are we going? They are questions of source and destination, of genesis and revelation, of Alpha and Omega, of beginning and end. "Good" cult leaders worth their salt know that all they have to do is grab hold of your unanswered questions about Genesis and Revelation and they've got their prey. Their manipulative techniques will hook a person in a way that strips life, identity, and future from some of the kindest and gentlest among us.

With that long introductory word let us focus on the Revelation text before us and see how we can protect and guide our particular flocks, for we do them a great disservice if we let the ever-popular-culture view of Revelation as the "end of history" prevail.

In this interlude between the sixth and seventh seals, a picture of the true new age emerges. All the people cry out in *a* large voice. Nations, tribes, people, and languages remain distinct, but now in praise, they have one voice. (Is it a cosmic Pentecost scene?) No mere 144,000, but a number so great that with the human eye alone it cannot be counted. There is nothing literal going on here, nothing literal save a description of the new relationship between God and God's people. It is an eschatological myth and it is recorded as a moment of ecstatic joy. Anyone who thinks that this is going to happen in this age, anyone who thinks they can create it in this age, has missed the point. That includes David Koresh and Elizabeth Claire Prophet.

When Domitian declared himself "Lord and God," the valley of the shadow of death was what loomed in front of the faithful. For many there was no escape from the pain, the tearing of limb from limb, of parent from child. John's vision puts even the horrors of a tortuous death into a new perspective. God will use even your death (Rev 7:14) to usher in the new creation. And in our worship, in our singing of these same words, the direct link between our activity and the activity of those "in heaven" is disclosed.

There wasn't a funeral in my little parish in rural Saskatchewan where we didn't sing "Behold a Host Arrayed in White." One does not have to be persecuted in the theo-political realm to receive the benefits of divine worship.

Another experience of worship is happening in today's Gospel. It is the worship of remembrance. It is the worship that speaks clearly to identity issues. "Oh, Channuka, Oh, Channuka, come light the menorah. Let's have a party, we'll all dance the hora. Gather round the table..." The Feast of Dedication (ἐγκαίνια/Channuka) is a great moment of renewal. What Jew doesn't know the story of Judas Maccabaeus? In this yearly remembrance we know that the Antiochus Epiphanes of this world will not have the last word. Source and destination; they are always closely aligned.

So Jesus is walking in the portico, on the edges of the temple, ever expanding its boundaries. And as to a candle in the dark, the Jews gather round him. (If you're not afraid to mix a few metaphors, try singing verses one and two of *WOV* #630, "Light One Candle to Watch for Messiah.") Jesus is the thread connecting the glory of Solomon, the temple's rededication, and the temple which will be raised up. Continuity, continuity, continuity; "No one will snatch them out of my hand. What my Father has given me is greater than all else and no one can snatch it out of the Father's hand."

Worshipping the One God (in any age) is like a finely woven cloth (John 19:23b). And just as it cannot be torn apart, neither can those who belong to the Lord be taken from him.

A prayer of preparation
"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever."
(Ps 23:6)

In You, O Lord, I find a life that is stronger than death. As this life prepares me to stand among Your saints and sing, may I not be afraid to sing of Your glory now. Amen

A "must sing" hymn on this day
"Who is This Host Arrayed in White"
(*LBW* #314)
If you're not preaching on the Revelation text, use it liturgically for the hymn of praise!

Fifth Sunday of Easter
May 10, 1998

Psalm 148
Acts 11:1-18
Revelation 21:1-6
John 13:31-35

Reflections
I used a meat knife in the butter and my 4'9" grandmother yelled at me in Yiddish and threw me out of the kitchen. Caught in the act! The grace that I experienced came not from her, but from the inner voice which told me it was still a knife and could function equally as well cutting a tender pot roast or spreading butter on a slice of rye. The laws of cleanliness may have had important functions in the pre-preservation nomadic days of my ancestors (Exodus 1:15 is the source of our name), but even by the time of Peter they were used more to separate than to honor. To take in only what was deemed as clean was an outward manifestation of an identity and of a relationship. Peter's vision (in a trance, no less!) and the ensuing baptisms let us know that true identity is a matter of the heart. The thread today that weaves back from the future is repentance, binding destination and source, demonstrating the congruency between the external and the internal. It is a woven piece.

My only hope is that Peter cooked it all before he ate it. (That piece was left out of the divine recipe!) If Peter could eat these scaly reptiles, these cawing birds, these gro-

tesque beasts (imagine what Stephen Spielberg would do with this scene), if Peter could eat this ugly mess, then everyone and everything that we've brushed aside as less than (clean or perfect) can be restored. It is a call back to the intent of the creator. There's even hope for all of us who've been thrown out of the kitchen, or out of the classroom, or even out of society. None is beyond repentance. None is beyond restoration. What a place to live out the new commandment!

As we move to the Revelation text an even far greater series of questions emerges: Does God will suffering? Does suffering reside in Satan? What tension exists for those who now suffer when they hear these words? Hope is the linchpin, and it is created within the tension of the Scripture's expressions concerning the stuff that makes for pain. We think (and sometimes read) these texts at funerals where the paradox of grief and resurrection are as close as the edges of a sword. "I kill and I make alive." Is the purpose of suffering to cleanse? Sometimes yes, sometimes no? But it can never be read in a 'tit-for-tat' kind of way. The one who experiences healing may not even know the one who suffered.

This is a new (2nd) Emmanuel text. The home (σκηνή) of God is among mortals. The Son of Man (incarnate) had no place to lay his head. God himself will be with them.

We know that Jesus wept, and that his word wiped away tears. It is a sign of what is to come, for some suffering can only be endured if in hope it will be no more. Does God want you to suffer? No way. But will God use your suffering to lead you to a far better day? Only in retrospect (as the future weaves back to the present) can we say "yes."

This text is what we want to say when a loved one has died, but in our need to be helpful, we tend to get to it too soon. Without letting our exegetical underwear hang out (which can be as crass as Madonna's!) this cosmological dimension of our Easter hope is trivialized if it is simply hung up like a carrot without acknowledging the context and emotions of one whose tears first need to fall before they can be wiped away.

And now to the Gospel. "When he had gone out." The scene is set. Could Jesus, would Jesus speak these words with Judas present? In John's Gospel the Lamb of God will be slaughtered when all the other lambs are slaughtered, on 14 Nisan. And just as in ancient times the lamb must be bought: for 30 coins this lamb was being prepared (Matthew 27:3).

It is that same old question of suffering and evil. Who's responsible here: God or Satan? O happy fault, we can't stand it, that God might have something to do with suffering. It's been so misused over the years, to cause more suffering, to keep the poor and the marginalized on the margin (remember the unclean). But here even death becomes the model, "Love one another, just as I have loved you."

How is Jesus' love most clearly manifest? In suffering, in death, in agony. There is nothing now to fear. He sets us free to love.

Are we any more ready to face death now than the disciples were? Mutual love is the only opening for that to happen.

So much of John's Gospel happens in two realms or on two levels. It's similar to what I've experienced in praying with the dying. There often seem to be two conversations occurring almost simultaneously (one here and one beyond). Few of us have had the experience of entry into that new land, so we stand on this side of the fence peering through, and like any view through a fence the picture is not complete. The image is there, but what we know is under our feet. Like a voice calling from the edge of our vision, like a scene that we see through the waves that rise off a hot pavement, Jesus

appears before us and calls us to love as he has loved.

It is an act of faith to enter into suffering. Moses never crossed into the promised land, but you will. Love one another—the fences will fall. Even the ugliest reptile will be a thing of beauty.

A prayer of preparation
"Praise the Lord from the Earth,
You sea monsters and all deeps,
fire and hail, snow and frost,
stormy wind fulfilling his command!"
(Ps 148:7-8)

Blessed Jesus, you love us as no other ever has. May your life fill the spaces of our brokenness, so that our actions will reveal only you. May your goodness be heard in every voice. Amen

A hymn to sing together
"Ubi Caritas et Amor" (*WOV* #665)

Sixth Sunday of Easter
May 17, 1998

Psalm 67
Acts 16:9-15
Revelation 21:10, 21:22–22:5
John 14:23-29 or John 5:1-9

Reflections
One of the dearest women I have ever known asked me to read this particular passage from Revelation at her impending funeral. She had been battling cancer for five years and the sores that covered what was left of her body oozed constantly. Could John on Patmos have imagined Irene on the Saskatchewan prairie finding comfort in God's Revelation? John may not have imagined it, but certainly God did. In this text we've not only crossed a fence, we've crossed a border.

Just as it would have been almost unimaginable for the hearers/readers of John's Apocalypse to think of anything worse than their current situation, John surprises them with a vision that is far greater than any they could have described: The healing of the nations, the face of God, and the end of night. All that terrifies us from within, all that terrifies us from without will be vanquished. The yield of the tree of life will even be tastier than the finest fruit. It will be a perpetual harvest, an eternal bounty. And the leaves of the tree will be for the healing of the nations.

God has cleansed the church. It is Christ's blood that flowed over the persecuted. Domitian and his cohorts meant it for evil, but God will use it for all our good.

In our North American context we will find few examples of persecution (the honoring of false gods is commonplace everywhere that I've lived), but no scarcity of pain or despair. And as I learned from Irene's

witness to her family and community, John's Revelation can speak to the terror within as well as the terror without.

It was three months after her death when Irene and her husband Egon were to have celebrated their fortieth wedding anniversary. Egon, their six children, numerous grandchildren, and their pastors shared a dinner that brilliant (λαμπρὸν ὡς κρύσταλλον) night. One of their sons had carved a cross from wood he found on the prairie. He polished it and put a little fancy scroll work around the edges and after a meal with bounteous portions he presented it to his dad. What was so unique about this cross was that Jesus wasn't hanging in the center of it. Instead Irene's picture had been pasted in the center, and she wasn't crying anymore.

Healing and worship are meant to go together. In our preaching we are not to deify individuals like Irene or even like Lydia in our Acts text, but we can certainly look at their lives (and at the lives of all the saints around us) and praise God as they have taught us. They, for me, provide a link to what I hope and pray lies ahead. For like the rest of you I have known terror in more than one form, and in sighs too deep for words I have called upon the One whose arms were outstretched for me.

When I survived my auto accident last year people said the strangest things to me. "God must have been with you" or "The angels must have been watching over you." I think they were happy that I was alive, but would not God have been with me if I had died? I might even be seeing the angels then!

John addressed the faithful of his day, and this closing section of his Apocalypse is meant to reveal a path through the worst of our fear (John 14:27). For while the emperor's sword, the monstrous growth of cancer cells, and a vehicle careening off a highway all appear to be different, the death that we each experience remains the same. John's intent is that we should believe and know that finally there will be no more night, no more terror, no more death. Thanks be to God for all the saints who have spoken so that we can still hear this word.

Abraham Joshua Heschel once wrote that the concern of a prophet is to see the human event as divine experience (*The Prophets* I:172). In the crucifixion/resurrection we see the divine event as human experience. The One whom we will see has a face and it is Jesus.

A prayer of preparation

"May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us." (Ps 67:1)

One moment we are here, and one moment we are not. One moment we are breathing, and one moment we are not. When we close our eyes at last, may they be opened by the light smiling from Your face. Amen

A hymn to sing together

"Holy Majesty, Before You" (*LBW* #247)

Seventh Sunday of Easter
May 24, 1998

Psalm 97
Acts 16:16-34
Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 21-22
John 17:1-11

Reflections

"One day, as we were going to the place of prayer...." This is the place, of course, where we are most vulnerable; this is the place where the power of the Evil One comes closest; this is the place where we know that we are followers of Christ. Don't we know by now that when the Holy Spirit is at work all the other spirits come out to play?

Paul and Silas encounter a slave girl (παιδίσκην) who had a spirit of divination (think "Python"/πύθωνα). If her owners were alive today, would they keep her in a house on a frontage road—you know the one—the dining room curtains are always closed behind the perpetual blue neon sign that's flashing, "Madame Sofie's, House of Prophecy"? (And why the RCL leaves out verse 15 of Revelation 22 after reading this text makes no sense to me!) But back to Paul and Silas.

The spirit in this slave girl cries out to the public that they are slaves. She who has been enslaved internally and externally still speaks the truth. Like those who mockingly nail a sign over Jesus' head, "The King of the Jews," God's truth will always make itself known.

Paul is amazed. By what? Her words, her presence, her outgoing nature, her loud mouth? (ἐν ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ: You might want to sing "The love of Jesus charms our fears, LBW #559 stanza 3.)

And when she was of no use to her owners through fortune-telling, have you wondered what happened to her?

Paul and Silas now have their own troubles to deal with. Stripped, beaten and immobilized (enslaved on the outside), they raise their hearts and voices to God. The earthquake breaks their shackles (Ps 46:1-2 or Ps 97:4-5), but these slaves of the most high God know where true freedom lies: in the giving of one's life for another. The jailer will wash their wounds, and he and his household will be washed in the water of life. Paul and Silas had said to him, "You *will be* saved" (σωθήσῃ σὺ). The effects of the future (of the eternal) begin now. It is cause for us all to rejoice.

The "high priestly prayer" of Jesus which comes to a close in John 17 speaks also of the power of God and the power given in his name (v. 26). Jesus makes the name of the *Righteous* Father known to them. In the psalm of the day (97), righteousness is paired with justice (v. 3), glory (v. 6), and joy (v. 11). Justice and glory describe the Lord, and joy is the operative mode for those who belong to him. The response of the household of the jailer (Acts 16:34) is in the same category.

And of all the events that bring rejoicing, there is none more potent than the coming of our Lord Jesus. John's Revelation closes with a cry to the future, a cry to the eternal, that he might come soon. When we gather around his table on this Sunday morning, it is with the reverence of the vanquished that we cry, "Come." Come into our lives now and at the end of time!

Two thousand years later, we have too often grown complacent in our cry, and if we were to be honest with ourselves, we most often live without regard to that eschatological edge. It is precisely why we need the *continuing* witness of this text, for "the eternal now" is always upon us. Let the groups on the fringes play their numbers games, for the certainty of the future lies in the "who," not in the "when." "Surely, *I am* coming

soon." Ask for what he has promised.

John knew that the greatest threat to the church of Jesus Christ comes from the inside, from the erosion of the spiritual life that takes place when we're napping. The Roman Empire, the Third Reich, the doctrines of Mao Tse Tung, and the death squads of the Guatemalan military may raise their ugly heads, but they cannot destroy the spirit of God made present in the lives of believers. Such a spirit has its source and its destination in the One who makes all things new.

A prayer of preparation
"Light dawns for the righteous,
and joy for the upright in heart.
Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous,
and give thanks to his holy name."
(Ps 97:11-12)

Father in heaven, you set all things in their courses, including our lives. May we seek nothing but to know you, so that wherever this life takes us we may know that You lie ahead. Amen

A hymn to sing together
"O Morningstar, How Fair and Bright"
(*LBW* #76)

The Day of Pentecost
May 31, 1998

Psalm 104:25-35, 37
Acts 2:1-21 or Genesis 11:1-9
Romans 8:14-17 or Acts 2:1-21
John 14:8-17 (25-27)

Reflections
When I think of Pentecost I think of danger. Neither folks wearing red sweatshirts nor children waving red balloons carries the edge that is called for. I want those Pentecost banners to get oh-so-close to the flame. I want the church to ignite in sound, in speech, in swirling color, in the movement of dancers, in the hands of a drummer. Pentecost, we've made it so tame. We have four people standing up and reading this Acts text in Norwegian, German, Spanish, and English at the same time, as if we could re create, in literal form, a picture of the day.

While living history pageants have their place, Pentecost requires more. The very Spirit that bears witness with our spirit calls us to a new creative edge, to the places we haven't been before. The Spirit was given so that the church might be in mission. Proclamation was the intent of the day. (It is not the full reversal of Babel, for each one hears in their *own* language.) In fire, wind, and tongues a restoration (Acts1:6-8; Numbers 11:29) has begun. It is not a literal recreation—let us not forget that the Jews had gathered on Pentecost before—but a new day.

A paradigm, not a building, for Church is created on that day. And just as the Spirit preceded the birth of Jesus (Luke 1:35), so the Spirit will have a hand in this creation.

Why had those Jews gathered on that day? They may have thought it was for the spring barley festival or even to remember the giving of the Law, but God had other plans. They were being observant and God

was being wild. (Does that mean God can even work in the most straightlaced of us?)

God was busy re-creating on that day. That is to say, God was leading each one to live out his original creative intentions (Gen 2:7). It is the language of praise that ushers forth, the witness of the faithful who unashamedly proclaim God's deeds of power. And in our own languages? The Dutch priest Huub Oosterhuis says of the Holy Spirit,

"You speak in silence
and all languages interpret you.
You are the truth of all words,
their permanence and their comfort
and every man who listens
with an open mind
can hear you in his own language
and in his own life..." (*Your Word Is Near* [Paulist Press c. 1968], p. 119)

Oh, how the Spirit bears witness with our spirit. In sighs too deep for words, in ancient rhythms of the drum, in yearnings for peace, in the dance of the candle's flame, God renews our hearts and sets fire to our lives.

When we try to control the uncontrollable, we move into the realm of idolatry, for any attempt to control the Spirit is an attempt to control God (John 14:16). The truth be known, a life lived listening for the Spirit is as scary as it gets, because it is a life that cannot be measured by the world's standards (John 14:17).

May your worship planning and your preaching reflect such danger. And may Joel's prophecy (Acts 2:18) be incarnate in your mouths.

A prayer of preparation
"When you send forth your spirit
they are created..." (Ps 104:30)

Fire in our hearts, fire in our mouths, fire in our hands; nothing that you touch remains the same. *Ruaḥ, Ruaḥ, Ruaḥ,* make us bold. Amen

A hymn to sing together
"African Processional" (Cameroon)—You can find it in *Global Songs / Local Voices* (Bread for the Journey)—or if you can find it, "Psalm 104, When You Send Forth your Spirit" (Ray Makeever).

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