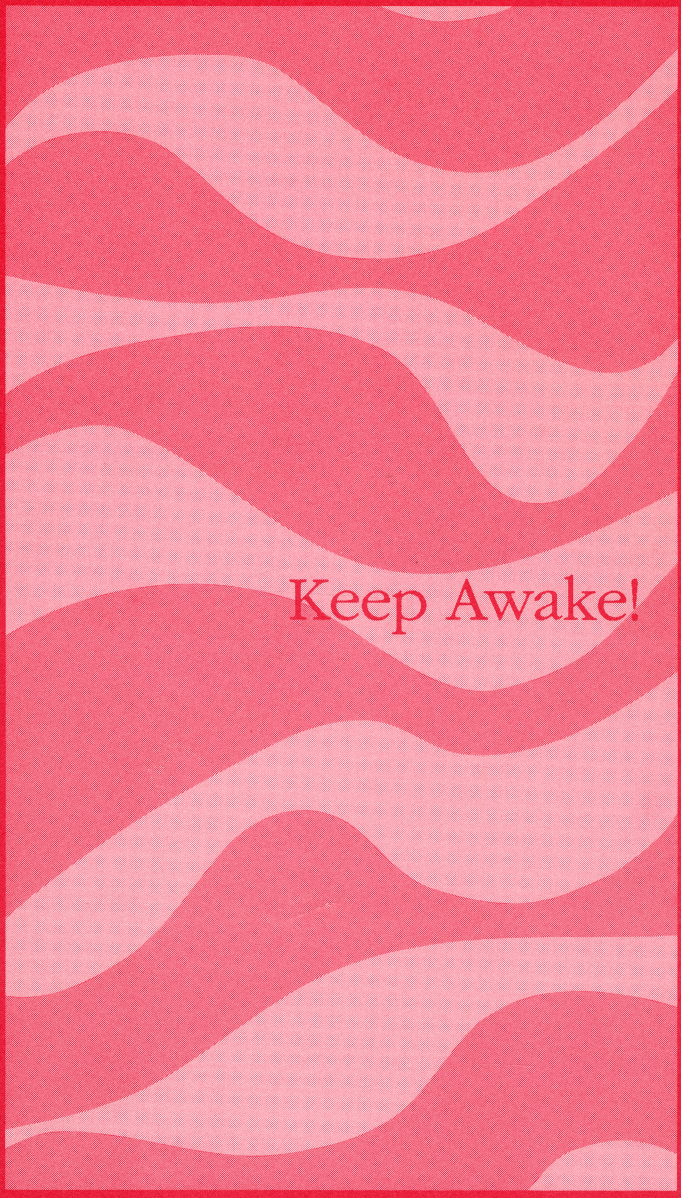
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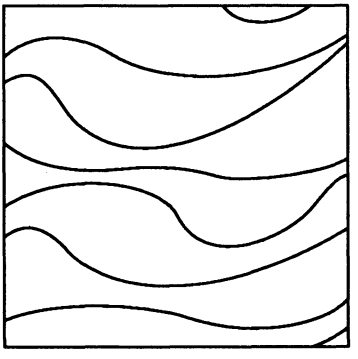
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Ash Wednesday—Good Friday

Contributors: Gary Morgan-Gohlke, Luisa Hanson, Gilbert Franke

Keep Awake!

When Conrad Tischendorf found the great Codex Sinaiticus in a waste-paper basket at the Convent of St. Catherine, on Mount Sinai, he stayed up all night to study this priceless manuscript. He later noted, "It would have been a sacrilege to sleep." Other figures in history were not so much on their toes. Rip Van Winkle slept through the American revolution, and Peter, James, and John nearly slept through Jesus' arrest. Small wonder, then, that the last words in the gospel for Advent 1 remind us that there are much more important things than sleep—even if that's the way we spend one third of our lives. As a lifelong insomniac and an early riser, I am not always sure that the admonition to keep awake is good news. One of my sons-in-law remarked that sleeping in for a Klein, even on a Saturday, doesn't go past 7:00 a.m.

But keeping awake at the right time is surely important. Whether we are looking for signs of God's advent or just being attentive to what is really going on in our congregations, all too often we are asleep at the switch, unaware of the signs of hope—or distress—that are sent in our direction. Perhaps the articles in this issue can serve as a kind of Advent-Christmas-Epiphany wake up call.

Edgar Krentz brings Mark onto our screens, with the emphasis that faith in Jesus as proclaimer of the kingdom of God defines what it means to be a disciple. Mark reports no resurrection appearances because the resurrection itself elevated Jesus to the role of cosmic ruler and judge. Mark was written in the late 60s, when Rome was winning the war against the Jews in Palestine. Christians in Rome were tempted to mute their public witness because their savior and king hailed from strife-torn Palestine. Mark calls his readers to complete the gospel he wrote by living out their discipleship in fearless witness to Christ. A wide-awake Markan church would risk all for the good news and have little concern for hierarchy and much concern for mission. A Markan church would

know the difference between religiosity and faithful living. An appendix provides an orientation to the Gospel of John, which plays a major role in the year of Mark.

Fred Strickert continues the emphasis on Mark by noting that the new, inclusive community in Mark is based on relationships and has no set boundaries. Throughout the book there is a tension between inside and outside. Those doing the will of God find themselves sitting around Jesus on the inside, while traditional insiders, such as family and religious authorities, find themselves on the outside. The final surprise of Mark's Gospel is that the categories of inside and outside have been abolished. Jesus offers wide-open arms for all in a new community.

George L. Murphy rehearses cosmic themes in the Epiphany that are helpful for parish ministry. The entire universe finds its fulfillment in the incarnation. The star that attracted the Magi was a natural, if unusual, event, probably related to a known planetary conjunction. Other possibilities include a miraculous light or a christological interpretation of an Old Testament text. Epiphany presents an opportunity to address the threat of astrology, which has experienced a resurgence in our day.

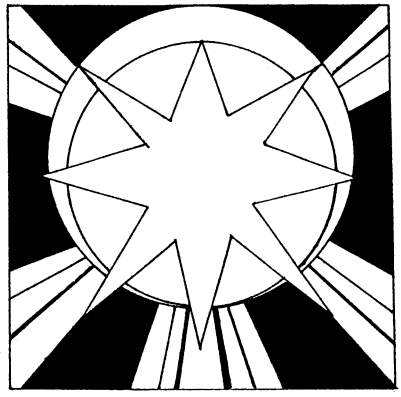
Günter Krüger tells the story of Johann Christoph Blumhardt, a controversial saint of the 19th century. Though Bultmann once said he detested the "Blumhardt stories," this remarkable pietist exercised a spirituality that renewed all those with whom he served. Exorcism and holistic healing were among his activities, but above all he was completely open to God. Blumhardt lived in Christ's presence and let himself be led by the Spirit. Drawing on the power of the slogan, "Jesus is victor," Blumhardt defined the kingdom as a state in which God's will alone rules and from which all other powers and forces hostile to him are banished. He built the church, not through evangelizing, but through victory over what he described as "personalities of darkness." The influence of this down-to-earth charismatic seems to be increasing in our day.

Jay C. Rochelle provides an extended review of a recent book by Jacob Neusner on Jewish-Christian dialogue. Actually this is one of four

books that Neusner has written on the subject in which he calls much of what passes as Jewish-Christian dialogue into question. Jews are not simply Christians without Jesus, and Christians are not simply Jews with Jesus. Jews today are not an extension of Old Testament figures any more than Christians today are mere extensions of New Testament figures. For Neusner Christ plays a role for Christians that is analogous to the role Israel plays for Jews.

Marc Kolden rounds out the issue with a fine Christmas sermon.

The parable of the Ten Bridesmaids reminds us that while five were wise, five others were quite foolish. But in "Wake, Awake, for Night is Flying," Philipp Nicolai alertly joined himself to the excitement of the wide-awake five: "No eye has seen, no ear/Has yet been trained to hear/ What joy is ours!" With the heavens, saints, angels, harps, cymbals, and the choir immortal we gather once more 'round God's dazzling light.



Everybody up for a new church year?

Ralph W. Klein
Editor

The Starting Point of the Gospel: The Year of Mark[1]

Edgar Krentz
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

Mark is the most challenging Gospel for the preacher, because Mark does not fit the standard popular conception of a gospel. He does not write a biography of Jesus by either ancient or modern standards. He has no infancy narratives, and his account of John the Baptist is the most compressed of the four Gospels. This Gospel concludes without any resurrection appearances of Jesus. There is only one long sermon by Jesus, the eschatological address in chapter 13. An overview of lectionary series B reflects these gaps, since the readings in the Easter season come primarily from John, while the Christmas cycle uses both Luke and Matthew. An appendix comments briefly on the significance of John in the year of Mark.

Markan themes

A number of themes characterize Mark's Gospel:

—Faith in Jesus as the proclaimer of the kingdom of God defines discipleship. Without faith even the parables conceal. (Mk 4:10-12)

—Jesus' word and authority are revealed in his great "acts of power" (Mark's term for miracles). Such acts of power call for the response of faith, but do not create it (see Mk 8:11-13 and the refusal to do a sign; Mk 3:19b-35 on miracles with the aid of Beelzebub).

—Jesus' messiahship is hidden, even though the title of the book (Mk 1:1) uses the term: "The starting point of the good news of Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God." He is unrecognized, unconfessed, hidden, and eventually deserted by all. Even his disciples do not recognize him as "The Son of Man," reject his interpretation of messiahship as suffering, dying and rising, and desert him at the trial and crucifixion.

—The resurrection is Jesus' elevation as the Son of Man to the role of cosmic ruler and judge (13:26, 14:62). Therefore there is no room in Mark for resurrection appearances.

—The main role of disciples after the

[1] An earlier version of this paper was written for and copyrighted by Lexegete, a pericope study computer program. I thank Rev. David Buechler for permission to print it here.

resurrection is to confess the gospel in the face of persecution (Mk 8:34-38). To be a disciple is to share the path Jesus walked to Jerusalem and the cross (8:34-38).

Jesus in Mark: missing pieces

There is little glory in this Markan Jesus. Mark gives no genealogy (cf. Mt 1:2-17; Lk 3:23-38). Jesus has no pre-history, neither as the pre-existent one of John 1:1-18 or as the one whose birth is presented as the activity of the Spirit of God. He appears on the scene as a mature person who comes to John for baptism. Mark's Gospel may appear strangely deficient at first, when compared to Matthew and Luke.

One gets the same impression at the end of the Gospel. Mark ends enigmatically, "for they were afraid,"[2] at 16:8. The resurrection is announced, but the resurrected Jesus appears to no one. The lectionary supplements Mark in the Easter cycle because Mark's story ends with a "downer"—or, at least, it appears to. One cannot but wonder why Mark ends as it does. The recent revision of the NEB[3] makes clear that the "most ancient witnesses bring the book to a close" at the phrase, though they print the so-called "shorter ending" as an addition to verse 8 and the "longer ending" as Mark 16:9-20. The NRSV[4] makes the variation in the ancient manuscripts more clear, printing the shorter ending and the longer ending in brackets and giving the expansion of the longer ending in the Freer Manuscript in the notes.

There are at least five different conclusions to Mark in the manuscript tradition. Ancient Christians who knew Matthew, Luke, and John simply could not believe that Mark ended as it did in 16:8. They felt instinctively that there had to be resurrection appearances and provided them. The Armenian Gospels of Etchmiadzin (Tenth Century) have a scribe's note that the longer ending was written by the Presbyter Ariston, a note that may well contain accurate information.

> To be a disciple is to share the path Jesus walked to Jerusalem and the cross.

Mark's plot

The lectionary habituates us to reading or hearing individual pericopes. But Mark wrote a gospel, a narrative with a plot in which events are interrelated and move toward a goal. Recent scholarship uses literary criticism to uncover the unique plot of each gospel (and Acts).[5] The preacher

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[2] The Greek term is ambiguous. It would just as well be translated "they were filled with awe," i.e. with a recognition that a divine act had taken place and called forth the proper response from them.

[3] *The Revised English Bible with the Apocrypha* (Oxford: Oxford University Press; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), "The New Testament," 47-48.

[4] *The Holy Bible Containing the Old and New Testaments. New Revised Standard Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990) 830.

[5] David Rhoads and Donald Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), were the first to do this. They called attention to the plot, the rhetoric used (narrator, narrative patterns, etc.), settings in time and space, and the major characters. Other useful works are Jack Dean Kingsbury,

should read Mark as a whole to understand its message and interpret each section of his gospel in relation to the whole as he or she prepares to preach Sunday after Sunday.

Mark's plot is relatively simple. The Gospel falls into four unequal parts.[6]

1. Mark 1:1-13. Jesus' identity and inauguration.

2. Mark 1:14-8:30. Jesus' ministry in Galilee: proclamation of the kingdom of God in word and deed.

a. 1:14-3:6 Ministry in and around Capernaum and its synagogue.

b. 3:7-6:6 Ministry outside the synagogue, around the Sea of Galilee.

c. 6:7-8:30 Growing controversy; ministry in Tyre and Sidon; confession at Caesarea Philippi.

There are four major themes found in each of these sections: the call and commissioning of the disciples for proclamation; the (ambiguous) great deeds of Jesus that proclaim the kingdom of God to those with faith; the messianic secret about Jesus and the disciples' misunderstanding of him; developing opposition to Jesus by non-disciples. For example, Mark 1:18-22 presents the call of four disciples to become fishers of men; 1:19-45 presents a (typical ?) day of miracles; 2:1-3:6 is a series of controversy stories that culminate in the Pharisees and Herodians plotting how to destroy Jesus.

3. Mark 8:31-10:52. Death and discipleship. Transfiguration and the journey to Jerusalem. Dominated by predictions of the passion (8:31-33; 9:30-32; 10:32-34; 10:45) and teaching on discipleship (8:34-9:1; 9:33-50; 10:17-31, 35-45). It contains the last of Jesus' acts of power.

4. Mark 11:1-16:8. Jerusalem: judgment, death, and resurrection. In Mark Jerusalem is the location of Jesus' controversy with the religious authorities (the debates in the temple, Mk 11:15-19, 11:27–12:44) and his condemnation of the city (11:12-14, 20-25; 13:1-37), of Jesus' esoteric teaching about eschatology and gospel to the disciples, of his passion and death, and the resurrection. The two predictions about the Son of Man in 13:26 and 14:62 provide the interpretive key to Mark's understanding of the resurrection: Jesus went to the Ancient of Days as the enthroned Son of Man of Dan 7:13-14.

The end of the Gospel is in view from the beginning. Misunderstanding, opposition, death, and resurrection are the goal toward which all moves. And it determines both the presentation of Christ's ministry and the nature of discipleship.

Jesus, the central character

Jesus dominates the Gospel from beginning to end. He is not a great preacher in Mark. Rather, Mark regularly uses the verb "to teach" to describe Jesus' activity;[7] the

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The Christology of Mark's Gospel (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), and *Conflict in Mark: Jesus, Authorities, Disciples* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989) 31-58; Werner H. Kelber, *Mark's Story of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979) is a narrative interpretation of the gospel; Frank Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979) stimulated many scholars to use literary criticism.

[6] Robert Smith, "Wounded Lion: Mark 9:1 and Other Missing Pieces," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 11 (1984): 345, divides the gospel into three sections in an interesting table.

[7] The verb "teach" is used in 1:21, 22; 2:13; 4:1, 2; 5:2; 6:6, 30, 34; 7:7; 8:31; 9:31; 10:1; 11:17; 12:14, 35; 14:29. He is called a teacher in 4:38, 5:35, 9:17; 10:17, 20, 35;

crowds are "amazed at his teaching" (1:22),[8] not when he preached, but when he exorcized a demon merely by his word. Extended speech by Jesus is found only in Mark 3:23-30 (sin against the Holy Ghost), 4:3-32 (parables, together with their purpose), 7:6-23 (unwashed hands and defilement), 8:34-9:1 (cross and discipleship), 9:39-50 (radical discipleship), and the apocalyptic discourse (Mark 13). Jesus speaks often in lapidary "one-liners" in Mark, words that often end a narrative.

In the first half of the Gospel Jesus is presented as a miracle worker whose activity fascinates the crowds. Miracles are recounted in 1:21-28,29-31,40-45; 2:1-12; 3:1-6; 4:35-41; 5:1-20, 21-43; 6:1-5, 32-44, 45-52, 53, 56; 7:24-30, 31-37; 8:1-10, 22-26; 9:14-29; 10:46-51; 11:12-14, 20-26. The list reveals something of their function in Mark. Most miracles occur before the confession at Caesarea Philippi. Yet the people who see them do not come to faith. Indeed, the miracle in 9:14-29 shows the powerlessness of the disciples left behind at the transfiguration. Mark 8:22-26 (healing of a blind man at Bethsaida, omitted in the lectionary)[9] and Mark 10:46-51 (blind Bar Timaeus at Jericho) serve the same function: in the latter Jesus' miracle is a response to Bar Timaeus' faith. The only miracle Jesus does in Jerusalem is the cursing of the fig tree (11:12-24, 20-26), an enacted parable of judgment against Jerusalem.

Jesus is hidden in Mark.[10] He does not openly confess his messiahship and forbids exorcized demons (1:24-25, 34; 3:11-12), those cured by his deeds of power (5:43; 7:36; 8:26), and even his disciples (8:30; 9:9[11]) from publicly identifying or confessing him. The crowds and the disciples do not understand him (see below). It is only non-Jews who openly confess him: the demoniac of Gerasa, who, ordered to tell what the Lord had done, preached in the Decapolis (5:19-20), and the deaf and mute man of the Decapolis.[12] Mark regards the gentile world (Rome?) as *the* place for proclamation (Galilee, the Decapolis, and Tyre and Sidon represent that symbolically in Mark).

The second half of the Gospel is dominated by the Passion. Martin Kähler called Mark "a Passion story with an extensive introduction"—and his word is apt.[13] The Jerusalem ministry occupies chapters 11-16, that is, Mark devotes a larger percentage of his Gospel to Holy Week than Matthew or Luke. The first Passion Prediction in Mk

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12:14, 19, 32; 13:1; 14:14. His activity in the temple in Holy Week is described as teaching!

[8] Cf. 1:27; 4:2; 11:18; 12:38.

[9] The lectionary tends to omit difficult or embarrassing verses or passages (e.g., Mark 4:10-12 [purpose of parables is to prevent faith], 7:9-13, 17-20; 8:11-21, 22-26; 9:1 [disciples will not taste death before the Son of Man comes in power]; 11:12-14, 20-25 [cursing of the fig tree]; 13:32. Parallels in Matthew or Luke are use to some omitted passages (not listed here). See Smith, 334-38.

[10] See D. E. Nineham, *The Gospel of St. Mark*. The Pelican Gospel Commentaries (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1963) 31-32.

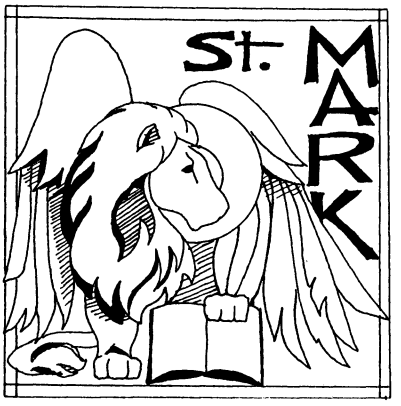
[11] Mark 9:9 is a key passage for understanding the Messianic Secret; the secret lasts only until "the Son of Man will rise from the dead." These "secret epiphanies" [M. Dibelius' phrase] are then to be proclaimed—as Mark himself is doing!

[12] These two stories raise interesting historical questions. The textual tradition of Mark 5:1 wavers between Gerasa (modern Jerash in Jordan), Gadara (modern Um Qeis in Jordan), and Gergesa (modern El Kursi on the slope east of the Sea of Galilee). John 7:31 contains an almost non-sensical itinerary for the trip to the Sea of Galilee. Check a good commentary.

[13] So Carl Braaten in Martin Kähler, *The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic Biblical Christ* (ed. and trans. with an introduction by Carl E. Braaten. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964) 24.

8:31 corresponds to Mk 1:14-16 in literary function. It introduces the motif of suffering and death as the way of the Son of Man.[14] Thus the passion predictions (8:31, 9:31; 10:32-34) and the extended passion narrative (11:1–15:47) shape the last half of the Gospel.

Mark 13:26 and 14:62 are key passages for understanding the death and resurrection of Jesus. Both use the language of the Old Testament. Mark 13:24-27 is the climax of the apocalyptic discourse to the four disciples on the Mount of Olives.[15] Sun and moon will lose their light, stars will be "thrown"[16] from the heaven, and "the powers in the heavens[17] will be shaken." Why? Because "then they will see the Son of Man going in clouds with great power and glory."[18] Mark uses the language of Dan 7:13-14, enthronement language, to describe Jesus' death and resurrection as the dethronement of hostile religious powers. Mark 13:24-17 would be a great text for Christ the King Sunday, if a Markan text were sought. In Mk 14:62 Jesus combines Dan 7:13-14 with language from Ps 110:1, "seated at the right hand of power." Psalm 110 is an enthronement psalm. Here too the



picture is not that of Jesus coming to earth, but *going* to the throne. The death and resurrection of the one who is "the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One" (the high priest's question in Mk 14:61) leads to his enthronement as Kosmokrator, Lord of the Universe.

Therefore there are no resurrection appearances in Mark, because the resurrected Jesus is enthroned in heaven at Mk 16:8. And that is the basis of the tremendous awe felt by the women at the tomb.

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[14] The title "Son of Man" occurs 13 times in Mark. Mark 2:10 and 2:28, the only two occurrences before 8:31, stress the present authority of the Son of Man. Three passages speak of the eschatological Son of Man: 8:38, 13:26, and 14:62. The other eight passages (8:31, 9:9, 12, 31; 10:33, 45; 14:21, 41), all in the second half of the book, talk of his death and resurrection.

[15] The Mount of Olives is the place where the Lord (the *kyrios*) will come and stand "on that day" over against Jerusalem; and then the Mount of Olives will be split in two, half going to fill the Dead Sea and half going to fill in the valleys of Judea (Zech 14:3-5). Jesus refers to this expectation in Mark 11:23 when he speaks of the mountain being thrown into the sea!

[16] "Fall" is often used as the passive of the verb "throw" in ancient Greek.

[17] Greeks and Romans thought of the sun, moon, and the five planets they could see as the governors who controlled human destiny on earth. They were called "the elemental spirits of the universe" (cf. Gal 4:3; Col 2:8). The *Poimandres,* the first tract in the Corpus Hermeticum, clearly reflects this cosmology.

[18] The word *erchomai* in Greek can mean either "come" or "go." The word in Mark is an application of Dan 7:13-14, where the movement is to the throne of the Ancient of Days, hence to heaven. The terms power and glory form a word play over against the heavenly forces in vv. 24-25.

Other characters in Mark

1. There are other characters in Mark, even some *individual actors*. Mark gives the names of a few: Jairus and Bar Timaeos. Others appear without names: the demoniac of Gerasa, the Syrophoenician woman, and others who are healed. They come to Jesus in faith (Mk 2:5; 5:34; 10:52) and ask him for help. Thus they are exemplars of Christians throughout the ages.[19] Almost without exception they are significant as recipients of Jesus' saving actions. (The young man who fled naked in the Garden of Gethsemane remains a great enigma [14:51-52]. He appears unmotivated and unused in terms of literary analysis. Mark does nothing with him!)

2. *The crowds* are faceless in Mark. On the one hand they are fascinated by Jesus; they assemble in such large numbers that it is not possible to enter Jesus' house (Mk 2:2). They are amazed at his teaching and recognize his authority (1:22, 27). They crowd around him at the Sea of Galilee in such numbers that he has to use a boat as his speaking platform (4:1; cf. 3:7-8, 20). They track him down on the other side of the Sea of Galilee, forgetful of food and life's necessities (6:32-33; cf. 8:1). Twice he feeds them in great numbers.

And yet, finally, they see in him only a wonder-worker, a "divine man"[20] whose power is available for their use. But Jesus passes severe judgment on them. Relationship to Jesus is determined by doing the will of God, not by blood (Mk 3:33-35). Mark 4:10-12, 21-25 (cf. 33-34) are the key passages. Parabolic speech is for the crowds; clear, direct speech and interpretation of the parables is reserved for the disciples (4:10-12). Disciples know the mystery of the kingdom of God because they recognize in Jesus God's agent of the kingdom. The crowds do not; therefore they hear parables from Jesus to prevent their understanding "lest they turn back and it be forgiven them" (Jesus identifies his proclamation with the negative prophetic witness of Isa 6:9-10). That carries out the principle enunciated in Mk 4:25: The one who has, gets more. The one who has not, loses even what he has. Harsh words. (One cannot help but apply this to the mechanical reading of the Scriptures today!)

Ultimately the crowds in the Palm Sunday procession into Jerusalem acclaim him as the bringer of the kingdom of their father David (Mk 11:9-10) in the words of Ps 118:25-26; the chief priests, scribes and elders hesitate in arresting Jesus out of fear of the crowd (Mk 12:12), which heard him with pleasure (12:37). Yet this crowd, stirred up by the leaders, asks for the release of Bar Abbas and calls for Jesus' crucifixion (15:11-12).

3. *The religious authorities and the Pharisees* are his direct opponents.[21] Their opposition begins early (Mk 2:1-3:6). They seek to trap him in blasphemy (scribes in 2:6-7), accuse him of impious table fellowship with sinners and tax farmers[22] (the scribes of the Pharisees, 2:16), of allowing his disciples not to observe proper fasting (the disciples of John and the Pharisees, 2:18), of permitting them to break the Sabbath laws (the Pharisees, 2:24), and breaking it himself (3:2). This opening collection of controversy stories makes clear that they

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[19] See Rhoads-Michie, 129-34.

[20] The term is used of miracle healers and teachers regarded as unusual in their life and death in the Greco-Roman world.

[21] See Rhoads-Michie, 117-22; Kingsbury, *Conflict*, 63-88.

[22] Since meals began with a *berachah*, a blessing of God, they were religious acts. To bless God with sinners was false worship! There was also the danger that the food might not be prepared in a kosher manner.

contest his authority and he claims it (to forgive sins, 2:10; to interpret Sabbath law, 2:27-28, 3:4). His authoritative actions and words lead to their plotting to destroy him (3:6).

When the scribes from Jerusalem question the source of his power ("Beelzeboul controls him" and "He throws out demons by the power of the ruler of the demons," 3:22), he responds in parables that claim that rejection of him blasphemes God' Spirit (3:23-30). When the Pharisees sought a "sign from heaven" as validation of his authority, he refused (8:11-13) and warned his disciples against the "yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod" (8:15).

Jesus predicts the death-bringing opposition of the religious leaders (the elders, leading priests, and scribes, 8:31; 10:33-34). And that is what happens in Jerusalem (11:18; 12:12). They question his authority and ultimately work his death. The chief priests mock him as he hangs on the cross with the demand for self-deliverance ("He saved others, himself he has no power to save," 15:31). Their last word to him challenge him to demonstrate his divine power. They represent religion that has lost its proper bearings and priorities.

4. *The disciples* respond to Jesus' call, "Follow me" (Mk 1:18-22), a call that comes without prior teaching or proclamation. The authority of Jesus breaks in on their daily existence. They are to be "fishers of people" (1:17), all twelve of them whom he named "apostles" and appointed to be with him (3:13-14). Jesus both calls and equips them "to preach[23] and to have authority to cast out demons" (3:14-15). The style of proclamation is clarified in Mk 6:7-13.

As he answers their request for an explanation of the parable of the sower (4:10-12), Jesus points out that they were given [to know] the mystery of the kingdom of God (by God is implied). Jesus clarifies the parables' significance to them. They see his great acts of power. They have unique experiences: they are present as he stills the tempest (4:35-31) and asks where there faith is. They grow afraid and ask who he is. And with Peter as spokesman, they identify him as the "Anointed King" (the "Christ," 8:29).

Relationship to Jesus is determined by doing the will of God, not by blood.

And yet Mark reports that they do not understand their own confession. Mark 6:51-52 states bluntly that Jesus' walking on the water made them witless,[24] "for they did not have understanding on the basis of the loaves [my translation of the Greek preposition *epi*]. Rather their hearts were hardened." The language of Isa 6:10 (cf. Mk 4:12), first used of those who do not become disciples, now is applied to the twelve. The judgment is reinforced in Mk 8:14-21. They do not understand his warning against the yeast of the Pharisees and Herod, thinking it is a reprimand because they forgot to buy bread. "Do you not catch on yet and can't you put things together yet? Do you have your heart

[23] Mark uses here the proper term for missionary proclamation in primitive Christianity.

[24] "And they were very much outside themselves," Mk 6:51. The verb implies losing one's mind because a greater power takes over (cf. the English "ecstasy").

hardened like stone?" This is Jesus' last comment to the twelve before the confession at Caesarea Philippi.

The disciples are mystified at first (Mk 1:18-8:21), then reject Jesus' interpretation of messiahship in the first passion prediction. Peter is the spokesperson for this, as he was in the confession. He began to rebuke Jesus (Mk 8:32; the phrase implies an unsuccessful attempt), only to be bluntly told that his rejection of Jesus' prediction was satanic, anti-God, and this-worldly. The voice from the cloud at the transfiguration, "Listen to him" (9:7), is divine ratification of Jesus' prediction.[25] Still the disciples discuss what resurrection might be (9:10). The second passion prediction results in ignorance (9:32), while the third (10:33-34) is followed by an uninformed request for status in the kingdom of God (10:37-38). Status depends on taking the role of slave, i.e. losing one's life (10:44-45).

The disciples all finally desert him at the arrest in Gethsemane (14:50). One even betrays him (14:10-11, 18-21, 44-45). Peter's initial bravado (14:27-31) turns into distant following (14:54) and threefold denial that he belongs to Jesus' followers (14:66-72). Jesus dies deserted by his followers, alone, with Psalm 22:1 his only word from the cross (15:33-34). No one supports him in his dying hours. Only the Gentile centurion in charge of the crucifixion detail interprets the true significance of his death: "Really, this fellow was God's Son" (15:39).

Only women disciples[26] observe the crucifixion from far away (15:41), prepare for proper burial procedures in the face of the hurried burial by Joseph of Arimathea (not one of the twelve! Mark 15:43-47), and so become the recipients of the announcement of the resurrection and the first proclaimers of the Easter gospel (16:1-8). "Go and tell his disciples and Peter" (16:7) indicates that the disciples, like the first readers of Mark's Gospel, understood the ultimate significance of Jesus' death on the basis of proclamation, not resurrection appearances. The long period of companionship with Jesus in his ministry led to misunderstanding and desertion; the resurrection proclamation led to understanding, courage, and witness.

Mark as gospel[27]

Mark titles his book "The Starting Point of the Good News of Jesus Christ, God's Son." The reader (preacher) must ask in what sense Mark is the "Starting Point of the Gospel"? The Greek word *arche* means "starting point, point of departure." Mark wrote his gospel about 68-70 C.E., when Rome was clearly winning the war against the Jews in Palestine. Titus had put the circumvallation around Jerusalem; he could easily starve the city into subjection. Christians in Rome believed in a Savior and King hailing from Palestine, but they were tempted to mute their public witness because of the war. Mark writes to encourage confession in the face of persecution. Mark uses the term *euaggelion* (good news, gospel) more than any other gospel.[28] His usage

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[25] Mark 9:2 gives the only *precise* dating in the Gospel outside of the passion account. "After six days" ties the narrative to what precedes, i.e Mk 8:27–9:1. The disciples are to understand that both Jesus' prediction of his death and his call for disciples to pick up their cross are ratified by the voice from the cloud.

[26] The use of the verb "follow" (Mk 15:41; cf. 1:18; 8:34) indicates disciple status.

[27] See James L. Bailey, "Perspectives on the Gospel of Mark," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 12 (1985) 15-17.

[28] Mark 1:1, 14, 15; 8:35; 10:29; 13:10; 14:9 (16:13, in spurious longer ending). Matthew uses the noun gospel four times

is a key to his over-arching message to his original readers. "To all the gentiles the gospel must first be preached," Mk 13:10; see also Mark 14:9: "where ever the gospel is proclaimed into all the cosmos"). Persecution at the hands of gentile rulers is the occasion for witness to them on behalf of Jesus (13:9). Betrayal and hatred are the occasion for eschatological fidelity (13:13). The disciple is called to leave household, family and fields "for my sake and for the sake of the gospel" (10:29).[29] The disciple who does that "will get them back a hundred times over in the present age *with persecutions* and in the coming age eternal life" (10:30). Persecution calls for fearless, committed proclamation of the gospel.

Mark 8:34–9:1 makes the same point emphatically. To be a disciple means to deny self, to pick up the cross and follow Jesus. The first passion prediction models disciple living! Galileans knew what carrying a cross meant. Varus in 6 C.E. crucified thousands of Galileans for rebellion against Rome, many very close to Nazareth. Verse 35 makes clear what is meant: losing life, dying, for "my sake and for the gospel." Once again the synoptic parallels do not have the term "gospel." Mark 8:38, the first of the three apocalyptic Son of Man sayings, stresses the significance of such witnessing in the form of a negative statement of holy law: "Whoever is ashamed of me and my words (known from Mark's Gospel), the Son of Man will be ashamed of him, when he comes in his glory." "To be ashamed" is the antonym of "to confess." If you say nothing in a trial before kings and rulers, the Son of Man will not witness for you at the heavenly trial, i.e. he will not serve as defending attorney and character witness.[30]

Mark calls his readers to complete the gospel he wrote by living out their discipleship in fearless witness to Christ in the face of persecution and death. His readers have in his gospel all that the original apostles had, the Easter proclamation which interpreted Jesus' life, message, death, and resurrection. Mark's message for the church in the post-modern world is the same, though persecution is (at least in the western world) not now a threat.

Mark calls his readers to complete the gospel he wrote by living out their discipleship in fearless witness to Christ in the face of persecution and death.

What would a church that took seriously Mark's Gospel look like?[31] People

(4:23//Mk 1:14; 9:35; 24:14//Mk 13:10; 26:13//14:9); each is borrowed from Mark. Luke never uses the noun, but has the verb "to preach good news" 10 times (plus 15 times in Acts). John never uses the noun or the verb. Mark uses the noun gospel more often than any writer except Paul!

[29] The parallels in Matthew and Luke do not use the term gospel.

[30] In Acts 7:56 Stephen sees Jesus standing (i.e. testifying for him) at the heavenly trial which balances the mob action condemning him in Jerusalem.

[31] I am indebted to my colleague David Rhoads for much of this paragraph; see *The Challenge of Diversity: The Witness of Paul and the Gospels* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996).

would lose their concern for status, for positions of power in the church, for a self-centered life. They would radically revise their commitments and priorities. Success would be redefined in terms of suffering and service. The life of the church would be expressed first and foremost not in cult and sacrament, but in risking all for the good news. They would have little concern for hierarchy, much concern for mission. Proclamation would identify the demons of modern life and exorcize them. It would recognize the demonic expressed in sickness, poverty, exclusion from society by reason of social status, and the like. Proclamation would distinguish between religiosity and faithful living. Confession would be active, not mere mouthing of past formulations, as good and as useful as they are. Christians would actually believe that quite ordinary people can live like that. That is good news—and worth preaching in the decade leading to the end of the second millennium after Jesus' death and resurrection.

Appendix: Non-Markan texts in Year B

An overview of lectionary series B shows that the festival half of the lectionary is structured largely in terms of Jesus' life. Twenty-two of the fifty-two Sundays in Lectionary B use Gospels that do not come from Mark: Advent 3-4, Christmas 1-2, Epiphany 3, Lent 3-5, Easter 2-7, Pentecost Day, Pentecost 1, 10-14, Christ the King. Nor do Christmas Day, the Name Day of Jesus (January 1), Epiphany, Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, or Ascension Day.

Series B is fundamentally a combination of Mark and John, as the list of Gospels in Series B shows. The Advent-Christmas season uses Gospels from Luke and John, while Matthew provides the texts for Epiphany and Ash Wednesday. John provides many other lessons: Epiphany 2, Lent 3-5, Easter 2, 4-7, Pentecost Day, Pentecost 1, 10-14, and Christ the King. Each of these gospels has its own themes and stresses differing aspects of Jesus and his significance.

That provides a challenge, because John is in many respects very different from Mark in its Christology, soteriology, and eschatology. John stresses that Jesus' life revealed his glory (incarnation: Jn 1:14, Christmas Gospel; miracles: Jn 2:11, frequent motif in John). In the Gospel for Epiphany 2 (Jn 1:43-51) Nathaniel identifies Jesus as rabbi, Son of God, and King of Israel (v. 49).[32] Jesus responds by claiming that he will see the Son of Man as the Jacob's ladder by which angels make contact between heaven and earth (v. 51). Jesus' identity is an open secret from the beginning and he openly confesses himself to be God's Son from Heaven, who reveals the Father to the world. Knowing Jesus in John makes the difference between salvation and judgment.

Jesus' passion and death (Good Friday Gospel) is his glorification in John (cf. John 17:1). His entry into Jerusalem in John is the entry of a king (cf. Jn 12:13, "the King of Israel"), with the inhabitants of Jerusalem coming out to meet him with palm branches (contrary to the Synoptic interpretation). His last meal with his disciples is a symposium at which he both teaches service

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[32] In John 1, John the Baptist calls Jesus "the Lamb of God that carries away the sin of the world," a reference to the Scapegoat of Yom Kippur or the sin offering (vv. 29, 36) and the one "on whom the Spirit of God comes down" (v. 32). Andrew identifies him as the "Messiah, which is translated the Anointed" (v. 41) and that is followed by the revelation of the significance of Peter's name.

(footwashing) and interprets his death as the necessary prelude to the arrival of the Paraclete (John 13-16) His power is shown in his great "I am" in response to those who come to arrest him (Jn 18:6, 8; compare earlier uses of the phrase in John). There is no condemnation by the Sanhedrin in John, only a brief appearance before Annas (18:13, 19-24) and the trial before Pilate (18:29–19:16), who identifies him as "King of the Jews" and refuses to change the identification (19:19-22). No one mocks Jesus on the cross in John, for his death is his glorification and victory. J. S. Bach correctly interprets Jesus' death in his *Passion According to St. John* when he has the contralto sing the aria, "Es ist vollbracht," when Jesus dies. Bach puts into her mouth, to accompaniment of trumpets in E, the jubilant shout, "The Lion of Judah triumphs now!" Jesus' death is his triumphant return to his place of origin, heaven (cf. Jn 3:13; 16:28); his death is in no sense a defeat. Jesus on the cross is the Jacob's ladder between heaven and earth. In short John gives a unique and powerful interpretation of Jesus. Preachers should be careful to preach John's great theology of Jesus at Christmas, in Lent and Easter, and in the eight Sundays in Pentecost for which Johannine Gospels are appointed.

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Two video resources

The Standard Video Bible Study—New Testament Series: *The Gospel of Mark.* The RSV Project, 460 Woodycrest Avenue, Nashville, TN 37210. Tel: (615) 254-7759. $49.95. An eight-session videotape guide, with leader's guide and a sample student book. Includes material from interviews with three Markan scholars: Dr. John Donahue, S.J., Dr. Fernando Segovia, and Dr. Herman Waetjen. A project of the Division of Education and Ministry of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.

Rhoads, David. *The Gospel of Mark.* Columbus, OH: Select, 1984. Two tapes, $110.00. A six session video course with Study Guide by a specialist in narrative criticism. Select's address is: 2199 East Main Street, Columbus, OHIO 43209. Tel.: (614) 235-4136.

With Wide Open Arms: The Passion According to Mark

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The Passion account in the Gospel of Mark presents the crucified Jesus with wide-open arms welcoming all into a new community.[1] In contrast to the institutional structure centered in the Jerusalem temple, the new inclusive community is based on relationships and has no set boundaries. This is the "new covenant in his blood," brought about when the Son of Man showed what it is to serve and gave himself as a ransom for many.

Two stories about women

One of the distinctive characteristics of the Markan structure is that the Passion account (chapters 14-15) is bracketed by two stories about women: one concerning the woman who anoints Jesus while dining in Bethany (14:3-9) and the other about the women who have stood at a distance at the cross and who have watched closely the burial of Jesus (15:40-47 and 16:1-8). Just as Mark has bracketed the middle section of the Gospel (chapters 8-10) with two stories about blind men (8:22-26 and 10:46-52) to highlight the continued blindness of the disciples, so here two episodes about women provide an interpretive device to help the reader understand the meaning of the passion. Elsewhere in Mark, the interpretive device of bracketing or sandwiching episodes together has been quite common, such as in the case of the stories of Jairus' daughter and the woman with a hemorrhage (5:21-43).[2] So it is not unexpected in the larger scope of the passion account.

It is clear that these two distinct episodes about women are in fact related to one another. The first woman, we are told, anoints Jesus' body beforehand for burial (14:8) because the empty tomb will thwart

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[1] For a general introduction to Mark's Passion account see Werner H. Kelber, ed., *The Passion in Mark: Studies on Mark 14-16* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976) and, more recently, Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Beginning of the Gospel: Probings of Mark in Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 92-118.

[2] David Rhoads and Donald Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 51.

the purposes of the latter women on the sunrise visit (16:1). These latter women will leave the tomb terrified and amazed, but most of all speechless (16:8), yet the reader has already been clued in that ultimately their mission will be accomplished and the gospel will be made known throughout the world, along with details about what they have done (14:9). In both cases, the women come unexpectedly out of nowhere. In a world where rabbis were discouraged from wasting time talking to women, where the testimony of women was not acceptable in court, and where men daily thanked God they were not born women, their prominence in the story of Jesus' passion is most unexpected. As many have noted, were Mark inventing a story to give credibility to the ministry of Jesus and the disciples, his choice of characters here is most surprising. Yet this is not a close-fisted world that Mark is talking about. It is one of new wine and new garments (2:21-22) and new teaching (1:27). It is a new community with Jesus' arms wide open, with two undeserving thieves positioned alongside on the right and left (15:27), and a number of women symbolically standing beyond that at a distance (15:40).

Although the women seem to come out of nowhere, Mark tells the reader that they were there all along, that they had in fact followed Jesus already back in Galilee where they customarily ministered to him (15:41). It is true that Mark had not mentioned them in the early part of the Gospel, the Galilean section (chapters 1-8), or even in the journey to Jerusalem (chapters 8-10). Yet they fit well in the new community where Jesus pointed to those around him—both brothers and *sisters*—as those doing the will of God (3:35); where Peter's mother-in-law (1:29-31), the daughter of Jairus (5:35-43), the woman with a hemorrhage (5:25-34), and the Syrophoenician woman (7:24-30) were not only recipients of healing, but also examples of courage and faith; and where a poor widow offering two coins was held up as the example of discipleship and self-denial (12:41-44).

In Mark's story of the passion, these women are not merely bystanders or insignificant characters. They play critical parts. At the Bethany dinner, the woman dinner guest functions much like the biblical prophets Samuel and Nathan in anointing Jesus for his servant kingship. At the tomb, the surprised visitors are entrusted by the heavenly messenger to "Go and Tell," to be witnesses to the resurrection. In short, these women are called upon to carry out prophetic and apostolic roles.

Outside/inside

It is significant that these two episodes about women take place outside the city of Jerusalem. As many have noted,[3] the theme of inside/outside is central to the first part of the Gospel, and it is important to pay attention to designations of public and private settings. Thus it is important to note that Bethany is located on the slopes of the Mount of Olives to the east of Jerusalem, and Golgotha and the tomb are located to the north of the city. Nevertheless, critical events of the passion take place within the city of Jerusalem itself. In the passion account, Jerusalem symbolizes the place of insiders in the old scheme of things. Previously, scribes had come down from Jerusalem to confront Jesus (3:22) and subsequently began their plotting to put him to death. Although the early ministry of Jesus

[3] Werner Kelber, *Mark's Story of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979); Donald H. Juel, *A Master of Surprise: Mark Interpreted* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 50-63; and Rhoads and Michie, 67.



is restricted to places in Galilee and surrounding areas (chapters 1-8), the final six chapters (11-16) center around a Jerusalem setting. The central section of the Gospel (chapters 8-10) takes place on the way to Jerusalem, and the three passion predictions underscore the necessity of Jesus' confrontation with the establishment in Jerusalem (8:31; 9:31; 10:33).

However, Jerusalem is not Jesus' place. He is at home with those on the outside. Thus it is significant that Mark calls attention to the detail that Jesus stays in Bethany outside Jerusalem so that his daily entrance must be noted:

"Then he *entered* Jerusalem and *went into* the temple" (11:11a).

"Then he *entered* Jerusalem and he *entered* the temple" (11:15).

"Again they *came to* Jerusalem. As he was walking *in* the temple..." (11:27).

This repetition heightens Jesus' encounters with insiders which lead to confrontation and plotting towards his death. Likewise Mark takes care to note each day Jesus' withdrawal from the city:

"When he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he *went out* to Bethany with the twelve" (11:11b).

"And when evening came, Jesus and his disciples *went out* of the city" (11:19).

"As he *came out* of the temple" (13:1).

It is true that the last supper is eaten inside Jerusalem, perhaps simply in compliance with Passover regulations. Yet Jesus quickly retreats to his own turf at Gethsemane: "When they had sung the hymn, they *went out* to the Mount of Olives" (14:26). It is there that the arrest takes place—the one time Jerusalem insiders had crossed over in his direction. Jesus makes that point quite clear when he addresses those coming to arrest him, "Have you *come out* with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit? Day after day I was with you *in* the temple" (14:48-49).

In contrast to women who continue to follow and watch from a distance, the twelve are depicted as all failing in their roles. "All of them deserted him and fled" (14:50). Jesus in fact had announced their failure in advance. It is difficult to know how much to make of the fact that the prediction of the betrayal takes place within Jerusalem at the final meal (14:18-21), while predictions about Peter's denial (14:30-31) and the desertion by the rest (14:27) occur outside Jerusalem. For Judas, it does seem to signal that he had now gone over to be with the insiders in their plot against Jesus. Earlier that movement toward the inside had been signaled with the bracketing of the episode of the anointing (14:3-9) within the episode of the high priests' plot (14:1-2; 10-12). This emphasizes the contrast of the activity inside Jerusalem with that outside in Bethany. In response to the events at the Bethany meal, Judas has moved to be among the insiders.

Earlier in the Gospel, these same insiders had accused Jesus of eating with tax collectors and sinners (2:15-17). So at Bethany it is appropriate that he dines at the house of Simon the leper on the outside.

Earlier in the Gospel, these same insiders had chastised Jesus for contact with the unclean: unclean spirits, lepers, and the woman with a hemorrhage. So at the end of the passion it is fitting that Jesus is laid to his final rest outside the city among dead, the ritually unclean.

An end to boundaries

A central theme of Jesus' ministry in Mark is the crossing of boundaries so that Jesus is found most often in the early chapters of Mark on the margins of society, encountering and ministering to those characterized as outsiders. Note also the frequent reference to sinners and the ritually unclean. Jesus recruits a new band of followers, who are frequently depicted gathering together in private in a house for further instruction, beyond that of the crowds outside. The irony is that those doing the will of God find themselves sitting around Jesus on the inside while traditional insiders, such as family and religious authorities, find themselves on the outside (3:31-35). As the success of Jesus grows, these traditional insiders are depicted as "going out" to conspire against Jesus (3:6; 12:12).

The stark reality of Mark is that Jesus dies all alone. If being on the inside means being close to Jesus, then the twelve have all deserted Jesus, and the women are standing at a distance and silent. This is stressed even more in the story of Peter's denial. It takes place *outside* in the courtyard of the high priests' house (14:53-54, 66-72) while *inside* Jesus offers the confession that he is the Messiah the Son of the Blessed One (14:55-65). If that were not enough, Peter moves even further from Jesus—to the outer courtyard—for the final denial (15:68). Except for the overriding promise of Jesus that after he is raised he will go before them to Galilee and there he will see them (14:28), we last see Peter on the outside.

The final surprise of Mark's Gospel is not that the categories of inside and outside have been reversed; but that they have been abolished! Thus the tearing of the temple veil (15:38) had been presaged by the tearing open of the heavens at Jesus' baptism (1:10). Both are boundaries of the old order.[4] This is made clear in the central section of the Gospel when the disciples mistakenly try to draw their own new boundaries. It occurs in their claims for greatness (9:33-37) and in their requests for hierarchical seats (10:35-45). It is arrogantly displayed when they try to exclude those bringing young children for Jesus to bless (10:13-15). It is presented in its clearest form, however, when the disciple John castigates one who casts out demons in Jesus' name without following them (9:38). One might expect the traditional insider/outsider adage: "Whoever is not for us is against us." Instead Jesus offers a reversal of old order ways of thinking and offers a wide welcome with outstretched hands, "Whoever is not against us is for us" (9:40). Likewise this new reality without boundaries is underscored in the words of Jesus blessing the person who offers a cold drink to one bearing the name of Christ, regardless of their own confession or attitude (9:41). Therefore it should not escape notice that near the end of the passion, even one of the enemy soldiers runs to offer Jesus a drink (15:36) and, shortly thereafter, the Roman centurion puts forward his confession: "Truly this man was God's Son!" (15:39)

Perhaps it is the story of Simon, an outsider from far off Cyrene, that demonstrates best this new reality. He is described as one "who was coming *in* from the country (15:21). He had come presumably as

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[4] Juel, 39-41.

part of a religious pilgrimage to be closer to God in the midst of the holy city of Jerusalem during this most holy Passover festival. Ironically, Mark would suggest that he never did quite reach his goal. He is described only in the process of *coming in*. Yet in the new reality, that was sufficient. Jesus had *come out* to him. Simon's story ends by noting his association with Jesus in carrying the cross and by the naming of his sons, Alexander and Rufus, apparently because they are known among early Christians. Perhaps the same could be implied for others named and remembered such as Barabbas as well as those unnamed such as the thieves crucified to the right and to the left—no longer on the outside.

It is in the first and last episodes of the passion that the theme of inclusion is underscored. What the anointing woman has done will be told in remembrance of her "wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world" (14:9). The irony, of course, is that her name is never given. Yet in a Gospel where women have not been mentioned by name, the death of Jesus brings surprises. The women at the tomb are named, not once or even twice, but three times (15:40; 15:47; 16:1). They will indeed be remembered.

At the same time these stories are not merely about women. They are reminders of the all-inclusive nature of the new reality. Thus in the first episode, the name of Simon the leper stands out. Undoubtedly a recipient of Jesus' healing activity, it is a reminder that Jesus' early ministry crossed boundaries to all classes of people including the true outcasts of the day declared unclean by Levitical law. In the final episode, along with the names Mary the mother of James and Joses, Mary Magdalene, and Salome, is the name of Joseph of Arimathea—characterized as insider of the old establishment—who gives his own tomb for Jesus' burial. That Joseph was "a respected member of the Council" (15:43) cannot go unnoticed.

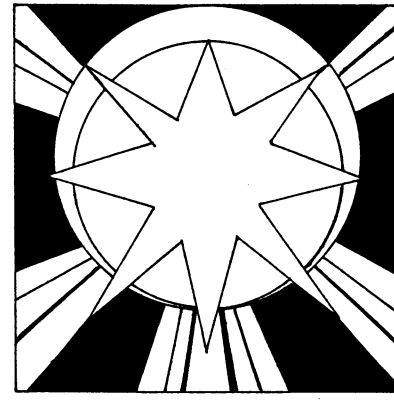
Throughout the Gospel, it has been the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem that have been portrayed as opponents of Jesus. They are the ones who from the beginning were active in plotting Jesus' death (3:6; 11:18; 12:12; 14:1). Likewise in the three passion predictions, the elders, chief priests, and scribes are designated as involved in the rejection and suffering of Jesus (8:31; 9:31; 10:33). However, a progression takes place so that in the final prediction, the Gentiles are added to the list. Thus at the end of the passion, it is the Gentile Pilate who is in control and a Jewish Council member who takes the side of Jesus.

Joseph of Arimathea is described as one of the Jerusalem insiders of the old order, but he does not end up on the outside. Jesus' Jerusalem ministry crossed boundaries in both directions; or more precisely, the new reality breaks open old boundaries and offers wide open arms for all in a new community.

Epiphany as a Cosmic Festival

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All the major festivals of the church year have universal dimensions. One of the Gospels for Christmas (John 1:1-14) proclaims that the one through whom all things were made has become flesh, and the psalms (96, 97, and 98) sing of God's kingship over all the world. The readings for the Easter Vigil begin with the creation of the universe (Genesis 1-3) and end with the call of the Song of the Three Young Men: "All you works of the Lord, bless the Lord" (*Lutheran Book of Worship* Canticle #18). And the old Introit for Pentecost, from the Book of Wisdom (1:7), announces that "The Spirit of the Lord filleth the world" (*Service Book & Hymnal*, p. 93).



A rich variety of cosmic themes is also found for the Epiphany. We will note here several ways in which exploration of these themes might be helpful in parish ministry. Because Epiphany usually does not fall on a Sunday, its observance is often neglected, and new worship themes for the festival may help to build interest in it. There are some possibilities also for Sunday School classes, which may be in need of a fresh start after Christmas. And at any time of the year the gospel's cosmic dimension should balance the sometimes excessive emphasis on the "for me" aspect of the Lutheran tradition and the often excessive individualism of American Christianity. We begin by considering some important aspects of the lectionary readings for Epiphany.

The texts

The texts for Epiphany in the *LBW* set the tone for the festival. The primary one is the Gospel, Mt 2:1-12, in which the magi are led by a star to the infant Jesus.[1] Two themes here are pertinent to our topic, the star as a cosmic sign and the Gentile magi. The first will be discussed at more length in the next sections. The coming of Gentiles to the newborn King of the Jews means that this child will be the savior (Mt 1:21) not only of the Jewish people but of all the nations of the world.

That is a hope to which many parts of the Old Testament already pointed. A number of such passages are found in Isaiah 40-66, and the first lesson for this festival, Isa 60:1-6, is one of the more dramatic of these. Israel will see all the people of the world coming to worship, bringing the abundance of the world. Even non-human animals will come, "the young camels of Midian and Ephah" (v. 6). (In fact, the camels of the magi which are obligatory for manger scenes and Christmas cards are found only here, not in the Epiphany Gospel.) There is some theological value to the old legends about the animals being able to speak on Christmas Eve, for the child who is born is the one in whom "all things" are to be gathered (Eph 1:20).

The psalm for the day, Psalm 72, portrays the rule of the Messiah, the descendant of David, as a universal one of justice and abundance. The tradition embodied in the superscription of this psalm, "Of Solomon," connects it with the splendors of David's immediate successor. However, the messianic reign is not simply a matter of power and splendor, but also of justice for those who are often neglected in conventional empires.

> For he delivers the needy
> when they call,
> the poor and those who have no helper.
> He has pity on the weak and the needy,
> and saves the lives of the needy.
> From oppression and violence
> he redeems their life;
> and precious is their blood in his sight.
> —Ps 72:12-14

The preceding texts, then, speak of the rule of God and of his Messiah over the whole earth and all its peoples. But that is not the end of the story, for the second lesson, Eph 3:2-12, points toward a manifestation of God which is cosmic in the fullest modern sense of the word. The entire universe finds its fulfillment in the Incarnation.[2] This reading emphasizes that the Gentiles have become members of God's

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[1] For detailed treatment of this and other texts dealing with the birth and youth of Jesus see Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*, New Updated Edition (New York: Doubleday, 1993).

[2] George L. Murphy, "The Incarnation as a Theanthropic Principle," *Word & World* XIII, 256, 1993.

people (vv. 6-8), and then goes on to say that God's further purpose is "that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places" (v. 10). Certainly the language of heavenly "rulers and authorities" (RSV "principalities and powers") is mythological, and needs to be handled with some care. But there may be here a hint that Christians should have more theological interest in space exploration than they have had in the past, and that interstellar mission work may eventually be on the church's agenda.

An adequate presentation of the cosmic dimensions of the gospel must speak about God's activity in the real world.

The astrologers

There are many ways of looking at the universe, and many different cosmologies. Not all of them are right. Modern science does not give us an infallible account of the world, but the scientific approach is consistent with belief in the orderliness of creation (Isa 45:18), and has had a great deal of success in describing and predicting natural processes. An adequate presentation of the cosmic dimensions of the gospel must take this scientific description of the universe seriously. It must speak about God's activity in the real world, not in some world of magic or an antiquated cosmological model.

With that warning in mind, we may be brought up short by the first verse of the gospel for Epiphany, Mt 2:1-12, where *magoi* from the East come to Jerusalem in search of the newborn king. The King James translation, retained in RSV and NRSV, is "wise men." But NEB and REB (as well as NRSV margin) introduce a perhaps disturbing note, rendering *magoi* as "astrologers."

Orthodox Judaism and Christianity have always taken a dim view of astrology. Even though attempts have been made to eliminate its religious features, astrology still retains its ancient associations with worship of "the host of heaven" (e.g., Deut 4:19, 17:3). And astrology is bad science: it just doesn't *work*.[3] Is it not then something of an embarrassment for the nations to be led to the Messiah by a sign in the heavens?

It is important to remember that scientific understanding of the world develops over the course of time. In the ancient world, there was no clear-cut distinction between what we today call astronomy and astrology. Belief in astrology among educated Europeans lasted into the beginning of the scientific revolution. Melanchthon, for example, put considerable stock in astrology, for which Luther criticized him several times.[4]

The use of astrology may be an example of the divine condescension which is seen most fully in the Incarnation: God is

[3] For an introductory critique of astrology by an astronomer and Roman Catholic priest see Kenneth J. Delano, *Astrology: Fact or Fiction?* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1973). See also George O. Abell, *Exploration of the Universe,* 3rd ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1975), 29-34.

[4] For criticisms of astrology in Luther's *Table Talk* see *Luther's Works* 54 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967): 172-73, 219-20, 458-59.

willing to use even such mistaken human ideas in order to bring salvation. But the gospel account can also be understood, not as a story of the success of astrology but of its submission to the true ruler of the universe, as Ignatius of Antioch said:

> How, then, was he manifested to the world? A star shone forth in heaven above all the other stars, the light of which was inexpressible, while its novelty struck men with astonishment. And all the rest of the stars, with the sun and moon, formed a chorus to this star, and its light was exceedingly great above them all. And there was agitation felt as to whence this new spectacle came, so unlike everything else [in the heavens]. Hence every kind of magic was destroyed, and every bond of wickedness disappeared; ignorance was removed, and the old kingdom abolished, God himself being manifested in human form for the renewal of eternal life.[5]

And in fact, the star did not lead the magi to Bethlehem but to Jerusalem, where people would naturally expect a king of the Jews to be born. It was from Scripture, Micah 5:2, that they were directed to Bethlehem.[6]

The star

What was the "star" which attracted the attention of the magi? At least since Kepler in the early seventeenth century, many attempts have been made to determine what celestial phenomenon the Star of Bethlehem might have been. A book by David Hughes treats the question at length and provides an extensive bibliography.[7] While it is not necessary for the present purpose to give a definitive solution to this problem, there are some general questions which should be dealt with.

Explanations of the Star of Bethlehem can be divided into three categories.[8] It may have been a natural (though perhaps very unusual) astronomical event, such as a comet, a conjunction of planets, or a supernova. It may have been a purely miraculous light. Or it may not have been a real celestial phenomenon at all, but an item in a theologically motivated story.

To begin with the final suggestion, we cannot, *a priori*, rule out the possibility that the story in Matthew is Christian *midrash*, a christological interpretation of an Old Testament text. The most obvious candidate for such a text is from the prophecy of Balaam in Numbers. In the NRSV this reads:

> I see him, but not now;
> I behold him, but not near—
> a star shall come out of Jacob,
> and a scepter shall rise out of Israel
> —Num 24:17a

(NEB gives more astronomical content by rendering the Hebrew *shebhet* as "comet" rather than "scepter.") This was understood in a messianic sense by some Jews, and the story in Matthew, with its star, could have been composed in order to apply it to Jesus. But the evangelist was not trying very hard to call attention to the prophecy of Balaam. Five times in Matthew 1-2 there are explicit references to fulfillment of prophecies, but the passage in Numbers is not even mentioned in connection with the star.

We also cannot ignore the possibility of a miraculous "star," but miracles should not be multiplied without compelling rea-

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[5] "The Epistle of Ignatius of Antioch to the Ephesians," Chapter XIX in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. I (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979 reprint): 57.

[6] Delano, *Astrology*, 57.

[7] David Hughes, *The Star of Bethlehem* (New York: Pocket Books, 1980).

[8] Hughes, 255-56.

It is with the objects of the physical world that God's purposes for the world are carried out.

sons. And unless the Star of Bethlehem were a purely visionary experience granted only to the magi, it would have been observed by star-watchers throughout the world whether it was natural or miraculous. Ancient astronomical records are far from complete, but in either case we could search for records of such observations. It would be hard to distinguish observations of a miraculous "star" and those of a nova or supernova, especially since they all would have been regarded as supernatural portents by ancient observers.

Explanation of the Star as a natural phenomenon may seem unexciting, but of the three possibilities it is best in accord with a proper understanding of the universal scope of God's activity. God is the creator of the real heavenly bodies, which shine and move in accord with the patterns which God has ordained, and these patterns are reflected in our laws of physics. And it is with the objects of the physical world that God's purposes for the world are carried out.

Several celestial phenomena might be identified with the Star of Bethlehem, and an investigator can begin by narrowing down the historical period within which the birth of Jesus might have occurred. The Gospel of Luke says that when Jesus began his ministry in the fifteenth year of the Emperor Tiberius he was "about thirty years old" (Lk 3:1, 23). Tiberius became Emperor in A.D. 14 and so (assuming that Luke's "about [*hosei*] thirty"[9] means between twenty-five and thirty-five, and remembering that there is, illogically, no year "A.D. 0" in our calendar), Jesus must have been born sometime between 7 B.C. and A.D. 4. There is another constraint if we assume the historical accuracy of Matthew's account, in which Jesus is born before the death of Herod the Great. It was generally thought, on the authority of Josephus, that Herod died in the spring of 4 B.C., but it has been argued recently that the correct year of his death is 1 B.C.[10] With either of these dates, the list of known astronomical possibilities for the Star is relatively short. Two planetary conjunctions in particular may be noted.[11]

A triple conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn took place in 7 B.C., those planets appearing close together three times during the course of that year. This was identified by Kepler (and perhaps earlier) with the Star of Bethlehem.[12] It is perhaps significant that these conjunctions occurred in the constellation of Pisces, which had traditionally been associated with the people of Israel. If Kepler's identification is correct, then Jesus' birth would most likely have been in 6 B.C.

But if Herod indeed did live until 1 B.C., then close conjunctions of Jupiter and Venus in 3 and 2 B.C. might be identified with the Star.[13] The second of these would

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[9] I. Howard Marshall, *Commentary on Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 162.

[10] Ernest Martin, *The Birth of Christ Recalculated* (Pasadena, CA: Foundation for Biblical Research, 1978).

[11] For much more extensive discussion of possibilities see Hughes, *The Star of Bethlehem.*

[12] Hughes, 127-68.

have been particularly spectacular, with those two brightest planets appearing together as a single brilliant star. Both of these conjunctions took place near the star Regulus in the constellation of Leo, and the lion has, of course, long been connected with the tribe of Judah (e.g., Gen 49:9).

In favor of identifying one of these conjunctions with the Star of Bethlehem is the fact that, for those who thought in astrological terms, there would have been some connection with the people of Israel. Other celestial phenomena, such as a comet which was observed in the constellation Capricorn in 5 B.C., cannot be ruled out,[14] but their connection with a "king of the Jews" would not have been so clear. (Halley's Comet, seen by Chinese astronomers in 12 B.C., would have been too early.)

Applications

What can be done with these ideas in a parish setting? The readings, of course, give a number of possibilities for proclamation. In the Gospel we have the example of the magi who use their knowledge and the signs of the heavens to search for the Messiah, but who have the humility to accept the guidance of Scripture, which directs them to Bethlehem. There is also the humility of *God*, who makes use of such means to bring the nations to the Messiah.

The possible connection which we have noted between the second lesson and a cosmic mission of the church should not be ignored. A science fiction story sermon on the Ephesians text might be in order.[15]

There are also opportunities for parish education. The identity of the Star of Bethlehem is often of interest to people, and planetariums sometimes have holiday shows on "the Christmas Star." An adult class on this topic, perhaps making use of some modest audio-visual resources, could be an attraction. A teacher need not claim to give the definitive solution to the problem of the Star's identity, but may simply set out some relevant biblical, historical, and scientific considerations, and suggest possible answers.

Finally, the story of the magi provides an opportunity to deal with astrology. The "pastor's page" in the parish newsletter might be the right setting for this discussion. Fifty years ago it would have seemed unnecessary to devote any of an educated congregation's time to this topic, but that is, unfortunately, no longer the case. Astrology has experienced a resurgence in "the age of Aquarius," to the extent that the wife of an American President was found to rely on it a few years ago. Pastors might be surprised to find how many of their parishioners take their "signs" seriously. The outdated science of astrology is a prominent part of the New Age mixture. This is not the only case in which bad science goes hand in hand with false religion, and shows how Christianity could benefit from an improvement in the presently poor level of scientific literacy in our culture.

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[13] Hughes, 170-77.

[14] Hughes, chapter 7.

[15] George L. Murphy, "Preaching at the Science-Theology Interface," *Lutheran Partners* 10.1, 14, 1994.

Johann Christoph Blumhardt (1805-1880): A Man for the Kingdom

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When it comes to Father Blumhardt, opinions divide, as we can see in the statements of two prominent Protestant theologians, Rudolf Bultmann and Walter Nigg. Bultmann writes, "I detest the Blumhardt stories!" (*Kerygma and Mythos* I, 150) while Nigg writes that in his opinion, Blumhardt was a "Protestant saint" (N 79). He adds, "If Blumhardt were really known to theologians—not just mentioned in passing, but *really* understood—then the whole business of theology in the universities would blow sky high." (N 77)

What are these "Blumhardt stories," loathed by one but seen as evidence of holiness by another?

Born in Stuttgart in 1805, Johann Christoph Blumhardt came from a family of craftsmen who belonged to the Swabian Pietists. By the age of twelve he had read the Bible through twice, and for the rest of his life he continued to work intensively and regularly with the Scriptures. His whole life and thought bore the deep and lasting imprint of their message. At the same time, it was a mystery to him even in his early years that both on his own and in the circle of his family and friends there were two things he could not find: the nearness of God testified to in the Bible, and above all the Spirit-filled life of the apostolic era.

After a short term as vicar, Blumhardt taught for six and a half years at the *Missionshaus* in Basel, an institution founded by the old German Christian Society, which was known at the time for its missionary, charitable, and ecumenical activities. Here Blumhardt "found the brotherly spirit and close ties with his colleagues... especially helpful" for his development and future work (S 47).

Two incidents from these years later proved to be turning points in Blumhardt's life. The first was the development of a serious skin disease which withstood all attempts at treatment. One morning he was so weak that he did not know how he could possibly get dressed. Kneeling, he cried to God for help, and as he got up, he sensed his sickness sliding down through his body and out through his feet. He was completely healed. The second was his meeting, in a girls' religion class which he taught, his

future wife and partner Doris Köllner, without whom the fulfillment of his life's task would have been inconceivable. Their friendship indicated the end of activities in Basel, for since they planned to marry, Blumhardt now had to apply for a proper position in a parish.

In 1837, when Blumhardt was thirty-two, he was appointed curate at Iptingen, near Vaihingen in Württemberg. For many years Iptingen had been the main center of a separatist group widespread in the area which criticized the superficiality of the established church and the rationalism of its theology and preaching. Many of these separatists had avoided attendance at worship services for twenty years. Friedrich Zündel (Blumhardt's biographer) described them as "robust, respectable people, capable in their own way, but stiff, brusque, and full of self-esteem" (Z 35). Once Blumhardt received a letter of complaint about the pastor signed "Wrathfully, the One above." (Z 36)

The old, somewhat eccentric minister (whom Blumhardt replaced) had long been out of touch with his flock. The congregation had fallen into bad ways, the younger members were out of hand, and relationships were broken by dissension. It was surely one of the most difficult parishes in Württemberg.

Although Blumhardt had no difficulty in building contacts with his new parishioners, he was extremely tactful, even cautious at first. Rather than burst upon his congregation's reserve with rash activism, he would wait until he was asked or invited. He had the fascinating ability to draw out the good even from problematic and disagreeable people, and to inspire trust in them. Basically, he saw in each individual a child of God. Moreover, because he paid no attention to gossip and had no use for negative talk about another person, he was able to approach each whom he met with complete openness and no preconceived notions.

At first, Blumhardt's sermons provided the key to doors that had so far been locked. After a funeral or wedding address, this or that listener would be so gripped that he felt he had to pass on his enthusiasm, and the next Sunday a group of newcomers would gather at a prudent distance beyond the open church door to listen to the sermon. Each Sunday they would come a little nearer, until finally they would seat themselves in solid rows in the gallery, directly opposite the pastor. Gradually they recognized in Blumhardt something of the true Church, which through him they felt they could accept once more. Not only houses and hearts opened to him in this way; his worship services were also filled with people again. Soon people came from far away, too, in order to hear his sermons.

In a letter to his fiancee we read:

> Yesterday I heard—and it aroused all kinds of painful emotions in me—that a neighboring pastor recently broke into tears in the pulpit. Almost fifty people from his congregation come to hear me each Sunday, neglecting him for the sake of a strange pastor. You can imagine how deeply this upsets me, for I can put myself in the position of such a man very well. But what can be done about it? I would never invite these people; I take great pains not to give occasion for them to accuse me of seeking a following.... I am thinking of paying the good pastor a visit very soon.

The people of Iptingen, knowing that a curacy lasts only a limited time, talked to Blumhardt about it with undisguised anxiety, voicing their fears that he might marry an unsuitable woman who would lead him away from the path of true faith. Blumhardt listened with friendly good humor and then told them about his fiancee, and the concern

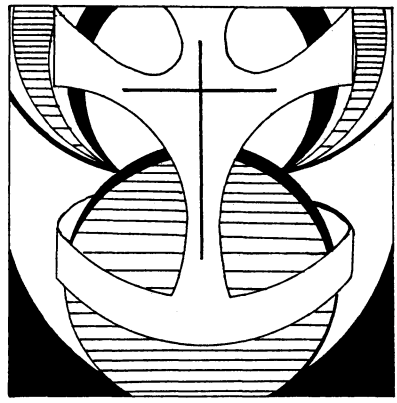
promptly evaporated. But he took their concern to heart. Writing to Doris that she must indeed take care not to let their future marriage and family life jeopardize his calling to the ministry, he confessed, "What I fear most is gradually sliding into a rut and forfeiting the Spirit from above to a greater or lesser degree."

In the summer of 1838 Blumhardt took on the pastorate of Möttlingen. He and Doris were married shortly afterwards.

Möttlingen, with its affiliated parish Unterhaugstett, lies at the north end of the Black Forest. Served for a century before Blumhardt by outstanding pastors, one might had expected it to become one of the best churches in Württemberg. This was hardly the case, however. When Blumhardt began his ministry, a crippling spiritual lassitude lay over the whole congregation. Pastor Barth, Blumhardt's immediate predecessor and a brilliant preacher, complained bitterly that the people of Möttlingen were obviously "preached to death" and fed up with the gospel. Most embarrassing to Barth was the fact that most of his so-called 'listeners' slept in church—and literally, at that. (S 57)

At first Blumhardt was in a difficult position. After Barth's spirited and eloquent preaching, his sermons seemed almost too simple and restrained. After all, Blumhardt never spoke any differently from the pulpit than he did in personal conversation. The church remained asleep. Obviously, an impenetrable fog covered the congregation (S 57), and despite his every effort, nothing special changed. Even Blumhardt himself was afflicted with a peculiar fatigue every summer in those first years.

Beginning in the fall of 1841, Blumhardt was drawn into what he always referred to later as his "Fight." At the start, he tried to keep a sensible distance from the affair, but finally it became obvious that he



could no longer evade it, at which point he drew up a report documenting its course for the ecclesiastical authorities entitled *The Sickness of Gottliebin Dittus*. We are now coming to what Bultmann called "the Blumhardt stories."

In Möttlingen lived a handicrafts teacher, Gottliebin Dittus, who came from a believing home. Said by others to be a deeply God-fearing person (Z 62), she was especially alert in an inner way and receptive to deeper insights; at one time she had been the favorite pupil of Dr. Barth, Blumhardt's forerunner as pastor. But ever since childhood she had been subject to various uncanny experiences, and she had suffered from strange illnesses for years. Though inexplicably drawn to the pastor, she felt repelled by him at the same time, and Blumhardt kept his distance from her on account of her peculiar behavior.

Then such eerie phenomena began to take place in the Dittus house, with such strange physical symptoms in Gottliebin, that Blumhardt felt obliged to investigate. When an inspection was carried out together with the mayor and several members of the district council, the men heard numerous extremely loud but unexplained noises and thumps. Official minutes were

drawn up, and Gottliebin was moved to quarters in another house. Again Blumhardt tried to stay clear of the affair, which was becoming more and more unpleasant for him personally. Admittedly, he did visit Gottliebin, but only when called in during one of her bad attacks. In general, however, he felt that her case was no task for him as pastor. (R 26)

A spirit of victory and strength came to him for the battle against the kingdom of darkness.

As the symptoms recurred, Blumhardt prayed that he and all who took part in trying to help Gottliebin might be protected from acting foolishly or being led astray. Again and again he met with the mayor and others to take counsel with them so that he and all those involved would remain "level-headed," as he himself said (Z 67). They studied the Word of God together and cautioned one another not to go further than the Scriptures led them. (Z 67)

Once when Gottliebin fell into violent convulsions, Dr. Spath, the attending physician, said in tears, "You would think there was no minister in the place, the way this sick girl is left lying here; this is not natural" (Z 68, S 343). Obviously, the doctor felt that supernatural forces were at work. In any case, the remark challenged Blumhardt finally to take up the case, and he began to visit the sick girl more frequently. Another incentive was the admonition of a visiting Moravian (Herrnhuter) preacher acquainted with Gottliebin. Taking leave of Blumhardt, he said with raised forefinger, "Don't forget your responsibility as minister!" (Z 68)

Shortly after this Blumhardt was to see yet another attack, again accompanied by strong convulsions; he was standing at the back of her room in the presence of several of Gottliebin's friends. He writes in his report (Z 68; S 60):

> It became clear to me that something demonic was at work... and I found it painful that absolutely no remedy or advice was available in such a horrible affair. Laboring under these thoughts, I was seized by a certain wrath, and suddenly an idea came over me—I can't see it in any other way than as an inspiration from above.... I walked purposefully up to her and seized her rigidly cramped hands, trying to keep them together as much as possible, and shouted into her ear, though she was unconscious, "Gottliebin, put your hands together and pray: 'Lord Jesus, help me! We've seen long enough what the Devil can do; now let us see what the Lord Jesus is able to do.'" After a few moments she awoke and repeated the words of prayer. The convulsions stopped, to the great amazement of all those present. This was the decisive moment that impelled me with irresistible force to take action in the affair.

The experience was a turning point in Blumhardt's life—it was the call to a service or task he had not known before. A spirit of victory and strength came to him for the battle against the kingdom of darkness. It became clearer and clearer to him that God-sent deliverance comes to the world in the same measure as the church calls upon it in faith and takes up the spiritual fight.

The struggle, which took the form of prayer alone, was no longer concentrated on Gottliebin—she appeared to have been freed in the meantime—but on her sister

Katharina. We will let Blumhardt report in his own words its final phase, a night of prayer:

> Suddenly, at about midnight, and lasting at least a quarter of an hour, an absolute shriek of despair rang out from the girl's throat with enough force to make the house collapse. This happened several times. Anything more horrifying could not be imagined, and there was no doubt that, to their great shock, at least half the inhabitants of the area became aware of the struggle. At the same time, Katharina began to shudder so violently that it seemed as if all her limbs would fall apart.
>
> Finally there came the most gripping moment, impossible for anyone to imagine who had not seen and heard it themselves. About two in the morning, while the girl's head and shoulders were bent far over the back of her chair, the self-confessed demon howled in a voice hardly conceivable for a human throat, "Jesus is victor!"—words which, as far abroad as they rang, were also understood, making an indelible impression on a number of people. Now the power and strength of the demon seemed to be broken further with every moment. It became quieter and quieter and more peaceful, and the motions gradually decreased and finally became quite imperceptible, just as the breath of life leaves the dying soul, though not until almost eight in the morning. At this moment the two-year-long struggle came finally to an end. (Z 88)

About Gottliebin herself, Blumhardt reports:

> Her earlier afflictions, all well known to the doctors, have disappeared: her hunched side, shortened leg, stomach trouble and so on. As a consequence her health has improved and become more stable, and for some time now she has been fully restored to health in every respect, which can be seen as a real miracle of God. (Z 89)

"Jesus is victor!" This cry reechoed like a trumpet call in Blumhardt during the following decade—in his theological thinking, his preaching, and his pastoral work.

What followed immediately after the end of the Fight came unexpectedly to Blumhardt: an awakening, and ultimately, renewal of his entire congregation. Later he would be asked, "What is so important about Möttlingen? What are its outstanding characteristics?" Whenever faced with these questions, he always replied, "The outstanding thing is the renewal of the church, not the [Möttlingen] Fight itself!"

What, then, actually happened that made Möttlingen so important to Blumhardt? By December 28, 1843, the Dittus family was finally free of all demonic powers. On New Year's Eve a notorious and rather eccentric man came into the parsonage and confided in the pastor that because he was a lost sinner he had been in hell that night, and there he had been told to go and find a pastor.

Blumhardt, taken by surprise, was reserved at first, but then he felt an inner urge to pray with the man before sending him off again—unconfessed. The next day the man came again, such a picture of grief that one of the maids wept when she saw him. It was only on a later visit that he brought his burdens out into the open for the first time, saying, "Pastor, I want to confess now." Blumhardt reports:

> As he got up from his knees, his face beamed, completely transfigured.... It was as though I had been transported to a completely new, totally unknown sphere. I did not know yet what to make of it... but simply and cautiously continued to handle such things in the same way, for soon still more sinners came." (Z 98)

In this connection, it should be known that at that time neither confession of sins

nor absolution through the laying-on of hands was customary among Protestants. But in the following days more and more people came to confess their sins and beg for forgiveness. Blumhardt wrote to his friend Dr. Barth about his constantly growing work:

> People come to me daily, even till eleven-thirty at night, and the next morning at six there are already others standing there; the whole day long there is no pause, and there is no time to think of anything else. Yesterday I put a stop to these visits because of my monthly paper, so I have to expect all the more today. It affects me in a way far beyond anything I could have imagined. One hundred and fifty-six people have come already, all with tears of repentance, if not on the first visit, then on the second, or for sure on the third. It is a puzzle to me how I shall manage. If you could imagine the various characters and knew the many different sins, the horror of which often almost paralyzes me, you would then realize even more than you already do the difficulty of my position. (Z 101)

Then the movement spread to neighboring villages as well, and, to some extent, further into the Black Forest. As time went by the worship services at Möttlingen became regularly swamped. On Good Friday, 1845, visitors from 176 towns or villages were counted. (Z 170)

As before, it pained Blumhardt that the services of many of his colleagues were being deserted to some degree (Z 105). Even more embarrassing, members of other churches wanted his services as pastor and counselor. But what was he to do, when other pastors did not hold with personal confession and absolution? He saw only one way. He advised those outside his parish to confide in one of their friends, as directed in the New Testament: "Confess your sins to one another" (Jas 5:16), thus receiving forgiveness and absolution and having this forgiveness sealed where possible at Communion (Z 106). In this way lay people were encouraged in brotherly service to one another, and a caring circle could grow out of a previous situation of need. On the question of what was most urgent to confess, Blumhardt always advised, "Confess the thing you are most reluctant to confess!" (Z 111)

The remarkable thing about the awakening was that here an *entire* congregation experienced revival—and that from then on there were no groups of so-called 'converted' and 'unconverted' members who kept each other at arm's length. It is this which helps us understand Blumhardt's hope and longing that such a small beginning might eventually embrace the whole of Christendom. For Blumhardt felt that if this did not happen—if the church did not open itself to an impulse such as this, which might bring a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit—then the movement in Möttlingen would not be able to maintain its present peak. As Blumhardt said, "Unless a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit is given to us, we people of Möttlingen are lost." (N 59)

The working of the Spirit was actually visible at Möttlingen in a very concrete way: the whole parish showed itself to be a shining example of love. At Sunday services, the townspeople offered their pews to visitors, seating themselves in the churchyard. In the same way they placed their houses, their beds, and their tables at the disposal of their guests with unbelievable hospitality.

Following the revival movement, almost as a side effect, word spread that people were being healed from various physical afflictions. Some of the healings took place already during the winter of 1844, as a result of confession and absolution, even without

having been specifically prayed for. As a rule Blumhardt only heard about it afterwards. People often shared about such experiences in the congregation, however, with the result that more and more people came asking for bodily healing through prayer. Two incidents serve as illustration:

> One morning all of a sudden a mother rushed in and called me—she had just split a boiling broth on her three-year-old by accident and didn't know what to do. I jumped up; the child, who was still unclothed, was scalded over its entire body, and it screamed without stopping. The room filled with people, and some said that this one or that knew an old saying that might help; he should be fetched quickly. I objected, telling the people rather to take heart and pray in silence. Then I cradled the child in my arms and sighed—and he grew quiet. Although burns still covered the little one and disappeared only after several days, the child did not have the slightest pain anymore. (Z 123)

> One Sunday, a lad carried his younger brother—a hunch-backed, crippled dwarf of a boy—to Möttlingen from a place an hour away. The following Sunday they returned again [to see Blumhardt], although the boy was still very bent. After a short time, however, he became straight and healthy. "I used to have a hump," he said, but now—and I don't know how—it's gone" (Z 124).

Various spiritual and physical healings were reported throughout this period, but these events were never the focal point of Blumhardt's interest. For the most part, healing happened incidentally and was looked on as normal within the life of the parish, and no one made a sensation of it. (S 68)

When people began to give Blumhardt credit for the power of healing, however, he energetically countered it: as he put it, he could only pray, "Jesus, help!" and anyone who believed in Jesus could do that. He was adamant: Only Jesus can heal.

> "Jesus is victor!" reechoed like a trumpet call in Blumhardt's theological thinking, his preaching, and his pastoral work.

Blumhardt was never interested in purely physical healing; that, he felt, was the physician's task. He "never saw himself as competing with orthodox medicine either and never discouraged anyone from visiting a doctor" (S 69). His concern was always the healing of the whole person. "If someone wants to become healthy in body without simultaneously experiencing the forgiveness of his sins, it won't serve him much to make him healthy" (R 47). If Blumhardt had a particular interest in sicknesses at all, it was primarily in those cases where the doctors had reached their limits. Incidentally, some cures were not achieved even by Blumhardt. Contemporary reports mention many "permanent" cures of the most serious illnesses, but we learn as well that many other sicknesses were not cured, and that some patients suffered a reversal after temporary improvement.

In his theological interpretation of these experiences Blumhardt came to the conclusion that Christendom was guilty of a loss of authority, both in freeing souls and in healing them. According to God's original plan, a servant of God should also be the bearer of heavenly gifts and powers for the church;

he should be empowered equally with the gift of preaching and the gift of healing and freeing. But as Blumhardt lamented, "Our Christianity knows absolutely nothing of this anymore." (R 48; cf. Z 144-147, R 10)

Meanwhile the pastor became a problem both for the government and for church officials. As early as January 1844 the responsible governmental department forbade him "to include healing as part of his pastoral office instead of calling a doctor." (Z 135ff.)

The ecclesiastical authorities used the same argument. Informing Blumhardt that religion should give comfort only—by emphasizing patience and the blessings brought by suffering—they forbade him to take overnight guests in his home. Later they even barred him from receiving out-of-town church members personally in his house, for instance after Sunday services. Bit by bit, Blumhardt was thus restricted within the framework of ordinary, traditional church life. It was easy to foresee that the situation was coming to a head.

A somewhat dryly written, objective "Pastoral Report" from the year 1845 begins with the following sentences:

> The religious situation of the church is at present highly satisfactory, insofar as the majority of the congregation who were won over at the time of the revival has remained faithful. The resulting change shows itself in the whole character of their thought and deed: the inhabitants of both places have become open, warm-hearted, friendly, and alert to all that is good. Worship services are very well attended, and members show great interest in them. (J 47ff)

The report closes with a remark that characterizes Blumhardt's work in the parish:

> The whole congregation gives a sober, devout impression, and there is nothing to be seen of religious excesses (J 48).

It should be noted—especially nowadays, when there is a wealth of theories on how to revitalize dying churches—that Blumhardt had no conception of methodically reconstructing his congregation: he had no preplanned blueprint, no strategy, no drawing-board design—not even a vague outline. And yet his church was vigorously rebuilt under his leadership. How and why? There is no other answer than that Blumhardt was a servant fully dedicated to God. To explain what this means in concrete terms, attention must be drawn to the following points:

—Blumhardt was familiar with the Word of God from childhood on, and the Word lived within him. He read the Scriptures regularly, even through discouraging circumstances and despite an excessively heavy workload (S 97). From his childhood he was filled with a longing for God's Spirit and its influence and strength.

—Throughout his whole life Blumhardt remained a man of prayer: "No rule has a more powerful effect on the whole of human conduct than the rule 'Pray without ceasing.'" (S 108)

—From the time of his "Fight" on he knew himself continually in the presence of Christ.

—He struggled life-long to seek the will of God, to understand it, and, where he felt certain of it, to obey it.

—Ever since his youth he constantly sought a life of community and service with brothers and sisters.

Completely open to God and dedicated to him, Blumhardt lived in Christ's presence and let himself be led by the Spirit. Because of this, the church flourished under his pastoral care as if by itself, without planning, blueprints, or strategies, thanks alone to his dedication. Actually, Blumhardt only prepared the ground, making it possible for God to work, to renew lives, and to build up

the church. Of course, he involved himself with the utmost intensity. But it is perfectly clear that the master builder was God alone.

Blumhardt let himself be led step by step, often on paths he himself would never have chosen. In the struggle for Gottliebin, for instance, he was drawn in "unsought and unwillingly" (Z 85); he even said "thrown in" (Z 69). Here Blumhardt encountered something seldom mentioned in today's discussions of church revitalization and growth: the presence of a member who, although she belonged to a family of "deeply-grounded Christians" and was described as having a "strong fear of God," stood under the influence of demonic powers (Z 62, 70, 92; J 63). In retrospect, it was this fact that showed itself as the actual, decisive hindrance to all previous endeavors to bring about renewal. As long as the satanically alien rule was not recognized, exposed, and done away with, the suffocating fog remained over the congregation at Möttlingen.

Blumhardt's experience has great relevance in our age, when the waves of occultism, satanism, and New Age religiosity are being vehemently spread far and wide. He can also teach us that on this front neither medical nor psychological means are of help, let alone the "informative" literature which neither recognizes its opponent nor takes it seriously and is therefore powerless to take action against it (cf. N 34, 36). He himself, at least, made use of nothing but the "pure weapons of prayer and the Word of God." (Z 74)

The building up of the church—at least in Möttlingen—began not through evangelizing but, as Blumhardt put it, through struggle and victory over "personalities of darkness" (S 27). With this he did not mean to detract from evangelization in any way, but only to draw attention to that which can actually block (rather than spur on) the breaking in of the gospel. One has the impression that after the fight and victory, the renewal of the church at Möttlingen fell into Blumhardt's lap like a ripe fruit. For although he was taxed to the limit, he appears more as an accompanist to the whole process than the driving force. It seems as

Blumhardt let himself be led step by step, often on paths he himself would never have chosen.

though all the sluices were opened: suddenly people came to repentance quite on their own; they themselves requested prayers to heal their bodily sufferings. Healings occurred partly without Blumhardt's knowledge, often simply as a result of his preaching.

As Blumhardt's fame grew, he received offers and inquiries from outside Württemberg and even from abroad (J 58). But William I of Württemberg, who had, incidentally, once come incognito to Möttlingen, sent the message, "Your king wishes you to remain in your fatherland...." (S 70)

After some searching Blumhardt was able, thanks to the generous help of friends and benefactors, to buy Bad Boll, an unprofitable spa with sulphur springs. In the summer of 1852 he moved there with his family and four members of the Dittus family, who had meanwhile become his most loyal co-workers.

The church officials above him agreed that Blumhardt should remain a pastor of the state church (*Landeskirche*), but with-

out stipend, and that Bad Boll should become a special parish, with Blumhardt to carry out all its functions—baptisms, communions, confirmations, weddings, and funerals. Apart from that, there were no restrictions such as had been imposed on Blumhardt in Möttlingen. (R 66)

The small spa had its own personnel to be integrated or assimilated, and in addition there were the many people who sought out Bad Boll on Blumhardt's account (R 68). Frequently, 120 to 150 guests were in the house at one time. Not surprisingly, the two different sets of house rules clashed—those of the spa and those of Blumhardt's spiritual family. Though this could have resulted in serious difficulties (in his relationship with visitors to the baths), Blumhardt preferred to emphasize the free atmosphere of an extended Christian household over the enforcement of rigid regulations.... Difficulties did arise very soon with the staff, however, and the way in which he dealt with the problem was characteristic:

> Blumhardt had employed many people out of compassion, and discharging people was not his strong point. The conduct of several of the staff members was questionable, however, and during one period one instance after another of hidden immorality came to Blumhardt's attention. In great distress, he said to his wife and children, "All of us must repent." Days of earnest self-examination followed, awakening in the family a new zeal for prayer and common Bible study. And what happened? Before long, one erring staffer after the other came quietly of his own accord to Blumhardt's room to confess his sins, and a movement similar to that at Möttlingen stirred through the house. (Z 209)

Under their new housefather, the premises soon exhibited a great attraction quite different from that of the former spa. People came from all over Germany and from foreign parts, the converted and the unconverted, believers and unbelievers (N 64). All without exception were admitted with the same cordiality. Class distinctions were indeed taken into account, but they were also very soon bridged over by the communal life of the household. At the large common mealtimes they all sat next to each other: princesses and peasants, Germans and foreigners (N 64). It was a foretaste of the great love-feasts of nations in the kingdom of God (B 143). Thanks to a letter from the liberal church historian Karl von Hase, we have a graphic contemporary description of life in Bad Boll:

> You may be told that it smells of Pietism and smacks of conventicalism, but I assure you that in everything Blumhardt sets in motion there is not a trace of unhealthiness or false pietism. A fresh, joyful spirit blows through this house and permeates the outer life as well as the inner, pervading the smallest and the greatest; it gives one a living impression of the peace of God—a peace beyond all reason. It is an atmosphere which works on the soul like a free mountain breeze on the body. All that is holy is so human, and all that is human so transfigured, and all without coercion, so completely natural that for as long as you are in the middle of it you believe it cannot be otherwise, and you are unable to grasp why it cannot be like this in other Christian households (N 64).

The household, large though it had become, remained nevertheless a single family. Mornings began with a worship meeting for the household staff, led by Blumhardt; afterwards, the families of the closer personnel, with their children and grandparents, gathered for the well-loved "children's blessing," at which "Grandfather" blessed each child with the laying-on of hands. Occasionally, as the need arose grownups also received a blessing. The entire house-

Behind his vision of the kingdom of God is the negative realization that this world is ruled by an alien will.

hold then met for breakfast with all the guests, after which Blumhardt held a worship meeting not unlike the evening devotions held daily at the end of supper.

It is said that Blumhardt's style of preaching was quite empty of pathos and bore no trace of pulpit oratory (S 74). After the evening meal, as at midday, he would remain seated in the circle of his guests, usually smoking a cigar. Here he was ready to discuss all the questions presented to him, and, as always, also ready to listen and learn. He showed great interest in all personal concerns, yet at the same time he had the gift of setting mundane human matters in the light of God (S 77). People who met Blumhardt for the first time were usually surprised to find that his personality was anything but imposing. One guest said of him:

> He puts absolutely no importance on himself, and he speaks, also in conversation, of nothing extraordinary; he is constantly full of humor and now and again earthy jokes. (S 74)

All the same, Blumhardt could be extremely curt, even almost harsh, when occasion demanded. He had the gift of discerning where a sensitive, caring patience was necessary, but also where brevity and sharpness were required (S 79). Incidentally, his warm humanity made it possible for him to address all guests with the familiar *Du* before long. A certain count once remarked, "I do believe that if a king were to come to Bad Boll, he would be addressed with *Du* in three days"—and not out of tactless familiarity, but because Blumhardt saw in each person a child of God, and therefore a member of God's great family (S 77). And so the household, in mirroring God's kingdom, was a place of renewal and community for body and soul.

Countless inner and outer healings took place at Bad Boll; they were an almost regular outcome of God's presence in this spirit-filled family. Indeed, there was always someone who had been freed or healed at the common table. But Blumhardt took great care that no fuss was made over such experiences; recovery of health should not become the most important thing. He vehemently opposed all attempts to isolate or emphasize individual gifts of the Spirit. Moreover, not all cases of sickness were healed, even here. Often Blumhardt would accompany some invalid to a friendly doctor in Stuttgart if he felt medical treatment was appropriate.

When Blumhardt speaks of God's kingdom, he has the happenings in these two towns foremost in mind: people were freed from the rule of foreign spirits, a congregation found renewal, and bodily sicknesses and human relationships were healed. To Blumhardt, all that was merely a very small foretaste of what is to come, like the first sheet of lightning before a storm. For as Jesus told his disciples when he sent them out to proclaim his message, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Go forth, heal the sick, raise up the dead, heal the lepers, and cast out demons!" (Mt 10:7-8)

Behind Blumhardt's vision of the kingdom of God is the negative realization that

The victory of Christ is indeed conclusive, but this victory must be claimed here and now and re-won again and again by the fighting church.

this world is ruled by an alien will. Writing about the third petition of the Lord's Prayer, he noted, "This plea makes it clear that many alien wills rule in creation" (SG 29). The world is still not God's kingdom. An alien will rules—above all, human self-will, though ultimately the will of a power opposed to God. And therefore "the powers of hell have brought in untold corruption" (SG 29). That is why Blumhardt once defined the kingdom as follows: "It expresses a condition of the world and the whole creation in which God's will rules alone, and all other powers and forces inimical to him are done away with" (SG 25). In other words, for Blumhardt the kingdom of God is concentrated in the statement "Jesus is victor" (SG 25). Jesus establishes his lordship, and where it is victorious, there is the kingdom of God.

How can God's kingdom arise from the kingdom of Satan, prince of this world? How can the change take place from the old to the new? The new epoch begins with the appearance of Jesus on earth—as he says to the Pharisees, "The kingdom of God is already among you" (Lk 17:21). The new era reveals itself further in Jesus' healing of the sick and casting out demons. Thus he said, "If I cast out demons through the Holy Spirit, then the kingdom of God has already come to you." (Mt 12:28)

The conclusive breakthrough—though still not the fulfillment—of the kingdom was finally demonstrated by Christ's victorious death on the cross (SG 31). For since then, the kingdom has become a reality through the change of authority that takes place in men's daily lives. As Blumhardt says, "First, those people who until now were subject to an alien will must gather around Jesus, and the more people do this, the wider his kingdom will grow. The souls he wins for himself... are pure territory gained by him, and in their unity with each other the kingdom of heaven is already established" (SG 27).

But there is no rulership without the ruled, no realm without subjects, no kingdom of God without a people of God. These people of God will be called then by the new King to a royal, priestly service: to work and fight together so that God's kingdom spreads. The front for this battle, however, remains the kingdom of darkness, and Blumhardt finds it necessary to expose a widespread illusion regarding this: "If someone hears it said, for example, that Christ has broken the might of the Devil, judged the prince of this world, and trodden on the serpent's head so that he is now almost done for, he then assumes that the Devil has no more power" (SG 36). But even though the Lord may say, "The prince of this world is condemned," he is in actual fact not yet deposed, and it is the task of Christian faith, which must gain victory on victory against darkness, to see to it that he will be fully deposed. Then Christ's victory, at present still on its way, shall come to fulfillment (SG 35; S 366).

The victory of Christ is indeed conclusive, but this victory must be claimed here and now and rewon again and again by the

fighting church. For this God's weapons (Ephesians 6; Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12) and the Holy Spirit's gifts of service are needed—gifts which by and large are missing. Blumhardt never doubted that the Holy Spirit was continually active in the church, but what he missed was the "spirit of Pentecost," as he called it, the spirit of early Christian apostolic authority.

Blumhardt grieved all his life over the spiritual poverty of the church and the whole of Christendom, and he repeatedly lamented that "we no longer have the spirit of Pentecost" (S 102). After all, he had fought for this pentecostal spirit of authority ever since the time God had led him to the front and into battle. His son Christoph gives an especially graphic description:

> In Möttlingen my father cried out, "Lord Jesus, you are simply not there! What is the meaning of all this? It simply isn't true that we are Christians! But now, once and for all, I want to see what is right—you, or the world!" At this there was a clap of thunder, and from then on we experienced what the apostles must have also experienced centuries before (S 200).

These happenings, like the promises in the Bible, awakened in Blumhardt a joy in the nearness of Jesus such as the early Christians knew, as well as a burning expectation of his imminent return. Blumhardt was deeply distressed that Christendom had lost the immediacy of expectation, and he even saw a relationship between this vanished expectation and the delay of Christ's second coming. "The Lord does not wish to come to a people who no longer await his coming; a people for whom he has become a matter of indifference" (S 20). On the other hand, he observed that in those places where the second coming of Christ was still reckoned with, this expectation was frequently overshadowed by visions of apocalyptic horror and therefore allied with great fear.

The horizon of Blumhardt's hope for God's kingdom is still not fully lit up, however, until we realize that his faith and hope encompassed the whole of humankind and the whole creation. "We believe that Jesus, the friend of man, will reveal a compassion so great that many wicked people will be saved" (J 261).

In contemplating the Cross and giving thought to Philippians 2:10-11, he acknowledged that "every knee must bow, in heaven just as on earth and under the earth, and all tongues acknowledge in honor to God the Father that Jesus Christ is the Lord...." (J 262)

Blumhardt did not want to set forth a dogma. Rather, it was the dynamic activity of the Spirit and his love for mankind and the whole of creation that drove him to his all-encompassing faith. In the face of the universal promises (of the Bible), he could in no way be satisfied with only a small flock of redeemed Christians. One of his last sentences before his death reflects once more the cosmic horizon of his faith and hope: "The Lord will open his gentle hand in compassion over all peoples" (Z 223).

We will close with an episode typical of Blumhardt but at the same time profoundly symbolic:

> Once Blumhardt went to visit his sons, who were both in Stutthart preparing for their final pre-university exam (*Abitur*). Not finding them at home, diligently bent over their books, he asked their landlady their whereabouts, and she told him that the two young gentlemen had gone to the circus for the afternoon. Blumhardt was in no way disappointed or indignant but simply replied, "Aha—in the circus." A quick decision, and he too made his way to the big tent, where he joined them unnoticed just behind

their seats. As they unsuspectingly enjoyed the various tricks, he suddenly announced, "Christoph, I'm here too!" There was no moralistic sermon on the lack of academic enthusiasm in store for the startled young men: their father simply wanted them to enjoy his unexpected presence.

"I'm here too!" Will they take note of it—Christendom and its churches, congregations, groups, and communities? Will they hear him also today when he announces his presence? Till now Blumhardt has remained largely undiscovered and unnoticed. Recently, however, he is making himself felt, and that in a time of many circus-like features and artistic fascinations, also in Christian circles and institutions; an era with no lack of theological artistry but plenty of circus-like activities. Unexpectedly, from behind our backs, the gentle voice of one of the most down-to-earth charismatics announces, "I'm here too!"

We have represented Blumhardt as a witness to the kingdom of God. But what message does he give us today as we go on our way? Blumhardt once defined the kingdom as follows: "A state of the world, and indeed the whole creation, in which God's will alone rules, and where all other powers and forces hostile to him are banished." (SG 25)

Blumhardt's key experience is summarized in his cry, "Jesus is victor;" in fact, for him the kingdom is in the first place nothing other than the tangible intensification of this cry. Accordingly, however, the coming of the kingdom is unmistakably designated as a battle: an aggressive attack on the kingdom of darkness and the prince of this world.

The church must take part in this offensive of God's kingdom, and in order to do this it must call on divine authority and responsibility. God's rulership will come into the world when the church claims the victory of Jesus. This means that the Christian life must take on the character of a battle. Today the church no longer faces one possessed girl; it faces a world infected and ruled by an infinite number of demons in the most varied various spheres—politics, technology, economics, academics, art, religion, and so on. We must recognize and identify these spirits everywhere, so that purified and liberated, they can become effective in a world which, according to the New Testament, lies for the present under the sway of evil and the prince of this world (1 John 5:19).

Blumhardt once said that "many alien wills rule in creation" (SG 29). For the church, this should mean taking leave of all "spiritual pacifism," all egotistical and individual-oriented private piety. It means that the church must mobilize and take up the front line, as commanded by Jesus Christ, taking the offensive with all the spiritual gifts she has been given in order to spread Christ's kingly rule.

Further, for Blumhardt the kingdom means the exclusive rule of God's will. What is the will of God? Let us remember Christ's one central command, which sums up God's will for his disciples: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another. As I have loved you, so shall you love one another." (Jn 13:34-35)

This same command is spelled out by Jesus in his High-Priestly Prayer, when he asks the Father on behalf of his disciples, "May they be one, as we are one; I in them and thou in me; may they be perfectly one. Then the world will know that thou didst send me." (Jn 17:23)

Here, through the prayer of their Lord, all Christians are challenged to let themselves be led together into the unity of the Body of Christ, beyond all barriers of groups and

communities, confessions and religious trends, without ironing out their God-given identity and variety. For only to this unity is authority promised for the church's great offensive on the world. That is why Blumhardt sought for a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit and why he sought for Christendom to win back its God-willed unity and its early Christian, apostolic authority. Otherwise not only the people of Möttlingen would be lost, but also every individual, group, community, or confession which remains in isolation.

And so, to conclude, here again is Blumhardt's very simple but very clear definition of the kingdom of God: a state of the world, in fact of the whole creation, in which God's will alone rules and from which all other powers and forces hostile to him are banished.

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Making Sense of Christian and Judaic Nonsense: A Book Worth Discussing

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Telling Tales: Making Sense of Christian and Judaic Nonsense. By Jacob Neusner. Foreword by Martin E. Marty. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993. vi and 170 pages. Paper. $10.99.

This book is third in a series of four on Jewish-Christian dialogue. *Jews and Christians: The Myth of a Common Tradition* (1991) was reviewed on these pages (see *Currents* 18:4 [August 1991] p. 298). Since then, *The Bible and Us: A Priest and a Rabbi Read the Scriptures Together*, with Andrew Greeley, has been published.

In *Telling Tales*, Neusner picks up a theme he sounded in *Jews and Christians*. That theme is simple: *Jewish-Christian dialogue never existed.* He surveys the historic evidence to show that, while a few ingenuous gestures were made toward such dialogue back as far as the fourth century, the validation of Christianity as religion of choice for the Roman empire and the subsequent caricature of "Judaism" from such influential preachers as John Chrysostom rendered genuine dialogue impossible until the end of the twentieth century.

Neusner shows "Judaism" to be an invention of Christian minds. Jews would never define themselves in the categories that have been created for them: "in practice, circumcision, the Sabbath, dietary laws; in belief, one God, Messiah yet to come, chosen people" (p. 50). The problem with these categories is that, while they might prove true, they are also the stuff of argument among Jews and their origin and trajectory is completely misunderstood by Christians, thus rendering them in the long run false descriptors, in Neusner's view. In his reckoning, Jews would more likely define themselves in terms of peoplehood in relation to Torah. The "ity" created the

"ism," but there are only Judaisms, as there are only Christianities.

The openly pejorative description of Jews as legalists, pharisees, etc., despite so much evidence to the contrary in recent scholarship, is alarmingly present in the writing of many considered to be reputable Christian scholars. Neusner agrees with George Foot Moore that such caricatures, created to show the superiority of Christianity at a time when Christians had political clout, were further advanced during the Reformation, and enabled Protestants (especially Lutherans) to retroject their argument with Rome to Jesus' argument with the pharisees (which reverberated again to our understanding of Scripture, though Neusner is gracious enough not to point that out here). While all this may be true, there is a certain Hebraic sensibility to much of the reform in Lutheran and Anabaptist dress, with its emphasis upon a this-worldly ethic and spirituality, that renders the relationship more complex.

The French and American revolutions provided impetus to dismantle the privilege of Christendom. Movements such as the rise of the critical study of Scripture and the founding of the new nation of Israel were also instrumental in providing the circumstances in which Jewish-Christian dialogue could begin. The Holocaust contributes the tragic backdrop and the modern urgency for the dialogue.

Neusner says that Jewish-Christian dialogue is a possibility in the United States, England,and France, for only in these countries do Jews have the resources in self-respect, scholarship, and numbers to enter dialogue as equals. At the same time, his denial of the validity of Christian-Jewish work in Germany relies on his belief in the residue of Holocaust shame as blockage on the Christian side and limited size of the community on the Jewish side; he ignores the pathbreaking work of a new generation of Christian theologians such as Peter Osten-Sacken and F. W. Marquardt, older theologians like Wolfhart Pannenberg, Jewish scholars like Pinchas Lapide (translated by Wilhelm Linss) and those who write in the journal *Kirche und Synagoge*.

While Neusner yearns to open the dialogue to include Islam, he flatly states that such dialogue is impossible for Christians as well as for Jews in the current political atmosphere. This will be news for people like Harold Vogelaar of the LSTC faculty, who has spent more than two decades in such work.

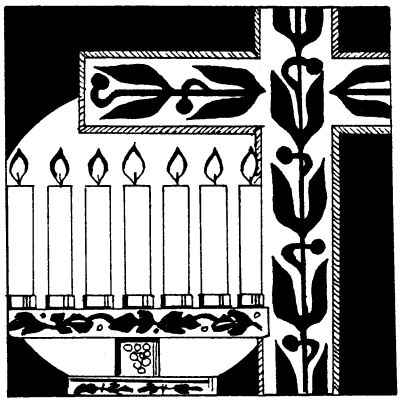
But all this criticism aside, what are Neusner's main points?

The problem for dialogue is that Jews and Christians are unwilling to (a) hear one another's stories, and (b) find the resources within each other's traditions for honoring such stories. If and as we are able to do so, genuine dialogue may proceed. One finds it surprising that Neusner uses none of the current narrative theological materials which have been developed by both Christians and Jews and there is no mention in the text or the notes to the specifically Jewish-Christian work which has been done by Michael Goldberg in his two books, *Narrative Theology* and *Jews and Christians: Getting Our Stories Straight*, both of which are now available in revised texts.

Neusner proposes a path around the current shape of Christian-Jewish dialogue. He seems to be saying, "forget what has happened in the last thirty years of the so-called dialogue. Let us act as if it never happened." Well, no and yes.

Neusner is wrong to say, "Every Christian knows about Judaism—and what Christians know is wrong" (p. 96). This is a flamboyant statement, the sort of broadside that he himself deplores earlier in the book, and it is quite simply untrue. For years now,

since Markus Barth called us to task in the fifties and early sixties, there has been intensive re-thinking of the Christian relationship to our Jewish background, including current relations with Jews and the state of Israel. Many of us have not been able to surmount the internal confusion that arises when we study and struggle with Jewish conclusions about the meaning and nature of the Jewish way, and yet many have spoken out, for years, to overcome stereotypes and bad scholarship and have prepared ourselves through immersion in Judaica and conversations (if not dialogue) with Jews to discover where the lines of demarcation begin, blur, and end. We will not erase the internal confusion to reach premature solutions to our problems, which are considerable once we move beyond the castigation and dismissal so characteristic of our history.



Who would want to return to the primitive state we were in at the end of World War II? To suggest that that is the condition of our knowledge, as Neusner seems to do, is posturing, pure and simple, and denies everything we know, as if we could unlearn the knowledge we have worked so hard to discover, invent, or reclaim.

At the same time, to give Neusner his due, his proposal—*Jewish-Christian dialogue never existed*—creates a gap or caesura in which we can pause, catch our breath, and recognize the two points of crucial importance in his whole argument:

1. Jews are not simply Christians without Jesus, and Christians are not simply Jews with Jesus; agreement about Jesus based on historic data about the Nazarene is fine and good and enables both Jews and Christians to call him "rabbi," but it denies the subsequent history of the Jesus-figure as Christ and Lord in the dogmatic tradition, all of which is part and parcel of the Christian story.

2. Jews today are not an extension of "Old Testament" figures any more than Christians today are extensions of "New Testament" figures. To deal with today's Judaisms requires us to admit that the rabbinic tradition saved Jewish faith for a new era while correcting it in its own inimitable fashion, which is different from the way it was saved for a new era in Christian dress. Today's Judaisms as well as today's Christianities bear genetic similarity to their ancestral formulations but their contemporary expressions are vastly different and show a complexity born of cultural settings and current issues.

Christians have a long history that has shaped them in ways that do not parallel the history of Jewishness. Simply put, we are not "New Testament Christians." Similarly, the Judaisms of today are related to the religion of the "Old Testament," but they evolved in ways that have altered that religion markedly *via* the rabbinic-talmudic tradition. While many scholars revision the history in this well-known way, Neusner's contribution has been to show that Judaism and Christianity are related historically by

way of *response*: Judaisms today would not be what they are, had not Christians challenged Jews on their right to continue as a legitimate religion. Talmud, as Neusner showed in his massive three-volume work, *The Foundations of Judaism*, grew in both concept and content in response to the empowerment of Christianity under Empire.

So today we approach each other as two quite different religions, despite our conviction that we share a common point of origin. We must begin with genuine respect for our differences rather than on the strength of our similarities if the dialogue is to proceed.

Earlier I mentioned that Christians committed to the dialogue with Jews are not willing to sacrifice our internal confusion for the sake of easy solutions.

What is this internal confusion? It comes from the following considerations: if Jesus is the Messiah, why did history not end with his arrival? Why do we not live in the apocalyptic fulfillment of the New Age? If Jesus was the Messiah promised the Jews, why did Judaism continue as a movement? If Jesus was not the Messiah as understood by his own people, how do we justify following his way as "Christians"? If Jesus is not the Messiah as understood by his own people, how can we deny them their covenant relationship with God? But if there are two covenants and not one (argued as a mediating position earlier in the 20th century by both Rosenzweig and Buber), how can we who follow the "second" covenant continue to act and teach as if Torah were erased? What is the dynamic behind the dissolution of Jewish relationships with their own daughter movement, the followers of Jesus, in those early generations? These are not easy questions. They keep us awake nights. There are inner contradictions to be addressed, they cannot be answered easily or with maxims, but first we must surface and live with them. Neusner's book is helpful to surface the contradictions and questions.

Most Christians want good-naturedly to create the emotional space for the existence of the Jewish people, especially in light of the Holocaust, but as Neusner points out, such sentimentality may solve the problem on the level of social cohesion but does nothing to solve it on the level of theological discourse.

Finally, then, what does Neusner propose? There are two concrete ideas which he lays out in the final substantive chapters of the book.

First, Jews must look at the Christian belief in Jesus as the Christ and find the resources in their own tradition that would enable them to sympathize with such a reading of the life of Christ. Neusner finds the principal resource by reading Talmud in the light of Nachmanides and then on to Abraham Joshua Heschel, especially the latter's work on the concept of pathos in the prophets. It is pathos-as-relationship that allows Jews the imaginative resource to perceive the Christian concept of incarnation. He further, stunningly, proposes the sage as model for incarnation in the later rabbinic tradition, for the sage embodies the will, and the presence of God among the people. There is a twist: God remains yet more than the sage so that "God incarnate remains God ineffable" (p. 137), in whose presence silence is the ultimate homage and response. Certainly Lutherans can identify with this concept, with our emphasis upon the revealed and hidden aspects of God, the *deus revelatus* who remains, even in the incarnation, *deus absconditus*. This is our peculiar way to honor the meaning of the second commandment, and to deny the value of metaphysical speculation in theological matters. This concept forges a powerful connecting link with the Jewish reality.

Israel continues as a physical, material, spatial reality into our day and thus Christians must take the nation of Israel into account...

Second, Neusner enjoins those of us on the Christian side to find resources by which we can understand the place of Israel in the Jewish tradition as the equivalent to our Christ. Neusner points out a daring leap made by the rabbis, who sustain the biblical portrait of Israel as a metaphor for the developing folk, the Jews, in such a way as to identify as one these two temporally separated peoples. For Jews, the "second Adam" is not—as in Paul—Christ, but rather the continuous presence of the people Israel who are called to rise as Adam fell, and who are to be identified with the suffering servant of Isaiah's poems. Neusner adds that no Jew of our day reads these words without reference to the Holocaust. Israel continues as a physical, material, spatial reality into our day and thus Christians must take the nation of Israel into account, while not imputing to the nation righteousness which it does not, cannot possess. For Christians to hold Israel to some higher righteousness, Neusner says, is but another form of anti-Semitism.

I find it astounding that Neusner simply bypasses the pathbreaking work of Paul van Buren, who has dedicated the *magnum opus* of his life to crafting a "Theology of the Jewish Christian Reality," of which three volumes have been published and the fourth is keenly awaited. Van Buren's second volume is entirely devoted to the meaning of Israel for Christians, and he covers in detail the proposal that Neusner has set before us. Neusner may disagree with van Buren, but his silence concerning what van Buren has attempted is quite puzzling and inexplicable. To set van Buren's second volume against Neusner's proposals point-by-point is outside the scope of a book review, but we should note that van Buren deals with the centrality of Sinai and Torah for the formation of Israel, the theme of the land and of the covenant, and the contemporary phenomenon and meaning of Israel for Christians.

Neusner suggests that the difficulties Christians have with Jews over the concept "Israel" is more than analogous to the troubles Jews have with Christians over the concept "Christ," that the two function in similar ways in their respective religions, and that it is on the basis of sustained consideration of these two divisive and yet related beliefs that we can begin the new phase of genuine dialogue.

Suggestions toward our future

There is no way that Jewish-Christian dialogue can be carried on in rural or small town settings apart from the leadership and the directions which can be provided in the major urban centers of New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, and Los Angeles, or through centers like the Institute for Jewish-Christian Understanding in Allentown, Pennsylvania. In these cities, along with their suburbs, Jewish population achieved a critical mass which permitted the development of a

solid Jewish identity that had cultural impact and intellectual depth. When I went to college, seminary, and graduate school with people from midwestern small towns, many students had never encountered a Jew. Their concept of Judaism, if they had one, derived from stereotypes, prejudice, bad preaching, and outdated readings of the New Testament.

Several models of interaction might be adopted at the seminary level.

1. Permanent additions to faculty in Judaica. Not likely considering the financial prospectus of most seminaries in Protestant denominations. The alternative is to utilize the resources at a local university, where departments of religion regularly feature Jewish scholars.

2. Permanent additions to faculty in Jewish-Christian dialogue. This is not the same as the above position. There are persons who have trained to work in Jewish-Christian dialogue by learning enough about each tradition to be comfortable working in both, and who serve as bridges to enable students and other faculty to discover the remnants of and limits to our Christian imperialism, as some enable us to discover our racism.

Several models of outreach might be developed on the parish level.

1. National churches can produce resources for preaching that would be written by a team of scholars and preachers both Jewish and Christian; this would take one step further work already being done by the Anti-Defamation League and others to point out anti-Jewishness if not anti-Semitism in biblical texts.

2. Pastors could study, together with a local rabbi, books, such as Neusner's *Telling Tales* or Clark Williamson's *Has God Rejected His People?* or Michael Goldberg's *Jews and Christians: Getting Our Stories Straight* with a study guide produced by the national church in concert with the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC) or the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR).

3. Pastors could enter into a relationship with local rabbis to engage in review of each other's preaching; this would be especially helpful for pastors when they deal with sensitive texts in the New Testament that relate to the teachings of the Jews at the time of Jesus, Jesus' relationship to his own Jewishness, and those texts critical of "scribes and pharisees."

4. Become involved in local ongoing Jewish-Christian dialogue groups... or begin one.

5. Commemorate the Holocaust by the observation of Yom HaShoah, or "Holocaust Remembrance Day"; the date is 27 Nisan in the Jewish calendar, which means it usually falls in April. The day is reckoned as the fifth day following the eighth day of Passover, so it can be computed from a calendar which lists Passover. Useful resources: Marcia Sachs Littell, ed., *Liturgies on the Holocaust* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1986); Elie Wiesel and Albert H. Friedlander, *The Six Days of Destruction* (Paramus, NJ: Paulist Press, 1988).

Jesus' Name: A Christmas Meditation

Mark Kolden
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> The genesis of Jesus Christ happened thus. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they had sexual intercourse, it was discovered that she was pregnant by [or from, *ek*, in the sense of source] the Holy Spirit. Joseph, being a righteous man, though not willing to make an example of her, decided to divorce her quietly. But while he was thinking about this—note this well!—an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because that which is brought to life in her is by [or from] the Holy Spirit. She will have a baby boy and you are to give him the name 'Jesus,' because he himself will save his people from [away from, *apo*], their sins." (Author's translation)

"You are to give him the name 'Jesus' because he himself will save his people from their sins."

What's in a name? "Jesus" is a Greek form of a Hebrew name, itself shortened from a name that means "God saves." Jesus is that rare person whose name means exactly what it says. "Jesus" tells us who he is and what he does. He is God; he does salvation. That's why he is called "Jesus."

That's why we sing "Jesus, name all names above" and "All hail the power of Jesus' name"; "At the name of Jesus, every knee shall bow" and "How sweet the name of Jesus sounds." We might think that the name of Jesus is the most widely known and respected name in the whole world.

That is probably *not* what Joseph was thinking. First, he was humiliated because he thought his fiancee Mary had gotten pregnant by another man. Then, just when he has decided to break off the marriage plans, an angel tells him not only that he is to go ahead with the marriage but also that they are to give the baby this high-falutin' name that will call even more attention to an already embarrassing situation. Why not

something less awkward than "Jesus" (God saves)?

Still today there is a puzzling reticence to speak the name "Jesus" that afflicts many Christians. It is relatively easy to speak of God or the church. It is pretty painless to speak of faith and love. It is almost sophisticated to speak of "the crucified one" or the suffering of God. But "Jesus" is probably said more often as profanity than as praise.

Some years ago, when many people were already expert on the computer, I was still using a typewriter. Yet I needed to type a lengthy manuscript and I knew a computer would make it much easier. But I was intimidated by computers. So I did what a couple of my technologically-challenged colleagues had done and I bought a little Smith-Corona word processor—just one step above a typewriter. And it worked fine.

It had one feature on it that I found very helpful. Whenever I made a typing error, the word processor beeped. Or when I typed a word it didn't recognize, like "hermeneutics," it beeped. Imagine my surprise, then, when I typed in perhaps the most famous name in all the world and my word processor beeped.

It knows Adam and Eve and Abraham and Sarah; it knows Isaac and Jacob, Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Amos; and Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Peter, and Paul. For goodness' sake, it knows Muhammad and Confucius and the Buddha; Aquinas and Luther, Calvin and Wesley, and Pope John Paul II. It knows Herod and Nero and even Lady Godiva and Madonna! It knows all of these, but it doesn't recognize "Jesus." It beeps every time I type the name "Jesus."

I could fix this, of course, but I leave it—to remind me that Jesus was and is a scandal: God hidden in human flesh; one who is righteous precisely in relating to sinners; an offense from conception to crucifixion, unrecognized by wisdom both human and mechanical.

At Christmas we remember the *genesis* of Jesus. This is the second great creative work of the Spirit. Just as in the beginning the Spirit of God was the sole source of all life, so now again the spirit is the sole source of *new* life—first in Mary's womb, then in us. It has been well said that the "office" (role) of the Holy Spirit is to bring Jesus to life and then to bring Jesus into human lives, which are in bondage to sin.

His name shall be called "Jesus" (God saves) because he will save his people from their sins. *From* their sins—notice that it does not say that Jesus will cleanse us of our sins or give us power to overcome them. It does not say that Jesus will take our sins away from us, but that he will take *us* away from our sins. He will save us *from* (*apo* = out of, away from) our sins. That's how I have learned to hear those words Jesus spoke to so many people during his ministry, "Follow me." "Follow me—for I would take you away from your sins." This is not an image of steady improvement but of conversion, of new birth. As someone has said, "Every conversion is a virgin birth." The new life Jesus brings to *us* is also only by the Spirit.

Old Joseph probably swallowed hard when he took the angel at his word and took Mary as his wife and named their first-born son "Jesus." He must have wondered if it made any sense at all. But he did it anyway. That's one of the things I like best about singing Christmas carols. Even with all our troubles and doubts, we go ahead and sing about Jesus anyway. We don't deny our fears and our darkness, but the familiar words and melodies draw us out of ourselves into welcoming the coming of the savior, whom with Mary and Joseph we call "Jesus"—for what else could anyone call the one who saves his people from their sins?

Book Reviews

Cruciformed: The Literary Impact of Mark's Story of Jesus and His Disciples. By Mark I. Wegener. New York & London: University Press of America, Inc., 1995. 275 pages. Cloth. $36.50.

This monograph is an adaptation of Dr. Wegener's 1992 doctoral dissertation presented to the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. As the subtitle implies, the study pursues a literary reading of the Gospel of Mark, focusing on the effect the "complete sweep of Mark's plot, characters and artistic impact" (p. 2) has on modern readers. The Markan narrative, according to Wegener, is designed to shape readers in a "cruciformed" pattern: that is, "first it frees them mentally and spiritually from being stymied by the fears of death and failure; then it empowers them physically and psychologically so they can better follow Jesus' agenda of self-giving service to others" (p. 222).

The book is a useful synthesis of nearly two decades of literary analysis of the Gospel of Mark. Wegener includes an annotated bibliography of nineteen books on Mark (from Frank Kermode's *The Genesis of Secrecy* and Werner Kelber's *Mark's Story of Jesus*—both published in 1979—to Donald Juel's *A Master of Surprise: Mark Interpreted*, published in 1994, and the forthcoming Hermeneia commentary on *Mark* by Adela Yarbro Collins), which allows the reader a quick review of the major players in the literary analysis of the Gospel.

Wegener's book is rather straightforward. Chapter 1 discusses the "Components of the Markan Narrative," which includes various attempts to name the literary genre of the Markan Gospel. Chapter 2 examines "Mark's Characters and Plot." In this undertaking, the author considers Jesus' teaching, miracles, and the titles ascribed to Jesus as well as the narrative's depiction of Jesus' disciples. The major portion of the book (chapters three through ten) offers Wegener's own literary analysis of the Markan Gospel. He divides the narrative into six scenes bracketed by a prologue and sequel ("Prologue: Disorientation in the Wasteland; Scene One: Healings and Opposition; Scene Two: Riddles and Rejection; Scene Three: Feedings and Frustration; Scene Four: Predictions and Delusion; Scene Five: Prophecies and Confrontation; Scene Six: Crucifixion and Desertion; and Sequel: Reorientation for the Future). In his final chapter entitled "Re-View: Cruciformed Readers in Today's World," the author conveniently summarizes his literary analysis in eight pages and briefly discusses the intended impact of the Gospel on modern readers.

If one is familiar with the last two decades of scholarship on the Gospel of Mark, then Wegener's volume offers no major new insights. Nonetheless, the book with its appendix provides a quick and lively access to the literary approach to Mark for any one new to this field of research. Wegener writes clearly and offers an understandable synthesis of a great quantity of previous research. This book might be especially useful reading for beginning teachers and pastors who are preparing for lectionary preaching on Mark. Although the book includes no scriptural index, chapters 3-10 function as a running literary commentary on the Markan narrative, scene by scene.

James L. Bailey
Wartburg Theological Seminary

Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time: The Historical Jesus and the Heart of Contemporary Faith. By Marcus J. Borg. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994. ix and 150 pages. Paper. $11.00.

Marcus Borg tries to make the case for what he calls a "transformist" view of the Christian faith. Faith is a transformative journey with God in the company of Jesus, the mediator of the sacred. Faith is not "fideistic," believing about Jesus, and it is not "moralistic," following the rules of

Jesus. Jesus is one who experienced the presence of God, and he is a mediator of the sacred who can help others experience the presence of God. The Jesus Borg presents is the pre-Easter Jesus, the Jesus of history, not the post-Easter Jesus, the Christ of faith. This is not surprising since he is a member of the Jesus Seminar whose purpose is to discover what can be known about Jesus with historical certainty.

Borg focuses on the pre-Easter Jesus as he is depicted in the synoptic Gospels and the Gospel of Thomas. The Gospel of John is supposedly not historical and so it is ignored. Borg says that the pre-Easter Jesus was a disciple of John the Baptist who experienced a conversion after John was imprisoned. Jesus was nonmessianic and noneschatological. He was a "spirit person," a mediator of the sacred. He was also a compassionate person who ministered in a world where the dominant view was one of holiness and purity. Jesus attacked the purity system as rigid and crippling and proposed compassion as the way to relate to people. Compassion, he states as an example for today, would break the purity code's treatment of homosexuals and cause people to evaluate them by the same criteria as heterosexuals. He does not speak of the limits and consequences of human behavior as did Jesus when he told the woman caught in adultery to go and sin no more. But that story, Borg holds, is not historical since it appears in the Gospel of John.

Jesus taught wisdom in aphorisms (short sayings) and parables (longer stories). His wisdom subverted the conventional wisdom of his day which dictated what people ought to believe and do. Borg notes that the conventional wisdom of Lutherans made faith into a new requirement. He expands on the theme of wisdom by trying to make the case that Jesus not only taught wisdom but could be called "Wisdom" or "Sophia," the Old Testament name for she who was wisdom and taught wisdom. He pushes this to the extreme when he rewrites John 1 and calls Jesus "Sophia" instead of "Word." He states that all names for Jesus are metaphorical and, therefore, believers should not narrow the image of Jesus to one metaphor, namely, "Son of God."

There are three biblical macro-stories, Borg says, that are guides for the Christian message and life. The first story, the Exodus, has to do with bondage and liberation. The second, Exile and Return, focuses on exile and coming home. The third is the Priestly story which centers on sin, guilt, and forgiveness. He is especially critical of the priestly approach, which he claims has been the dominant one in Christianity. There are six distortions, he claims, and the one which stood out for this reviewer is that the priestly story is very hard to believe. "The notion that God's only son came to this planet to offer his life as a sacrifice for the sins of the world, and that God could not forgive us without that having happened, and that we are saved by believing this story, is simply incredible" (p. 131). That is a very autobiographical statement on Borg's part. The book has its greatest value for people like Marcus Borg who have found it hard to believe that Jesus is Savior. For them, and for Borg, there is value in thinking of Jesus as "spirit person," a mediator of the sacred, one who helps people journey with God. That is better than being agnostic.

When Borg speaks of "story theology" and literary criticism, he ignores the critique that literary or narrative criticism has about his approach to biblical studies. Literary criticism accepts the text as presented without digging through the layers behind and beneath it. It is critical of those who attempt to do so. Mark Alan Powell's *What is Narrative Criticism?* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990) presents the critique that narrative criticism has for people like Borg and the Jesus Seminar.

There are many fine things that Borg says about the transformist way of Christian life. It is a journey with Jesus. It involves eating at his table and experiencing his banquet. It means being in the alternative community of Jesus and becoming compassionate. However, there are many Christians and Christian communities who fit that description and still believe Jesus is Son of God and Savior. Borg's transformist way of relating to Jesus does not have a corner on the compassionate life.

Robert Conrad
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

Christ in a Post-Christian World. By Pamela Dickey Young. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995. ix and 162 pages. Cloth. $14.00.

"What does it mean to claim a particular religious identity in the late 20th century?" This is one of the first questions Pamela Dickey Young raises. Along with the more pointed question, "What does it mean to be a *Christian* in the late 20th century?," it sets the tone for the rest of her book. Believing that "one cannot be religious in the abstract," she attempts to apply the principles of a Feminist-Christian theology to the concrete context of inter-religious dialogue. In the process, she offers a model with which one can confess oneself as a Christian while still maintaining an openness to hearing the claim of those around us. She seeks a Christian theology that is not only "non-imperialistic" and "non-patriarchal," but also faithful to its historical, symbolic traditions.

One of the strengths of this book is that the author takes seriously both the aspects of life which divide us, as well as those which unite us. Again and again she challenges us to do theology in the specific, particular situation in which we find ourselves. However, she also encourages us to look for genuine universal principles. These need to be concrete enough to speak to our current situation but also broad enough to allow for communication across cultural, sexual, and economic boundaries. This balancing of the general and the universal is a theme which surfaces repeatedly in later chapters.

As a feminist, she outlines four basic contributions she believes feminism offers in the broader scope of inter-religious dialogue. First, its corrective factor within Christianity itself; second, its ability to unite people across religious boundaries, giving them common ground for thought and action; third, the possibility of encouraging religious discussions among women outside the "official" theological positions; and fourth, an emphasis on particularity, which celebrates the "richness and multivalence" of religious symbols. This section is especially helpful for someone interested in better understanding a feminist perspective, or looking to include feminism in a wider theological dialogue.

In chapters 3 and 4, she discusses the difficulties inherent in defining the role of Christology in the larger context of inter-religious dialogue. I found her handling of various positions from Christocentrism to pluralism helpful, as well as her reinterpretation of the role of Jesus and the aim of Christology. She identifies the central concern of Christology as "the ultimate meaning of my life in relation to God," and sees Jesus as the broker of that salvific relationship in which the Christian finds her/his life's meaning fulfilled.

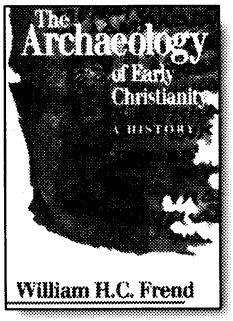
From this, she goes on to talk about God: the ways in which God can be conceived, and place of "truth" in that process. The claim she makes, citing Langdon Gilkey, is that "religious traditions are relative manifestations of absolute meaning." This is her way of avoiding the "slippery slope" of pure religious relativism without imposing an inflexible religious imperialism on believers of other traditions. She expands on this idea in chapter 5, where she discusses how we experience the world and where we experience God in our lives. This discussion raises important ethical issues, and offers a worthwhile contribution to the difficult and timely question of how we define justice and value.

In the closing chapters, she raises the question of what is the "morally good," and what criteria we have to judge a faithful religious response to God. All theology includes claims about goodness and truth: how do we evaluate their accuracy? From this position, she moves further to discuss the claims religion makes regarding beauty and value, both in the world and as attributes of God. The strength of these sections is their grounding in our daily life. They keep the conversation firmly rooted in our experience of the world, and are easily applicable to concrete situations that ministers and other servants in the church must face daily.

This book is easily readable, interesting, and challenging, and has an important word to speak to anyone who is interested in strengthening his/her own faith, gaining insight into the feminist perspective, or learning more about how to faithfully enter into dialogue with those outside the Christian faith.

Kristin Johnston
Wartburg Theological Seminary

Signs and Shadows
in Early Christian Studies

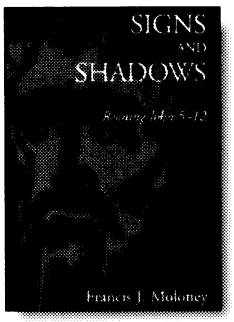


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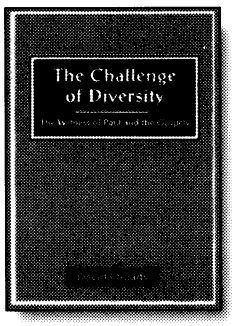


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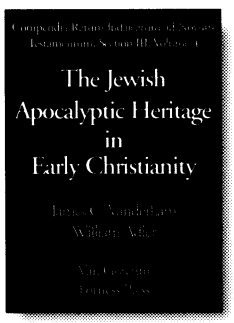
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Understanding Paul's Ethics. Edited by Brian S. Rosner. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1995. xiii and 377 pages. Paper. $22.00.

Brian S. Rosner has rendered a useful service to students of Pauline ethics by collecting in this one volume fourteen essays from the 20th century concerning the general subject of Pauline ethics with his own introduction and conclusion. They are arranged in seven chapters (origin, context, social dimension, shape, logic, foundations, and relevance) which overlap somewhat but serve to arrange the material in a helpful manner. On the origin, Rosner (with Holtz and contrary to Harnack) takes the view that the biblical/Jewish origin of Paul's ethics is crucial to assessing the other aspects of Paul's ethics. I will mention only some of the individual essays.

Alfred Seeberg's essay, "Moral Teaching: The Existence and Contents of 'the Ways,'" is enlightening by listing all the sins mentioned by Paul and assigning to them various stages of probability that they belonged to the tradition, the teaching of "the Ways."

Rudolf Bultmann, "The Problem of Ethics in Paul," illuminates the statement in Galatians 5:25, "Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit." This existence can only be understood as the gift of the Spirit.

Michael Parsons in a very lucid article, "Being Precedes Act: Indicative and Imperative in Paul's Writing," discusses three views of the relationship between indicative and imperative in Paul: virtual separation (Dodd), fusion (Bultmann a.o.), and close relationship, incorporating a clear distinction. The latter is his own view and is illustrated by the exegesis of some sample passages.

Eduard Lohse's essay, "The Church in Everyday Life," although not limited to Paul, points out exceedingly well the idea that Christian ethics is not a system of generally valid truths but demands the total person.

Schnabel, "How Paul Developed His Ethics," after discussing specific ethical passages of the Pauline epistles, offers a "systematic concentration" in which he points out that Pauline ethics are theologically motivated, theocentric, christological, ecclesiological, and eschatological. The Torah is not abolished but is modified. In addition the words of Jesus are a binding authority. Christian love is not an abstract principle but always has concrete content.

Wolfgang Schrage, "The Formal Ethical Interpretation of Pauline Paranesis," opposes the view that Pauline ethics are necessitated only because of an abating of the eschatological expectation or are a sign of weakness. Rather they are motivated eschatologically as is shown by the close connection between eschatology and ethics. Although many commands are occasioned by specific situations in the congregations, there are also admonitions which are valid always, sometimes in a prophylactic way.

Richard N. Longenecker discusses four ways of using the New Testament for ethics (a law book, universal principles, Holy Spirit as guide, situation ethics) and sees some good in all of them. After discussing seven biblical perspectives, he defines New Testament ethics as follows: "prescriptive principles stemming from the heart of the gospel (usually embodied in the example and teachings of Jesus), which are meant to be applied to specific situations by the direction and enablement of the Holy Spirit, being always motivated and conditioned by love." Certainly, this definition takes just about everything into account!

Rosner summarizes the seven areas of discussion in an explanation of 1 Thess 4:1-12.

The various writers, of course, have their own viewpoints, spread out over almost one hundred years, and it is difficult to see unity in this book. But this diversity also makes it interesting and illuminating for the reader. Suggestions for further study are offered which require immersion in the world of the New Testament and may lead to a thorough grasp of New Testament ethics. An index of Pauline references and of modern authors completes the book. I recommend it for theological students and those pastors who love deep involvement in the New Testament.

Wilhelm C. Linss
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

Women's Visions: Theological Reflection, Celebration, Action. Edited by Ofelia Ortega. Geneva: WCC Publications, 1995. xi and 182 pages. Paper. $12.90.

This collection of essays by women from various parts of the world grows out of the seminar "Women in Dialogue: Wholeness of Vision towards the 21st Century," held at Bossey, Switzerland, in 1994. Organized by the Ecumenical Institute in Bossey, along with the women's programmes of the World Council of Churches, World Alliance of Reformed Churches, Lutheran World Federation, and Conference of European Churches, the seminar and book are a contribution to the midpoint of the Ecumenical Decade—Churches in Solidarity with Women.

The essays are a valuable resource for readers interested in women's perspectives on the church's global mission. African, Asian, European, South American, Latin American, North American, Australian, and Middle Eastern Christian feminists make connections between various aspects of feminist theology and their local contexts. Hearing their voices deepens our sense of the interconnectedness of Christianity throughout the world and challenges parochial theological and ecclesial assumptions. The book will be of interest primarily to those for whom the church's global mission is a priority in ministry. It also will be of interest to persons seeking a brief introduction to the variety of contextualized feminist theological reflection underway all around the globe.

Gwen Sayler
Wartburg Theological Seminary

Leading Women: How Church Women Can Avoid Leadership Traps and Negotiate the Gender Maze. By Carol E. Becker. Nashville: Abingdon, 1996. 206 pages. Paper. $14.95.

Voices of women and men leaders in Protestant denominations speak through interviews and focus groups of the dilemmas they face working together in faith communities. The author has done the necessary background research, both in surveying recent literature and in listening to professionals in a variety of settings. She presents a not yet fully integrated but very readable work, especially for those who are seeking an introduction to the issues.

Becker shows us how women and men, often while trying very hard to be a team, misinterpret each other's hopes, communication style, and use of power. The quotes from her interviews make the book real and substantive. A woman speaking about her supervisory role said, "The need to collapse the distance that should exist between me and the staff is sometimes an urge on my part as well as theirs." The presence of more and more women in leadership roles has opened up a variety of styles.

This book is not just for women. The title, while an interesting play on words, may mislead. In order for us to achieve partnership, both men and women must fully own and work on the issues. Two of the most useful chapters, "Traps for Men" and "What Men Must Do," are particularly useful for male pastors who as yet have not worked in healthy full partnerships with female pastors, associates in ministry, or diaconal ministers. "A man who decides to move beyond hierarchy to collaboration, fights the cultural expectation that he should be decisive." Becker tells how men can learn from women and how women can learn from men. We need to really "acknowledge the other, something we may only think we have been doing."

The author details specific themes and gives ten factors for change; however, she may fall into her own trap of being merely "sensitive" and therefore cautious in her call for change. Nevertheless, men and women will find this a productive book to encourage their own conversation toward greater understanding and new ways of working productively together.

Norma Cook Everist
Wartburg Theological Seminary

Hearing the New Testament. Strategies for Interpretation. Edited by Joel B. Green. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1995. xvi and 444 pages. Cloth. $25.00.

Green has collected a number of significant essays on the interpretation of the New Testament, written by various authors on various subjects. The editor himself has contributed three and a half essays, introducing and summarizing the subject as well as one on discourse analysis, and one as co-author with Richard B. Hays on the use of the Old Testament. The essays are unified by the use of "set texts," Lk 3:1-20; Jn 4:1-42; 1 Cor 11:2-34; Jas 4:13-5:6; Revelation 5. Each essay is followed by suggestions for further reading. Indexes of scripture and other ancient sources and of modern authors are provided. Not all essays can be discussed here. The essays reflect the "methodological pluralism" existing at the end of the twentieth century (Anthony C. Thiselton in his historical survey).

Bruce Chilton in "Traditio-Historical Criticism and Study of Jesus" analyzes cycles of tradition before the writing of the Gospels but is quite dogmatic in positing these revisions (e.g., a Jacobean circle) without providing convincing proof.

Other authors discuss the relevance of Jewish and Greco-Roman texts, the use of textual criticism, modern linguistics, co-text, genre analysis, and the New Testament's use of the Old Testament. Other chapters are devoted to more recent endeavors, such as social-scientific perspectives, narrative criticism, the role of the reader, including deconstruction, a global purview, feminist hermeneutics, and canonical interpretation.

Edgar V. McKnight, "Presuppositions in New Testament Study," offers a brief review of philosophy from Plato to Ricoeur and an even briefer discussion of the present hermeneutical situation and concludes that "nothing has been offered that has effectively altered the pluralism of interpretation."

The canonical interpretation of Jas 4:13–5:6 by Robert W. Wall and Sandra M. Schneiders' feminist reading of John 4 are especially interesting.

In the last chapter, Green demonstrates applications of these different readings to the practical life of the church.

Despite the multiplicity of authors and subjects, the book makes a unified impression, due to the editor's planning and editing.

The book serves well as an introduction to the various old and new ways of reading and hearing the New Testament and is to be recommended for beginning theological students and for pastors to keep up with more recent developments in the interpretation of the New Testament.

Wilhelm C. Linss

Engaging the New Testament. An Interdisciplinary Introduction. By Russell Pregeant. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995. 581 pages. Cloth. $46.00.

This masterful introduction to the New Testament was designed primarily for academic settings. Pregeant integrates historical criticism with reader-response analysis throughout the text. He also weaves into his discussions of each book or collection selected issues from other critical perspectives. It is a rigorous text with the right blend of background information, discussion of scholarly controversies and dialogue among different approaches to the texts, and methods of critical analysis that is suitable for Master's or seminary level English New Testament surveys. In the right circumstances, it deserves consideration for undergraduate courses.

Chapter One describes various scholarly approaches to the Bible (historical-critical, social-scientific, theological and ideological existential, psychological, and literary), and, with remarkable clarity, explains the contemporary methods of critical study (form, redaction and rhetorical criticism, structuralism, reader-response analysis, and deconstruction). Part One provides background information. It summarizes late postexilic concepts and movements, discusses the prehistory of the gospels, the issue of apostolicity, and the synoptic problem, and clarifies the distinction between the historical Jesus and the Jesus tradition. Part Two focuses

on the Gospels and Acts; Part Three examines the Pauline corpus; Part Four presents Hebrews, the General letters, and Revelation. The two Appendices present an explanation of the term "Son of Man" and a "Chronology of Paul" by John A. Darr. Pregeant provides a brief glossary and a subject index at the end of the text. Each chapter concludes with a number of salient questions for study and reflection followed by a bibliography.

After fourteen years of teaching lower division biblical introductions that were almost exclusively populated by freshmen and sophomores, I would not adopt this text in similar circumstances. I would consider it for an upper division survey. This text needs an instructor who is aware of the issues and the methods it incorporates; those who are not biblical scholars but happen to teach New Testament surveys may find themselves unprepared to clarify this text. The book should fascinate a serious amateur and would be an excellent review for pastors. Although I sense that this book is too detailed for casual courses offered in parish settings, those who direct Bible studies at the parochial level will find that Pregeant's text is a valuable resource for their own preparation.

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Literary Theory. By David Dawson. Guides to Theological Inquiry. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995. x and 150 pages. Paper. $11.00.

Biblical scholars have been mining the fields of modern literary criticism for some time now to find new ways of approaching texts. The time may have come, this book avers, for theologians to take an analogous approach to literary theory.

The study adopts a paradigmatic approach, not offering (as the title might imply) a general introduction to the field, but rather a dialogical engagement of three particular theorists: Paul de Man, Harold Bloom, and Mikhail Bakhtin. Dawson probes the writings of these three for insights relevant to theological reflection and employs theological categories to critique these writings at points where issues of correlating concern are found.

De Man and Bloom are portrayed as offering anti-incarnationist theories. The former's deconstructive and performative understanding of language is compared and contrasted with Augustine's exposition of the sign character of Scripture and Luther's teaching on the function of words in the Eucharist. Bloom's gnostic exaltation of poetry and identification of its inevitable revisionary power is compared to Christian understandings of promise and fulfillment. Neither theorist will allow meaning to be found in "the material stuff of life, in the here and now. In contrast, Bloom insists that meaning is to be found elsewhere, while de Man insists that meaning simply is not to be found" (p. 120).

Bakhtin's understanding of how a novelist "authors" a hero offers an integrative approach that is generally more compatible with Christian conceptions, especially as regards "the paradox of a divine agency that constitutes rather than subverts genuine human agency" (p. 86). But in another sense Bakhtin's representation of life as apparent tragedy but ultimate comedy may parallel only naive varieties of Christian thought that are existentially unsatisfying.

The book is thought-provoking, no more and no less. Parish pastors will find little here that impacts the actual work of ministry one way or another, but those who enjoy a little retreat to the ivory tower now and then will find the intellectual stimulation it offers to be challenging and worthwhile.

Mark Allan Powell
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Columbus, Ohio

Sheltering the Jews: Stories of Holocaust Rescuers. By Mordecai Paldiel. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996. viii and 224 pages. Paper. $16.00.

In this highly readable account, Mordecai Paldiel presents a wide variety of stories concerning people and communities who protected Jews during the Nazi period. The stories are based upon those individuals who have been honored as "Righteous among the Nations" at Israel's *Yad Vashem*, a memorial to the six million Jews who perished in the Nazi Holocaust. Paldiel is not only the director of *Yad Vashem* but was one of the children hidden during the war years. This book is an excellent introduction to a side of that dark period of Europe's history that is not often emphasized.

Paldiel begins with a brief introduction highlighting the extermination policy. The groundwork was laid during the years between Hitler's rise to power in 1933 and the first exterminations in 1941, which would lead to public acceptance of "the final solution." Initially laws deprived Jews of civil rights. The Nazis conducted mass shootings of Jews in newly conquered Russian territories, but these efforts were not "efficient" enough. Then in January of 1942, a conference was held at Wannsee during which plans were made for the deportation of Jews from all over Europe to the new killing facilities in Poland. Paldiel notes that by the end of 1942, "the majority of the ancient Jewish communities in Poland, Holland, and other European countries had been consigned to the gas chambers..." (p. 5). He also reminds the reader that even as the Nazis were struggling against all odds for survival during the last years of the war, the zeal to kill Jews did not abate.

This book is interesting and well-written. The only defect is its size. The stories are almost anecdotal and beg fleshing out. Corrie ten Boom's story documented in the book, *The Hiding Place*, is condensed into one paragraph. Nonetheless, one is impressed with the number of people who literally risked their lives, sometimes in the face of opposition from their own families, in order to save Jews.

In the final chapter on the significance of these deeds, Paldiel writes, "They [the rescuers] are proof that there is another, not yet fully explored, dimension of human behavior that can come to the fore and manifest itself during periods of crisis" (p. 193). This chapter can inspire those who fight against injustice in any society.

Sheltering the Jews could easily serve as the basis for a discussion or series of discussions about the Holocaust for Confirmation-age youth to adults. It could be supplemented with films or videos such as "Schindler's List," "The Hiding Place," "Raoul Wallenberg," or "Au revoir les enfants." An extensive bibliography of English-language sources will assist anyone wishing to find out more about the rescuers.

Betty Krafft
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

Rural Evangelism: Catching the Vision. By Kevin E. Ruffcorn. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1994. 128 pages. Paper. $9.95.

Throughout his book, Ruffcorn conveys a keen awareness of the plight of rural life. He shares with his readers some of the significant realities of rural culture and how they effect evangelism efforts. One of his insights includes the paradox of neighborliness and personal privacy. Rural and small town communities know how to be neighbors. They will help each other out in a moment's notice. The same families often live and work beside each other for generations. Yet, in the midst of such neighborliness, there is also a deep respect for personal privacy. Certain things are not discussed. Personal opinions on religion is one of those things.

Another aspect of rural life that directly affects the issue of evangelism is fear. Ruffcorn discusses a number of fears that rural congregations may experience. One of the most persistent and pervasive is the fear of failure. Rural people understand failure from personal and communal experience. Families are losing farms that have been in the family for generations. People have to move away or take on additional jobs. This sense of failure in the community spills over into church life so that doing any new task may seem insurmountable. In addition, when this happens, the rural church can take on an attitude of insti-

tutional survival rather than evangelism. This makes people unwilling to risk or try something new.

Despite these challenges, Ruffcorn asserts that evangelism can happen. Through the course of the book, Ruffcorn walks the reader through the process of establishing evangelism. The main ingredients for making evangelism a reality for the congregation are the pastor and his or her concrete vision of evangelism, time, and the proper motivation of the congregation. Ruffcorn illustrates his points with stories of how pastors and their congregations began, and continue in, the process of becoming evangelistic.

Ruffcorn has a working definition of evangelism that is at the core of his book: "Evangelism is the proclamation of the good news, both inwardly and outwardly, by word and action in an intentional manner" (p. 20). Ruffcorn disabuses the reader of false understandings of what evangelism is and does. Evangelism is not necessarily about getting lots of people into church. This is good because most rural areas have experienced a significant drop in population. Nor is evangelism about knocking on the doors of strangers. Rather, Ruffcorn reminds us that evangelism is an intentionally relational enterprise. Fundamentally, it is about the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ to those inside *and* outside of the church.

Rural Evangelism is filled with sagacious insights for the pastor or lay leader who wants to bring about evangelistic change in the congregation. Ruffcorn offers an astute observation to pastors and lay leaders about conflict being a natural by-product of change. "Evangelism spurs change and change is accompanied by conflict. The conflict is not proportional to the degree of change perceived by the pastor; it is, rather, proportional to the degree of change perceived by the congregation." This is wise counsel to those of us who are often baffled by the negative reactions of congregational members over the need for simple and rational changes.

I highly recommend this book for anyone planning on implementing an evangelism program within a rural or small town context. There is a lot of practical wisdom in this little book.

Jeff Zell
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The Double Message: Patterns of Gender in Luke-Acts. By Turid Karlsen Seim. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994. viii and 301 pages. Cloth. $29.95.

Turid Karlsen Seim articulates her thesis best: "to investigate how mutual dependence, interplay, and power structures between women and men are conceived" in Luke-Acts. An English version of her doctoral dissertation at the University of Oslo, this book is extensively researched and sets a scholarly and readable tone.

In Chapter Two, Seim uses literary criticism to examine what has been called "gender pairs," references to men and women whose mutual activities mark complementary and inclusive contributions to Luke's narrative as a whole. In Chapter Three, Seim looks at women in particular. Describing the narrative niches of the women in Lk 8:1-3, she ruminates on their possible historical and social positions. In Chapter Four, Seim offers a thorough investigation of Lk 10:38-42, the story of Mary and Martha, a high traffic area for feminist biblical interpreters. The Holy Spirit's activity is the focus in Chapter Five; the Holy Spirit pours the gift of prophecy upon women throughout Luke-Acts. In the final chapter, Seim argues that women in Luke are not dependent upon marriage or family for identity; women's inclusion into the fellowship of Jesus offered a freeing alternative.

The title "The Double Message" describes ambivalence in Luke-Acts: women are both silenced and heard, women are both present and rejected by men in the narrative, women are both placed in the home and upheld as persons of "independent integrity."

A strength of this book is its incorporation of other New Testament texts that inform gender questions; Luke is a partner in intertextual dialogue. At times, however, the chapters seem to meander. At those times, the conclusions lack decisive clarity. One conclusion is clear: Jesus' presence and teachings create a new community not bound by social strata. With this conclusion in its pages, this book is a healthy consideration of the benefits of diversity in the church.

Bonnie Flessen
Wartburg Theological Seminary

A Map of Twentieth-Century Theology: Readings from Karl Barth to Radical Pluralism. Edited by Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1995. x and 388 pages. Paper. $26.00.

The Preface to this anthology discloses a more modest aim than claimed by the volume's title: "It offers readings that cover the most significant developments in twentieth-century theology up to the emergence of the current radical pluralism" (p. ix). When one keeps in mind that "radical pluralism" in theology surfaced in the 1960s, there are major developments in twentieth-century theology which simply do not enter the purview of this book.

The selection of readings does an excellent job of tracing the dominant influence of European, especially German, voices in theological debate during the first two-thirds of this century. Part One on "Dialectical Theology and Its Descendants" includes separate chapters on crisis in theology, dialectical theology, new systematics, theologies of secularization, the new hermeneutics, eschatological theology, and trinitarian theology. Part Two on "Alternative Paradigms in Theology" consists of individual chapters on theology of religions, confessional theologies, transcendental Thomism, theology and language, process theology, and neo-Protestantism in America. The Introduction to the nineteenth-century background (especially the brief interpretation of Schleiermacher and Hegel) and the Editors' Introduction to each of thirteen chapters of the book are extremely helpful for understanding the intricacies which distinguish each theological position. All of the giants are represented: Barth, Bonhoeffer, Brunner, Bultmann, Moltmann, Pannenberg, Rahner, and Tillich, among others.

What a discerning reader will soon discover, however, is how dramatically the theological scene has changed in the last three decades. The awakening to contextuality in theology now reveals that what was once considered a universal theological paradigm was itself highly particular, conditioned by both European political developments and by the university context in which theology was written. What does it mean that of the 37 representative readings in this volume, all of them are by men, none of them by people of color, 24 by Germans, 32 by Europeans, and the other 5 by North Americans? This is not so much to criticize the editors as to demonstrate how radically the theological scene has changed. When liberation theologians, beginning in the late 1960s, pointed out the dependency of theological thought upon European statements of the problem and European answers, they were very much on target.

The selections included in this volume pose the question of gains and losses in the shift from a dominant European paradigm to a situation of "radical pluralism." The editors seem to lament the new situation. Others, particularly those previously excluded from the discussion, see things quite differently. Postmodernism confronts contemporary Christian theology with the formidable task of articulating a cohesive worldview which incorporates many new, challenging, and critical viewpoints. A hundred years from now, those who list the most significant developments in twentieth-century theology may view the present not so much as a time of disintegration as a time of ferment before the emergence of a new and more inclusive Christian paradigm, one which takes seriously both the reality of oppression and the insights of other great world religions. Should that paradigm emerge, however, we can be sure that fragments of the twentieth-century theology documented in this book will have an honored place in the new configuration.

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Briefly Noted

Fortunate the Eyes that See. Edited by Astrid B. Beck, Andrew H. Bartelt, Paul R. Raabe, and Chris A. Franke (Eerdmans, $45). These forty essays celebrate the 70th birthday of David Noel Freedman. Freedman's accomplishments and publications are wide-ranging, but he is perhaps best known for his editing of the Anchor Bible series, now comprising some 74 volumes! His own bibliography takes up 37 pages. The essays in this book themselves range as widely as the interests of the honoree, from needlework and sewing in Israel to Norse mythical traditions. Two of the editors are professors at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis. *RWK*

The Book of Genesis. Chapters 18-50. By Victor P. Hamilton (Eerdmans, $42). As with volume 1 of this massive commentary in the NICOT series, H. provides a fresh translation, copious notes and bibliography, and an "evangelical" reading of the text, including frequent paragraphs that discuss the New Testament appropriation of Genesis. While H. maintains a conservative perspective, he does not insist that the book was written by Moses and concedes that all need to acknowledge post-Mosaic touching-up. He has ransacked the immense secondary literature on Genesis and provides fair and remarkably clear discussions of controverted points (see e.g. the commentary on Gen 49:10). There is even an occasional bit of humor, as when he remarks, on Gen 19:4-8, that the audience of the story may be relieved not to be among the daughters of Lot. Its clear verse-by-verse layout makes it a delight to consult on specific points. While H. and I differ markedly on how Genesis was composed, I plan to keep his two-volume commentary close at hand and refer to it often. *RWK*

Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament. Volume VII. Edited by G. Johannes Botterweck†, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry (Eerdmans, $39.99). The ecumenical and international team producing this "Old Testament Kittel" has now reached words beginning with *kaph* and *lamadh*, interpreting the Hebrew and Aramaic words semantically and theologically. Under each keyword the writers investigate other related words. In this volume we have such crucial words as the Semitic equivalents of "glory," "priest," "atone," "heart," "Levite," "Leviathan," and "bread"—about 75 words in all. *RWK*

Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi. By Paul L. Redditt (Eerdmans, $14.99). All of a sudden we have a series of excellent commentaries on these post-exilic prophets (see the alternatives by David L. Petersen and Eric and Carol Meyers in the Old Testament Library and the Anchor Bible respectively). R. believes that Zechariah 9-14 was written in the Persian period. Its writers believed that the Davidides and other leading families of Jerusalem needed to repent and be cleansed. The redactor of the Minor Prophets summarized the contents of Malachi in 4:4-6: Remember the law of Moses and look forward to the Day of Yahweh, when God would approve the faithful and judge the sinful. *RWK*

Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi. By David L. Petersen (Westminster/John Knox, $28). P., who earlier published a commentary in the same Old Testament Library on Haggai and Zechariah 1-8, demonstrates again in this commentary his deep knowledge of the social setting of the Persian period. Whereas in Zechariah 9-14 Judah's place in Yahweh's international plan stands as the subject for reflection, in Malachi it is the religious life of the community in Judah and Jerusalem that is the primary concern. Zechariah 9-14 foresees significant destruction, but Malachi provides a means by which at least some Judeans might survive. The epilogue to Malachi presupposes the existence of the collection of latter prophets, preceded already by the Pentateuch and Former Prophets. *RWK*

A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period. Volume II: From the Exile to the Maccabees. By Rainer Albertz (Westminster/John Knox, $32). In my review of Volume I (*Currents* 21 [1994] 459-60), I noted that this work might well be *the* book of the 90s in Old Testament studies. Volume II does not disappoint as it traces Israel's official religion, its opponents, and the substratum of personal piety. He believes the Pentateuch is a compromise between the Deuteronomistic and Priestly schools, with the old monarchic theology largely excluded (building largely on the work of Blum). He sees three parties in post-exilic times: the wicked rich, the pious poor, and a third party which largely sided with the poor though they criticized the latter's prophetic expectations. While some of his social reconstructions are by necessity speculative, overall he gives a compelling account of the interface between society and religion in ancient Israel. *RWK*

This book grew out of Ulrich Luz's concern that modern theological students do not see the value of scholarly biblical interpretation. They experience the gap between past and present and find that modern interpretation does not produce a text's significance for them personally. Since he is writing this generation's major critical commentary on Matthew, he reflects on how interpretation aids the church hear Matthew's significance for today in **Matthew in History: Interpretation, Influence, Effects** (Fortress Press, $10). He warns in his first chapter that classical historical criticism puts a huge gap between text and the contemporary world. He seeks to bridge that gap. His basic principle is: "I would propose to understand the meaning of a biblical text as an interaction of a 'kernel of meaning,' which corresponds to the given structures of a text, and a 'directional meaning,' which gives a present direction to the readers on their way to new lands" (p. 20). Thus he combines historical critical interpretation with the study of the history of the effects of a text. That "kernel of meaning" provides a control over arbitrary interpretation. He illustrates the values of this approach by an examination of Matthew 10 ("Itinerant Radicals, Settled Communities and the Church Today") and Matthew 16 ("Peter: The True Christian or the Pope"). The final chapter, "The History of Effects and the Question of Truth," draws implications for contemporary church life. Reading and pondering this slim paperback will enrich and make relevant preaching on Matthew. I heartily recommend it.

Edgar Krentz

Morna Hooker, Professor of Divinity at Cambridge University, provides useful resources for preaching in Lent and Holy Week in her short volume **Not Ashamed of the Gospel: New Testament Interpretations of the Death of Christ** (Eerdmans, $11). Separate chapters treat Paul, Mark, Matthew, Luke-Acts, John, and Hebrews, with brief attention given to 1 Peter, 1 John, and Revelation. She gives sharp contours to each author, showing their distinctive insights, while stressing that all are aware of the shame of the cross. Informative, stimulating, clear. Read this before Lent—or at any time in the year to enrich your preaching. *Edgar Krentz*

The Future of Theology: Essays in Honor of Jürgen Moltmann. Edited by Miroslav Volf, Carmen Krieg, and Thomas Kucharz (Eerdmans, $35). Twenty-six renowned contemporary theologians contribute significant reflections about the future of theology in this volume dedicated as a *Festschrift* to Moltmann on his 70th birthday (Cobb, Cone, Gutiérrez, Hall, Pannenberg, Ruether, Soelle, *et al.*). The book is formally organized into three sections: "Challenges" theology is facing, "Perspectives" on addressing the challenges, and "Themes" needing attention today. The book is not an analysis of Moltmann's thought *per se* but a way of honoring the spirit of his theology through original and creative contributions to current debate. The various essay topics are lively and timely. The resonance between Moltmann's theology and liberation themes is especially evident. The book begins with an excellent introduction on the challenges and prospects of theology by Miroslav Volf. Because God lives — God as our "dignity," "agony," and "hope" (Moltmann) — theology has a future. This book contains many concise and penetrating insights, worthy of the theologian it honors and the God who inspires them all. *Craig L. Nessan*

Preaching Helps

Ash Wednesday—Good Friday, Series B

Doing Violence

Because I teach New Testament at a seminary, some of my preacher friends feel a bit nervous when I sit in front of them on a Sunday morning. What kind of grades will I give to their interpretation? Will I think they have done violence to the text?

Interesting phrase. Some voices are raised these days saying that the Bible is full of violent stories, texts of terror. That's not news. The news comes in the "so what" portion that follows. What has happened, some tell us, is that all those stories of violence in a book called holy sanctifies the doing of violence in human history. The ins have killed the outs, men have violated women and violently subdued them, Christians have crusaded against the infidel, one brand of Christian has cheerfully burned or executed another brand regarded as heretical. And they have done this, we are told, not only in the name of religion but because the violence in the texts sanctions violence in our lives and so begets further violence.

What we need is some kind of V chip for reading the Bible. We do of course edit the stories for telling to children. Without trying to be cute, we do eliminate the gory until young hearts and heads can begin to hear the biblical voice whole.

Did the ancient evangelists already use a form of V chip? Certain members of the Jesus Seminar think so. John Dominic Crossan in a series of interesting books has convinced many of his colleagues that the Gospels have rewritten the story of Jesus' last days to mask the ugly truth. The gospel according to Crossan has it that Jesus' body was not removed from the cross and buried honorably in a friend's tomb. Rather, says Crossan, it is far more likely that Jesus died on the cross and was then left

there so that his corpse was picked at by carrion birds. Or his body was taken down by soldiers and dumped into a common grave for criminals with a few inches of dirt shoveled on top of it, and then wild dogs may have dug it up a few days later and eaten it.

Crossan and many members of the Jesus Seminar eliminate as unhistorical most of the details of the passion narratives, including the words of Jesus from the cross, the confession of the centurion, the intervention of Joseph of Arimathea, burial in a tomb, the preparation of spices by women, the visit of women to the tomb on Sunday morning. These were substituted, they say, because the truth was too hard.

I very much doubt the truth of Crossan's reconstructions. And on many levels I prefer the Gospels just as they stand. The passion narratives in our Gospels are not so antiseptic. They are full of violence, including the violence of betrayal, denial, fear, and flight on the part of the disciples. The cross is not a pretty sight. The cross is a potent witness to the power of the lie, the speed of darkness, the cunning of evil, and it bears witness to the fragility of good intentions and the indifference of men in uniform under orders and the weakness of the bonds of friendship when one's own existence is on the line.

But if the evangelists are right and the centurion is right and this really is God's son, then the cross also bears witness that God is mysteriously present with blessing not only in moments of success and victory and growth but also in times of defeat and weakness and even in death. It's easy to say, God blessed me with a new home. God blessed me with a raise. God blessed me with a quick recovery. All that is true. But I remember one preacher declaring that it is just as true only harder to say, God blessed me with illness, with defeat, with a reverse, an accident. God is present with potent blessing in and with and under every event of our lives, both what we call good and what we call hard and cruel.

Not finding the blessing in the text, not finding good news, not proclaiming the victory of God in the ministering life and servant death of Jesus Christ—that alone is worth the label of "doing violence to the text."

Woody Nelson sings a moving version of "What a Wonderful World." The song speaks of "bright blessed days and dark sacred nights." That

edges up to the truth. Both our bright days and our dark nights are made blessed and sacred by the presence of God who suffers on behalf of the life of the world. And the crucified calls us to participate in God's own passionate love.

Helping us reflect on the texts of the Lenten season are three pastors serving in Texas. **Gary Morgan-Gohlke** has been the pastor of St. John Lutheran Church in Bishop, Texas, for three years. Gary is Dean of the Coastal Bend Conference. Married, with two daughters, he uses spare moments for reading, sailing, and tinkering on cars and computers. He likes to travel.

Luisa Hanson has been pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in Kingsville, Texas, just six miles south of Bishop, for the past three years. She is a native of California and grew up with a love of the ocean and mountains. In the somewhat flatter coastal plains of Texas, music and jogging are her therapy. Luisa is active in the Kingsville Police Department Chaplaincy Program and chair of the Coastal Bend Conference Outreach Committee.

Gilbert Franke, pastor of St. Paul Lutheran Church, LCMS, just down the street from St. John in Bishop, has spent his 24 years in the pastoral ministry in Texas. Gil and his wife, Beth, have one son. The death of a younger son four years ago in an automobile accident has led Gil to a deeper study of suffering and reliance on God's will. He is an amateur radio operator, writes poetry and an occasional hymn text. The Frankes enjoy camping, hiking, walking, and sailing, an activity they share with the Morgan-Gohlkes.

Thanks to Gary, Luisa, and Gilbert for sharing their reflections on the way of the cross. And hats off to all preachers who wrestle with texts like Jacob at the Jabbok or like Christ in the garden.

Yours,

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Ash Wednesday
February 12, 1997

Psalm 51:1-7
Joel:1-2, 12-17
2 Corinthians 5:20b–6:10
Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

First Reading

To the extent that the Christian church in America is ever able to be truly countercultural, the season of Lent is certainly that time. Discipline, denial, and cross-bearing fly in the face of the dominant culture, nay, even in the face of our most human desires. From the honest and humble confession of sins on Ash Wednesday to the anguished cry from the cross on Good Friday, Christians in this season will travel a path rarely seen outside the church.

On Ash Wednesday, I read Psalm 51 responsively with the congregation as a confession of sins. This psalm masterfully sets the scene for the reading from Matthew. Saying out loud, "I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me," makes humility seem like a natural response. After saying, "I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me," would you really want to stand at the street corner praying so you would be seen by others?

With the confession of Psalm 51 still hanging heavy in the air, Jesus speaks an affirming word about honesty and humility. Do not be like the hypocrites who seek public recognition for their supposed righteousness. Better that you be honest with God and with yourself about how righteous you really are. Better that your offering be in an envelope. Better that you seek out a quiet place, alone with God to pray. Better that your fasting be a time for spiritual growth.

Note the unstated assumptions in this part of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. The word "if" appears nowhere in this section. Not, "If you practice your piety... if you give alms... if you pray... if you fast." No, those spiritual disciplines are a given for those who follow Jesus. The issue at hand is how these things ought to be done, and why.

When you give, pray, or fast to get public recognition, that is your reward. When you do these same things with humility, then God has another reward in store for you. And when you store up those rewards in heaven, then you can bank on them being there for you. After all, heaven is where your heart and your eyes should be set, Jesus tells us.

Tillich said that a symbol bears the reality of that which it symbolizes. Similarly, this psalm of confession creates the reality which Jesus calls for in the gospel reading: a true sense of humility. A broken and contrite heart, God will not despise. What could be a better way to begin the penitential season of Lent than with a heartfelt confession of sins which leads into the spiritual discipline of a Lenten journey to the foot of the cross?

Pastoral Reflections

Perhaps more than in any other place in modern society, farm families are reminded daily of their dependence on God. Despite all of the advances in farm machinery, chemicals, and seeds, farmers still depend on the rains to fall at the right times, for the sun to shine, and for the seasons to be predictable. Farmers can control more factors of production now than ever before, but none are so arrogant as to claim control of the whole growing process.

Lacking complete control of life, some turn to the gods of fate. However, for most of our nation's farmers, it is faith, not fate, which sustains them in the face of inclement

conditions. That simple (but not easy) faith that says, "God will provide," is the faith which sustains in times of drought, flood, hail, or freeze.

This deep and abiding faith in a God who will provide, even when all evidence seems to the contrary, is a faith which usually humbles a person. Rare is the farmer who brags about what a wonderful crop he produced or the wonderful price it fetched in the marketplace. No, even in bumper crop years, most farmers will only modestly tell how good the crop really was. And then they'll promptly complain (justifiably) about what a low price they got and how broke they still are. Unlike their urban counterparts, a farmer's clothes, car, and house usually will not reveal much about his economic status. Humility and modesty are the rule.

However, despite all the difficulties and uncertainties of farming, it does have its rewards. Independence, life outdoors, constant feedback, and joy in the mystery of seeing a green shoot emerge from the soil and eventually result in a plentiful yield are some of the rewards of farming. Pride in caring for land that has been in the family for many years, or even generations, pride in working hard and pride in providing food and fiber for the world are other rewards.

Lent is a time to humbly receive the rewards which God bestows. It isn't a time of self-aggrandizement or arrogance. It is a time to again acknowledge our dependence on God for all good things and to let that be our only reward. Faith that God does provide for us frees us to provide for others, pray for others, and entrust our every need to God's care. GMG

First Sunday in Lent
February 16, 1997

Psalm 25:1-10
Genesis 9:8-17
1 Peter 3:18-22
Mark 1:9-15

First Reading

Like the Gospel of Mark itself, the pericope designated as the Gospel reading for this day is brief but dense with meaning. In six sentences, Mark has Jesus leave Galilee, get baptized by John, be declared the Son of God, spend 40 days in the wilderness, and then return to Galilee preaching a message of good news about the impending arrival of the Kingdom of God. And by the way, John was arrested, too.

Each narrative detail is rich in theological meaning, but it is the forty days in the wilderness that sets the stage for the Lenten season. One moment a heavenly voice declares, "with you I am well pleased," and the next moment Jesus finds himself in the wilderness driven there by the same Spirit that had just descended upon him at his baptism. Thus the Spirit links his baptism and his suffering, just as Jesus would later speak of baptism to symbolize the suffering that he would experience at his crucifixion (Mk 10:38-39). The one who was told, "You are my Son, my beloved," is quickly ushered into the wilderness and shown to be a suffering servant (Isa 42:1).

Mark mentions two aspects of the wilderness experience. First, Jesus was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan. Second, he was with the wild animals, and the angels waited on him. The temptation, of course, evokes the details from the tripartite Q account found in Matthew and Luke. However, the mention of the wild animals is

unique to Mark. And paired with the reference to the ministering angels, the animals seem to be contrasted with wilderness, not a detail of wilderness. Thus the wild animals surrounding Jesus are more like the wild animals that surrounded Adam than a threat or a danger. In the face of barrenness and temptation, the second Adam is cared for by angels. Jesus experiences the presence of God in his time of temptation. This abiding presence is no doubt important as the rest of the passion story unfolds, with Jesus commending his entire being into the hands of the Father.

Jesus emerges from the wilderness, not bitter or despairing, but rather strengthened by the Spirit and filled with a message of good news. The good news is that God has drawn near to us and we are invited to turn and grasp the benefit of this good news. May this Lenten season be a time when all Christian people can be touched by angels and prepared to hear the good news of Easter resurrection.

Pastoral Reflections

Someone once quipped that if the devil owned both hell and Texas, he'd live in Texas and rent out hell. No, it's not just the humidity, it is the heat, and lots of it. Seldom are there cooling rains in many parts of this large state. The dry areas in south and west Texas are larger than most other states in the union. Mile after dry mile stretches to the horizon in every direction.

Yet despite the heat, or perhaps because of it, people still choose to live and vacation in desert areas. One popular vacation spot is Big Bend National Park. Dry and hilly, the park pushes south towards Mexico, making a big bend in the Rio Grande River, for which the park is named. Camping and hiking in this region bring a different set of challenges than in mountains or forests. Heat exhaustion and dehydration are constant threats. So are the wild animals: snakes, scorpions, and mountain lions. The desert is no place for the weak or the fearful. In this extreme environment, even a small mistake can be life threatening.

But the desert has its rewards. Chief among them is a heightened sense of awareness. Like hot air expands a balloon, the desert heat seems to push the sky and the horizons farther away. The heat rising from the desert floor causes the air to ripple like a dream sequence in a movie. Sweat cleanses the pores in nature's original dry sauna.

It was into just such a place that Jesus was driven by the Spirit after his baptism in the Jordan. Into the desert, with its fears and dangers, he went, surrounded by wild beasts, living under the protective hand of God for forty days. There the tempter struggled valiantly against the Spirit, fighting to win the soul of the Son of Man. To survive that desert experience would have been an accomplishment worthy of praise, to triumph showed that surely God was present.

For forty days in Lent, the struggle continues. In the austerity of this desert season, the tempter will surely be present. Wild animals will roar in work-places, in homes, in communities, and in churches. But for those whose awareness is heightened by these desert conditions, the gentle and protective hand of God will also be felt. The same Spirit present at baptism will be present here also. And emerging from this wilderness will be a proclamation of good news: Christ is risen, He is risen indeed! GMG

Second Sunday in Lent
February 23, 1997

Psalm 22:23-31
Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16
Romans 4:13-25
Mark 8:31-38

First Reading

Just ten days into this Lenten season and the gauntlet is thrown down. Jesus speaks quite openly about what will happen to him and what must happen to his followers. Suffering, rejection, death and rising are coming to the one so recently identified by Peter as the Messiah (Mk 8:29). Cross-bearing and life-losing are the signs by which the followers of Jesus will be known.

Sound crazy? It certainly did to Peter. So he rebuked Jesus just as Jesus had rebuked a demon (Mk 1:25) and the raging wind (4:39). Jesus did not take such insubordination lightly. He promptly rebuked Peter in return, pointing out to him that his eyes were fixated on the wrong thing. Set your eyes on divine things, and suffering and rejection will take their place in the wider scheme of things. Set your eyes on human things and you'll forever be asking why bad things happen in our world.

The wisdom that Jesus shares with Peter and the other disciples is that great paradox he expresses in so many of the parables: To hold on to life is to lose it. To let go is to gain new life. The first will be last and the last, first. Possessing the whole world will not gain you life, but the cross can. The Son of Man must undergo great suffering and rise again.

Peter and the disciples become the first of Jesus' many followers who will raise the question of the foolishness and folly of the cross. It is such a hard teaching that we are wont to ignore it. Were it not for the tradition of the church year and the lectionary listing these hard lessons, many would just "praise and worship" God year-round, rebuking these Lenten themes of hard discipleship. Yet adulterous and sinful is the generation that is ashamed of Jesus and his words. Eyes set on divine things will see the truth that giving your life to God and for others is the surest way to find real life.

Pastoral Reflections

High atop Corcovado Mountain, jutting up almost a half mile above the ocean, stands the magnificent statue of Christ the Redeemer, arms stretched out to embrace the city of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and the world beyond. Just as the Eiffel Tower evokes Paris and the Statue of Liberty, New York, *Cristo Redentor* is the symbol of Rio.

The 120-foot tall statue is visible day and night from anywhere in the entire city. With but a mere upward glance, you can set your eyes on things divine. For a brief moment of meditation, you can ponder the divine in the midst of the human. The locals know that those who set their eyes on things divine will never lose their way. For, you see, the statue of Jesus is designed to be quite practical in that everything to his right hand is the south part of the city and everything to his left is north. It is impossible to be lost when your eyes are set on Christ the Redeemer!

In arguably the most beautiful city on earth, Christ the Redeemer is above all things. The statue is set like a crown jewel atop a mountain so steep it's more like a spire. A luxuriantly green rain forest speckled with tropical flowers adorns the mountainside. Beyond the famous snow-white beaches, Copacabana and Ipanema, rolls the deep blue Atlantic, stretching to the horizon. Well-tanned people are everywhere, making Rio

look like heaven on earth. Like a tropical paradise, street vendors sell fresh coconuts, the tops expertly chopped off and a long straw descending into the sweet milk. Other vendors sell tasty cooked meats and cool ice cream pops. Pleasure for all the senses is never far away. The fingerprints of a lovingly creative God are everywhere.

But look upward again. The pose of Christ the Redeemer is not one of triumph or glory. No. It is a cross-shaped Christ. Arms outstretched as if firmly nailed to a cross. Look closely and you'll see more than just tropical beauty because there clinging to the mountainsides are thousands of shacks, the infamous *favelas*, or slums. Here there are no paved streets, no telephones or electricity, no running water. Here live the poor and the forgotten, clinging to life as tenuously as their shacks cling to the steep muddy hillsides.

And then there are the street children. Literally millions of them. Tourists are warned to take nothing of value with them onto the streets. When the crime rate rises too high, the city police hunt down children on the streets and kill them like wild animals.

Creation and redemption. Beauty and squalor. Rich and poor. Glory and cross. Christ the Redeemer is needed in this corner of creation as much as in your corner. Disciples willing to deny themselves, take up crosses and follow Jesus are needed everywhere. GMG

Third Sunday in Lent
March 2, 1997

Psalm 19
Exodus 20:1-17
1 Corinthians 1:18-25
John 2:13-22

First Reading

The lessons for this day describe God's claim on his people. When the Lord brought the descendants of Israel out of Egypt and gave them his commandments, he called them to an exclusive allegiance which he guarded jealously (Exod 20:-17). Even the message of God's power to save through the cross of Christ is particular to the point of foolishness, or so it appears to those who are perishing (1 Cor 1:18-25). Jesus' claim to raise a temple for the worshiping people of God just three days after its destruction seemed like a fool's boast to those who were looking for some sign of his right to exclude the mercantile interests from the Temple compound (Jn 2:13-22). They did not understand that his authority extended beyond the narrow confines of the temple court to embrace the nations and kings of the earth.

John placed his account of the cleansing of the temple at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. With a kind of parenthetical comment in verse 22 ("After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said"), he bracketed Jesus' ministry from this point forward and focused the impact of the cross on the significance of this event: that Jesus himself replaced the Temple. This claim reached its conclusion in The Revelation (21:22-27) where no temple was seen in the new Jerusalem "because the Lord God almighty and the Lamb are its temple."

Commentaries discuss the references to the Passover in John's Gospel (2:13, 6:4,

11:55, and possibly 5:1), with implications for determining the length of Jesus' ministry, but surely this is more than just a literary way to have Jesus in Jerusalem. The cleansing of the Temple is linked with the Passover event of the Exodus which marked the Israelites as the chosen people of God.

The injunction to the Israelites to cleanse every piece of leavening from their houses in preparation for the Passover (Exod 12:15, 19) is still followed by Orthodox Jews today. In his own preparation for the Passover, Jesus undertook the prescribed cleansing of leaven from his Father's house. The merchants and bankers were filling up the Court of the Gentiles like rising bread dough left too long before kneading. God-fearers from the nations were being pushed out of their only place for worship. In cleansing the Temple Jesus moved God's claim beyond the Jewish people to those being displaced by the merchants and moneychangers.

The Jews wanted to know what right Jesus had to challenge the way the Temple trade was being done. They demanded a miraculous sign, as they were still doing even in Paul's day (1 Cor 1:22). Jesus gave them a veiled reference to a temple, razed and raised again in three days. After Jesus' resurrection the disciples knew he had spoken of the cross and his body, dead yet alive again, and living still in the body of the believers.

Pastoral Reflections

"The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing," but this sign of God's weakness is stronger than human strength. While Herod had been building the Temple for forty-six years, in three days God raised a new and spiritual temple to encompass the prayers of all nations for eternity. The cross of Christ makes its claim on our prayers today. Jesus confronts our lives with his concern for those who are being excluded from true worship.

Often that includes us! What is the leaven in the worship lives of busy pastors? Is it a pride that places us in center stage and ignores the needs of "foreigners in our midst"? Is it a Lenten schedule that impresses us with the importance of our studies, sermons, and services? Perhaps the "merchants" are less figurative than we think. Financial concerns distort our vision of the cross. Last Fourth of July, I received an urgent message that a baby was scheduled for emergency surgery the next day. Although I had planned to take the day off, I was impressed with my pastoral duty—and *by* my conscientious devotion! I agreed to be at the hospital by 6:30 a.m. There was a heavy dew in the morning. My windshield washer wasn't working, so I stopped along the way to improve my view of the road. There must have been some oil on the squeegee. After I had wiped my windshield, it was worse than before! I had to get detergent to wash the squeegee before I could clean my windshield.

If we intend to keep Christ's cross clearly in view on our journey during Lent, we must wipe all the leaven from our worship lives, but the cleansing mop can only be rinsed out in the sacrificial blood of Christ.

An object lesson: Wipe a dirty mirror with an oily dustcloth!

Hymns: "Not all the Blood of Beasts" joins the themes of sacrificial animals and leaven. "Built on a Rock" celebrates true worship in the Body of Christ.

A prayer to start the service: O Lord, my God, you have claimed me more than I have sought you. Throw out the sin from my life by the cleansing power of Jesus' death. Help me share your love with those who need to know the power of your victory over sin. Amen. GAF

Fourth Sunday in Lent
March 9, 1996

Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22
Numbers 21:4-9
Ephesians 2:1-10
John 3:14-21

First Reading

Today's lessons present the mystery of God's love hidden in his dealings with his people. Because he loved the Israelites even when they complained about their food in the desert, God sent poisonous snakes to turn them back to him (Num 21:4-9). When we were dead in our sins, God undercut our pride and took away our boast by making faith a free gift (Eph 2:1-10). God loved us so much that he gave us a Savior, disguising his love in a horrible death and a terrible miscarriage of justice. (Jn 3:14-21)

A popular statement that expresses the truth of these texts is "God loves us so much that he is not willing to let us stay the way we are." To what extent he is willing to hide his love in the process of changing us is the mystery uncovered in these lessons. Who can understand a love so great that the One who loves us orchestrates the death of his own beloved Son? How can one explain the love of One who put his Son under the condemnation of this world so that he would not have to condemn the whole world?

John's contrasting use of the word "condemn" in verse 17 and in 9:39 helps us see under the surface of the mystery. God did not send his Son into the world to "condemn" the world, but Jesus did come into the world for "judgment." In each case the word is the same, but the sense is different. Judgment and even the death of his Son was necessary in order that some may be saved from perishing. The apostle Paul accepted the mystery that there are times when a person must be "handed over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and the spirit saved on the day of the Lord" (1 Cor 5:5).

John's Gospel teaches clearly, "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, will have life in his name" (20:31). This "life of the ages" or life in the age to come is compared with the physical life restored to those who looked at the bronze serpent lifted up by Moses (Num 21:9). The Son of Man lifted up on the cross of Calvary gives new life to those who look to him in faith. St. Paul declared, "The sting of death is sin...but God gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Cor 15:56-57)

John's familiar contrast between light and darkness illumines what God is doing in this dark world through the light of his truth in Jesus. His light shines in our lives to guide us in doing God's will. God's plan for achieving his purpose is often hidden from our sight, but whoever knows the extent of God's love trusts his purpose and lives by the light of his truth.

Pastoral Reflections

Not many in the crowd on Calvary saw the glory behind the gory scene, because God's love was hidden well in that bare body on the cross. Matthew reported the way most of those there saw it: "Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, 'I am the Son of God'" (Mt 27:43). But John told it like it really was, illumined by the light of God's truth: "When he had received the drink, Jesus said, 'It is finished!'"

It is hard to see suffering in the lives of our members and look beyond it to recognize the work of God, but once in a while the light of God's truth breaks into the darkness of our world. In my first congregation there was a man, a victim of debilitating strokes. I thought I'd surely bury him a few short months after

I arrived. Five years later, suffering from another stroke, he lay in the hospital at death's door. His wife and her sister who had not spoken with each other in over twenty years sat at his side. Now, together, they watched and waited! Yes, our gracious God is willing to hide his love in order to accomplish his purposes!

Poisonous snakes turn grumbling pilgrims back to God. A bowed and broken body wins eternal life for sinners. God in his grace, without any works on the part of those who are fallen, raises them up so they may do the good works he has prepared in advance for them to do.

Object lesson: Use a band-aid and bottle of alcohol to illustrate that sometimes it takes a pain to make something better.

Hymns: "Amazing Grace," "By Grace I'm Saved," "Jesus, Your Blood and Righteousness" express the wonder of the mystery hidden in God's love.

A prayer to start the service: Lord Jesus, you did not come to this world to condemn it, but by being condemned, you have saved it. Help me keep my eyes fixed on you and your cross so that I may live by your gracious death to show people your love through the life I live for you. Amen. GAF

Fifth Sunday in Lent
March 16, 1997

Psalm 51:1-12
Jeremiah 31:31-34
Hebrews 5:5-10
John 12:20-33

First Reading

God's relentless pursuit of his purpose is the subject of the lessons for this Sunday. Even when the house of Israel broke God's covenant like a faithless wife, God promised to forgive and forget and re-covenant with his people (Jer 31:31-34). Jesus, our great High Priest, sacrificed himself in obedience to the Father's will in order to restore God's wayward people (Heb 5:5-10). Recognizing the purpose of his mission, Jesus knew what he had to do and did it. He embraced his Father's will and, in doing so, embraced us all as well. (Jn 12:20-33)

When Mary approached Jesus before his first miraculous sign, he told her that his hour had not yet come (2:4). When some Greeks who wanted to see Jesus approached Philip, Jesus replied, "Now the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified" (12:23). Once again, Jesus saved the best for last. Through this, his greatest miraculous sign, even the Greeks would see his glory and believe in him.

The synoptic gospels record the progression of Jesus' passion predictions with the sense that he set his face resolutely toward Jerusalem and the cross. John's narrative moves from first to last with the miraculous signs that show Jesus relentlessly pursuing the purpose of his incarnation. In this pericope the reader comes to John's version of Gethsemane: "Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I

came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!"

Each miraculous sign had brought glory to Jesus and to his Father's name. The last would bring the greatest glory because it would fulfill the purpose of Christ's coming. Jesus spoke of his crucifixion ("When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself") in a way reminiscent of the bronze snake in the wilderness (cf. 3:14). Not only did he indicate that all people, including those Greeks at the Feast, would see his glory and believe in him, he also taught the purpose of his mission: to restore humanity, poisoned by sin, to new and eternal life.

This text points to the completion of Jesus' mission, but it also enlists those who are restored to new life in the ongoing purpose of the Father's will. Verses 24-26, with their call to follow Jesus beyond the cross through service, require the disciple to value life in this world as less important than life in the world to come. This life is lived to give for others, just as Jesus gave his life for us.

Pastoral Reflections

"The hour has come" is not spoken here with resignation, but with the anticipation pent up in Jesus' being since the creation of this world! The prophet Jeremiah reported God's promise to restore his wayward people through a new covenant. At last, as Jesus approached the cross, his purpose was about to be fulfilled. It certainly wasn't an easy sacrifice to make. Jesus was troubled in heart much more than John's account indicates. The writer to the Hebrews fleshed out his agony a little: "He offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death." But Jesus' resolve stood firm: "For this very reason I came to this hour."

The classic example of faithful adherence to a purpose greater than oneself is pious Aeneas, the remnant of Troy with a divine mission to carry his legacy to Roman soil. Along a troubled journey, delayed by many distractions, faithful Aeneas finally reached Italy's shore, although he faltered in his resolve for a moment in the courts of beautiful Dido. Of course Aeneas' task is not on a par with Jesus' mission!

One of last years' better movies was "A Time to Kill," based on the John Grisham novel. A young lawyer in today's South had grasped the vision of his mentor to "create a new world one case at a time." Struggling with prejudice, violence, and tragedy as he defended a black man in a volatile trial, he finally resolved to pursue his quest although he had lost very much of himself and stood to lose much more.

Our problem as pastors is much like that of our people. We have seen Jesus and graciously accept the new life he won for us by his cross, but we don't have the focus of his purpose in our lives. A clear vision of the cross in our Lenten journey will enlist us in the task of giving our lives in service to others. When our purpose is one with the cross, just as Jesus' will and the Father's are one, we will be ready to lose our life in this world and gain it in the age to come.

Object lesson: The patient pursuit of a goal is not popular in our world of instant satisfaction today. A savings stamp book of some sort may illustrate commitment to a goal.

Hymns: "My Song is Love Unknown," "Glory be to Jesus," "Chief of Sinners Though I Be," celebrate Christ's obedience in suffering and death to win our salvation.

Prayer to start the service: Dear Jesus, you suffered death, obedient to the will of your Father, to rescue me from disobedience. Help me see that the glory of your love is the gift of your life, so that I may live joyfully as I give my life in the covenant of your grace. Amen. GAF

Palm/Passion Sunday March 23, 1997

Psalm 31:9-16
Isaiah 50:4-9a
Philippians 2:5-11
Mark 14:1–15:47

First Reading

The triumphal entry of Jesus through the welcoming crowds of people, the betrayal, the meal, lonely prayer, arrest, the plot to kill Jesus, abandonment and finally death... *this* is our Gospel for Palm/Passion Sunday!! The forces behind these events continue to build in intensity until the purpose of Jesus emerges in stark clarity—his unwavering journey to the cross. In following Jesus' path to its conclusion, we see that *his* focus has been clear all along.

As we look at the narrative of Jesus and that of his followers, interwoven with the account of those who challenged his authority from the very beginning of his ministry, we find in sharp relief the narrow path that Jesus has taken, leading straight to Jerusalem. Neither the friends of Jesus, nor those against him, truly understand the purpose of his ministry or where total trust in God the Father leads. Those who have believed and confessed that Jesus is the Messiah drop away in fear, leaving him alone to face his accusers. The ensuing taunting and mocking that Jesus endures, recalls his temptations in the wilderness; not by Satan this time, but by the chief priests, elders, scribes... the elite of the religious community. Then the crowds, soldiers, and even those just passing by join in, stripping Jesus of any remaining shred of respect. And yet, at the end of it all, we find a lone centurion seeing beyond the blindness surrounding him, and able to say, "Truly this man was God's Son!" (Mk 15:39). And so, what seems to be the end is the beginning, as proclaimed so well in Philippians, "Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (2:9-11).

All of the supporting Scripture for this day tremendously heightens the image of Jesus portrayed in Mark. The familiar verses from Philippians 2 remind us that Jesus "took the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness." And in this role as servant, Jesus undertakes the journey that he knows leads to suffering. Yet in the end, through his obedience he is glorified. This trust in the face of distress is eloquently expressed in the Psalm of the Day, "But I trust in you, O Lord; I say, 'You are my God.' My times are in your hand; deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors. Let your face shine upon your servant; save me in your steadfast love." (vv. 14-16)

Pastoral Reflections

Is it possible or even wise to include the essence of this lengthy, complex Gospel in one Sunday service? I have heard the complaint that to "cover" all of the events of Holy Week on Passion Sunday invites the congregation to skip the Maundy Thursday and Good Friday Services. However, if the transition from the triumphal entry to the dark betrayal and complete abandonment of Jesus is meaningfully portrayed on Sunday, the stage is set as we enter Holy Week; and some members may be inspired to deepen their experience in the coming days instead of skipping over to Easter morning. In our congregation we have made a script of the Gospel, with a narrator and cast of characters, so that the entire journey to the cross is

presented as a dramatic reading. There are no costumes or acting out, but the variety of voices greatly clarifies and brings alive the words for the participants and listeners alike. Older youth can easily take part as members of the crowd or with individual parts as they are able; but most certainly, this is a time to completely focus on the Gospel message.

Through the Lenten weeks, we as Christian folk have perhaps focused on our own journey with disciplines chosen to sharpen our awareness of God's presence in our lives. And now we have the opportunity to return our full attention to the relentless movement of Jesus toward the cross. He was not fooled by his reception as he entered Jerusalem, for the tension from the religious leaders was ever present as they looked for a way to arrest him and have him killed. And as this dramatic chain of events unfolds before us, Jesus' role as servant is magnified. His total obedience to God the Father is heightened, and we cannot dismiss the pain and horror of rejection and abandonment that he suffers.

As we experience again the Lenten journey to the cross, we are reminded anew how Jesus teaches us the way to keep our focus on him. From the time of his baptism, when the heavens are opened, Jesus unfailingly seeks to know God's will. The strength of his commitment toward the cross is most certainly rooted in prayer. Time after time we hear of him going off alone to pray, and this last part of his journey is no exception. Tested to the end, Jesus remains the servant of God the Father. Is not this the challenge we all face? The task to bring all of the threads of our life to a point of convergence on Christ, so that we live with a purpose that stands in stark relief among all the clamoring, interweaving forces around us—a purpose that leads to Christ and the total giving up of ourselves to receive the gift of eternal life with God.

Music can of course greatly contribute to the transition from joyous processions to the clear recognition of the cross. Beginning with the familiar "All Glory, Laud, and Honor," "Prepare the Royal Highway," or perhaps "You Servants of God," a wonderful closing for the Palm/Passion Sunday is the hymn, "Ah, Holy Jesus":

> For me, kind Jesus, was thine incarnation,
> thy mortal sorrow, and thy life's oblation;
> thy death of anguish and thy bitter Passion,
> for my salvation. (v. 4)

Another hymn possibility is "What Wondrous Love Is This," and for those with choir, organ and flute available, there is a beautiful arrangement by Bradley Ellingboe, published by Neil Kjos Music. LEH

Maundy Thursday
March 27, 1997

Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19
Exodus 12:1-14
1 Corinthians 11:23-26
John 13:1-17, 31b-35

First Reading

As we reach this day in Holy Week, worship becomes a special oasis along the tension-filled route to the cross. Having lived with the grumbling and arguing around him during his ministry, and feeling the growing movement to put him to death, we now encounter Jesus planning a quiet gathering of his closest students. Many followers have already turned away, but dare Jesus hope that in one last effort of teaching and explanation this small group will understand his purpose?

Can we imagine that Jesus felt his mission had been accomplished? Was one more evening enough to prepare these disciples to carry on his ministry? It is hard to believe that everything seemed ready for his departure. How do we decide when the time has come for us to move ahead in our ministry? When everyone is ready? When everyone understands? If this had been Jesus' criteria, most likely he would still be here preaching and teaching, keeping one step ahead of those plotting to kill him.

No, Jesus calmly spends this last evening with his friends, not frantically going over all he had told them previously, but trusting that they are clean (also see Jn 15:3). And then, he even moves on to a more complete unfolding of being a servant of God, and how to live with one another. And so, this final meal together isn't just a time to say goodbye, or a last chance to get them in shape to be ready for the days to come. We find Jesus bringing the climax of his teaching to those who didn't yet fully comprehend who he was or what was about to happen. Jesus knew that he had come from God and that it was now the time to return to God (v. 3); but before continuing on that path, he shared supper with the disciples and then went to each in turn to wash their feet. The disciples had already been washed clean by the word that Jesus had spoken to them, and we too have been cleansed by the word spoken in our baptism. Yet as we drag our feet through the contamination of this world, we ask for and receive continued cleansing from God. God does for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

And now Jesus reinforces his action with a new commandment. He tells the disciples that it is not enough to love God or receive God's love—they will be known as Jesus' followers only if they have love for one another. It's not enough to carry out his example of washing each other's feet. It must be done with love.

Pastoral Reflections

In her book *The Cloister Walk* (Riverhead Books, 1996) Kathleen Norris writes that in monastery life, the Easter Triduum is a total surrender to worship. And she adds, "If you've become acclimated to the normal rhythms of the monastery, the daily round of prayer, meals, and work, the liturgies of the Triduum are guaranteed to throw you off" (p. 176). While most of us will not be in such an intense atmosphere of worship during these Holy Week days, we certainly do have the opportunity to intentionally be thrown off our regular schedule and order of worship.

Rich in content and symbol, these services provide us with the occasion to deepen our involvement in the remembered events of Holy Week while we bring them to our

present experience. The symbolic washing of the feet during this Maundy Thursday service is very moving and powerful, although some parishioners find it too difficult to have the pastor kneel down and wash their bare feet. Is it the intimate touch? Or perhaps it's the feeling that "I should wash my own feet; no one should have to do that for me."

Not too long ago I visited a church member in the hospital. He had been there for quite some time, and was very weak. When I walked into the room, he was trying to eat lunch, but having great difficulty. And so I asked if it would be all right for me to cut the meat into smaller pieces. He said, "Yes, I would appreciate that." After he finished eating we talked for a bit, and then seeing tears in his eyes I looked at him questioningly. He answered my unspoken question. "I never thought the day would come when my pastor would have to cut up my food." This wasn't a laughing matter to him; in fact, if he *had* been able to do it himself, it might have been a lark for the pastor to prepare his food.

But isn't this what foot washing is about? Are we truly able to give up the need to 'do it ourselves'? Jesus cleanses for us what we are unable to clean for ourselves. Can we receive the ministering of Christ, accepting that we can never be purified from our sin without it? And how do we wash one another's feet? With our forgiveness, we are able to see others as clean too, just as Christ has washed us in his accepting, forgiving grace. What better prelude for celebrating Holy Communion?

The Maundy Thursday Eucharist can be an especially intimate service, emphasizing the cleansing forgiveness and new commandment given by Jesus, "As I have loved you, so you must love one another" (v. 34). In a small congregation the members can form a circle, and after the pastor communes the closest person, then that individual walks with the pastor around the inside of the circle helping to hold the elements enabling each person to commune his or her neighbor. Where this isn't practical because of size, persons may walk forward in pairs and commune each other at the front. Many other variations are possible which bring the communicants together in ways not usually experienced on a Sunday morning.

The offering response "Create in me a Clean Heart" (*LBW* p. 75) and the Eucharistic Prayer IV attributed to Hippolytus (*Ministers Desk Edition* p. 226) seem especially appropriate in this service. Also, the confession on the right side of the page from the *LBW* Compline Service continues the pattern of mutual serving between pastor and parishioners. Of course creating such a service requires that everything be printed out clearly. Juggling books and looking for unfamiliar parts of the liturgy will inhibit the quiet, intimate atmosphere needed for this profound worship experience. Leaving in silence creates a bridge from Jesus' last sharing with the disciples to the reality of his lonely journey to the cross, now taken up again.

Some hymn possibilities from *With One Voice* include: "Ubi Caritas et Amor," "Healer of Our Every Ill," "Jesus Remember Me," "A New Commandment," and from the *LBW* "Amazing Grace," "Lord Whose Love In Humble Service," and the "Lamb of God" from *Now the Feast and Celebration* by Marty Haugen. LEH

Good Friday
March 28, 1997

Psalm 22
Isaiah 52:13–53:12
Hebrews 10:16-25
John 18:1–19:42

First Reading

After the fellowship of Maundy Thursday, we now turn back to Jesus and the events leading us to the foot of the cross. The singular purpose of Jesus' mission becomes again the driving force of our worship time together. However, the passion story that we hear this day is given to us with a very different set of eyes and ears than those which brought us the Gospel lesson last Sunday. Even while still on the way to the actual crucifixion, it is as though Jesus is already glorified, and certainly everything is happening according to plan.

The contrast in mood of John's account as compared to Mark is striking. A couple of specific examples illustrate this point. In Mark, as Jesus enters the garden of Gethsemane to pray, he is distressed and agitated, and he tells his disciples that he is deeply grieved, even to death (14:33-34). The same verse in the NIV even deepens Jesus' feelings: "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death." In his prayer to Abba, Father, Jesus asks that this cup be removed if possible. In John, however, Jesus does not leave to pray alone, but while still gathered with the disciples prays specifically, and at great length, *for them*, and for all who will believe through their word (17:20). There is no question about what Jesus will do, and no sense of struggle in fulfilling his purpose. In fact, a number of times we are reminded that Scripture is being fulfilled.

Similarly, at the crucifixion, the sense of total abandonment that is portrayed in Mark does not appear in John. Instead of crying out the words, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mk 15:34), Jesus simply says (in order to fulfill the Scripture), "I am thirsty." After receiving some wine on a branch of hyssop, he concludes, "It is finished" (Jn 19:28-30)

One should not be lulled into believing, however, that John is portraying a gnostic kind of Jesus where nothing affects him in a human way. Recall how he was deeply moved by Mary's sorrow at the death of her brother Lazarus; how he became tired by his journey to Samaria (Jn 4:6); and how he was troubled in spirit when speaking of the one who would betray him (Jn 13:21).

It does seem, though, that in John's account of the passion story, we have the mystery of the incarnate Jesus and of the resurrected Christ even before the crucifixion takes place. But in light of the opening verses of chapter one in John, this really shouldn't be surprising. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." And so we have the challenge in this Good Friday service of comprehending and presenting a mystery—the reality of Jesus' death on a cross while he is at the same time our risen Lord who redeems us.

Pastoral Reflections

During a two-day stay in Mexico City with no particular agenda, I wandered around stopping to see what was interesting. The many churches that I saw were fascinating and for the most part beautiful. I grew to expect some representation of the crucified Christ to be hanging on the wall; and so when I sat down in one sanctuary, I was surprised not to see one. Gradually my eyes became more accustomed to the dim, natural light, and all of a sudden I saw the imprint of a hand

and three drops of blood in the white plaster wall behind the altar. The suffering Christ was here after all.

Although it wasn't Good Friday, this episode of about 20 minutes in one afternoon was perhaps the most profound Good Friday message I have ever had. It wasn't just that I finally saw the imprint in the wall with my eyes. The unexpected recognition of the hand and drops of blood affected my whole being. It seemed as though I was surrounded by the presence of Christ on the cross. Although this experience can never be repeated in exactly the same way, this is my vision of what a meaningful Good Friday service is like: to be struck dumb by the reality of Christ's death.

How do we move beyond the intellectual understanding of the gospel words toward a more complete realization of Christ's suffering? The elements of this Good Friday service include Scripture, prayer, hymns, and silence. We are often uncomfortable with silence and try to fill every space; but intentional silence, especially in this service, is as necessary as rests in a musical score. If necessary, put a sign in the narthex to remind folks that as they enter, the service has already begun with silent reflection.

Most congregations have certain unique traditions for this service. One of our talented woodworking members has made a large candle cross that is used on this day and again on Easter morning. On Good Friday the candles are extinguished one by one between the readings, and of course on Sunday morning they are all lighted. If you are able to dim the lights, it's easier to create the atmosphere singular to this day. Not having a dimmer available, we have used a spot light on the cross at the end of the service which allows just enough light for people to leave safely.

Good Friday isn't a time to try out new hymns, although new ones can certainly be learned ahead of time. But the beautiful "O Sacred Head, Now Wounded," "Ah, Holy Jesus," and "Were You There" are still the most moving and meditative. One hymn that isn't among the traditional for this service is "I Am the Bread of Life" (*WOV*), however, as a closing hymn it anticipates the coming resurrection, and may serve as a helpful bridge for congregations that don't have an Easter Vigil. It can also serve to emphasize the uniqueness of John's Gospel in that the glorified Christ and human Jesus to be crucified are both present. The powerful refrain can be followed by silent prayer and meditation for an indefinite length of time as congregation members leave in silence when they are ready. LEH

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