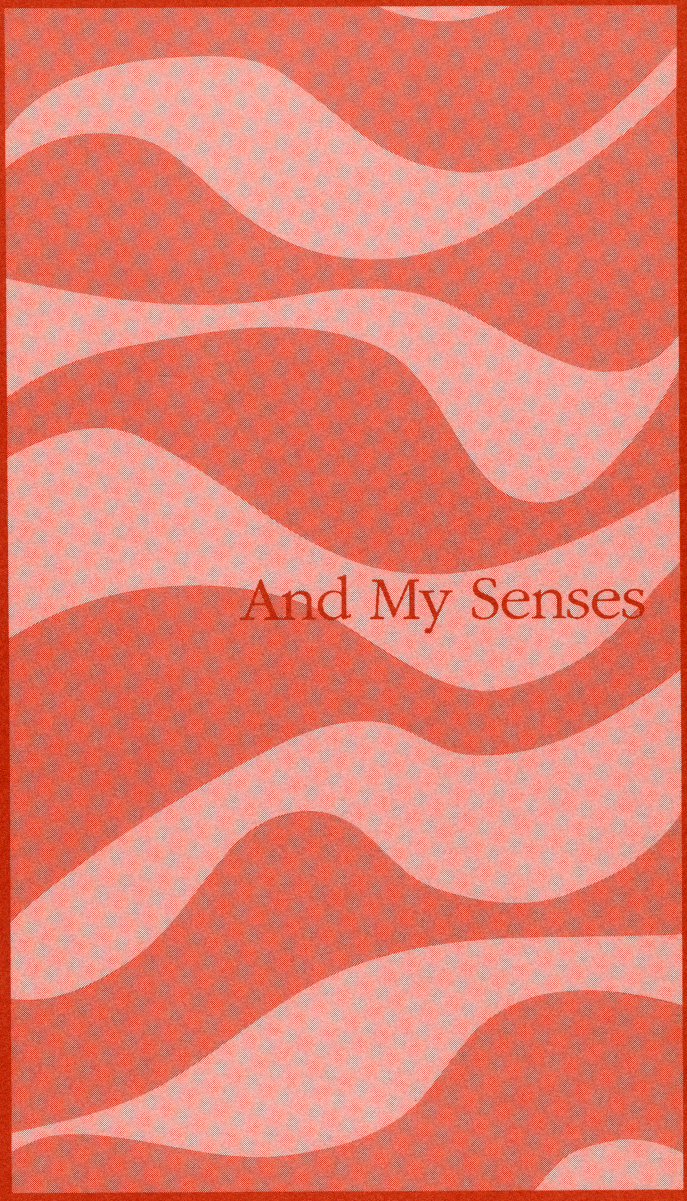
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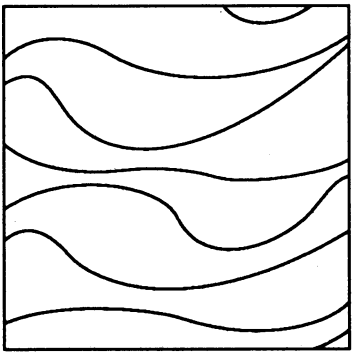
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Series A
Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost—Thanksgiving Day

Contributors: Robert Robinson, Karen Parker

And My Senses

As Luther taught the word of truth, in simple style to tender youth (Small Catechism): "I believe that God has created me... and still sustains my body and soul, all my limbs and senses, my reason and all the faculties of my mind, together with food and clothing, house and home, family and property.... All this God does out of pure, parental, and divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness on my part. For all of this I am bound to thank, praise, serve, and obey...."

Most of us memorized a version of this explanation of the First Article of the Creed during our confirmation instruction. The older I get the more grateful I am for those memory work assignments. They burned into my mind the insight that what George and Pauline Klein accomplished in Springfield, Illinois, almost sixty years ago was also and especially God's work. It has, therefore, never been difficult for me to affirm that the Big Bang was also God's work. And now—when trifocals and slight hearing loss underscore the point—I am still bound to thank, praise, serve, and obey for all my senses.

William J. Urbrock points out that the prophet Amos engages our eyes and our ears. The book of the words which Amos *saw* also resonates with *sound.* There is an interplay of the sounds of Israel and her neighbors, the speech of the prophet, and the voice of Yahweh. In addition to sounding off in earthquake, roaring, and thunder, Yahweh speaks an intelligible, meaningful word that demands a response. But in contrast to the silence evoked by Yahweh's presence, there is an even more dreadful silence, the silence of God's absence. This pairing of sounds and silences gives a resounding testimony to the freedom of divine speech and divine intervention.

Carol J. Schlueter has listened attentively to the voices of valiant survivors of domestic violence. The church has responded to these

agonizing sounds with disbelief, denial, abandonment, threat—and complete support. She suggests what churches can do to create mutual relationships and offers strategies to achieve gender equality. She calls congregations to develop awareness about domestic violence, to learn attitudes and behaviors which are helpful to survivors, and to think through the messages they send to the faithful about gender relations. The church has a choice: to be on the side of death for the survivors of domestic violence, or to be on the side of life by being willing to support women in their vulnerability.

Robert J. Grosch discusses the dual relationships pastors have with counselees—they are both pastor and counselor. Since parishioners who seek out their pastors for counseling want something they perceive they cannot get elsewhere, he concludes that pastoral dual relationships should not be judged by the same criteria that are used for secular counselors and their clients. In fact, the duality of the pastor-counselor relationships can be an advantage depending upon how power is managed. This essay concludes with a structure-setting mini-lecture that clarifies the roles of pastor and parishioner and indicates how to know when boundaries have been crossed or when the counselee should be referred to an outside counselor.

S. John Roth reflects on the challenges pastors face in rural or small town ministry. Many congregations in these settings are stressed out by the complexity of the agricultural economy. At the same time parishioners resist change since it has been singularly unkind to them, but they show their interdependence by relying on pastors of neighboring congregations. Pastors in these non-urban settings suffer from isolation and from the paucity of status symbols. Their challenge is to maintain a sense of calling and identity in the face of invisibility. Still the author concedes that much of parish ministry—including its joys and satisfactions—is common to all settings.

Fred Glennon probes the ethical challenges faced by social ministry organizations today. How can one maintain indigent care in the face of budget cutbacks? There are often tensions between respectful and equitable treatment of clients and fair and equitable treatment of employ-

ees. The challenge for any social ministry organization seeking to remain ethical in the midst of organizational constraints is to clarify and communicate its theological assumptions to all stakeholders through appropriate structures and policies.

James W. Hallerberg posits 17 theses opposed to close, or closed, communion. This is primarily an issue for the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, among Lutherans today, and many from that synod subscribe for *Currents*. The essay appeals to Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions in its opposition to legalism. All of us need to be comforted and strengthened by the knowledge that those are truly worthy and well prepared who have faith in these words: "given and shed for you for the remission of sins." Notices about communion in church bulletins should be positive and welcoming, even while reminding guests about how the sacrament is understood in a specific congregation.

Blessed are *your* eyes and ears! Many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it (Mt 13:16-17). And the same God who gave us abilities to see, hear, and smell also gave us the ability to *speak* about what we have heard and seen and to *serve* with our hands in response to such sounds and sights. In so making Christ known we offer hope for the world.

Ralph W. Klein
Editor

The Book of Amos: The Sounds and the Silences

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Readers of the Book of Amos often are amazed by the remarkable power of its language and style.[1] Hans Walter Wolff, for example, draws attention to "the wealth of rhetorical forms" and the rich imagery of Amos' language, leading him to observe that "Amos misses no opportunity to stimulate the ear and the understanding of his audience" (Wolff: 91, 98).

Put another way, we may say that Amos is a book that engages not only the eyes of those who read its pages but their ears as well. This two-pronged appeal to the senses of sight and hearing, doubled again by the implicit appeal to the mind's eye and the heart's ear, is signalled by the striking editorial introduction to the book: "The *words* of Amos... which he *saw*... two years before the earthquake" (1:1).[2]

Actually, this double appeal to vision and hearing, redoubled on both physical and spiritual planes, is common throughout the Hebrew Bible. The remarkable story of the call of the boy Samuel in 1 Samuel 3, for example, is bracketed by the narrator's introductory and concluding statements that "The *word* of the LORD was rare in those days; *visions* were not widespread" (v. 1), but that, after Samuel's call, "The LORD continued to *appear* [lit. "be seen"] at Shiloh, for the LORD revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the *word* of the LORD" (v. 21).[3] Like Samuel, and other prophets in the Hebrew Bible, Amos was a visionary.[4] The

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[1] In this article I will deal with the Book of Amos as a whole, listening, as it were, to a single implied author. Readers interested in the current state of discussion about the levels of editorial activity in the book may consult the works of Mays, Paul, Wolff, and Willoughby, listed at the end of this article.

[2] Emphasis mine, here and throughout. Biblical citations here and throughout are from the NRSV, unless otherwise noted.

[3] The rest of 1 Samuel 3 develops around a skillful interplay of sight and sound, hearing and seeing. For example, the narrative describes how Eli's *eyesight* was dim, weakening his ability to *see* (v. 2), such that it was only after the LORD had *called* to Samuel three times that Eli *understood* what was happening and counseled Samuel to respond, "'*Speak*, LORD, for your servant is *listening*'" (vv. 8-9).

[4] The Book of Micah, for example, is introduced in a manner similar to Amos as "The *word* of the LORD that came to Micah...

book, in fact, reports no less than five visions granted to Amos by YHWH. They are variously introduced by the words, "This is what the Lord GOD *showed* me" (7:1; 7:4; 8:1), "This is what he *showed* me" (7:7), and "I *saw*" (9:1).

Like his fellow visionaries, however, Amos invited his audience to *hear* what he had seen. Moreover, the Book of Amos now invites every reader to *hear* what it reports that Amos has seen and spoken, since the vision now has been put into "the *words* of Amos," which have in turn become a collective vehicle for the *word* of the God of Israel: "The LORD roars from Zion, and *utters his voice* from Jerusalem" (Amos 1:2).

The book of the words which Amos saw is a book that resonates with sound; it practically clamors for a hearing. I refer here not to the frequent poetic use of alliteration and assonance, which lend such literary beauty to Amos and to other books in the Hebrew Bible, especially when recited or chanted aloud. Rather, I have in mind the powerfully imaginative portrayal of sounds in Amos, skillfully arranged both harmoniously and dissonantly, such that an attentive reader or reciter can "hear" them with an inner ear. As if we were sampling a recording, I intend here to program the playback so as to highlight some of the many ways in which the Book of Amos, in its short nine chapters, presents an interplay of the sounds of Israel and her neighbors, the speech of the prophet, and the voice of YHWH. In a concluding section, I will comment on some passages that juxtapose an ear-catching silence to all the sounds of the book.

The sounds

The roaring of YHWH. The Book of Amos begins with references to a striking progression of sounds: an earthquake (*ha-ra'aš*, an onomatopoeic word), followed by the lion-roaring of YHWH and the uttering of his thunder-like voice,[5] which, in turn, calls forth a response of mourning[6] by the pastures (1:1-2). As in Judg 5:5, the rumbling

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which he *saw*" (Mic 1:1). Isaiah begins, "The *vision* of Isaiah son of Amoz, which he *saw*" (Isa 1:1). Jeremiah is introduced as "The *words* of Jeremiah... to whom the *word* of the LORD came" (Jer 1:1-2), but shortly thereafter we twice read that "the *word* of the LORD came... *saying*, "What do you *see*?" (Jer 1:11, 13). Ezekiel, of course, "*saw visions* of God" (Ezek 1:1), but he also swallowed a divine scroll so he could "*speak* my [=YHWH's] very *words*" to the people (Ezek 3:4). Nahum is billed as "the book of the *vision* of Nahum" (Nah 1:1)," while Habakkuk is presented as "the oracle [*massa'*] that the prophet Habakkuk *saw*" (Hab 1:1). Obadiah begins, "The *vision* of Obadiah. Thus *says* the Lord GOD" (Obadiah 1).

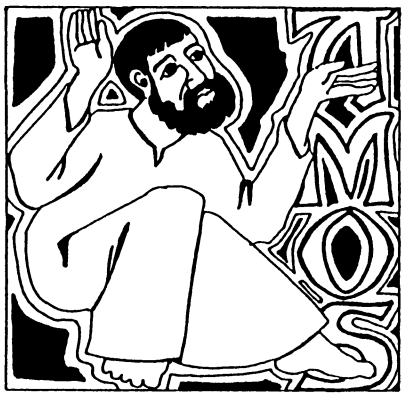
[5] The phrase, *yitten qolo*, may be compared to *natan beqolo* in Ps 46:7. Dahood (281) notes several other texts in the Hebrew Bible where *qol* = thunder and cites a parallel usage in Ugaritic. Paul (38-39) also cites two Akkadian parallels and demonstrates how thunder was often conceived as a lion's roar. The classic biblical text referring to YHWH's thundering "voice" is, of course, Psalm 29.

[6] The verb is *'abal*, which is translated "wither" in the *NRSV* and "wilt" by Wolff (116), in parallel to the "drying up" of the top of Carmel in the same verse. Mays (21) and Paul (33) simply reverse the synonyms, translating *'abal* as "dry up" and the parallel verb *yabeš* as "wither." Paul (40, n. 65) neatly summarizes the argument for Heb. *'abal* = Akk. *abalu*, "to dry up/out," to be carefully distinguished from the Heb. homonym *'abal* = "to mourn."

In view of the usage of *'abal* in 5:16, 8:8,10 and 9:5, all of which refer to mourning, however, I would argue for the same transla-

earthquake signals God's approach for battle, here against his own people, while, as in Nahum 1:3b-5, it is accompanied by a divine rebuke that dries up sea and river and makes Bashan and Carmel wither.[7]

Moreover, as Wolff points out (119), the arresting reference to YHWH's roaring as the parallel antecedent to the uttering of his thunder-voice is thematic for the entire book. For precisely in 3:8 Amos uses the metaphor of the roaring lion to comprehend his prophetic auditions. This feature, combined here at the outset of the book with features of a hymnic theophany account, results in an appropriate motto summarizing the message of the prophet. What Amos *saw* two years before the earthquake was a Divine *sound* that bespoke earth-shattering events for himself and his people far more devastating than any earthquake imaginable.



Following immediately upon this opening roar/thunder is the first of more than two dozen occurrences of "Thus says [*'amar*] the LORD," "says the LORD," "says the Lord GOD," that introduce or conclude the prophetic oracles throughout the book. Together with an almost equal number of occurrences of "*ne'um YHWH*" = "oracle/utterance of the LORD," these constant reminders punctuate the message of Amos, pounding upon the ear, drumming home the truth that YHWH does not merely sound off in earthquake, roaring and thunder, but speaks an intelligible, meaningful word that demands a response.[8]

The point is made forcefully in two pivotal passages. The first asserts that: "Surely the Lord GOD does nothing, without *revealing his secret* to his servants the prophets" (3:7).[9] The second is a hymnic passage, which sings: "For lo, the one who

tion here (following the LXX), or for a paraphrastic "wither in mourning." Hammershaimb (20) seems to hit on the poetic intention when he remarks that "When nature, which also is a living thing, mourns, this can be seen by the vegetation withering...." I am suggesting that "mourning" carries a connotation of sound with it, the pitiful response to YHWH's roaring and thunder voice. This mourning of the pastures will be echoed by the mourning of people in village, farm and vineyard (5:16), of everyone in the land (8:8, 10), and, indeed, of everyone on the earth (9:5).

[7] In Amos 1:2 the parallel verbs are *'abal* and *yabeš* ("mourn" // "dry up"). In Nah 1:4 the parallels are *yabbešehu* and *heḥrib*, *'umlal* and *'umlal* (translated in NRSV as "makes it dry" // "dries up" and "wither" // "fades").

[8] Limburg (1987) has shown how the distribution of Divine Speech formulas (twenty-seven *'amar* formulas, twenty-one *ne'um* formulas and a single *dibber* formula) in Amos is carefully arranged such that the formulas occur in groups of seven in each major section of the book.

[9] The key phrase is *galah sodo*, which NRSV translates as "revealing his secret," the meaning this phrase has in Prov 11:13, 20:19, and 25:9. *Sod*, which refers to the Divine council in Jer 23:18 and Job 15:8, appears to carry the additional connotation of "plan" or "counsel" in Amos 3:7, i.e., the result of council deliberations normally hidden from ordinary mortals.

forms the mountains, creates the wind, *reveals his thoughts* to mortals, makes the morning darkness, and treads on the heights of the earth—the LORD, the God of hosts, is his name!" (4:13).[10]

Amos presents YHWH's roaring thunder and Israel's noise as sounds at cross purposes.

What that divine intention or plan is, Amos proclaims in public for all to hear. The public sounding is forcefully marked by the series of calls to attention that surround or envelope the two pivotal passages just cited. The repeated "Hear this word!" (3:1, 4:1, 5:1), "Proclaim" (= "make heard"; 3:9), "Hear, and testify" (3:13), keep demanding attention to the awful message: "I will punish you for all your iniquities" (3:2), "On the day I punish Israel for its transgressions" (3:14), "Therefore thus I will do to you, O Israel; because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel!" (4:12).

The noise of Israel. Amos, however, presents the unheeding aristocrats of Israel as being much too preoccupied with their own noises to pay any attention to divine roaring and thunderous proclamation.

The aristocracy's noise is first of all a noise of dishonesty and oppression. Amos calls for heralds to "proclaim" an invitation to neighboring countries to "Assemble yourselves on Mount Samaria, and see what *great tumults* [*mehumot rabbot*] are within it, and what oppressions are in its midst" (3:9). Elsewhere, *mehuma* (sg) *-ot* (pl) refers to the terror and panic associated with a time of disaster and chaos, and to the noisy confusion of battle.[11] I am suggesting that the "great tumults" may be read as referring both to the oppressive activities of the aristocracy and to the resultant outcry of the oppressed. A related "Hear this!" message (8:4-6) is directed similarly at those who are busy discussing among themselves how to cheat on grain sales and how best to falsify measures so as to defraud the poor. Into the noise of such discussions, it is the dissonant voice indeed who would dare to speak for honesty: "They hate the one who reproves in the gate, and they abhor the one who speaks the truth" (5:10).

Secondly, the noise is that of festivity, both religious and secular. In his scathing denunciation of the *marzeaḥ* revels,[12] Amos excoriates those who can afford to lounge at luxurious parties and who "sing idle songs

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[10] This remarkable combination of creation imagery and the image of intelligible human communication is reminiscent of Psalm 19. There, too, the One whose glory is proclaimed by the "speech" of the created world (the sky, the sun, and the progression of days and nights), is hymned as the same One who communicates with his servants through the life-reviving Torah and its mind-enlightening precepts and commandments.

[11] See Deut 7:23; 1 Sam 5:9,11; 14:20; Isa 22:5; Zech 14:13; and 2 Chron 15:5. In his discussion of the meaning of *mehuma*, which he translates as "terror," Wolff (193) draws attention to the "basically martial and homicidal tenor" of the term. Paul (117) reads Amos as referring here to the "great fear and confusion" resulting from the "outrages" of the wealthy.

[12] See King (1988a: chap. 6; 1988b) for archaeological evidence of the *marzeaḥ* feast in ancient Israel.

to the sound of the harp, and like David improvise on instruments of music," but who fail to mourn over the ruin of Joseph (6:4-7). Under the circumstances, he asserts, sounds of grief would be more appropriate than sounds of celebration. Moreover, Amos also blasts those who make a great show of religious celebration. In an ironic parroting of his inspired directive to the proclaiming heralds (*hašmi'u*; 3:9), Amos presents YHWH the Sovereign as inviting the people of Israel to "proclaim [*qir'u*] freewill offerings, publish [*hašmi'u*] them, for so you love to do" (4:5). Later, the irony turns into downright rejection: "Take away from me the noise [*hamon*] of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps" (5:23). Finally, Amos turns his ears away from the victory rejoicing of those who claim to have won their own battle at "Lo-debar,"[13] but who have "turned justice into poison and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood" (6:12-13).

YHWH and Israel "sounding" at cross purposes. It is clear from the two preceding sections that Amos presents YHWH's roaring thunder and Israel's noise as sounds at cross purposes. Further indications of the conflicting sounds are contained in the following sets of verses.

First, we may play off against the prophet's constantly repeated assertions of "Thus says the LORD" the book's quotation of the "sayings" of those who are supposed to be listening to the divine voice. They prefer, rather, to have their own say. We hear the noblewomen of Samaria *saying* to their husbands, "'Bring something to drink!'" (4:1). We hear those celebrating war victory *saying*, "'Have we not by our own strength taken Karnaim for ourselves?'" (6:13). We hear those who trample on the poor *saying*, "'When will the new moon be over so that we may sell grain... and practice deceit with false balances, buying the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals?'" (8:5-6). And we hear people invoking other deities, *saying*, "'As your god lives, O Dan,' and 'As the way of Beersheba lives'" (8:14).

Second, we hear YHWH and the people commanding (*ṣwh*) at cross purposes. The people have "*commanded* the prophets, saying, 'You shall not prophesy'" (2:12). For his part, however, YHWH *commands* that houses great and small be broken into bits (6:11), *commands* that the sea serpent bite those who try to hide in the sea (9:3), and *commands* that the sword slay even those who had been carried still alive into captivity (9:4).

Finally, we even hear the people and YHWH swearing (*šb'*) oaths at cross purposes. The people *swear* by other gods (8:14), while YHWH *swears* by his holiness that days are coming when the noblewomen will be hauled away like garbage (4:2), *swears* by his life that he abhors Jacob, hates his strongholds and will deliver up the city (6:8), and *swears* by the pride of Jacob that he will forget none of their oppressive deeds (8:7).

The book portrays Amos himself as the center or the meeting place of these opposing speech-events. A climactic scene in this regard is the famous confrontation of Amos with Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, in 7:10-17. The scene is bounded by and played off against a series of visionary conversations between Amos and YHWH in 7:1-9 and a vision in 8:1-3. In 7:1-6 we

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[13] NRSV notes that Lo-debar (an actual place, see 2 Sam 9:4,5; 17:27) may be translated literally as "a thing of nothingness." Wolff (288) suggests that Amos or an editor intends an ironic twist to the name, presenting the celebrants as rejoicing over "No-thing." Paul (219) also reads a sarcastic pun intended.

The battle of words that is carried on throughout Amos is complemented by the sounds of war that punctuate the oracles.

hear Amos twice interceding on behalf of Jacob/Israel to avert a threatened disaster, each time with YHWH responding, "It shall not be so." In 7:7-9, however, Amos's words are limited to identifying the plumb-line which has been shown to him, while YHWH speaks in no uncertain terms of the impending destruction of Israel and of the sword he will send against the dynasty of Jeroboam II. In the confrontation scene itself, Amaziah first sends a report to the king, quoting Amos to the extent that Jeroboam will die by the sword and Israel go into exile off the land (7:10-11). How did Amaziah come to know this? We are left to infer that Amos had spoken of his vision publicly or, at least, to Amaziah. But there is no report from Amaziah about how Amos had twice interceded for Israel. Why not? Was it because Amos had not told him or because he preferred not to mention this fact? Next, we hear Amaziah speaking directly to Amos (7:12-13) in precisely the same vein as Amos had accused the people of speaking in 2:12. In the book it is only Amaziah, however, who actually does command a prophet, Amos himself, not to prophesy: "Never again prophesy at Bethel!" In his ensuing staccato-like response, Amos clearly underscores the cross-purposes at work in all this talk, divine and human. "...the LORD *said* to me, 'Go prophesy to my people Israel.' Now therefore *hear* the word of the LORD. You *say*, 'Do not prophesy... and do not preach....' Therefore thus *says* the LORD, 'Your wife... your sons and your daughters... your land... you yourself... and Israel...'" will endure humiliation, death, and exile (7:14-17). Immediately, we leave the scene, left to imagine Amaziah's infuriated response, and turn to look and listen in on yet another vision report (8:1-3). How startling now to hear the sound that carries back over this entire set of conflicting visions and conversations: "'The songs of the temple shall become wailings in that day,' says the Lord God; 'the dead bodies shall be many, cast out in every place. Hush!'" (8:3).[14]

The din of battle. The battle of words that is carried on throughout Amos is complemented by the sounds of war that punctuate the oracles. It is clear from the outset that the roar and thunder-voice of YHWH is a call to battle, for immediately after the introductory couplet in 1:2 there follows the repetitious series of pronouncements against the nations (1:3–2:3; 2:4-5). In this rhetorically powerful series we hear of past war atrocities committed by one neighboring people against another and of the devouring fire that YHWH now threatens to send against each group in turn. Dull, indeed, is the imagination of any reader who cannot hear in the background the lingering outcries of the populations already maimed, slaughtered or taken into exile, or the simi-

[14] An alternative translation for 8:3 is suggested in n. 15. In any event, the verse speaks of wailing and the howls of lamentation.

lar outcries that must greet the threatened firestorm from YHWH yet to come. For those whose imagination needs prodding, Amos speaks of the "shouting on the day of battle, with a storm on the day of the whirlwind" (1:14) and of the "uproar, amid shouting and the sound of the trumpet" (2:2) that will inevitably accompany YHWH's fire.

The same awful sounds, we may infer, will also shatter the ear in Israel, since Amos declares that a rain of fire will fall upon YHWH's own people (5:6; cp. 7:4), that the nation's defenses will be breached and its strongholds plundered (3:11), and that destruction by the sword is inevitable (7:9,11,17; 9:1,4,10; cp. 4:10).

The cry of lamentation. YHWH, so the book persuades its readers, will have the final say. His roaring voice is loudest. The tumultuous oppressions, the festival noise and singing, the speaking and commanding and swearing of the people—all will be resolved into the coda of mourning after war and devastation.

Above (see n. 6), I suggested that the note of mourning may be sounded already in 1:2. The prophet himself takes up an anticipatory funeral dirge (*qinah*) over fallen "maiden Israel" in 5:1-2, which is followed by two pronouncements of woe (*hoy*): woe for those who desire the day of YHWH, since it will be a day of darkness and gloom (5:18-20), and woe for the nobility who take their ease in Zion and Samaria (6:1).

The lamentations begun by the land and by Amos will soon be taken up by the people themselves. "In all the squares there shall be wailing; and in all the streets they shall say, 'Alas! alas! [*ho-ho*].' They shall call the farmers to mourning [*'ebel*], and those skilled in lamentation, to wailing; in all the vineyards there shall be wailing, for I will pass through the midst of you, says the LORD" (5:16-17). And again, "the singing women of the palace shall wail on that day... 'So many corpses! Strewn everywhere! Hush!'" (8:3).[15] "Shall not the land tremble... and everyone mourn [*'abal*] who lives in it....? On that day... I will turn your feasts into mourning [*'ebel*], and all your songs into lamentation [*qinah*]... like the mourning [*'ebel*] for an only son" (8:8,9-10).

Finally, if the Book of Amos opens with earthquake (*ra'aš*), mourning (*'abelu*), and the withering of the top of Carmel (*roš hak-karmel*) (1:1-2), it now comes full circle with thresholds quaking (*yir'ašu*), refugees snatched away from the top of Carmel (*roš hak-karmel*), and all on earth mourning (*'abelu*) (9:1, 3, 5). To paraphrase one of our recent poets, "This is the way the world ends—*both* with a bang and whimper!"[16]

The silences

Standing in stark contrast to the sensory overload of sounds in Amos are the silences in the book.

In 5:13 the implied author remarks, "Therefore the prudent will keep silent in such a time; for it is an evil time." Are we to understand a reference here to the worldly wise, perhaps to the proverbially wise courtier, who knows how to keep his mouth shut when nobody is interested in the truth anyway (cf. 5:10, and see Mays: 98)? Would not such a person reap the scorn of an Amos,

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[15] This is Paul's translation (253 + 254-55), following a suggestion of Wolff (217) and others. The LXX has not the palace wailing women but the "ceilings" or "panels" of the temple doing the howling.

[16] T. S. Eliot's "The Hollow Men" concludes: This is the way the world ends / This is the way the world ends / This is the way the world ends / Not with a bang but a whimper" (Eliot: 59).

who felt constrained to speak out when YHWH roared? Or, as Wolff suggests (250), does a disciple of Amos here advise prudent listeners to become the kind of silent ones who no longer oppose the prophetic word, who, as people of understanding, now read the signs of the times as divine judgment draws near? If so, it seems the verse is also inviting readers of the book not to stand with those who refuse to listen to prophecy, like Amos' contemporaries (2:12; 7:12-13), but to accept this book and its message in reverential silence, for YHWH speaks through it.

The following passage also may be read as reinforcing the expected proper attitude of silence and fear to be evoked by the terrifying presence of YHWH, now become as palpable to those who have experienced his judgment as formerly to Amos, when he heard the thunderous divine roar: "If ten people remain in one house, they shall die. And if a relative... shall say to someone in the innermost parts of the house, 'Is anyone else with you?' the answer will come, 'No.' Then the relative shall say, 'Hush! [*has*]. We must not mention the name of the LORD'" (6:9-10).[17] Once again, the prudent reader is drawn into an understanding silence, since the hymnic oracles in Amos, all of which end with a similar reference to the name of YHWH (4:13; 5:8; 9:6), extol the One whose creative power can both form and destroy the entire known universe.

These silences, then, convey an awesome feeling of the divine Presence, akin to Elijah's experience at Horeb (1 Kgs 19:11-12) or to that of the psalmist (Psalm 46). In the former, it is perhaps the ringing in his ears, the inner echo of the uproar of wind and earthquake now past, that remains as the prelude to Elijah's being addressed by the voice of God. In the latter, the tumultuous roaring of nations at war, likened to the turbulent roaring of primeval Sea, is banished by the appearance of YHWH of heavenly armies, who "utters his voice" (like thunder!) and melts the earth (v. 6, Eng.), saying, "'Be still, and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth.'" (v. 10, Eng.)

In contrast to the silence evoked by YHWH's presence, the Book of Amos knows an even more dreadful silence, the silence of God's *absence*.

In contrast to the silence evoked by YHWH's presence, the Book of Amos knows an even more dreadful silence, a silence akin to Job's experience of Shadday, the silence of God's *absence*. "The time is surely coming, says the Lord GOD, when I will send a famine on the land; not a famine of bread, or a thirst for water, but of *hearing* the words of the LORD. They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east; they shall run to and fro, seeking the word of the

[17] Compare similar admonitions to silence at the awful presence of YHWH in Hab 2:20 ("YHWH is in his holy temple, *Has* before him, all the earth"); Zeph 1:7 ("*Has* before the lord YHWH, For the day of YHWH is near"), and Zech 2:17 ("*Has*, all flesh, before YHWH, for he has roused himself from his holy dwelling"). (Translations mine.)

LORD, but they shall not find it" (8:11-12). Those who refused to "Hear this word!," as the book keeps calling, evidently are granted their wish. There is no more word to be heard. To quote another bard, "The rest is silence."

Again, the passage carries great persuasive power, appealing to an implied audience that they need not search for the divine word any farther than in this very book they are presently reading and listening to. If they listen, and thereby separate themselves from "all the sinners of my people... who say, 'Evil shall not overtake or meet us'" (9:9), they may expect to be counted with the select few to whom the promise is given, "except that I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob" (9:8). Perhaps YHWH of the heavenly armies will be gracious to them (5:15). Maybe they will be among those who will be planted again on the land, now done with its quaking and upheavals, and who may hear a *new* sound: "says the LORD *your* God" (9:15).

Thus, the Book of Amos, by its rhetorical pairing of sounds and silences, gives a resounding testimony to the freedom of divine speech and intervention. It works powerfully to persuade readers to distance themselves from those who refused to "Hear this word!" but instead to listen, along with Amos of old, to the roaring show-and-tell of YHWH—before the earthquake!

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Creating a New Reality: No More Domestic Violence

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Domestic violence is the number one health threat to women and accounts for more deaths than automobile accidents, muggings, and rapes combined.[1] Survivors of domestic violence are valiant women[2] not only because they have broken free from literally being beaten down but also because they call the church to create realities where domestic violence will not happen. Survivors' stories are little known. In opening ourselves to their accounts, we can raise our consciousness about the nature and prevalence of domestic violence, and we can learn how to make a Christian response.

This paper has three main themes. The first theme is that of listening to the voices of valiant survivors of domestic violence. Abuse robs a woman of her voice, and to listen is part of her healing—and part of ours, since too often we have turned away. This theme centers around an interview with two survivors of domestic violence, the stories of Jessie and Susan (not their real names).[3] Their stories are similar to countless others.[4] In recounting parts of my interview with these women, I have kept their own words as much as possible. With their permission, I have used direct quotations wherever possible. Some changes have been made to protect their identities.

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[1] See facts sheet on *Wife Assault*, "Dispelling the Myths," Ontario Women's Directorate, 2 Carlton Street, 12th Floor, Toronto, Ontario, M5B 2M9, Canada (tel. 416-314-0300).

[2] Abuse of men also occurs. See Roberta Morris, "Violence Against Women," in *Ending Violence in Families, a Training Program for Pastoral Care Workers* (Toronto: United Church of Canada, 1988), 17-32. "Emotional and verbal abuse of men does occur, but it usually does not accompany the same threat of physical violence and the power dynamic is distinctly different. Abuse of men is not usually reinforced by the social, religious and economic factors that are operative in women's experience" (p. 17). In 95% of domestic violence cases, it is men who commit acts against women.

[3] Permission was granted by "Susan" and "Jessie" for the use of the interview material in this paper.

[4] See the videos listed in the resource list on pages 263-64.

Interwoven throughout these women's stories is the role of the church and its several responses, hence, the second theme: We listen carefully to the effect of the church's action in order to learn more about what attitudes and behaviors are needed as a truly Christian response to that issue. I shall recount the story of several churches which turned their backs on an opportunity to meet Christ in these women, and I shall discuss an example of a church which responded helpfully. As ambassadors for Christ in the world the church can have a healing role to play, as we shall see.

The third theme follows from the others and is presented in a different style. Whereas the first two themes derive from the narrative styles of the interview, the third theme is constituted by clear lists of statistics, reminders for advocates of survivors, strategies for church praxis of fuller gender equity, and resources which aim toward real change in the church's awareness of domestic violence and responsibility in creating a different future. The style communicates an urgent need for the church to respond to domestic violence as a gospel issue.

The stories of survivors are moving and challenging; their courage and resilient spirits are inspiring. I hope that their words will not only stir up a response in you but move you to be part of the solution to domestic violence, a large part of the violence in our culture.

Two valiant women

Although wife assault transcends particular cultural groups or socio-economic status,[5] the women I cite are both Anglo-Saxon. Trying to come to terms with their memories, they tell with painful eloquence the story of how they came to leave an abusive situation in their homes. The telling is part of the healing because the cycle of abuse silences a woman.

Susan and Jessie, both in their early thirties, had recently left the "second stage" program of a local women's shelter. In this stage, residents move out of the shelter but continue to be supported by its staff, who provide them with information about community resources for finding jobs and housing. At this point, they are starting new lives for themselves away from the place which offered them their initial sanctuary.

Susan and Jessie both experienced physical violence in their marriages. They eventually left their homes and sought refuge in a women's shelter. They have been out of the shelter for about three years now. I asked both women what role their church played in their dilemma.

Susan, who does not attend church regularly, says, "Although I did not attend church at the time I left my husband, I think that my backing in the church helped me to be able to leave." From the safety of the shelter, she went to see her pastor. Initially he was supportive. However, after talking to her husband, the pastor said she should go back to him. Susan sums up her reaction to the pastor's swift reversal of attitude: "I haven't gone back to church much. I had hoped to have the kids baptized so that they

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[5] Physical abuse can include pushing and shoving, biting, choking, kicking, slapping, punching, throwing objects, forcing someone to be a passenger when driving recklessly, pulling hair, threatening with a weapon, stabbing, burning. Psychological abuse can include ignoring/belittling feelings, ridiculing, insulting, humiliating, controlling the money, blaming others for one's own abusiveness, hurting or killing a family pet, threatening murder or suicide. In Canada, any forced sexual act is considered sexual assault and is a crime.

could become part of the church, so that they would have some backing, but after his about-face, I thought, Forget it!"

When I asked her what she wished he would have said, she replied, "I wish he would have been more supportive. I wish that he would have stayed with the response he gave me the first time. It would have been fine, but after we had that other conversation in which he turned right around, it just turned me off."

Jessie, on the other hand, says that she had no religious upbringing, although she was baptized in the Anglican church. She became a Christian a few years before her marriage, and it is this experience which supported her during her ordeal. "During the turmoil and what was happening to me, I knew, biblically speaking, that my husband was wrong regardless of what any minister or priest said. I get my strength from God."[6]

Jessie was terrorized by her husband and had knives held to her throat. To this day she must hide her whereabouts from her former husband because of death threats he has made against her. She says,

> I knew it was not acceptable in God's eyes to treat me this way. Five months after my marriage, I went into the shelter, but I still believed that the bonds of marriage still hold: Your husband is still to love you. Why is he doing this? You're tossed between other people and what you know in your heart and soul. I didn't want my kids to live this way. I went to the shelter.

The church gave Jessie five different responses when she told about her situation: disbelief, denial which sent her back into a life threatening situation, abandonment, threat, and complete support. We can observe the first three responses in her recounting a visit she made to her pastor while she was still living with her husband.

> I went to a pastor and when I talked to him, he was very supportive. Then after he talked to my husband, he said, 'Well, you know your husband said that he didn't beat you. Where are the marks on your neck?' And I said to him, 'Well, it's just a he-said/she-said thing, and what I suggest you do is that you stop everything and that you take it to the Lord in prayer. We'll talk again. I don't want to hear that you are on my side or my husband's side. I want to hear that you spoke to the Lord.' And the pastor did, and he had nothing to say when he called back. He apologized for his judgment, but he didn't offer support.

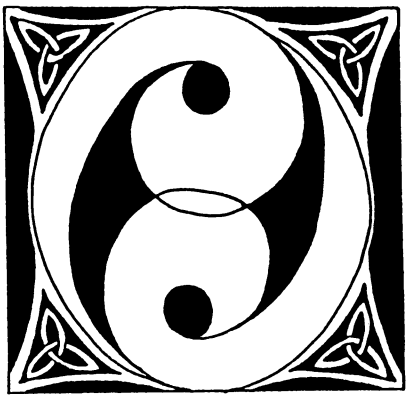
Jessie was strong in her conviction that she deserved a better life, even though the pastor she went to for help allowed the abuse to continue by not believing her and by siding with her abuser. Jessie took a painful and gigantic leap from several core building blocks of her identity: her home, her pastor, and, as we shall see, her congregation.

The church's fourth response was to threaten her. As Jessie was trying to make her decision, the Christian people around her were less than helpful.[7] As she puts it, "People were telling me, 'If you break up, it's adultery.'" In the end she trusted herself and God. "I had to make the right decision.

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[6] In the video *Broken Vows*, Janet, a survivor who had formerly experienced abuse put it this way, "I was surprised to find that God was with me even though the church was telling me I was wrong. My spirituality could be based on what I felt and who I was. I could tell other Christian women that God loves us and that we have basic human rights, basic dignity, and it is wrong when any person takes that away from us." For more information, see the list of resources on pages 263-64.

[7] Another woman stated that people would quote from the Bible and say that the husband is the head of the house. "People I loved and respected in the church blamed me for breaking up the family." See the video *Broken Vows*.



God was helping me to make the right decision."

The pastor's disbelief of Jessie and both his and the church members' minimization of her suffering, as well as their pressuring her to remain in an abusive situation, created an immense load for her—for anyone—to bear. As Dr. Anne Ganley says, abused women "not only have to fight the abuser to keep sanity and safety, they also have to fight the community who want to blame them and put them down."[8]

The resilience of the human spirit is evident in the desire to trust and to reach out again and again in spite of betrayals. After Jessie had left her home and had gone to the shelter, she reached out again to a pastor. "I wanted to hear a warm voice... someone who had known me, someone who believed what I was saying. I called a church in another city where I had lived about five years earlier."

This fifth response of the church was different. Says Jessie, "The pastor said, 'Jessie, if you say this is true, then it's true. Tell us what you need. Letters of recommendation? Money? Anything. Just call us.'" Jessie ended up moving to closer to that church and is now an active member. The response of this pastor serves as a model for a Christian response.

When I asked Jessie what she wished the church had done in her first attempt to reach out, she replied,

> Just trusted me as a woman, as a human being. A victim shouldn't have to prove that they are being strangled. How dare you expect me to prove that my husband has held guns to my head and that we're being held hostage for eight hours at a time while we're being terrorized? I didn't expect anything except, 'Believe me.'

The pastor and his wife who believed Jessie were very supportive to her. The congregation responded to her emotional and financial needs, including her moving expenses and her car repairs, so that she could go into hiding because her husband had made death threats against her.

Quite often people ask why women remain in abusive situations. Jessie has this to say:

> When you're in it, you think, "I can stay here. I know what's going to happen today and tomorrow and the next day. If I leave, I don't know anything about what's going to happen." I lost my home. I lost my financial security. I had never been poor in my life. I left with a suitcase in one hand and a baby in the other. I had to take my other daughter, my first-born, to her father (different father) because I couldn't look after her. Do you know how hard that is? This was extremely hard on the ego. I had to leave my ego behind. I was leaving for the unknown. He said he'd kill me if I left him. You know that if you stay that you're going to get beaten. So what's better? Getting killed or getting beaten? It's scarier to leave than to stay. I had to

[8] Ganley is a psychologist in Seattle, Washington. See the video *Broken Vows*.

> go into hiding and to segregate myself from my friends and family because he had threatened them too. I had no one. I had to protect everyone that I loved.

Quite plainly, despite her earlier disappointing experience with the church, Jessie still thought of it as a possible safe place where she would be accepted and believed, and so she reached out to it again. This is incredible faith.

The congregation did in fact respond positively. Jessie reports that members have been supportive but that there is still an underlying prejudice which she must face.

> You still get segregated in the congregation. You're still branded 'One of *those*,' a marked woman. It is unspoken, but I get the feeling that people are saying, 'Sons, don't touch her with a ten foot pole,' and I have to deal with and come to terms with that attitude. The pastor and his wife are wonderful and they don't feed into that garbage, but much of the congregation does.

When I asked Jessie what she'd like to say to pastors, she replied,

> This [domestic violence] isn't fun and games. Women don't leave their husbands to live in the shelters for the money, for fun, or for kicks. It's all we have. It's not fun. It's humiliating, disgusting. The woman is begging to go there for survival. If you doubt that, take it to the Lord.

Susan concurs:

> I agree with Jessie. We don't do it for fun and games. It's not something we haven't thought about. It's usually the last straw, and it takes a lot of strength and courage to make that decision. Listen to women. Try to change the attitude that divorced people are not all right. I still have a great fear of church people, that they're not going to be accepting. I haven't gone back to church regularly. I stay on the outside. Churches could get more involved. Some men could volunteer to be big brothers to boys who have no male role models. Families could invite a woman and her kids over. The modeling by loving men would be good for both girls and boys to learn how a loving man can relate to kids.

Before she married her husband, Jessie had no idea that he was an abuser. "I knew that he was the man who loved me. He treated me so special. I was his princess. He respected me. Three weeks after we were married, it started. I knew this wasn't right." Women who have to face the truth that they married an abuser, have to confront the loss of deep and meaningful dreams.

The grief of women like Susan and Jessie is like that described in these words from Psalm 55:12-14:

It is not an enemy who taunts me—
then I could bear it;
It is not an adversary who deals insolently with me—
then I could hide from him.
But it is you, my equal, my companion, my familiar friend.
We used to hold sweet converse together....

The typical cycle of domestic violence comprises a buildup of tension, an outbreak of violence, followed by remorse by the batterer for his actions, and then a "honeymoon stage" during which he gives loving attention and often gifts to the woman. It is during this last stage that a wife may hope that things are changing, and therefore she stays.

Susan was married for eight years. She says that before she married him, she had an inkling that her husband could be violent but denied it. She always thought, Well, if we change this piece and this piece, it will get better. But that didn't happen. The beatings started after she began to work

outside the home. Her husband said that she'd changed and he began to harass her about how much money she had in her bank account. He banged her head against the wall, locked her out of the house in winter, and bent a paring knife blade in front of her.

Susan had help from her mother, father, and sisters-in-law to leave this abusive situation. They investigated shelters for her. Her father begged her to leave before her husband killed her. Her aunt also was supportive. Susan had help to pack her bags and to leave while her husband was away.

Studies on domestic violence indicate that the batterer wants control and the beatings are designed to get control of the woman's behavior and activities.[9] Ganley notes that abusers use tactics of control not when they are angry but when they want something. The tactics, whether fists or sweetness, are meant to get the woman to comply.[10] Victor Lewis of the Oakland (California) Men's Project believes that many men are taught that they should get their way. They can push people around until they get it. If they can't get their way, they are not real men. Lewis contends that "we live in a society that believes at a deep unconscious level that men are in control and have control of women."[11] David Currie, chief social worker at the Clarke Institute of Psychiatry in Toronto, Ontario, has written about male violence. He says that a "major contributing factor to women remaining in violent relationships is the endorsement and teaching by our social institutions that women belong in the home, are less competent than men to succeed in the work force, should defer to the dominance of their husbands, and should be the primary emotional support of the family."[12]

For Susan, her husband's great need to control her did not express itself just through physical violence. He used controlling behaviors by his attitude during child custody battles, in breaking restraining orders, and in deliberately violating agreements about the arrangements for child visitation. It takes a great deal of courage to live with these obstacles to a woman's well-being as well as the terrifying memories. Yet both Susan and Jessie have pressed on with their goals to have a better life. Clearly these are valiant women, yet both of them have had trouble seeing themselves in this way.

We live in a society that believes at a deep unconscious level that men are in control and have control of women.

Some courageous women are saying No to domestic violence and saying Yes to life at great risk. They risk being killed; they risk leaving their homes for an unknown future; they risk the loss of their social status and contacts; they risk rejection by telling the secret about the way things really are; and they risk the destruc-

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[9] See David W. Currie, "Why Men Abuse Women," in *Ending Violence in Families*, 22-32 at 22-23.

[10] Currie, 22-23.

[11] Mr. Victor Lewis, in the video *Broken Vows*.

[12] Currie, "Why Men Abuse Women," p. 29; and *The Abusive Husband: An Approach to Intervention*, Toronto: Clarke Institute of Psychiatry, 1988.

tion of their dreams and hopes. One has to be valiant to act on the truth which has so many risks attached to it.

Theologically, it is clear that by caring enough about their own bodies to say No More, these women are caring for the body of Christ, for we are all one in Christ. They call it survival. Theologically, it is the recognition of their real worth in God's eyes and of their bodies as God's temple (1 Cor 3:16-17). I call it the first light of dawn, a resurrection.

There are many ways that the church can participate in ministering to Christ's body through supporting the fullness of women's well-being. They include the following: developing a congregational awareness of domestic violence, learning attitudes and behaviors which are helpful to survivors, pledging a commitment to becoming involved, thinking through the gender relations messages our churches send to women and men in our congregations, and being willing to oppose sex-role stereotyping in church praxis.

While I cannot here give extensive detail, I shall make some preliminary suggestions. In terms of developing an awareness, I have already noted the importance of the stories of survivors of domestic violence. Stories help a congregation to understand the situation from the point of view of the women. Most of us understand families on the basis of our own and do not realize what other families are like from the inside. Families where abuse occurs may appear happy and loving in public, and abusers are frequently charming people in social situations. The stories of women survivors help reveal the private oppressive realities in many families as well as the courageous women who struggle for life. Statistics too, are useful in building awareness. We have seen that domestic violence is the number one health risk for women.[13] This point and other statistics about wife assault may also help a congregation realize the seriousness of the problem.

Facts on wife assault

1. 31% of all women killed are murdered by their boyfriends, husbands, ex-spouses, partners.[14]

2. 20% of all marriages (the figure is low because incidents are often not reported) have acts of violence against the wife. "In a recent study, one in five Canadian men living with a woman admitted to using violence against her."[15] In the United States, a woman is beaten every eighteen seconds.[16]

3. In 95% of all incidents, it is men committing domestic violence against women.

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[13] Domestic violence accounts for more deaths than automobile accidents, muggings, and rapes combined. See p. 1.

[14] *Wife Assault*, "Dispelling the Myths," Ontario Women's Directorate, 2 Carlton Street, 12th Floor, Toronto, Ontario, M5B 2M9, Canada (tel. 416-314-0300).

[15] See Peter Jaffe et al., *A Research Study to Evaluate the Impact and Effectiveness of the Policy Directive That Police Lay Charges in All Domestic Violence Incidents Where Reasonable and Probable Grounds Exist* (Toronto: Provincial Secretariat for Justice, 1985), 26.

[16] See "'We are Where God is': Sacred Dimensions of Battered Women's Lives," by Laureen E. Smith, in *Sacred Dimensions of Women's Experience*, edited by Elizabeth Dodson Gray, Wellesley, MA: Roundtable Press, 1988, 210-19 at 211.

[17] It is well known that domestic violence exists in many countries around the world. See the video *Litrosi* which explores this issue within the Greek setting and *No Small Matter*, a video which focuses on the Punjabi culture in Canada (29 min., available from the

4. Wife assault has been part of society's way of life for a long time.[17] In 1767 it was English common law that a man could "chastise his wife with a whip or rattan no wider than his thumb."[18] In Canada, physical and mental cruelty became grounds for divorce in Canada only in 1968. As recently as 1984, "a Chief Justice of Edmonton reduced the original 30-day sentence of a man convicted of assaulting his wife, since although she had been slapped, kicked, and suffered a broken elbow, the judge declared that she 'had acted like a complete shrew... (her) abusive language would have provoked a saint.'"[19] In the same year, a county court judge in Ontario rated the rape of a young female dancer as "two on a scale of ten" because the attack had not involved "a long period of stark horror."[20]

Despite these astonishing statistics, this problem has not had much attention as a gospel issue. Consequently, many people do not know how to be advocates of survivors of domestic violence. A list of reminders about what behaviors and attitudes are most helpful to survivors follows.

Points to remember for pastors and other advocates

1. Believe women who say that they are being abused and believe the situation they describe.

2. When physical abuse occurs, urge the women to get medical help. It will provide the medical record that she will need.

3. No behavior of any woman ever justifies or provokes violence. It is a crime. Let her know that this is your view.

4. Never tell an abused woman what she should do. Instead, show concern for her safety, affirm her desire for more life, and explore alternatives with her. *Never*

It is not the one who leaves an abusive situation who breaks up a marriage and family, it is the one who is assaultive.

say, "Why didn't you leave?" or "What did you do to warrant the attack?"

5. Let safety be the first concern, not saving the relationship or restoring the marriage. Violence destroys trust and breaks the marriage covenant which presupposes mutuality, trust, respect, and a safe, supportive environment. It is not the one who leaves an abusive situation who breaks up a marriage and family, it is the one who is assaultive.

6. Never try to explain away the abusive behaviors. This minimizes the woman's experience and serves to discount her.

7. Do not attempt to counsel with an abused woman and her batterer together. She cannot tell the truth because she may be beaten later for something she has said. "Experience has taught that marriage coun-

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National Film Board, Toronto, ON). It is noteworthy that at the Ecumenical Decade in Solidarity With Women, in Geneva, April 28–May 8, 1994, one of the main concerns of women from around the world (regions of Africa, Asia, North America, Europe, Caribbean, and Pacific) was domestic violence.

[18] Jaffe et al., *A Research Study*, 26.

[19] Allan Gould, "Snakes and Ladders," *Today's Parent* (May, 1986): 30-35 at 33.

seling before the man has learned to control his violent behavior is at best ineffective and possibly destructive."[21]

What churches can do

Most churches today acknowledge that roles for men and women are changing. It is important for churches to be deliberate in their efforts to create an atmosphere of mutuality. As such, increased efforts must be made to enhancing a woman's self-esteem so that she sees herself as a valuable daughter of God who is cherished and gifted, whose views and thoughts and feelings matter and are considered in decision making. I can give only a few suggestions here. I frame them in an example of what a church which puts the well-being of women at the center of its structure might look like:

1. The congregation experiences both women and men as leaders in the church, and tasks are not divided along lines of sex-role stereotyping. Women preach as often as men and the children in Sunday School relate to a male pastor as often as to a female one. Similarly, women and men alike both serve on finance committees and serve coffee.

2. Women are invited to express their views at annual meetings and at other ecclesial decision-making times.

3. Women are encouraged to take time for retreats for themselves as a way to honor their needs for solitude and rest.

4. Men are encouraged to meet with other men to talk about their life experiences, to discuss how to express and deal constructively with feelings, and to model mutuality.

5. Texts about women from the Bible are preached on by male pastors who have done their reading of contemporary women's writings on the passage every bit as much as women pastors preach about the men in the Bible and read the works of male commentators.[22]

6. There are sermons which name and denounce domestic violence, and women feel safe to reveal their situation to the pastor.

7. The congregation learns about the misuse of the symbol of the cross, which is a symbol of redemptive suffering, but is often distorted to justify violence and to urge a battered woman to bear her cross as Jesus did.[23] Such theological justification is irresponsible because it does not analyze the social and political powers which legitimate violence; it does not notice that the victim has not chosen the path of suffering; and it does not place Christ's suffering in the context of the resurrection.

8. There is awareness that a helpful message in one context is deadly in another. While the message that we need to focus more on community than on selfish individual needs is helpful for the powerful in the church, it may contribute to a woman's staying in an abusive situation because she is used to putting the needs of others above her own. Consequently, the pastor specifies that for individuals facing situations of oppression, God supports them in pursuing their needs.

We turn now to resources which are available and which can help us to create a reality in which domestic violence is not tolerated.

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[20] Gould, "Snakes and Ladders," 33.

[21] See David W. Currie, "Why Men Abuse Women," 27.

[22] Carol J. Schlueter, "The Gender Balance of Texts from the Gospels: The Revised Common Lectionary and the Lutheran Book of Worship," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 20:3 (June 1993): 177-86.

[23] See Laureen E. Smith, "'We are Where God is,'" 210.

Resources

A number of resources are available for churches to build their awareness of domestic violence, how to be helpful in an immediate crisis, and how to strategize to change society so that no woman is battered. Some are listed below.

Books and Articles

Alsdurf, James and Phyllis. *Battered into Submission: The Tragedy of Wife Abuse in the Christian Home.* Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1989.

Bussert, Joy. *Battered Women; From a Theology of Suffering to an Ethic of Empowerment.* Lutheran Church in America, 1986.

Fortune, Marie. *Family Violence: A Workshop Manual for Clergy and Other Service Providers.* Rockville, MD.: National Clearinghouse on Domestic Violence, 1980.

_____. *Keeping the Faith, Questions and Answers for the Abused Woman.* New York: Harper, San Francisco, 1987.

Horton, Anne L., and Judith A. Williamson. *Abuse and Religion: When Praying Isn't Enough.* Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1988.

Martin, Del. *Battered Wives.* Pocket Books. New York: Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1983.

Mickelsen, Alvera and Berkeley. "What does *kephal* mean in the New Testament? in *Women, Authority, and the Bible*, ed. Alvera Mickelsen. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1986.

Miller, Melissa A. *Family Violence. The Compassionate Church Responds.* Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 1994.

Church Packets Addressing Domestic Violence

Broken Promises. Division for Parish Life and the Division for Church and Society, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, 1987, available from 1512 St. James St., Winnepeg, Manitoba R3H 0L2, Canada.

Morris, Roberta. *Ending Violence in Families, a Training Program for Pastoral Care Workers.* National Clearing House on Family Violence, Room 1110, Finance Bldg., Tunney's Pasture, Ottawa, ON K1A 1B5, (613) 957-9527.

Hands to End Violence Against Women: A Resource for Congregational Use, 1988. $20.00. (A shorter edition for congregational study is available for $10.00.) Women's Inter-Church Council of Canada, 815 Danforth Ave., Ste. 402, Toronto, ON M4J 1L2, (416) 462-2528.

The Purple Packett—Domestic Violence Resources for Pastoring Persons: Wife Abuse. Mennonite Central Committee Domestic Violence Task Force, 50 Kent Ave., Kitchener, ON N2F 3R1.

Violence in the Family. A Workshop Curriculum for Clergy and Other Helpers. By Marie M. Fortune. Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 1991.

Videos

Broken Vows: Religious Perspectives on Domestic Violence. VHS, 60 min. Gives examples of Christian and Jewish responses to domestic violence. Available from the Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence, 1914 N. 34th St., Ste. 105, Seattle, WA 98103, (206) 634-1903. Also available from the Women's Inter-Church Council of Canada, 815 Danforth Ave., Ste. 402, Toronto, ON M4J 1L2, (416) 462-2528.

One in Ten, Ecumenical Family Ministries, 1987. VHS, 60 min. Part of a three-part documentary about wife abuse. Available on loan from the Women's Inter-Church Council of Canada, 815 Danforth Ave., Ste. 402, Toronto, ON M4J 1L2, (416) 462-2528.

Right from the Start: Dating Violence Prevention for Teens, VHS, 23 min. An educational film for teens to help them to recognize dating abuse and to confront unacceptable attitudes and behaviors. Friday Street Productions. Available from National Film Board, Toronto, ON, (416) 973-3012.

Without Fear. Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women, 1993. VHS, 25 min. Facilitator's guide. Designed to raise public awareness about the extent of violence against women in Canada. Available through National Film Board outlets and from the Women's Inter-Church Council of Canada, 815 Danforth Ave., Ste. 402, Toronto, ON M4J 1L2, (416) 462-2528.

Worship resources

Some of the books and church packets have worship resources. This booklet, however, was written specifically as a worship resource.

Lord, Hear Our Prayers. Domestic Violence Worship Resources, 1994. Mennonite Central Committee, 50 Kent Ave., Kitchener, ON N2F 3R1 ($5.00).

Conclusion

Creating a new reality in which there is no more domestic violence sounds like an idealistic task. Yet in our ways of being we can turn from the tolerance of violence against women to work towards a new reality which is life-affirming. As we have seen from the interview with Susan and Jessie, the church has a choice — to be on the side of death for survivors of domestic violence or on the side of life by being willing to support the choices of women.

The church can also help to create an atmosphere in which women and men are valued and encouraged to be supportive of each other; where both can speak their own needs and know that they will be heard and attended to if possible; where both will use their gifts of leadership and service for the furthering of the gospel; where there is no sex-role stereotyping; and where both are expected to take responsibility for their behavior.

In citing the interview with Susan and Jessie, I have attempted to give their voices a hearing and to make them matter in revealing a gospel issue. Their stories have offered us an opportunity to admire them for their valiant spirits, understand better the risk and cost it takes to leave abusive situations, and to learn that the church can have a healing role by listening to their stories, taking them seriously, and responding with whatever support they can offer these women.

We have seen that creating such a new reality will necessitate both support for survivors of domestic violence and attention to the practices in our churches. I believe that God works with us to bring about this new reality as a furthering of the work begun in Jesus' ministry with women on earth and of the resurrection hope in Christ.

Do Clergy Create an Unethical Dual Relationship when Counseling with Members of Their Parish?

Robert J. Grosch
Redding, California

In 1973 the American Psychological Association, in its Code of Ethics, first used the term "dual relationship." This term made counseling relationships problematic because of a "dual relationship," without regard to whether or not the relationship may be exploitative.

In the counseling field, a dual relationship is said to exist whenever a counselor relates to a counselee in more than one role. Examples would be a counselor who counsels someone for whom he also serves as landlord; or a therapist who gives psychological treatment to her housekeeper.

Some fear that a dual relationship will inhibit effective therapy, give rise to exploitation of the client, and in extreme cases lead to inappropriate romantic or sexual relationships.

Most of the ethical codes of the counseling professions are critical of dual relationships. The following is a summary of those statements:

American Association for Counseling and Development: "When the member has other relationships, particularly of an administrative, supervisory, and/or evaluative nature with an individual seeking counseling services, the member must not serve as the counselor, but should refer the individual to another professional.... Dual relationships with clients might impair the member's objectivity and professional judgment."

American Association of Marriage and Family Therapy: "Therapists... make every effort to avoid dual relationships with clients that could impair professional judgment or increase the risk of exploitation. When a dual relationship cannot be avoided, therapists take appropriate professional precautions to ensure judgment is not impaired

and no exploitation occurs. Examples... include... business or close personal relationships with clients...." (Principle 1.2)

American Psychological Association: "Psychologists make every effort to avoid dual relationships that could impair their professional judgment or increase the risk of exploitation." (Principle 6.a)

None of the various ethical codes defines a dual relationship with precision, focusing instead upon the issues of impaired professional judgment and of exploitation of the counselee.

In many states, professional counselors can be disciplined by their licensing boards for participating in such a dual relationship, despite the absence of an accepted legal definition of what constitutes a dual relationship.

Legally the issue remains uncertain. California's Attorney General has gone so far as to state that legislating on the subject is most difficult:

> I believe there is considerable difficulty with legislating the subject of prohibited dual relationships. It is a very broad area, subject to so many variations and permutations... that it prohibits conduct which either should not be prohibited or cannot be avoided in many instances. While therapists are often put in uncomfortable circumstances on the fringes of dual relationships, sometimes these are necessary in order to effect the principle goal of aiding the client.[1]

The Attorney General goes on to state that allowances need to be made in the area of dual relationships for "particular ethnic and cultural identities."

In today's world, serious and dedicated Christians are a unique and minority culture within our society. This is just as true for Christians as it is for lesbians, Asians, holocaust survivors, the physically handicapped, or others for whom the counseling professions make special allowances.

Christians have their own set of values which often run counter to those of the society in general, and the therapeutic community in particular. Corey, Corey, and Callanan lay the foundation for this point of view when they state, "The word *culture* can be interpreted broadly, for it can be associated with a racial or ethnic group as well as with... religion."[2]

The California Supreme Court also recognizes that the church in its counseling has a unique posture when it states in *Nally vs. Grace Community Church*, "Clinical psychology and pastoral counseling do not spring from the same well," allowing that the latter is a religious practice not subject to the same criteria of accountability as clinical psychology.

The reality of duality

Duality always exists on some level in the counseling relationship, be it a pastoral or a secular one. One is never *just* a counselor. At the very least, one is a *male* or a *female* counselor. Gender creates a dual identity with the client, and already dictates what are appropriate or inappropriate behaviors with the client. This duality alone will "influence our judgment" in the relationship.

Duality is far more pervasive than mere gender, even in a relatively "clean" counseling relationship. Any counselor who has been an author, public speaker, civic volunteer, small-town politician, parent in the

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[1] Quoted in *The California Therapist* (October 1989), p. 11.

[2] Corey, Gerald, Marianne Schneider Corey, and Patrick Callanan, *Issues and Ethics in the Helping Professions* (Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole, 1993), 241.

PTA, or teacher at the evening community college has no doubt engaged in a dual relationship with a client. Secular counselors do not necessarily come to the counseling relationship any less tainted than does the parish pastor.

Ryder and Hepworth believe that dual relationships are so ubiquitous that they are virtually impossible to eliminate.[3]

Some within the counseling community even focus on the beneficial aspects of dual relationships.[4]

Hedges goes so far as to say that "all beneficial effects of psychotherapy arise as a consequence of the dual relationship." This is because "the nature of transference, countertransference, resistance... *de facto* rest upon the existence of a dual relationship."

It seems, then, that dual relationships are inevitable. Therefore, clinicians should conduct them thoughtfully and ethically, making whatever happens "grist for the mill."[6]

For parish clergy, the dual relationship with parishioners is taken for granted. It is a given. One well-known pastoral counselor says, "It's not unusual for me to see a family clinically on Friday afternoon and then to preach a sermon to that family on Sunday morning—or to sit in a committee meeting with the parents of that family on Sunday evening to talk about youth programming.... I do not agree that we should not enter into depth counseling relationships with the people."[7]

Since parishioners enter into the duality of relationship with their pastors knowingly, intentionally, and within a cultural context where such duality is supported and encouraged, it ought not to be viewed by the same criteria as duality among secular counselors and their clients.

Parishioners who seek out their pastors for counseling want something they perceive they cannot get elsewhere, something made possible only within the dual relationship itself. For this very reason, they are often not willing to accept a referral elsewhere. When such is the case, the pastor is all the more justified in retaining the member as a counselee.[8]

Finally, it must be considered that the pastor who is approached by a member of the parish for counseling will affect his/her pastoral relationship with the parishioner by whether or not the member is accepted for counseling. Hence a duality to the

[3] Ryder, Robert, and Jeri Hepworth, "AAMFT Ethical Code: 'Dual Relationships,'" *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy* 19:2 (1990), 129.

[4] Corey, Corey & Callanan, 142.

[5] Hedges, Lawrence E., "In Praise of the Dual Relationship," Part II, *The California Therapist* (July/Aug. 1993), 46.

[6] Hedges, Lawrence E., "In Praise of the Dual Relationship," Part I, *The California Therapist* (May/June 1993), 46.

[7] Craig, James, lecture at AAMFT Annual Conference, San Francisco, CA, 10/18/89.

[8] Hass, Leonard J., *Keeping Up the Good Work: A Practitioner's Guide to Mental Health Ethics* (Sarasota, FL: Professional Resource Exchange, 1989), 23.

The duality of the pastoral-counselor relationsips can be an advantage depending upon the management of power.

pastoral relationship is then set into motion, whether or not the member is accepted for counseling. Since the pastoral relationship is both prior and primary, I hold that the pastoral relationship should be maintained as a first priority. However, I do believe pastors should not be discouraged from counseling with members based solely upon rigidly interpreted "dual relationship" considerations.

Advantages and disadvantages

Three arguments against dual relationships are:

1. A dual relationship may result in less confrontative behavior on behalf of the pastoral therapist because the client is known socially or pastorally.

2. There is a loss of objectivity on the therapist's part due to the previous pastoral relationship.

3. Dual relationships are an invitation to an improper, sexual relationship.

The last of these reasons may appear to be the most important to us in this age of increasing reports of clergy sexual misconduct. Yet, there are no solid studies demonstrating that sexual misconduct by clergy takes place any more often in the counseling relationship than it does in the context of other pastoral duties.

What all pastors do need to remember, however, is that those who come for counseling will by definition be more vulnerable than the average parishioner. Such counselees may also come with a predisposition toward exploiting the dual relationship of pastor and counselor for their own reasons. However, it is always the pastor's responsibility to not allow the pastoral counselor relationship to deteriorate into anything other than a professional, helping relationship.

As for the pastoral relationship flavoring the interventions and observations of the pastoral therapist, we think this can actually be an advantage. Prior history with a family can facilitate an understanding of its problem and give insight as to the best method for solving the problem.

Prior history with one's parishioners often saves hours of history-taking in the initial stages of counseling, and keeps the counselee from misleading the counselor by trying to "look good" with a stranger.

Even some secular therapists hold that involvement in dual relationships actually can contribute towards improved rather than impaired professional judgment.[9]

Since the misuse and exploitation of dual relationships takes place when the power differential in the relationship is most evident, the potential misuse of power is a more fruitful place to focus one's attention in examining such relationships.

Obviously the more power one holds, the more potentially devastating the dual relationship can be. With pastors, this power differential can be either increased or de-

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[9]Tomm, Karl, "The Ethics of Dual Relationships," *The California Therapist* (Jan./Feb. 1993), 7ff.

creased through pastoral counseling. The exposure and familiarity that comes about in the counseling relationship can serve to take the pastor off the "ivory tower" and make him/her appear more human in the sight of the parishioner. This decrease in the power differential can more fully humanize both the counseling and the pastoral relationships.

Tomm agrees with this point of view when he writes,

> When persons relate to each other in multiple contexts there is greater opportunity to recognize each other as ordinary human beings. There is less probability of either party persisting in distorted perceptions of the other, such as attributions of exaggerated insight and wisdom in therapists (by their clients), or attributions of pervasive personal limitations and deficits in clients (by their therapists). (p. 15)

We conclude, then, that the duality of the pastoral-counselor relationships can be an advantage depending upon the management of power. Those relationships that seek to decrease the power differential as the client heals and grows are less likely to be exploitative and hence are ethical within the cultural values of the church.

However, those pastors who use the counseling relationship to increase the power differential between themselves and their parishioners are acting unethically and to the detriment of their clients.

Suggestions

For pastors who see their ministry as including the role of pastoral counseling, I make the following suggestions:

1. Learn the difference between counseling and psychotherapy. Realize that the latter generates such significant transference (and countertransference) that your ministry with this person may well become too complicated to continue.

2. Find a Christian professional counselor whom you can trust and with whom you can be open. Arrange to review your counseling with him/her.

3. Upgrade your skills in counseling through continuing education.

4. Set limits on the number of visits you will have with a parishioner. Realize that you do not have the time (and probably not the training) to work with problems involving more than four to six sessions.

5. Whenever possible, be sure that the dual relationship takes place in public. For instance, counseling with your church organist, with whom your only non-counseling contact may be on Sunday morning, in public, is a different situation than counseling someone you also visit privately in their home.

6. Be sure to set structure in place at the initial interview so that potential problems are addressed before they arise. A structure-setting mini-lecture might sound something like this:

"Your entering counseling with me will possibly cause you some difficulties. Through the years I have learned to try to separate as much as possible my pastoral and my counseling roles, but this is something you will perhaps have to learn. If it proves difficult for us to have these two sides to our relationship, it is important that we are able to talk about this.

"For example, sometimes people in counseling hear sermons in a new way, and wonder, 'Is he preaching to me? Did he include that in the sermon just for me, because he knows so much about me?' I assure you nothing in our sessions is ever in the sermon, even by reference or insinuation. If you see connections between your personal problems and the content of the

sermon, it is coincidental. This is one reason I always preach on the assigned texts of the day, and preach sermons that stick closely to that text. However, the content of a sermon, if it is meaningful to you and your problems, is always worthy of consideration and perhaps even of inclusion in our counseling sessions; just don't think I included that portion of the sermon *specifically for you.*

"Sometimes people think, too, that I look out into the congregation or greet people at the door with our counseling in the back of my mind. I don't. If I greet you at the door of the church and ask, "How are you?", such a greeting carries no more weight now than it did when we weren't in counseling together. I do not stop being your pastor just because I have become your counselor.

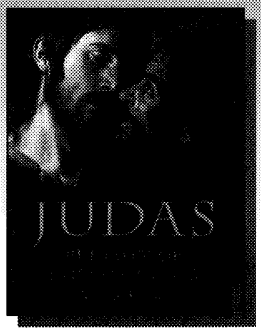
"If at any time you are uncomfortable over the two sides of our relationship, I hope you will bring it up so we can discuss it and either work it through, or make a referral to an appropriate counselor outside the parish.

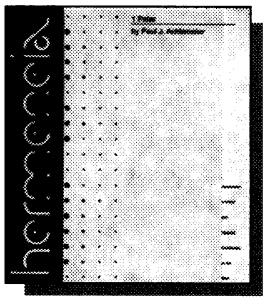
"Our relationship, because it is pastoral, also bears certain advantages in that we can in a pastoral manner integrate your spiritual life with your personal, presently-problemed life. If this is not working for you at any time, I hope you will bring it up for discussion.

"Since it is best to keep our dual relationships somewhat separate, I will ask that you not discuss therapeutic issues with me when I am serving as your pastor (such as seeking an appointment for counseling over coffee in the parish hall). Nor will we discuss church administration at any of our counseling sessions.

"Experience teaches me that pastoral counseling has advantages that far outweigh the disadvantages, but if this is not the case for you as we proceed, please speak up so we can make sure your needs are being served."

Judas...
Jesus, Paul, John...
Peter...

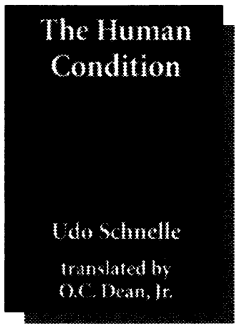




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Challenges in Rural/ Small Town Ministry

Palmquist Memorial Lecture on Ministry in Town and Country

S. John Roth
Faith Lutheran Church
Jacksonville, Illinois

The assigned topic for this presentation is "Challenges in Rural/Small Town Ministry." Let me say a few things about how I will approach this topic. It is easy to run together in our minds the images "rural church" and "small church." Numerous writers have developed categories of congregations based on the size of the congregation, and have discussed the implications of congregational size on the congregation's personality and on the way the congregation functions as an organization. Lyle Schaller's categories are perhaps the most popular.[1] Schaller labels the smallest congregations "cat" congregations; these congregations will have fewer than 50 people in worship on any given Sunday morning. Schaller's next category is "collie" congregations, i.e., congregations with average attendance between 50 and 100. Then there are "garden" congregations, then "ranch" congregations, and so on. It is true that most rural/small town congregations are small. They are often cat and collie size, and what Schaller says about the nature of cat and collie congregations will be true of most rural/small town churches.

Yet it is a mistake to equate "rural/small town church" with "small church." A rural cat-sized congregation may have more in common with a long-established, first-ring suburban congregation than it does with the rural garden-sized congregation down the road. For example, both cat-sized congregations may provide no secretarial help to the pastor, may do no long-range planning, may operate without a pledge system, may be financially one furnace failure away from oblivion, and may expect the pastor to attend every congregational event—from meetings to women's group socials. The rural/small town garden-sized congregation, on the other hand, may provide the pastor with a part-time secretary,

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[1] Lyle Schaller, *Looking in the Mirror* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), 14-37.

may have an elaborate pledge system, may operate with a five-year long-range plan, and may recognize that their congregation functions best when the pastor is not at everything that goes on.

Congregational size—in rural/small town areas—plays a large role in determining what a congregation's challenges will be, and in delimiting what the congregation's resources for meeting those challenges will be. Therefore, resources that investigate congregational dynamics based on congregational size are helpful for pastors in rural/small town settings. My principal qualification about such categorizations would be that you need to stretch the categories such as Schaller's upwards when you apply them to rural/small town settings. Rural/small town congregations have a tendency to function, for example, as collie-type congregations well into what would be considered larger, garden-type size.

So, the size of a congregation is a factor in any congregational setting, and many of the challenges a pastor faces in rural/small town ministry do relate to the size of the congregation. Nevertheless, we can identify characteristics of and challenges in rural/small town ministry that set rural/small town ministry apart from ministry in urban and suburban settings, aside from congregational size. Even if these characteristics and challenges are not unique to rural/small town ministry, they are, in my judgment, especially pronounced in the rural/small town setting. So, in the time I have, I am going to try to be more mindful of rural-in-contrast-to-urban church dynamics, and give less attention to size-specific church challenges.[2] I have divided this talk into two halves and a total of six challenges. The first three challenges look at *ministry* in the rural/small town context. The final three challenges look at the *minister* in the rural/small town context.

Challenge #1: Our people experience the stress of the complexity of the agricultural economy. Norman Rockwell's simple, rural America, if it ever existed, does not exist today. Numerous factors combine to make life for the typical rural household highly stressful. While we are past the days of "the farm crisis," a time during the 1980s when farmers were going belly-up right and left, family farm operations are still risky business. Profit margins, especially for farmers who got caught crosswise in the turbulent times in the 1980s, are razor thin. The economics of agriculture are extremely complex and require a great deal of sophistication to navigate. Farm commodities are international commodities. Pricing factors have to do with everything from interna-

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[2] Students of the hermeneutics of biblical exegesis are paying closer attention to the social location of the biblical interpreter because the interpreter invariably interprets the text out of personal perspectives shaped by his or her experience. Similarly, my interpretation of rural/small town ministry grows out my background and current setting in ministry. So, let me tell you a bit about myself. I am not a farm boy. I grew up in suburban St. Louis. I went to Christ Seminary-Seminex in St. Louis. Though I took a course in "town and country ministry"—that is what we called it back then—I never seriously imagined that I would serve in a rural/small town setting. There were very few rural/small town congregations in my church body, the AELC, and in any case my life frame of reference was urban and suburban. My first call was to Grace Lutheran Church, Glen Ellyn, in suburban DuPage county (metro Chicago). I now live in Jacksonville, Illinois, which is 80 miles north of St. Louis and 35 miles west of Springfield. The population of "metro" Jacksonville is about 23,000; our county, Morgan county, about 39,000. To put that in perspective, on a bad day there are more people at Soldier Field watching a Bears game than there are people living in Morgan county. I have been at Faith Lutheran in Jacksonville since March 1988.



tional trade agreements to winter weather in Russia to rainfall in Argentina. Moreover, farm equipment is sophisticated and expensive equipment. Let me give you an example. A combine is a piece of machinery that you drive through the fields to harvest the crop. A combine picks the corn and shells it, i.e. separates the corn from the husk and the cob. Combines are now appearing in our area which provide computerized analysis of crop yields. The computer reports the field's yield on a grid that divides the field up into blocks as small as, say, 10' by 10'. Based on that finely-tuned analysis, the farmer tailors future nutrient and fertilizer applications precisely to that block of land.

The nature of farming now is that economic forces demand that each farmer work more and more acres of ground. Working more acreage leads to investments in larger and larger pieces of farm equipment, which in turn translates into incorporating larger debt loads into the farming operation. Debt becomes more serviceable if the farming operation expands, and so the cycle begins again. Let's not kid ourselves that farm life is a simple, stress-free life compared with urban/suburban life.

Moreover, let's not kid ourselves that rural people all have a slower lifestyle than do their urban and suburban counterparts. The quickening of the pace of life appears to me to be especially impacting rural women, because these women are balancing traditional duties of a farm wife with work outside of the home. Except for those women who are retired, not one of the women in our congregation who live out on the farm does not do some other kind of work to provide income for the family. Among our farm wives we have a social worker, a tax accountant, and a postal worker. They are on the run constantly. In general, very few rural/small town women or men are available during the day for volunteer activities. It is impossible, for example, for our congregation to run Vacation Bible School in the morning or afternoon; we have VBS in the evening, because that is when we can get VBS workers. In the complex world of the agricultural setting, rural women balance job, family, and farm.

At the same time, the non-farm employment situation is one of almost polar opposites. Demand for some skills is strong; for others it is almost nonexistent. Teachers may likely have some difficulty finding jobs. Licensed Clinical Social Workers can write their own ticket. Taxi drivers will starve. A reliable farm equipment operator can always find work. (I might mention here that this employment reality impacts the pastor who brings a job-hunting spouse to a rural/small town area.)

Our challenge is to minister effectively, with perceptiveness and empathy, to people experiencing the stress of the complexity of the agricultural economy.

Challenge #2: Our people tend to resist change. To minister effectively in rural/small town settings, a pastor needs to understand and appreciate the resistance to change

that characterizes most of our congregations. "Change" is not a welcome term in rural areas and small towns. In rural/small town settings, change overwhelmingly means school consolidation and the loss of the local school, loss of businesses, shrinking populations, loss of industry, the closing of the local hospital, and the like. The cluster of ELCA congregations that our congregation is part of encompasses Cass, Morgan, and Scott counties. All three counties experienced population decline between the 1980 census and the 1990 census: Cass down 11%, Morgan down 3%, Scott down 8%. If a pastor talks "change," people stiffen—not because they are stubborn (though some people are stubborn), not because they are unintelligent or uncaring, but because for the most part change has been unkind to them.

Pastors serving in rural/small town settings quickly become aware of a second significant barrier to change. You can be the pastor of a typical rural/small town congregation for 10 years and the majority of the members of the congregation will still have seniority over you. Rural/small town congregations typically are long-established congregations. In our conference of 21 churches, not one is under 30 years old, only two are under 40 years old, 14—fully two thirds—are more than 100 years old; and six of these 100+ year-old congregations pre-date the Civil War. Members of these congregations come in large measure from families that have been members for generations or, if not born into the congregation, have been members for most of their adult life. These members have seen pastors come and go, including pastors that they have loved and respected. The ethos of the rural/small town setting is "you, dear pastor, will leave, and we (the lay members) will be left and we don't know whether we can manage your changes in your absence."

In such an climate, rural/small town congregations are not looking for change agents. They are looking for love givers.[3] This does not mean that change is impossible. It simply means that leadership for change is a privilege that the pastor earns through the pastor's manifest affection for the people of the church. Martin Luther King, Jr., said, "Whom you would change you must first love." And King's words are certainly true in the rural/small town setting. If we appreciate what lies behind a congregation's resistance to change, it is possible to mesh our pastoral vision for mission with the congregation's values.

Challenge #3: Our congregations rely on each other's pastors. Rural/small town congregations characteristically experience rapid clergy turnover and relatively long vacancies. Indeed, congregations expect that if their pastor does a good job, she or he will leave, i.e., will be "promoted." I have been at Faith, Jacksonville, for fewer than eight years. In a conference of 21 ELCA congregations, only three conference pastors have been in the conference longer than I have.[4] Among fellow clergy, a rural/small town pastor rapidly gains in seniority. When pastoral vacancies occur, a pastor from a neighboring congregation typically becomes the interim pastor: teaches confirmation,

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[3] See Steve Burt's excellent discussion of this in *Activating Leadership in the Small Church: Clergy and Laity Working Together* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1988), especially pp. 68-79.

[4] Incidentally, rural/small town clergy rapidly gain in seniority among their clergy peers in the community also. There are 39 churches in Jacksonville. Among them, there are at least 30 full-time ministerial positions. I know most of the clergy, and as I figure it, only 5 full-time clergy have been in Jacksonville longer than I have.

preaches and conducts worship if scheduling permits (or schedules are sometimes altered to make scheduling permit), marries, buries, visits the sick and shut-in. This is typically taken for granted and not fully appreciated by the congregations involved.

Reliance by congregations on the neighboring rural/small town pastor presents the pastor with hard choices about the use of his or her time, energy, and attention. What is fair in these situations? What is fair to the pastor, to the pastor's own congregation, and to the vacant congregation? For example, the most "painless" solution to a pastoral vacancy for a declining vacant congregation is for a neighboring pastor to step in and simply fill the functional vacuum created by the departure of the congregation's former pastor, so that congregational life proceeds "normally." But this apparently painless solution may permit and even encourage the congregation to rely on this "temporary" arrangement and avoid facing up to its decline. On the other hand, our pastoral inclination is not to want people to go without pastoral care. How do we provide pastoral care in such a situation in a way that will be healthy for everyone concerned in the long run? Again, what is fair? Finding workable answers is a challenge.

There we have three challenges. Up to this point, I have lifted up challenges related to the ministering that we *do* in rural/small town settings. Now let me shift gears and make a few comments about three challenges which adhere to *being* a minister in a rural/small town setting. These challenges are less tangible than the first three, but they invariably confront the pastor serving in a rural/small town situation.

Challenge #4: Clergy isolation. In my case, the nearest ELCA clergy person lives 15 miles away. I am the only ELCA clergy person in my county. When I served in Glen Ellyn, Illinois (DuPage county), there were a half dozen or more other Lutheran clergy of our predecessor church bodies within the Glen Ellyn-Wheaton community. While there are, excluding synod officials, nine other ELCA clergy persons within a 50-mile radius of my church, all of them are an 11-digit, long-distance phone call away. We live in different communities that have varying community agendas and problems; five of the nine are in Springfield, 35 miles away, and I rarely see them more than once or twice a year.

Moreover, clergy friends come and go. Seasoned and secure friendships are hard to come by. Contrast my situation with my father's. My father is now retired and serving an interim pastorate in St. Louis. He and my mother have met socially with the "Preachers" group (other Lutheran pastors and spouses) regularly for more than 30 years. There is some turnover in the group, but all of the people now involved have been serving in their present ministries for more than 10 years, and several of the pastors and spouses have been friends and mutual support givers for fully 30+ years. In rural/small town settings, clergy friends, when they can be found, simply do not stay proximate long enough for that type of bonding to develop.[5]

The challenge of clergy isolation affects pastors whether they are male or female, single or married.

Challenge #5: Few clergy status symbols. What are the status symbols for pastors?

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[5] Related to clergy isolation and rapid turnover is the paucity of pastoral role models of stable, mature ministries in rural/small town settings. But the issue of healthy models of ministry is too complex to be treated adequately in this brief presentation.

Don't kid yourself. They are there. Let's be honest with one another. Though we would like to say that we do not judge one another by the world's standards, worldly-looking symbols play a real role. What makes us feel valued? Money, a large congregation, growth, an exotic specialized ministry? Please pardon me, but I find it disingenuous when clergy who possess such status symbols and who would not dream of laying them aside voluntarily say that pastors should not care about status. Status symbols do matter, regardless of what anyone says, because everyone wants to feel as though what they are doing is important.

Serving in a rural/small town setting is implicitly low status. Pastors who are no longer serving in a rural/small town setting quickly recall with fondness their small town ministry roots. But when they boast, pastors boast of *having come from* rural America, not of *being in* a small town. I get the impression at times when friends of mine and I are talking—well-meaning friends who want nothing but the best for me—that they suspect that were I rightly motivated, ambitious, and skilled as a pastor, I would have moved onward and upward from Jacksonville by now.

The challenge for pastors (as well as for bishops and other denominational officials) is to resymbolize, in a real sense, status in ministry.

Challenge #6: The invisibility factor. This challenge is related to the previous one. When you are in rural/small town ministry, there is this gnawing feeling whenever denominational materials on church life come out that, "Gee—they are just not talking about me." Typical rural/small town ministry is pretty much invisible in our published material. Let me give you an example. The Division for Ministry has recently produced a video-based workshop for congregations on hospitality evangelism. The video is entitled "Awakenings." The video presentations take the viewer into several congregational settings where we meet people who are doing evangelism that works, i.e., evangelism that is drawing people into their growing congregations. A common thread running through the vignettes is that these congregations are consistently urban and suburban. Now, it is not always obvious that this is the case. For example, Our Savior Lutheran is identified as Our Savior, Hastings, Minnesota. Most people probably have not heard of Hastings and could suppose that it were a small- or medium-sized city. In fact, Hastings is part of greater Minneapolis-St. Paul. If I were a cynical person, I would wonder if the producers of "Awakenings" would like us to believe that Hastings and other municipalities named in the video are simple, average American towns: Apple Valley, Minnesota, and Burnsville, Minnesota, and Ramsey, Minnesota, and White Plains, New York. In fact, they are all located in large metropolitan areas. Apple Valley, Burnsville, and Ramsey are part of the Twin Cities metropolitan area, and White Plains is metro New York. One

> Rural/small town congregations are not looking for change agents. They are looking for love givers.

congregation is actually identified in the video presentation as a rural congregation: a church in Rubicon, Wisconsin. The video shows an idyllic scene of this country church out in a field and talks about how unlikely it would be that this rural church would be growing. But it quickly becomes apparent, as the pastor of this church talks about the population growth of the Rubicon area, that Rubicon is developing into an attractive bedroom community for commuters to Milwaukee and Madison. People in rural/small town settings such as Morgan, Cass, and Scott counties look at that depiction of rural and think to themselves, "Gee, that's not me." Please do not misunderstand me. I am not trying to trash the video presentation. It offers helpful advice to pastors and congregations. Nevertheless, it illustrates my point about invisibility in that typical rural/small town settings do not appear.

The challenge is to maintain a sense of calling and identity in the face of invisibility or, in other words, little apparent notice of rural/small town ministry.

Concluding comments. A couple of weeks ago, I spoke with the 5th and 6th graders at my daughter's grade school about what a pastor does. The school invites people from various occupations to come in and talk about what they do for a living. I was given only 20 minutes, and the time limit forced me to sort out what is central to my pastoral ministry, the basic things that I do. The things that I talked about in those 20 minutes—the things that actually do take up most of my time and attention—are things that are common to parish ministry anywhere. The Sunday morning worship service is the center of congregational life, and every week I spend a significant amount of time in service and sermon preparation. The major challenge in almost all parish situations is the challenge to prepare and deliver a decent sermon week after week, every week, year in and year out. Then there is confirmation instruction, communion instruction, crisis counseling, pre-marriage counseling and weddings, funerals, hospital calls, and shut-in calls. These things were the same for me in DuPage county as they are in Morgan county. My point is that though I have sketched distinctive aspects of rural/small town ministry, keep in mind that much of parish ministry—including its joys and satisfactions—is common to all settings.

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Ethical Challenges for Social Ministry Today: Some Theological and Ethical Considerations

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Introduction

Many of the ethical concerns with which social ministry organizations struggle emerge from the internal and external constraints that they experience. Usually, the thought of constraints evokes negative images. We think of the barriers that keep us from doing what we really want to do. A lack of resources, money, and personnel would certainly interfere with a hospital's ability to build and staff a new hospital wing. Yet constraints can have a positive effect as well. If your mission statement limits your purpose to helping poor people find jobs, and someone asks you to start a tutoring program for children, your mission statement keeps you from wasting resources or getting involved in activities outside your expertise. The purpose of this paper is to identify the ethical challenges that organizational constraints raise for social ministry organizations and to discuss some theological resources and strategies to meet those challenges.

What are some of the constraints social ministry organizations experience? External constraints usually emerge from changes in the political, economic, and social environments in which the organization operates. Changes in laws, such as requiring long-term care facilities to become Medicaid certified, can constrain social ministry organizations from pursuing certain courses of action. Economic recession and budgetary cutbacks make funds scarce and increase the competition for them. Congregations are failing to meet budgets; denominations are being forced to lay off employees. If you happen to work for a social ministry organization, your interests are usually the first to go as institutions upon which your organization depends for funding focus on their own survival.

Social and cultural changes also contribute to the constraints organizations experience. The complexity of the causes of social problems leave many social ministry organizations frustrated and overwhelmed. Volunteers are becoming a scarce resource. Volunteerism in this country is still strong but the nature of volunteerism is changing. The "traditional" role of women keeps changing as more and more women enter into professions outside the home and have less discretionary time to invest in "voluntary" activities. Moreover, as families wait longer to have children and as medical advances increase life span, many families struggle with their own caregiving roles with younger children and aging parents (the bulk of which women still assume).

Internal constraints can include incompetent board and staff members, inflexible structures or policies, or inadequate communication flows. A major internal constraint for any social ministry organization is the tendency to substitute the needs of the organization for its purpose. Sociologist Amitai Etzioni reminds us that organizations are instruments created to serve specific goals or purposes. "But in the process of forming them, of granting them resources, and of recruiting personnel, interest groups are formed which are frequently concerned more with preserving and building up the organization itself than in helping it to serve its initial purpose."[1] Those interest groups include any person or party who has a stake in maintaining the organization, such as boards, staff, funders, and clients.

Another potential internal constraint is the theological or value assumptions that underlie an organization's mission and purpose. When the stakeholders in your organization share these assumptions, the consensus enables you to stay focused and keeps you from engaging in activities in which you do not want to be involved. When the stakeholders do not share these assumptions, the diversity can lead to confusion and conflict, which managers struggle to resolve. (Any church-related social ministry which has ever accepted federal funding, with its strings and stipulations, has experienced this.)

Ethical concerns

The interplay between these external and internal constraints often creates uncertainty and ambiguity, major contributors to the increasing number of ethical issues with which social ministry organizations struggle. Without attempting to be comprehensive, let me discuss four of those issues.

First, a fundamental moral challenge facing social ministry organizations is *to maintain indigent care in the face of budget cutbacks.* Most of us would agree that the primary basis for giving care is need, not ability to pay. However, providing care is not cheap and its cost is rising. Cutbacks in funding from the government, denominations, and others are forcing many caregiving organizations to increase costs to clients or to reduce or eliminate some services. These are difficult decisions which have significant ethical implications.

Church-related long-term care facilities, accustomed to providing high levels of care, struggle with maintaining quality of care at a time when the ratio of Medicaid to self-pay patients is increasing and government reimbursement levels are substandard. Hospitals, seeking to balance their obligation to serve the medically needy with their obligation to keep the hospital open, are

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[1] Amitai Etzioni, *Modern Organizations* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1964), 10.

reaching the limits of cost-shifting. Meanwhile, the news media report stories of hospitals with emergency room facilities engaging in "patient dumping," shipping indigent and uninsured patients to public hospitals when they are medically transferable to avoid admitting them. Social service organizations find themselves tempted to "cream"—focus efforts on the easier, cleaner clients—or to falsify results to keep the money and the clients coming in.

A second ethical concern social ministry organizations face is *the respectful and equitable treatment of clients.* The mission of social ministry organizations is to provide care to people in need. An underlying motivation is the belief that all persons regardless of race, class, or status deserve respect. Sometimes, however, we do not communicate the mission and values of the organization to every staff person or volunteer, and these distinctions often affect the treatment a client receives. Poor people of color who assert themselves or make demands on intake workers can often expect to have their applications treated less enthusiastically than others. Workers feel that, since they are doing "these people" a favor, the poor have no right to make demands. We prefer to help the "humble" poor: the ones who have their hats in their hands, ask politely, and express gratitude for whatever they receive.

Interestingly, the least paid, who work in the lower-status jobs of social ministry organizations, are often the employees who treat clients unfairly (a point to which I will return in a moment). Yet it can also happen with any member of the organization whose focus gets turned in on serving one's own or one's organization's needs instead of the needs of the client. Many service providers harass, even abuse their needy, powerless clients. Stories of orderlies or nursing assistants abusing patients in nursing homes are

Many service providers harass, even abuse their needy, powerless clients.

juicy fodder for the news media, incidents that, fortunately, are less likely to happen in church-related long-term care facilities. Sexual harassment is also prevalent. Undoubtedly, physical abuse and sexual harassment are appalling and unacceptable, but needy people often do not report them for fear of reprisals or because organizations ignore their accusations. They are as powerless in our organizations as they are anywhere else in society.

A third area in which ethical concerns arise for social service organizations is in *the fair and equitable treatment of employees.* Helping people to feel fairly treated means that the standards for hiring, promotion, and discipline are job related and applied equally. However, race and sex discrimination continue to be problems for social ministry organizations as they are for other employers. Fair treatment also means that workers feel the organization considers their needs and recognizes their internal and external constraints. Social ministry organizations make demands on employees that force them to choose between work and their other obligations to themselves and their families. Written and unwritten expectations show little flexibility.

Other concerns include adequate compensation and the quality of work life. Studies on worker dissatisfaction point to two

sources.[2] On the one hand, people are dissatisfied in their work because of a lack of external rewards such as status, income, or benefits. For various economic and social



reasons, social ministry organizations do not provide adequate wages and benefits to all of their employees, particularly those working in low-status jobs. Ironically, these workers are often the ones the organization depends upon to provide a good portion of the caregiving. Yet when these employees are having trouble making ends meet, it is difficult for them to give themselves fully to the care of others as the organization expects. Perhaps one of the reasons why employees of social ministry organizations show disrespect for clients is they feel undervalued themselves, either because of the low status of their work or the inadequacy of their compensation.

A second source of worker dissatisfaction is the lack of intrinsic meaning. We often assume or hope that people work for social ministry organizations out of a sense of vocation and commitment. Yet not all the work that goes on in social ministry organizations is intrinsically rewarding. Much of the work is repetitive and mundane, providing little variety or challenge. Some caregiving work is hard, dirty, even demeaning, and comes with negative status for those who perform it. If social ministry organizations expect employees to find meaning in the caregiving work that they do, then the moral challenge is to find ways to improve the quality and status of this hard but necessary work.

A final area of ethical concern which organizational constraints raise for us comes under the rubric of *conflicts of interest.* One area of potential conflict is questionable fund-raising practices. In tight economic times, boards and staff can get so focused on keeping the organization financially stable that they lose sight of the organization's values and purpose and find themselves doing things that they might not otherwise do. One is taking money from sources that may not be in keeping with the values of the organization. We hear a lot of discussion these days about socially-conscious investing. What about socially-conscious fundraising?

A second potential conflict of interest arises when board or staff members experience personal gain by working with the organization. The need for high profile board members in order to raise the visibility of an organization and hopefully generate income has caused many social ministry organizations to bring on board members who may not share the mission and purpose of the organization, or whose interest in being on the board is unrelated to serving the needs of the client. The worst cases are examples of board members who

[2] *Work in America*, Report of a Special Task Force to the Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, with a foreword by Elliot L. Richardson (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1973), chap. 1.

get on boards and then try to steer certain contracts and products in their direction.

Other conflicts emerge for organizations who have board members who represent other organizations and who allow their loyalties and commitments to the other organizations to influence their judgment. This can often happen with denominational representatives to social ministry organizations, but it also occurs with corporate or civic representatives. At times, this experience can be positive, like a business person pushing for economic efficiency. But negative experiences can occur as well. For example, a person who worked for the central business organization of a southeastern city was appointed to the board of a church-related organization that builds affordable housing. During discussion of building a single-room occupancy hotel downtown, this board member tried to get them to design it to attract middle-income renters. The central business organization had developed upscale shopping and restaurants downtown that required patrons. Low-income residents could hardly afford to be those patrons.

Theological resources

How can social ministry organizations address the ethical challenges raised by internal and external constraints? Where can they look for direction and help? Although each social ministry organization has a different mission and a different context in which it operates, they share a theological tradition that informs, shapes, and distinguishes them from other caregiving institutions. If we allow it, this tradition can offer us some guidance as we seek solutions to our ethical concerns. Four theological components of that tradition are particularly relevant.

The first is the *doctrine of creation.* The world is God's creation and each creature has worth in God's sight. One aspect of this doctrine is the idea of the image of God. Since human beings are a distinctive kind of creature, God has endowed humanity with a special kind of worth. The U.S. Catholic Bishops write:

> At the summit of creation stands the creation of man and woman, made in God's image (Gen 1:26-27). *As such every human being possesses an inalienable dignity that stamps human existence prior to any division into races or nations and prior to human labor and human achievement* (Genesis 4-11).[3]

The notion of the image of God, entailing inalienable dignity, has been variably understood. Theologians have included human capacities for rationality, creative activity, self-transcendence, and relationship. Certainly all of these capacities contribute to our worth, the source of which is in God's creating and covenanting activity. Most important is that God has endowed all human beings with these capacities prior to any divisions by race, class, or status. Hence, respect for the dignity or intrinsic worth of every person begins here.

One implication of this doctrine of creation is that respect for human capacities for creative intelligence and relationship includes allowing them voice in the decisions that affect them. For clients, respect means giving them some say in the shape and form our ministry takes. For employees, respect means relinquishing some control over the nature and direction of their daily work.

Another idea embedded in the doctrine of creation is stewardship. Because of our

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[3] *Economic Justice for All* (Washington: National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1986), par. 32.

God's gift of grace sets us free from self-centered concern for ourselves and free for service to our neighbors.

capabilities, God expects humanity to be responsible stewards of all that God places in our care. For social ministry organizations, stewardship demands that they help life to flourish by engaging their context. This requires honest and thorough analysis of the internal and external environments in which they find themselves. Their ministry must be both proactive and reactive, understanding and using the resources at their disposal responsibly. Yet stewardship also demands that we accept death. At an individual level, accepting death means accepting our finitude and acknowledging that other concerns are more important than gaining a few more weeks or months to live. At a corporate level, accepting death means recognizing when programs and institutions must die because they are not the best use of the resources to meet human need.

A second theological motif is *justification by faith.* Our capacities for freedom and self-transcendence mean that we can also forsake God's love and purpose in creation and seek our own instead. Sin is the opposite of faith. We misplace our trust and value in objects other than God. As a consequence, we can treat others with indifference or hostility. The sinful self does not respect the intrinsic worth of each person, but seeks to use others in light of its own ends. The sinful self does not concern itself with the true needs of others, except when doing so coincides with its own needs.

Fortunately, God's redeeming love does not leave us in our sin. Rather, through faith, God's gift of grace sets us free from self-centered concern for ourselves and free for service to our neighbors. Justification by faith does not mean that we will always give others their due respect or become responsible stewards; caring Christians sometimes use others or resources for their own ends. As Luther noted, we are always saint and sinner. Rather, justification by faith means that God's grace opens new possibilities that we will put our energies into seeking the good of others as well as our own.

This points to a third theological motif: the *universality of Christian vocation.* The vocation of all Christians, no matter their station in life, is to serve their neighbors in need.[4] "As new persons in Christ, Christians have been set free and empowered to exercise their vocation through many roles, occupations among them."[5] This view of vocation implies that social ministry organizations are as integral to the life of the church as sacrament and worship. Just as service without worship is drudgery, so worship without service is empty ritual (Amos 5:21-24). The universality of vocation can also enable social ministry organizations to build a distinctive corporate culture. We find meaning in our work because of its social contribution. Each caregiving

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[4] John C. Raines and Donna C. Day-Lower, *Modern Work and Human Meaning* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), 105.

[5] "Economic Justice: Stewardship of Creation in Human Community," Social Statement by the Lutheran Church in America, 3.

role is valuable, even the dirty work, because it contributes to the common good.

How we practice our vocation of serving our neighbors raises concerns about *justice*, a fourth theological resource. A few years ago, I guided five students from Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary through a week-long urban immersion experience in Atlanta. One of the issues they raised was the distinction between serving people in need, sometimes called charity, and justice. They noted that Lutherans have always affirmed caring for others in need. Was working for justice the same?

According to some recent Lutheran social statements, charity is not a substitute for but a complement to justice. They are "different forms of the Creator's providential love."[6] Justification is God's redeeming activity that frees and empowers us to act lovingly and justly. "Motivated by the love of God in Christ, the church has this double commission: to serve human need and to testify prophetically for justice in the ordering of society and the use of its resources."[7] If we truly care, then we must change the structures that keep our neighbors in need.[8]

What, then, is the content of social justice? The biblical record suggests, and recent Christian statements on justice affirm, that a just society is one that orders its institutions in such a way that each member can participate meaningfully in the life and structures of the community.[9] Let me sketch four implications of this view of justice.

First, denying any member the opportunity for meaningful participation diminishes the entire community. Therefore, impediments to participation in the political, economic, and cultural life of society, such as happen with extreme inequalities in the distribution of resources, must be undone. The prophet Amos spoke judgment to Israel because she had allowed the privileged in society to use their wealth and power to corrupt the courts and to enslave the poor. Letting "justice roll down like the waters" (5:24) meant insuring that all the people had enough resources and power to secure their rights and place as full members of society. This has implications for minimum standards of care: they must befit human dignity.

Second, the distribution of resources should focus first on those whose needs are unmet to strengthen their membership. In other words, distributive justice must be bottom up not trickle down. This is the impetus behind the notion, "God is on the side of the poor and oppressed." The poor

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[6] "Economic Justice: Stewardship of Creation in Human Community," 4.

[7] "Poverty," Social Statement by the Lutheran Church in America, 1.

[8] At a meeting of Lutheran theologians in the Americas in 1985 in Mexico City, the same debate focused around the relationship between justification and justice. They concluded: "The God who justifies in Christ calls us to do justice. In the midst of economic dependence, militarism, poverty, and other structures of death, we discern the signs of the Kingdom of God among the oppressed struggling for life and liberation. Here it is impossible for Christians to be neutral. All who proclaim the Word of God must also identify and challenge the forces of death and destruction which defy the Kingdom of God. We affirm our Lutheran understanding of Christian vocation to direct us to serve the neighbor and to engage in the struggle for the transformation of society." From "Statement of a Consultation: Justification and Justice; A Meeting of Lutheran Theologians in the Americas," *Word and World* 7:1 (Winter 1987): 79.

[9] The U.S. Catholic Bishops contend: "Social justice implies that persons have an obligation to be active and productive participants in the life of society and that society has a duty to enable them to participate in this way." *Economic Justice for All*, par. 119.

are not simply an economic class. Rather, the poor are those who are marginalized, powerless, or excluded from genuine participation in community. A society that seeks to provide justice for all must focus greater resources in their direction to secure the promise of a full life to those most unable to secure it for themselves.

Many social ministry organization managers struggle with how to balance the interests and needs of their various stakeholders. This principle of justice suggests that managers should focus their resources on the most marginalized or powerless stakeholders. Sometimes, the distribution is not equitable. This does not mean that we do not care for the others or do not have to be fair to them. But this principle provides a basis for distributing resources that undergirds the equality of all.

Third, social justice requires fairness in all economic relations, especially work. In our society, we expect all able-bodied persons to work as the primary means of gaining the resources needed to participate meaningfully in society. Surely compensation from employment ought to be sufficient to do so. According to a recent Lutheran social statement, God's justice demands "the opportunity for meaningful employment sufficiently remunerative to secure, at the very least, the minimal necessities required in our society for living in decency and dignity."[10] Christians of many stripes have held up the standard of a "just wage" to employers. The time has come to abide by it in our own organizations. We must explore creative solutions where people can work and live decently. We must use our collective power to advocate change in the nature and structure of work and compensation in the broader society as well.

Finally, social justice requires some institutionalized checks against human sin. The reality of sin, individually and corporately, means that no institution or system of social justice fully embodies God's intention. Human beings will continue to be self-centered and self-interested and all institutions seeking justice must establish adequate policies and procedures that place limits upon the destructive tendencies of such self-centered behavior on the part of any stakeholder.

Conclusion

Undoubtedly, there are other ethical concerns that social ministry organizations face, and other theological resources to guide them in their struggle. I have only tried to be suggestive not exhaustive. The challenge for any social ministry organization seeking to remain ethical in the midst of organizational constraints is to clarify and communicate its theological assumptions to all stakeholders through appropriate structures and policies. That task is not easy. It requires the systematic checking and evaluation of all policies and programs against the organization's values and purpose. Yet the benefits to the stakeholders of the organization and the communities they serve, namely a clearer sense of purpose and commitment, far outweigh the costs.

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[10] "Poverty," 2.

Seventeen Theses Opposing "Close(d) Communion"

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1. Working Definition of LCMS "Close(d) Communion" Policy is taken from Res. 2-19/1967: "that pastors and congregations of The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, except in situations of emergency and in special cases of pastoral care, *commune individuals of only those Synods which are now in fellowship with us.*" (Reaffirmed 3-08/1986)

2. Dr. Barry's "President's Newsletter" (*Reporter* supplement, January 1993, p. 4-a) summarizes—correctly, I believe—LCMS policy as follows: "The practice of close communion means that we *limit participation* in the Sacrament in our churches to those persons who are members of our confessional fellowship." He also states that "I am not convinced a visitor at our worship services on Sunday morning falls in to this sort of 'emergency' situation. The act of refusing to commune a visitor can be a potentially troubling one." It is clear that he recommends refusing to commune such visitors.

3. While some claim different emphasis between "close" and "closed," for LCMS the focus, purpose, effect are the same: church fellowship (union), prescribed by LCMS, and agreement in doctrine, as defined by LCMS, *and* the Synod's own pronouncements about both are the *standards* for determining who should be admitted and/or welcomed at the Table of the Lord. If there are "exceptions" and people who do not qualify for admission or welcome are indeed communed, such exceptions still have as reference the same standards.

4. Among Lutherans, the Scriptures and Confessions are the only agreed upon standards for establishing and/or judging teaching, policy, and practice. Scripture functions as *norma normans*; the Lutheran Symbols function as *norma normata*. Scripture should be the only source and norm for this discussion, and the Lutheran Symbols are a faithful exposition of Holy Scripture and carry recognized authority for Lutherans for this discussion. Neither Holy Scripture

nor the Lutheran Symbols teach "close(d) communion." Scripture and Confessions are misused/misapplied whenever they are quoted to support a position which is not intended by the original author. In addition,

We must never give the impression that any celebration of the Holy Eucharist is in isolation from all celebrations.

Scripture is misused whenever one part of Scripture is selectively quoted and another (contradicting or having a different point of view) portion of Scripture is omitted.

5. For Lutheran Christians, the words of our Lord Jesus Christ (the *verba*) are the primary focus for any discussion about the Lord's Supper. We celebrate the Lord's Supper because of the Word of Christ, "Do this for the remembrance of me." "Is" means—and effects—what it says; the Word makes the Sacrament (cf. Luther, Large Catechism [Tappert], p. 448, #10-11). "Take... eat... take... drink... all of you" are *direct commands*, and we come to the Lord's Table to commune in obedience to his command (LC, #45-46).

6. Exegetical rules and confessional rubrics require that we take words at face value unless there are reasons (in the text, in the context, etc.) not to do so. That is the issue with "is" and the teaching of the real and substantial presence of our Lord's body and blood in the Sacrament. In like manner, "all" here means *all Christians* (the phrase "all of you" in this context clearly means those gathered with Jesus in the Upper Room: the disciples—i.e., those who follow Jesus). The command to "take, eat, drink, do" is issued to all Christians who can hear, understand, and respond in faithful obedience to the Lord's inviting command.

7. Communion card and/or bulletin statements which reflect the LCMS "close(d) communion" policy intend to do what they are by definition: close the door to some—restrict admission, exclude from partaking, imply or threaten "passing by," and make it clear that *some are not welcome to commune*. Thus they issue a *counter-command*: do *not* do this; do not take, eat, drink (matters little what the qualifiers are: if you belong to a church not in official fellowship with us; if you do not agree with all matters of doctrine with us; etc.).

8. One aspect of legalism is that it adds requirements. Legalism likes things more closed than open. Legalism tends to complicate. Legalism tends to narrow definitions rather than broaden perspective. The LCMS policy and communion card/bulletin statements reflecting or influenced by such "close(d) communion" ideology (e.g., "Model communion card statement") appear not to be satisfied that the liturgy of the mass and the participation of the people in this holy work are sufficient. The sinful pride of the legalism of the LCMS policy and attending communion card/bulletin statements is that it seems to think that it can do the job better than the liturgy of the mass and/or the Eucharistic Prayer (cf. *LBW*).

9. Luther is not complicated nor does he add requirements: "He is truly worthy and

well prepared *who has faith* in these words, 'given and shed for you for the remission of sins....'" The LCMS "close(d) communion" policy (and communion card/bulletin statements influenced by it) and President Barry's recent writing add to Luther's clear minimum requirement for "worthy participation."

10. In 1 Corinthians, that place where problems connected to the celebration of the Eucharist are dealt with more completely than anywhere else in the New Testament, St. Paul's accusation is against those who have excluded people from the celebration—indeed, since they have set their own agenda, he lets them know that it is *their party* rather than the Lord's Supper which is taking place. It appears that the validity of the celebration of the Eucharist is in question when people set their excluding ("closed") agenda/policy rather than following the Lord's command.

11. In various writings, Dr. Sam Nafzger of the LCMS Commission on Theology & Church Relations (CTCR) emphasizes welcoming all "those Christians for whom Christ has appointed it" and recommends Francis Pieper's statement that "both pastor and congregation must most carefully guard against denying the Lord's supper to anyone to whom Christ wants it to be given." However, the CTCR model does not use the word "welcome," nor would it be seen by visiting non-LCMS people as welcoming, precisely because it maintains the "closed" rather than more open orientation.

12. Lutheran Christians, who rightly teach that the Lord's Supper is a means of grace, should keep the emphasis and focus on grace and gift and welcome rather than on restrictions and requirements and complicated barriers.

13. The Holy Eucharist is the *Lord's* Supper. He is present with his Word, and his Word effects his presence. The Lord is present at ELCA and other Christian celebrations as he is present at our/LCMS celebrations of his Holy Meal. If the Lord Jesus is present at "their table," "they" should be welcome at "our table," just as "we" are welcome at "his/their" table. There must be reciprocity of both hospitality and presence (our Lord's, theirs, ours!). If the Lord Jesus welcomes them to his Table at their celebrations, we should welcome them to his Table at our celebrations.

14. "Join our prayers with those of your servants of every time and every place, and unite them..." (*LBW* Eucharistic Prayer) gives expression to the catholic and unifying character and power of the Holy Eucharist. Since every celebration of the Holy Eucharist is done with the effective Word of Christ, and since each celebration is part of his whole offering of himself to all his people, we must never suggest or give the impression that any celebration of the Holy Eucharist is in isolation from all celebrations. A "close(d) communion" policy and/or a communion card/bulletin statement based on it does suggest that the unity of the church is something we accomplish rather than a gift to be celebrated, isolationism slips into sectarianism and heresy, and what is pure gospel is turned into a new law.

15. If, in addition to the liturgy and to the *verba*, a bulletin and/or communion card statement is decided upon for use in the pursuit of responsible pastoral care, the statement should be positive, inviting, and welcoming in wording—and should be clearly perceived as such by visiting guests who are not members of churches in official fellowship with the LCMS; it should be more "open" than "closed"; it should help

individuals to make decisions rather than presuming to make decisions for individuals; it should (in fashion like Luther in the LC) offer encouragement to commune rather than complicated barriers which may lead to not communing.



16. The following sample statements are better than others I've seen:

1. Guests who confess Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, who affirm his Real Presence in the Sacrament, and who desire to celebrate forgiveness and communion are *welcome* at the Lord's Table.

2. Christian congregations and their public servants are only the administrant and not the lords of the Sacrament. The Lord's Supper is not their institution, but Christ's.... The Lord's Supper is appointed only for the people who have already come to faith in Christ.... Both pastor and congregation must most carefully guard against denying the Lord's Supper to anyone to whom Christ wants it to be given.

17. Parishes and pastors whose practice is more in line with Holy Scripture than with the "close(d) communion" policy of the LCMS and/or its interpretation by President Barry should be public about their practice and inform others of their actions and of their protest against LCMS "close(d) communion," so that they become participants in effecting a change within LCMS.

A Book Worth Discussing: *The New Testament and Psalms. An Inclusive Version*

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The New Testament and Psalms. An Inclusive Version. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995. xxiv and 536 pages. $14.95.

It is appropriate and timely that serious consideration has been given to the publication of an inclusive version of the Bible and that, as a beginning, the New Testament has been published. The NTIV (my abbreviation) is an independent project and uses as its basis the New Revised Standard Version, which has already taken steps to be more inclusive than the RSV. This review does not evaluate the NRSV itself, but only the changes made in the NTIV from the NRSV. The NTIV is edited by Victor Roland Gold, Thomas L. Hoyt, Jr., Sharon H. Ringe, Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite, Burton H. Throckmorton, Jr., and Barbara A. Withers. Ringe and Throckmorton are New Testament professors, Gold is a Lutheran.

The principles for the version are indicated in the "General Introduction." The editors state the reasons for a new version in the first part: changes in the English language are noticeable in more inclusive and more specific terminology in regard to gender (firefighter, policeperson, etc.), to disabilities ("people who are blind" instead of "the blind"), and to race. The introduction calls this a more specific terminology (because it specifies that not only males are meant but females are included). I suppose one might also say that it becomes a more general terminology because it no longer specifies male or female. The editors further state that the edition "attempts to anticipate developments," in other words that it intends to influence the development. It remains to be seen whether this goal can be reached by this version. The editors admit that considerable interpretation is involved in such an attempt.

The main statement is the following: "This version has undertaken the effort to replace or rephrase all gender-specific language not referring to particular historical

individuals, all pejorative references to race, color, or religion, and all identifications of persons by their physical disability alone, by means of paraphrase, alternative renderings, and other acceptable means of conforming the language of the work to an inclusive idea." The editors further claim that authority for this version also comes from within the Scriptures themselves: male and female are created by God, there is an inclusive community (Gal 3:28). Metaphors, such as Jesus as the Lamb of God or God as Father should not be taken literally.

In order to bring about this inclusiveness, masculine pronouns are avoided in reference to God because in English (different from other languages where gender is grammatical) the gender of nouns and pronouns indicates only *biological* gender. Pronouns are replaced either by "God," by another expression for "God," by using participles, or by using the passive. While for the historical person Jesus masculine pronouns are used, the editors have avoided them for either the pre-existent or the post-crucifixion Jesus.

Because "Father" is a male metaphor but God has no sex and "Father" for some people has negative connotations, a new metaphor "Father-Mother" is introduced in this version, thus "attributing both fatherly and motherly attributes to God." Often, "God" is substituted for "Father." "Lord" is sometimes retained when the antecedent could be either God or Christ, in other cases a substitute is made. With all this variety, the reader has no way of deciding what the original text contained. Therefore, the NTIV is further removed from the original Greek than other versions.

When in the Gospels the historical person, Jesus, is referred to as "son," the word is retained, but when the maleness is not relevant and Jesus is called "Son of God" or simply "Son," "Child" is used instead. It seems to me that "child" is less appropriate for an adult than for a young person.

The NTIV uses "The Human One" for "Son of Man." In my opinion, this is better than "Son of humanity," which has been used in other inclusive versions.

Other regular changes are "Dominion" for "Kingdom" when it refers to authority or rule although the editors realize that "dominion" etymologically is also a male-oriented word. "Ruler" or "Sovereign" is substituted for "King" when it refers to God. In the NTIV no gender is attributed to Satan, the devil, or angels. When "darkness" is used metaphorically, connoting negative qualities, it is changed to "night" or other expressions, in order to avoid the association of negative qualities with dark-skinned people. The NTIV does not identify people by their conditions, such a blind, deaf, leper, demoniac, but speaks of people who are blind, etc. "Slaves" is avoided by speaking of people who are enslaved. When "the Jews" in the Gospel of John is used as a reference to unbelieving people, it is rendered "the religious authorities" or "leaders" in order to avoid an anti-Jewish bias. "Circumcision" and "uncircumcision" are treated in various ways, sometimes retained, sometimes changed to "those under the law" and "those outside the law." Ὑποτάσσω in reference to wives is usually translated as "to be committed" or in reference to those enslaved as "to accept the authority." Ὑπακούω is rendered by "to heed." All this makes it much less authoritarian. Often possessive pronouns are omitted; this sometimes seems awkward. The passive voice is used more often than in other versions, even though English teachers encourage the use of the active voice in preference to the passive. Use of the plural is often good, but in many instances it obscures the personal decision. The changes are especially noticeable in the Gospels

although similar changes have been made in the rest of the NT.

Examples with some comments follow.

Mt 1:2ff.: "Abraham and Sarah were the parents of Isaac, and Isaac and Rebekah the parents of Jacob...." The names of the mothers are additions to the text. When the mother is not known, it says that "Perez was the father of Hezron," etc.

Mt 8:5-13 is rendered in such a way that the servant could be male or female (against Greek and NRSV), but in Mt 9:18-26, the girl is left female.

Mt 8:17: "This one took our infirmities and bore our diseases." Mt 25:31: "When the Human One comes in glory with all the angels, then that one will sit...." "This one" and "that one," used frequently and in various instances, sound quite derogatory although they are not meant so.

Mt 15:13: "Every plant that God, my heavenly Father-Mother, has not planted will be uprooted." This is only one example of "Father-Mother." It sounds very unusual, to say the least. According to the editors, it allows the mind to oscillate between the picture of God as "Father" and the picture of God as "Mother." I think it is especially awkward when Jesus speaks of God as his "Father-Mother."

Mt 25:14: "For it is as if someone, going on a journey, summoned servants to him and entrusted his property to them." It is inconsistent that "someone" is used instead of "a man" (NRSV) and then masculine pronouns are applied.

Mt 28:19: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father-Mother and of the beloved Child and of the Holy Spirit." I hope that this version does not become the formula used in Christian baptism.

Mk 12:6 (parable of the wicked tenants): "The owner had still one other, a beloved child. Finally the owner sent that child to them, saying, "They will respect my child." How old was this child? Could the tenants really be expected to respect a child?

> The NTIV does not identify people by their conditions, such a blind, deaf, leper, demoniac, but speaks of people who are blind, etc.

Lk 10:22: "All things have been handed over to me by my Father-Mother; and no one knows who the Child is except the Father-Mother, or who the Father-Mother is except the Child and anyone to whom the Child chooses to reveal God." No comment needed.

Lk 11:34: "your body is deprived of light." NRSV: "full of darkness." The NTIV does not indicate the inwardness of this idea.

Jn 3:16: "For God so loved the world that God gave God's only Child, so that everyone who believes in that Child may not perish but may have eternal life." This sounds very repetitious.

Jn 13:32: "If God has been glorified in the Human One, God will also glorify that very one in Godself and will glorify that one at once." This sounds particularly awkward. Can one understand such a sentence?

Jn 17:1-2: "Father-Mother, the hour has come; glorify your Child so that the Child may glorify you, since you have given

that Child authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given your Child."

Acts 11:2: "So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the believers who were under the law criticized him." (NRSV: "the circumcised believers;" Greek: οἱ ἐκ περιτομῆς.) This can be defended.

A strong objection is a literary one: The version is anything but beautiful.

Acts 22:8: "I answered, 'Who are you, Lord?' Then *I was answered*, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth whom you are persecuting.'" This is a strange use of the passive.

Acts 22:14-15: "The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know the divine will, to see the Righteous One and to hear that one's own voice; for to all the world you will be a witness to that one of what you have seen and heard." Acts 25:24: "you see this one" in reference to Paul, instead of "this man" (NRSV). Or 28:4: "This person" for "this man" (NRSV). Does Paul also have to be degendered?

1 Cor 6:15-16: "Should I therefore take those members of Christ and make them members of a person who is sexually promiscuous? Never! Do you not know that whoever is united to someone who is sexually promiscous [sic] becomes united with that person's body?" This is a case where gender differences are eliminated so that anyone, male or female, might be accused. "Prostitute" is here changed to "sexually promiscuous" perhaps because it is seen as characterizing a person. In reference to Rahab and in 1 Cor 6:9 "prostitute" is retained. "Fornication" etc. is often changed to "sexual immorality" etc. although consistency is missing.

Eph 1:3-14 contains 16 times the word "God" while the NRSV has it only twice and the Greek has θεός only once.

2 Tim 2:13: "Christ cannot deny Christ's self." NRSV: "he cannot deny himself." "Self" here becomes a psychological term rather than a reflexive pronoun.

Heb 1:5b: "I will be a parent to the Child, and the Child will be my very own." NRSV: "I will be his Father, and he will be my Son." This distorts the simple statement.

In Heb 12:5-11, "guidance" is substituted for "discipline," in order to make the admonition less authoritarian. But it is difficult to understand why "guidance always seems painful" (v. 11) although this would apply to discipline.

1 Pet 2:3-4: "if indeed you have tasted that *God* is good. Come to *Christ*, a living stone." In Greek and in the NRSV it is clear that the same person is meant because a relative pronoun is used.

2 Pet 2:4: "God cast them (the angels) into hell and imprisoned them in the deepest part of the night." NRSV: "committed them to chains of deepest darkness." Night is not a locality but a time reference so that the meaning is changed considerably.

1 Jn 1:5: "God is light and in God light is never absent." Is this really the same as "God is light and in him there is no darkness at all"?

In Rev 17:1-18, the prostitute is no longer necessarily a woman but a person.

Rev 21:2: "And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven

from God, prepared as a bride and bridegroom adorned for each other." 21:9: "Come, I will show you the betrothed, the one wed to the Lamb."

Because in the Psalms also "the Lord" is usually replaced by "God," many Psalms become very repetitious. E.g., in Psalm 147, the NTIV uses "God" 25 times while the NRSV uses "Lord" eight times and "God" three times.

Some general remarks:

1. The attempt to produce an inclusive version is to be welcomed. But it seems that the English language despite its flexibility and rich vocabulary does not lend itself easily to such an endeavor. It does not have inclusive pronouns and thus must use involved measures to get around this problem.

2. There is a great deal of inconsistency. This may be due to different revisers, but it is noticeable. Sometimes individuals who come to Jesus are designated in such a way that they could be male or female, sometimes they are left as men (as in the original). But the inconsistency frequently exists *within* one passage.

3. "Brothers" is sometimes rendered by "friends," at other times we find "brothers and sisters" or (frequently) "sisters and brothers." "Friends" loses the intimacy for me.

4. The question of faithfulness to the original text has to be raised. The addition of female names in the genealogy or to Abraham may make sense; after all, it was Sarah's offspring, not Hagar's, to whom the covenant was promised. But it does change the text. The original text is also disregarded when ambiguous usage of κύριος or relative pronouns is removed.

5. A strong objection is a literary one: The version is anything but beautiful; it sounds frequently very awkward or worse. The constant repetition of names or of nouns in order to avoid using male pronouns is boring. See Rom 10:30: "And those whom God predestined God also called; and those whom God called God also justified; and those whom God justified God also glorified." Pronouns relieve this awkward repetition. It is especially jarring to use "God-self" or "Christ's self" in avoidance of "him-self." E.g., Rom 15:3: "For Christ did not please Christ's self." Even if beauty and smoothness are less important than the meaning of Scripture, this criticism must be made.

6. This raises the question: To what extent should "political correctness" influence the translation of Scripture? Certainly, Luther's principle that one must be attentive to the speech of the people is correct, but the NTIV does not reflect the current language of the people.

7. Footnotes in the NRSV, explaining changes (the addition of "and sisters" to "brothers,") are omitted in NTIV. The reader should be made aware of the changes.

8. One may raise the question for whom this version is intended. Feminists may prefer it to other translations, but change of language does not delete other passages objectionable to them (e.g., 1 Cor 14:33-36). The lack of beauty argues against use in liturgy. Scholars and students use the Greek text or a more literal translation.

According to the introduction, the editors hope and wish that it may "influence the development of important changes in language." I doubt if this version will be read so widely that it will achieve this goal.

Book Reviews

Becoming Married. By Herbert Anderson and Robert Cotton Fite. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993. 170 pages. Paper. $12.99.

Pastors who have struggled to define the purpose of premarriage preparation and to clarify their role in that process may find in *Becoming Married* just the help they need in clarifying their own basic assumptions about these matters.

A central theological and psychological conviction that underlies *Becoming Married* is that "it is necessary to leave in order to cleave." Becoming married is a process that occurs over a long period of time, and depends on the capacity of two persons to make their own decisions and to make their way in the world without undue emotional dependence on the homes from which they have come. A second important conviction is that separateness and togetherness need to be kept in delicate balance in family living. The image of one flesh, which is used so often in Christian descriptions of marriage, needs to be expanded to help couples affirm both the value of their separateness and the value of their connectedness. The metaphor the authors use to describe this delicate balance is "a home with a room of one's own."

Becoming Married, the second volume in a five-volume series on pivotal family tasks, builds upon the foundations laid in *Leaving Home* (see review in *Currents* June 1996 issue, p. 220). An opening chapter sets forth the thesis that healthy marriages depend on the emotional freedom couples have to assert their own values and goals while continuing to demonstrate care for their families. The next chapters provide a model for premarriage preparation, describe how to assist couples in planning a meaningful wedding, examine ordinary aspects of becoming married that are made more complicated by the nature of the relationship or circumstances at the time of the wedding, discuss post-wedding issues, suggest pastoral and congregational strategies for assisting newly-married couples, and reflect theologically on the relationship between the Christian tradition and the process of becoming married that is set forth in the book.

The purpose of premarriage work, according to Anderson and Fite, is not to assess the compatibility of the personalities of the couples through conversations or psychological testing. Instead, the purposes of premarriage preparation include helping the couple understand their family histories and legacies, enhancing the leaving home process, helping the couple envision what kind of family they want to become, and pointing to the goodness of God's love. The authors provide a four-session model for how to fulfill these purposes, a model that presupposes post-marriage work will occur in the early years of marital bonding. Post-marriage work is essential because it is after marriage rather than prior to marriage that couples are most motivated to face their own relationship issues and conflicts.

Pastors and congregations will find concrete help in developing premarriage sessions, in planning a wedding with a couple, and in thinking through how to assist couples after the wedding. Just as important, they will be challenged to think carefully about their own assumptions about becoming married and to articulate the theological and psychological premises that guide their own approaches to couples. As in all the books in this helpful series, there are rich stories and evocative reflections on pastoral work and pastoral theology. I have sometimes given this book to couples with whom I have engaged in premarriage work and have used the book in my pastoral care classes to help students reflect on the process of premarriage preparation.

The primary audience the authors seem to have in mind is the middle-class American family. While strongly affirming the importance of community, the authors accent most of all the importance of gaining emotional freedom from families of origin. This is so much a matter of theological principle for them that I found myself wondering if they would consider that a

theology of the family arising from more sociocentric cultures, where communal values are so much more highly valued than individual freedom, could still be Christian. The book also does not address the issue of how to work theologically and pastorally with same-sex couples who seek pastoral guidance and the ministry of the church, a reality which has profound implications for our theological understanding of the meaning of such terms as "family" and "couple." With that said, however, there is much in this volume that I believe would be relevant to a broader discussion of covenantal relationships and I am grateful for this most helpful contribution to pastoral theology.

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Out of Silence: Emerging Themes in Asian American Churches. By Fumitaka Matsuoka. Cleveland OH: United Church Press, 1995. 184 pages. Paper. $10.95.

The book is concerned with interracial and interethnic relationships in the fragmented society of the United States and tries to provide an answer to the question: "How does Christian faith meet the serious challenges of our lives today in its incarnated form, that is, in communities of faith?"

In answering this question, the author divides the book into three parts. The first part deals with the important place of Christian churches in Asian American communities. The book rightly points out that for Asian Americans the church is an important source of moral authority, and it is "a primary locus for the emergence of distinct Asian American cultures" in American society. Also it points out that the churches are social agencies to help the immigrants to settle, adjust, and "become American."

The second part of the book deals with tension and a sense of insecurity in the life of Asian Christians in the United States in the process of becoming Americans. The author calls this "holy insecurity." Asian American Christians, together with their churches, are caught between the tension of keeping the history, language, and cultural life of their Asian countries of origin while also being assimilated in the mainstream of American society. In this tension of "holy insecurity" the Asians experience a deep spiritual pain that "arises from the unresolvable conflict between the impossibility of letting go of one's own ethnic, cultural, and ancestral belonging and at the same time realizing that the assertion of one's own particularity is perceived as deviance by the society at large" (59).

The third and concluding part of this book suggests an alternative understanding of community to oppose the oppression of racism and the domination of certain racial and ethnic groups. In this concluding part, the author re-emphasizes the point he made in his introduction "...to acknowledge the historical character of all theologies" for "theology is done in *loco et tempore*." So the author takes the particular historical situation of Asian American Christians seriously and challenges the readers to oppose the ideal that absolutizes prior historical development of European and American theologies. Then the author gives some examples of a Chinese church in Hawaii that was founded in 1934 by a group of second generation Chinese, but is now becoming a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and inclusive church as a desirable "new paradigm for community building in America."

The book has practical information for multi-cultural ministry and evangelism. The methodologies employed in the book are ethnographic surveys, historical research, and interviews of many Asian American pastors, scholars and church members. The book is useful for seminary students who are interested in multicultural ministry and for general students who are engaged in ethnic studies.

The author is a Japanese-American who is engaged in theological education as Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean of the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, California.

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Fortress Introduction to Lutheranism. By Eric Gritsch. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994. Paper. $12.00.

Eric Gritsch's book begins with a historical survey of Lutheranism from its inception to the present. Gritsch covers an amazing amount of material in less than one hundred amply illustrated pages: Luther's initial breakthrough, the formation of the movement, orthodox and pietistic developments, the challenges of the Enlightenment, the move to this continent and to other parts of the world, and the attempt of the diverse branches to come back together in the LWF. Gritsch presents each movement's specific concerns and commitments as their chief proponents would have us know them. They are not portrayed from some privileged ground of 'true Lutheranism'; Gritsch's only clear bias is his firm commitment to Lutheranism as a reform movement in the church catholic. Thus we are enabled to see how the continued tensions within the Lutheran churches today are often rooted in the diversity of the past.

The second part of the book reflects on classical themes of Lutheranism as they challenge our contemporary life. While not fully elaborated, these declarations are engaging and accessible to a broad lay audience.

This book is a fine survey of our heritage. However, the title's "Introduction" should not be taken as a sign that this book could be used in a new member class. Such people would find more specifics about Lutheranism than they want to know and fewer basics than they need to know. Rather this book might best find its home following Gritsch's own concrete proposal for church renewal: among a cadre of one-tenth of a congregation's active membership who serve as yeast for the whole batch through committed study of the Scriptures and the Lutheran tradition. In such a context this book would help the faithful claim our diverse heritage for a new day.

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Briefly Noted

Bonnie Thurston provides a helpful guide to three challenging small epistles in **Reading Colossians, Ephesians, and 2 Thessalonians: A Literary and Theological Commentary** (Crossroad, $16.95). She regards Paul as the author of Colossians (hesitantly) but considers Ephesians and 2 Thessalonians as deuteropauline. Her method of interpretation is to write an essay that summarizes the thought of each section of a letter, while a very brief introduction discusses authorship and reason for writing. She provides a general bibliography for each letter and a minimal bibliography for each section. Pastors and laity alike will find that these pages, written in very clear English, open up the thought of these letters. Put this book in your parish library; it will be much appreciated. *Edgar Krentz*

The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann. By Richard Bauckham (T & T Clark, $24.95). Bauckham, professor at St. Mary's College, University of St. Andrews, provides readers with a critical yet strongly positive evaluation of Moltmann's works up to 1993. Following an initial overview, succeeding chapters are devoted to specific themes: theology of hope, divine suffering, theodicy, political theology, ecclesiology, Holy Spirit, the Trinity and human freedom, creation and evolution, Messianic Christology, and mysticism. The book concludes with a solid bibliography of works by and about Moltmann. While a definitive study cannot yet be written because Moltmann's project is yet in progress, this work will engage readers in the method and themes of Moltmann's thought and direct them to his own writings. Moltmann's theology, bridging Trinitarian commitment with political responsibility, deserves such attention. *Craig L. Nessan*

Systematic Theology. Volume II: Doctrine. By James Wm. McClendon (Abingdon, $24.95). As sequel to the author's *Ethics: Systematic Theology. Volume I*, we finally have a full-scale presentation of Christian doctrine from the tradition of the Radical Reformation for the first time in nearly a century. The treatment starts with the end, i.e., with God's eschatological rule, centers in Christology, and ends with the Holy Spirit and mission. It is a self-reflective confessional theology: grounded in and related to the primary practices of the church, rooted in Scripture, informed and competent about the history of doctrine, in dialogue with current streams, and ecumenically engaging. This is a serious piece of Christian theology that needs to find an honored place on the "dogmatics" bookshelf next to all the major comprehensive texts on Christian theology. *Reinhard Hütter*

Theology and Narrative. Selected Essays. By Hans W. Frei. Edited by George Hunsinger and William C. Placher (Oxford University Press, $35.00). Here is a very well edited and crafted collection of top essays by one of America's outstanding theologians of this century. The essays reflect Frei's intense interest in and reflection on hermeneutics and Christology. The reader is enriched by his ongoing engagement with theologians as Schleiermacher, Barth, and his own teacher H. Richard Niebuhr. It is not easy reading, but highly rewarding for anyone seriously interested in these topics. The collection is greatly enriched by William Placher's introduction to Frei's life and work and by George Hunsinger's concluding essay on Frei's significance for theology today. *Reinhard Hütter*

The last nine books of the New Testament attract little attention, compared to the Gospels and the Pauline corpus. But the revised and enlarged edition of **The General Letters. Hebrews, James, 1-2 Peter, Jude, 1-2-3 John** (Fortress, $11.00) edited by Gerhard Krodel might aid in changing that. The new edition reprints Reginald Fuller on James, provides extensively revised versions of Krodel on 1 Peter and Jude and Fred Danker on 2 Peter, and gives new interpretations of James by Frances Gench and the Johannine Epistles by R. Alan Culpepper. The effects of recent social history on the interpretations is evident in their attention to boundary making, to setting the books within the social relationship patterns of the day, and in looking for the social problems within the Christian church. Useful practical bibliographies appear at the end of the volume. *Multum in parvo*, a lot of helpful material in brief compass. Buy it; you'll like it! This is very practical, useful material that you will reach for often.

Edgar Krentz

An important new tool for New Testament studies has appeared: **The Exhaustive Concordance to the Greek New Testament**, edited by John R. Kohlenberger III, Edward W. Goodrick, and James A. Swanson (Zondervan, $49.99). It is well worth the price. It is based on the most recent critical text, the 4th edition of *The Greek New Testament* (UBS4 = Aland's 27th edition). It is the only affordable concordance based on this text. Wherever the Greek text underlying the New International Version differs, its text is also indicated. Five things characterize this concordance: 1. It is complete but for twenty-nine terms (for which it gives place references, but not citations). 2. It gives fuller contextual citations than most concordances. 3. It gives basic word statistics for each entry. 4. It gives cross-references to terms "that are related by root or share common elements" that the user should consult. 5. It calls attention to phrases of special significance. I can see only two drawbacks to the work. It uses a very small Greek type face (about 7 point!), which makes it hard on aging eyes. The phrases of special significance are usually presented in proper syntactical relationships—except for adjectives. There the nominative masculine is regularly used, even when it modifies a neuter of feminine noun (a linguistic barbarism!). It does look odd to see *hagios pneuma*. In many ways this is the best complete printed concordance available today. I shall recommend it to students. *Edgar Krentz*

Preaching Helps

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost—Thanksgiving Day, Series A

Finding Fault

The cartoon on the editorial page of the *San Francisco Chronicle* this morning shows a couple talking in the foreground. Behind them with a length of heavy chain around his ankle is their teenaged son. Mom and dad say to one another: "What are we to do? If we keep him here, it's child abuse. If we let him out, we'll be blamed for the crimes he commits."

I guess that's what we call a "sad commentary" on the times. Courts are finding parents at fault for not supervising their kids. And kids are taking their parents to court for restraint or discipline which they find burdensome or unfair.

It's hard to do a good job of assessing fault. Whose fault is it that I (together with hundreds of thousands of others) live practically on top of the Hayward Fault, a nasty branch of the San Andreas Fault? When one or the other of these two faults in the earth snaps, I hope it will be only a minor adjustment.

I can walk a couple of hundred yards and see evidence of the Hayward Fault, but there isn't a thing I can do about it. I could move, I suppose, and I can take a few commonsense precautions (keep a stock of water on hand and know where to turn off the gas). But there's no curing that fault.

Faults in the rock and faults in the lives of individuals and whole nations are serious business. Dole and Clinton are taking off the gloves

these days and getting really serious about finding fault with one another's persons and positions.

The prophets announced that God found plenty of fault with Judah and Jerusalem. But beyond all faultfinding, in fact behind the faulting, was an unerringly gracious purpose. God wills life, and whether speaking harshly or speaking tenderly, God would waken people to their danger and woo them to repentance and renewal.

Helping us in this issue to hear the voice of God in the voices of the prophets is Professor **Robert Robinson** of The Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia. Bob is Professor of Old Testament and Hebrew Language and has served at Philadelphia since 1989. He has recently edited two volumes of *Semeia*, dealing with issues of Literary Theory. And he has a commentary on Genesis in the works. When he is not teaching or writing, he enjoys swimming and woodworking. He is currently involved in laying a hardwood floor, which he claims is very satisfying labor! We thank him for taking time out to produce the First Readings on Old Testament texts. His offerings are the final installment in our year-long emphasis on the first lessons.

The prophets phrased their message both in prose and poetry. It's only fitting. The language of Scripture is always breaking free, taking flight and soaring, straining to capture in words something of the terror of God's judging and some glimmer of the wonder of God's loving and forgiving.

Karen Parker is the poetic pastor of Saint Peter Lutheran Church in Englewood, Colorado. She recently enjoyed a sabbatical from parish duties at Saint Peter, where she has served for the past dozen years. She used her sabbatical to write lectionary-based hymns. Part of the time she worked in California with hymn writer and teacher Brian Wren, and she also fulfilled a hope of many years by spending some time at the Taize community in France.

Karen's words have appeared on these pages previously. Here she is again, once more offering Pastoral Reflections in the form of original hymns and poems. She has set her imagination to the task of composing

hymns which will connect the words and images of the lectionary texts with contemporary issues. She invites you to use her hymns as personal meditation and preparation and also to print them out (with proper acknowledgment, of course) and sing them some Sunday morning.

Neither Robert Robinson nor Karen Parker is a fault-finder. They do not neglect God's diagnosis of our condition, but they seek always to sound grace notes. God in great mercy grants us all we need to live in joy, in spite of terrible faults in the earth and faults in our own characters and constitutions.

Singing hymns to God in spite of our faults is a classic Christian maneuver, an excellent strategy for outwitting the demons.

Yours most cordially,

Robert H. Smith
Editor of *Preaching Helps*
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Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost: Proper 21 September 29, 1996

Psalm 25:1-9
Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32
Philippians 2:1-13
Matthew 21:23-32

First Reading

Ezekiel may be read as a tragic exploration of themes of divine and human responsibility, both individual and collective, played against the unfolding saga of the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians.

The fall of Jerusalem is the moment of judgment, explained and justified by the devastating witness collected in Ezekiel's commissions of inquiry within the city walls (chapter 8-10) and by the prophet's explicit and symbolic recounting of Israel's history of rebellion (chapters 16 and 20). But big questions remain: Who bears responsibility for the fall? Is devastating, consuming judgment God's last word? Is God's love finally consumed by righteous fury?

Twice (in chapters 3 and 33) Ezekiel is commissioned as a watchman over Israel. The role of the watchman is to warn the people of approaching danger as they work in the fields, so they may flee to the fortified city for safety. What is the danger which Ezekiel is to announce? It is the approaching judgment of God, which will swallow up all the unrighteous. God commissions Ezekiel to warn the people against God's own impending judgment! The extraordinary message that God warns the people so that they may escape God's own actions is driven home by the wording of 33:7. Many translations have at the end of this verse, "You shall give them a word of warning from me." The passage could as well be translated, "You shall warn them against me." Let there be no question that the devastation about to bury Judah originates with God. But then, most extraordinarily, God issues a warning against God's own impending actions. Certainly here is a profound sign that God's love for the people has not been nullified by God's fully justified wrath. God helps the people to escape by sending warning through the prophet. If they fail to take warning, the responsibility is their own.

The renewed commission of Ezekiel as a watchman just at the moment of judgment makes clear the depth of God's will to forgive. Even at the last moment, after Israel's unfaithfulness to God has been thoroughly documented by Ezekiel's witness, there is no change in God's fundamental desire for the good of the people, which is the import of the call for them to return. That will is explicitly and beautifully stated in 33:11, "As I live," God swears, "I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked." How shall we live? The response is a clarion call: Even in the midst of judgment and death, God promises life. Neither continued sinning nor weak resignation is the desire of God. Even in the very moment of judgment, God desires life for God's people.

Like Ezekiel 33, Ezekiel 18 seeks to make sense of God's mercy and goodwill to the people of Israel in the midst of enveloping catastrophe. Although the nation Israel is about to be destroyed by the Babylonians—some already are in exile, the fall of Jerusalem is imminent—individuals who turn from their evil will be spared. Ezekiel announces the possibility of escape from judgment for individual righteous Israelites in explicit renunciation of a popular proverb, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth have been set on edge." The thrust of the proverb is clear. God punishes the wrong people. The present generation is

being destroyed for the sins of their parents. The implication, made explicit in v. 25 ("Yet you say, 'The way of the Lord is not just'"), is that God harbors anger against an earlier generation and unjustly takes it out on present Israelites. Speaking through Ezekiel, God rescinds the proverb, forbidding it to be spoken in Israel, and substitutes an assurance that only those individuals who have caused their own downfall will die; the righteous will live.

Because of this passage and others like it, Ezekiel is often seen as the prophet who transforms Israel's tradition of collective responsibility (the whole nation stands or falls together) to one of individual responsibility (each person must answer for his or her own actions alone). The issue of God's justice is seen as forcing this reappraisal. If righteous people also lose their lives in the moment of judgment, can God be called just? By assuring that only those individuals who have merited their own destruction will be killed in the judgment about to come, Ezekiel answers the charges laid to God's justice.

God's justice is at question in this passage, but it is not the only issue. Even more pressing is the tacit question of the nature of God's will for the people. Has God turned from loving and caring for the people to exclusively desiring their destruction? The question is set up earlier in chapter 16, the terrible recounting of Israel's history of unfaithfulness. Israel was a foundling of most suspect parentage. God tenderly raised her and took her as bride. But Israel time and again proved unfaithful, taking God's good gifts and giving them to her lovers. Yet God remained faithful, forgiving and restoring Israel until finally Israel's actions had completely destroyed the relationship. Now there is no Israel and there is no relationship. God's anger burns hot. God indignantly repays Israel's faithlessness. But is that the last word? Has God gone over to be only a destroyer?

Ezekiel 18 indicates clearly that God's goodwill and mercy towards God's people has not changed, even in the midst of fully justified judgment. Indeed the nation must be destroyed, but Ezekiel offers a new way of understanding one's relationship to God, based on individual repentance (notice the strong call to repentance in vv. 30, 31) and continued righteous action (expressly defined in vv. 10-18 in terms reminiscent of the laws of the Holiness Code of Leviticus 17-26). Ezekiel here looks beyond judgment to a new *modus vivendi* with God, one that does not presuppose the nation Israel. What God offers through Ezekiel is truly a *modus vivendi*, a way for Israel to live by keeping God's good laws and so living in righteousness and justice. Although the mode of God's relationship with Israel must change, God's underlying faithfulness has not. "I have no pleasure in the death of anyone.... Turn, and live." RBR

Pastoral Reflections

Both the first lesson and Gospel deal with issues of judgment, authority, and fairness. In Ezekiel, God is in the role of antagonist. God, the one who defines and judges, is in charge and appears somewhat authoritarian. And yet, God is still the compassionate one who invites to repentance with the powerful invitation: "Turn, then, and live."

In the Gospel, Jesus is confronted by the religious leaders who question his authority. He will not answer them directly, but responds with a story about integrity, or lack of it. Jesus pronounces judgment on them for their lack of belief, and includes an announcement of grace for the undeserving.

Verses 2, 3, and 4 of the following hymn are based on the lessons for today. KP

Hymn:
Where Do We See God?

Text:
karen parker

Meter:
10.10.10.10

Tunes:
National Hymn
(*LBW* #567 "God of Our Fathers")
or
Ellers (*LBW* #262
"Savior, Again to Your Dear Name")
or
Eventide
(*LBW* #272 "Abide With Me")

This hymn is designed to be sung several Sundays in the season of Pentecost, the Sundays using Propers 21-23. Verses 1 and 10 could always be sung, with verses for the particular Sundays sung in between.

1. Where do we see God? Where do we find grace?
God's word our album, pictures Jesus' face.
The stories tell of God's divine embrace,
And Christ invites: "My footsteps now retrace."

2. "Why choose to die, my chosen? Turn and live.
New spirits and new hearts, I freely give.
Judgment is mine," God says, "but Love my choice.
Turn then and live. Respond with heart and voice."

3. How can we know you, God, and do your will?
Give us the eyes of faith to see you still.
You are at work in us, and you entreat:
"Live with compassion, make my joy complete."

4. Lover of justice and integrity,
Guide us to live by Love's authority.
When we are tested, strengthen faith grown weak.
That, Spirit-graced, we live the words we speak.

5. Land-owner God, you bless with many things.
Still craving more, we keep acquiring.
We are confused, we grasp all things as ours.
And we're demeaned by greed which soon devours.

6. Christ came to free us from the bonds of greed.
God's justice questions what we think we need.
If self-indulgence veils our need of Christ,
Once more denied, God's son is sacrificed.

7. O wondrous God, your gracious overture:
Plans formed of old, so faithful and so sure!
Your word brings hope of death's assured demise,
And every tear, wiped from our grieving eyes.

8. We are invited to the wedding feast.
Others refused, their places were released.
Not by our merit, nor our choice of dress,
Clothed by God's grace, we shed our hopelessness.

9. Let us be glad, let us rejoice today.
This is our God, salvation's here to stay!
Come to the banquet, for the feast is spread.
Christ, who invites, is here in wine and bread.

10. Give thanks to God, from whom all grace derives.
Let us live out that gift in faithful lives.
Christ's mind in us, humility increase.
Living God's way of unity and peace.

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost: Proper 22 October 6, 1996

Psalm 80:7-15
Isaiah 5:1-7
Philippians 3:4b-14
Matthew 21:33-46

First Reading

This Song of the Vineyard represents constantly shifting patterns of significance. It begins in beguiling fashion with a gentle song of praise: "Let me tell you of the care and attention of my beloved for his vineyard. He chose fertile ground, prepared it thoroughly, planted only the finest stock, defended it against depredation, and prepared to enjoy its fruit." How thorough, how tender. But the song ends in bitterness and disappointment; the vineyard yielded wild grapes.

Well, we might think, that happens in the agricultural world. Sometimes you get a crop, sometimes you don't. That is not the attitude here. The planter of the vineyard appears in his own voice and demands that the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem render a judgment against the vineyard. The agricultural analogy must stretch. The vineyard has a will. It is responsible. This is not just a matter of having failed to produce a crop. The vineyard has defied and subverted the tender efforts of the owner. To the question, "Why did it yield wild grapes?" comes the implicit answer, "Because it was ungrateful and defiant." The level of significance has begun to shift beyond the purely agricultural analogy, yet the passage still plays off the profound sense of disappointment of one who has done everything to assure a crop, only to be rewarded with nothing.

The agricultural analogy is continued in the next section. Because the vineyard has failed to produce as expected, it will be torn up. Again, however, the passage goes beyond the agricultural image. The field will not just be torn up as unproductive. It will be punished, the walls and hedges that protect it removed, briars and thorns allowed to take over, the field itself trampled down. At the end comes a threat that once again changes the level of significance at which we must read the passage, "I will command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it." Now we know who the "I" is, who planted the vineyard.

Verse 7 breaks out of the analogy altogether and makes explicit the meaning of the song. Those who in v. 3 were called upon to render judgment upon the vineyard are themselves the vineyard and its pleasant plantings. In a double play on words the justified expectations of the owner of the vineyard are contrasted with the wild grapes actually produced. "He looked for justice (*mishpaṭ*) but behold, bloodshed (*mispaḥ*), for righteousness (*ṣedaqah*), but behold, a cry (*ṣe'aqah*)."

The easy accessibility of the agricultural analogy makes it impossible to fend off the force of this condemnation. Even the men of Judah and Jerusalem themselves must concede that tearing out the vineyard is fully justified. No halfway measures here. This passage, together with the series of woe oracles that follow it, serve as unassailable justification for the impending judgment which Isaiah is commissioned in chapter 6 to proclaim and insure through his prophetic activity. Cities will lie in waste, all will be utterly desolate. The vineyard will be rooted out. Nonetheless, the contrasting note is sounded in chapter 6:13. There will still remain the holy seed. Judgment, even thoroughly justified judgment, is not the only word from the Lord. RBR

Pastoral Reflections

In the first lesson we find God professing to be a singer of love songs. But this is no love song! Or is it? Love does include chastening, discipline, and pruning, but destruction?! God expects righteousness and justice from the chosen, but that expectation has not been carried out. The text prompts each of us to ask, "Am I a pleasant planting (fine wine), or wild grapes?"

The vineyard in the Gospel was a killing field! Those who had been blessed by God were driven by greed to murder. Consumerism and greed are both ancient and modern. Like the tenants in the story, we believe we have a right to the possessions placed into our care. But the truth is found in the words of the hymn: "We give thee but thine own, whate'er the gift may be; all that we have is thine alone, a trust, O Lord, from thee" (*LBW* #410). The offertory prayer in *Hymnal Supplement 1991* speaks the same truth this way: "Merciful God, everything in heaven and earth belongs to you. We joyfully release what you have entrusted to us...." Stanzas 5 and 6 of my hymn (see p. 305) are based on the readings for this Sunday and speak to these same issues.

When we grasp our possessions and seek to keep them, then our things keep us in bondage. The good news is that God has freed us from *all* bondage — even the bondage to our belongings. Indeed, the gospel of belonging is expressed most beautifully in the words of the second lesson, "Christ Jesus has made me his own." KP

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost: Proper 23 October 13, 1996

Psalm 23
Isaiah 25:1-9
Philippians 4:1-9
Matthew 22:1-14

First Reading

"On this mountain, on that day." This passage seeks to place us at a specific time and place, but that time and place are not in the first instance defined by ordinary chronology and geography. Space and time are not neutral categories of thought here, flat grids upon which events may be marked, but the dimensions of God's plans, formed of old (v. 1), to bring the salvation for which we have waited (v. 9).

The passage begins with a hymn of praise (vv. 1-5) for God's destruction of "the city" (v. 2). "The city" is mentioned numerous times in the immediate context of this passage (24:10, 12; 26:1, 5; 27:10), nearly always as marked for destruction, but it is never named. Scholars have tried to be specific where the text is not, suggesting that "the city" is Jerusalem or Babylon, but in their specificity they move in a different direction than the passage. The place with which the passage is concerned is not given either historic or geographic specificity, but is rather identified by its relationship to God's plan, announced of old, faithful and sure. God's plan, articulated fully in Isaiah's oracles against his own nation and against the surrounding nations (chapters 13-23), has consistently been to bring down the proud and the haughty nations, those who oppress the poor and the needy, in the language of v. 4, or are ruthless, the key term of

vv. 3, 4 and 5. "The city" is therefore any haughty, lawless city that lies broken by God's will to crush the proud. Jerusalem and Babylon fit that space, but so do many other cities.

The hymn of praise is in the past tense. God has already judged "the city" in vindication of God's plan. The next section (vv. 6-8) turns to the future, envisioning a great feast spread by God for all peoples. The feast will take place "on this mountain." Again, the mountain is not named, but here the reason is because it does not need to be. God's chosen mountain everywhere in Isaiah is Jerusalem or Zion, the "mountain of the house of the Lord" to which "all the nations shall flow" (Isa 2:2). Zion is the expected locus of salvation for all nations, the place to which God's ultimate plan always leads. The imagery of the feast, fine wine, rich food, is in explicit contrast to the state of the earth before its judgment and restoration. In Isa 24:4-13, just before this passage, the earth is described as under a curse because all the peoples have "transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant" (Isa 24:5). Because of the curse "The wine mourns, the vine languishes" (v. 7), "No more do they drink wine with singing" (v. 9), "There is an outcry in the streets for lack of wine" (v. 11). No feast here. But once judgment has taken place, once the plan moves from the past tense to the future and from scattered nations to the chosen place, Zion, then the curse will be lifted, God will "destroy on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations." (25:7)

The final section, v. 9, introduces the people into the complex space and time described in the earlier two sections. "On that day," the day of the great feast prepared for all nations, the people will play their part, recognizing their God for whom they have waited and rejoicing in the salvation that God's careful plan has bestowed on them. This last section places all believers in a specific relationship to God's plans. They stand between judgment on "that city," the pride and lawlessness that God has destroyed, and the promised feast which God has prepared. RBR

Pastoral Reflections

Stanzas 7, 8, and 9 of the hymn (see p. 305) are based on the lessons of Proper 23.

Twenty-First Sunday after Pentecost: Proper 24 October 20, 1996

Psalm 96:1-9, 10-13
Isaiah 45:1-7
1 Thessalonians 1:1-10
Matthew 22:15-22

First Reading

The section of the book of Isaiah known as "Second Isaiah" (chapters 40-55) sets readers on the cusp of history. As in chapter 25, the reader is placed at the crucial turning point between the former things which have been accomplished—God's righteous judgment on Israel's injustice and faithlessness—and the things that are to come—God's equally powerful commitment to restore God's people to wholeness with God and with one another. Israel still stands within the bitterness of judgment, but now hears clearly the herald proclaim that her "warfare is ended, her iniquity is pardoned" (Isa 40:2). Age-old promises of God's favor, operative even from the moment of God's creation of

the earth, stand at the threshold of fulfillment. Hope, chastened by judgment, arises anew.

The interplay within the will of God between righteous indignation at all injustice and betrayal of faith and God's profound mercy and desire for the good of God's people drives history, is the true depth and motive of history in Isaiah. That interplay can seem to force an abstraction from history, moving away from actual concrete events to focus on the will of God that lies behind them. Second Isaiah in particular runs the risk of occasioning that abstraction. Few specific historical allusions are found in the section; the focus remains intently on God's activity and the fulfillment of God's promises of old.

Yet Second Isaiah will not allow God's will to become something separate from human history, mysteriously above or behind or apart from it. "Thus says the Lord to his anointed, to *Cyrus*." The medium of God's will is history, concrete history, as concrete as the Persian conqueror Cyrus, anointed to bring to an end the Babylonian empire, the instrument of God's judgment of Israel.

Cyrus is seen here as the instrument by which God turns history from judgment to promise. That is the force of the striking use of the term "anointed" (*meshiho*, the same word as Messiah), a title elsewhere reserved for Israel's kings or high officials. Cyrus is not an independent historical figure, pursuing his own ends, but God's commissioned agent, God's anointed, although he does not know it. Cyrus' victories are not his own, or not his own alone; they result from God's preparing the way, breaking down the gates of fortified cities in his route, disarming opposing kings (the probable meaning of "ungird the loins" in v. 1)—all, ultimately, "for the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen" (v. 4). Cyrus is a world historical figure. World history is now the scale of God's operations on behalf of Israel, so that it is not finally surprising that Cyrus can be used as God's anointed.

Indeed, there should be no surprise at all at the scope of God's work within history. There is only one God, "beside me there is no God" (v. 5). All lies within God's hand. "I form light and create darkness, I make weal and create woe, I am the Lord, who do all these things" (v. 7).

The force of this passage is to place all history within the scope of God's will and thus also to place each person within that will. No one is randomly located. Each reader indeed stands at the very cusp of God's history, the turning point from judgment, the very real past, to restoration and deliverance, the promised future. RBR

Pastoral Reflections

In an effort at entrapment, the Pharisees sound a contemporary note. They ask Jesus about taxes! At first Jesus' response may seem to affirm a dualism between sacred and secular. And yet on closer scrutiny, his pointed words speak across the generations to us: "Give to God the things that are God's" (Mt 22:21). For as we discussed two weeks ago in the story of the tenants who confused issues of stewardship and ownership, the truth is that God is the owner of all things. Since God owns all things, Jesus' answer "Give to God the things that are God's" is a call to be faithful stewards of everything!

The story of Cyrus in the first lesson is yet another example of God's way of obscuring the line between secular and sacred. God can and does use even that which we might define as "evil" to bring about God's purposes.

Possessions can so easily become our idols, seducing us to believe that they can

provide meaning and security. We are called to be like the Thessalonians who "turned... from idols to serve a living and true God."

The following poem is based on the readings for this Sunday.

God's Paradigm

Come, dear community, gather to hear
God's Word of life for us now in this time.
Wrestle when difficult truth becomes clear.
Dare to live God's paradigm.

I am the Lord, there is no other God.
Though you don't know me I give you
your name.
I go before you, your paths I have trod.
I will not be put to shame.

Turn from your idols whose counterfeit claims
And false securities trap and deceive.
Shun empty promises, evil's sly games.
Welcome the grace you receive. KP

Twenty Second Sunday after Pentecost: Proper 25 October 27, 1996

Psalm 1
Leviticus 19:1-2, 15-18
1 Thessalonians 2:1-8
Matthew 22:34-46

First Reading

A refrain runs through the nineteenth chapter of Leviticus: "I am the Lord" (vv. 3, 4, 10, 12, 14, 16, 18, 25, 28, 30, 31, 32, 34, 36, 37). The refrain comes in each case at the end of a command ("You shall" or "You shall not") and seems to identify the authority behind the command. We seem to be within a system based on duly authorized command and required obedience, a system fully consonant with the popular image of Leviticus as a book of law, hardly relevant to the Christian life.

The truth of this passage is much deeper. The refrain is not so much a specific authorization for each individual command as an attempt to root the distinctive life of the "congregation of the people of Israel" (v. 1), a life shaped into a unique society by reception of these commands, in the nature of God. The refrain continually refers back throughout the chapter to its opening verse, "You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am *holy.*" God's holiness provides the model and the standard for the essential nature of the people Israel. God's holiness, we might say, is to be the constitution of the people.

Specifically what it means for the people to be holy as God is holy is spelled out in the series of commands that follow the central principle, "Be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy." These commands are strongly reminiscent of the Ten Commandments: "every one of you shall revere his mother and his father and you shall keep my sabbaths," v. 3; "Do not turn to idols or make for yourselves molten gods," v. 4; "You shall not steal," v. 11; "You shall not swear by my name falsely," v. 12; "You shall not oppress your neighbor or rob him," v. 13. The parallels are so strong that the impression is given that Leviticus 19 represents a commentary on the giving of the Ten Commandments. That impression is strengthened by recognizing that the giving of the law at Mt. Sinai was also concerned with holiness. Just after Israel arrived at Mt. Sinai God called Moses up onto the mountain and promised to make Israel a "holy people" (*goy qodesh*, Ex 19:6). The medium of that holiness is the law, which God is about to give. If the people keep the laws, then the life they live in conformity with

them will be holy. Unfolding events at Sinai draw the implications of Israel's holiness. Before the people agree to keep the laws, they are prevented from going up on the mountain. They may not approach God. God's holiness is like a consuming fire to everything that is not also holy. Holiness represents a mark of separation between God and the people. But once the people have formally accepted the covenant represented by the laws (Exodus 24 describes the ceremony), then the elders representing the people are able to go up on the mountain and share a ceremonial meal in the very presence of God. Holiness does not divide the people from God once they are in the covenant. It unites people and God.

Leviticus 19 shares with the Exodus account of the giving of the Ten Commandments the belief that holiness unites the people with God, and it shares the conviction that holiness is a function of living life within the commandments of God. Further, Leviticus 19 shares the belief that holiness extends beyond the purely cultic sphere into the social life of the people. The verses that complete the reading for today (15-18) are concerned with injustice and partiality in judgment, with hatred and slander, with openly confronting conflict with one's neighbor (this may be the meaning of "you shall reason with your neighbor" in v. 17), with the grand principle that may govern all social relationships, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Holiness is not just a matter of ritual purity, as it is elsewhere in Leviticus (although ritual purity is not a matter of indifference). The integrity and justice of the relationships between members of the community constitutes the holy people. And it is the holy people that are able to stand in the presence of God. RBR

Pastoral Reflections

The movie "Dead Man Walking" is one of the most powerful portrayals of grace I have ever seen. It is not a pretty film! It is a story of a man on death row, convicted of a heinous crime, and some scenes are nearly unbearable to watch. The film came to mind as I read today's lessons.

What does it mean for us to be told, "You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy"? The remaining words of the Leviticus text seem to clarify that living out holiness includes justice, impartiality, integrity, family harmony, love, and conviction. We are to live lives of holiness for the simple (yet profound!) reason that God is God. This view of holiness does not imply perfection. The goal is not to attain God's approval. Rather, because God is God, God's people are to live out the characteristics of God. Created in the image of God, we are called to look like our divine parent.

"Dead Man Walking" is based on the true story of Sr. Helen Prejean, a Roman Catholic nun, who epitomizes these characteristics of holiness. She puts a very modern face on the words of our second reading. "Entrusted with the message of the gospel" she had the "courage in God to declare the gospel in spite of great opposition" just as did Paul's missionary team who worked with the Thessalonians (1 Thess 2:2-4). The courageous nun "never came with words of flattery or a pretext for greed; nor did [she] seek praise from mortals..." She was gentle among very hostile groups of people, "like a nurse caring for her own children. So deeply did [she] care, that she was determined to share not only the gospel of God but also her own self, because [those to whom she was called] had become very dear to her" (vv. 5-8). Truly, Sr. Helen has given us a visible image of one who lived out Jesus' commandment of love to God and neighbor! KP

Reformation Day
October 31, 1996

Psalm 46
Jeremiah 31:31-34
Romans 3:19-28
John 8:31-36

First Reading

This passage again centers on covenant (*berith*, a term that occurs four times in this short passage). The covenant offered by God at Mt. Sinai and accepted by Israel was the form of Israel's national life. God expressed God's goodwill toward Israel in the form of law (*torah*). In following the *torah* of God, Israel became the nation God had promised, just and harmonious within, faithful and obedient toward God. But Israel had not followed the *torah* but broke the covenant. Decisively. Verse 32 is emphatic, "*My* covenant which *they* broke." Now what is there to do? Is a relationship with God possible if the covenant has been shattered?

The most direct approach to restoring the broken relationship with God would seem to be to call upon the people to reinstitute the covenant by conforming to the laws. A call to repentance leading to the reestablishment by the people of the covenant. The passage makes no such call. Israel has broken the covenant, shattered the relationship, but it has no power to restore the covenant, any more than it had the power to institute the covenant in the first place. The initiative lies with God.

God seizes that initiative. God is about to do something new, to give God's relationship to the people a future. What is that new thing? A new *covenant*. God's fundamental will for Israel has not changed. The covenant represented the nation God sought to create, the laws God gave at Sinai formed the just and faithful society, so once again the covenant and its laws (my *torah*, v. 33) will stand at the heart of the relationship with God. There is no revocation of the law simply because the people failed to obey it. How could there be? The law represents God's goodwill toward the people. That goodwill is no less the basis of the new relationship Jeremiah announces than it was of the old covenant relationship.

What is new about the new covenant is just this: weaknesses in the covenant itself which allowed it to be broken will be corrected. God diagnoses the problems in the old covenant. The people did not know the law, therefore they broke it. So, God corrects the problem. The new covenant, my *torah*, will be written on the heart, on the organ of thought and emotion, so that everyone will know the law and keep it. The covenant relationship, epitomized in the phrase "I will be their God, and they will be my people" (v. 33), will be restored.

Extraordinary about this promise of a new covenant is the generosity of God's spirit and God's yearning for the people God had chosen. There is very little recrimination against the people, only that frank acknowledgment that it was the people who destroyed the old covenant. God does not look to lay blame, but only to insure that God's relationship with the people may continue, and with the same object of the good of the people in view. God forgives and forgets past iniquity (v. 34), and perfects the covenant by placing the knowledge of God (identical with the law of God) within the heart of the people.

Christian theology tends to emphasize the word "new" in the new covenant and to downplay or even ignore the continuity between new covenant and old covenant. The issue, however, is forced by the words "my *torah*" at the center of this passage and by the juxtaposition of Jeremiah 31 with the read-

ing from Romans which is the epistle lesson today. The relationship of old and new covenant demands reflection that is beyond the scope of this brief exegesis. However, that reflection will be deepened if it is remembered that the *torah* is an expression of the same generous and gracious spirit of God which Christians find most fully in the gift of God's Son. RBR

All Saints' Day
November 1, 1996

Psalm 34:1-10, 22
Revelation 7:9-17
1 John 3:1-3
Matthew 5:1-12

First Reading

Psalm 34 may be classified in several different ways. It is an acrostic psalm, one of the more perfect examples, with each line beginning with a successive letter in the Hebrew alphabet. At the beginning it may be called a hymn of thanksgiving, praising God for deliverance from fear and trouble. The end, beginning with v. 11, is a wisdom psalm, concerned with teaching the fear of the Lord and full of instruction and precepts. These categories are accurate and useful in interpreting the psalm, but the psalm's own key to its interpretation is contained in the superscription, which places the psalm in a specific context. This, the superscription gives us to understand, is the psalm that David sang when "he feigned madness before Abimelech, so that he drove him out, and he went away." The reference is to 1 Samuel 21, although details are a bit garbled. Saul's jealousy drove David to flee to *Ahimelech*, the priest at Nob, who, unaware of Saul's enmity, sheltered David, gave him bread from the altar, and, on his departure, the sword of Goliath. There was no feigning madness before Ahimelech. From Ahimelech David fled to Achish, the Philistine king of Gath. It was here that David was forced to pretend to be mad so that Achish would not kill him as a potential military rival. It is against this compound event, the sheltering by Ahimelech from the persecution of Saul and the "from the frying pan into the fire" sanctuary of Achish, that we are to interpret this psalm. It is the interpretive key.

The psalm itself plays upon two senses of "fear." Verse 4 says, "I sought the Lord, and he answered me, and delivered me from all my fears." The general human emotion of fear receives depth and substance here by imagining David's terror as he ran in headlong flight from Saul or as he fell in with Achish, Israel's avowed enemy, who had every reason to destroy him. This fear is grounded; it is not unfocused anxiety. The complementary sense of fear, and, in a deep sense, its antidote, is "the fear of the Lord" (vv. 7, 9, 11). Verse 7 says succinctly, "The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them." David feared the Lord and so had nothing to fear, for the Lord saves from trouble those who fear God. Therefore (this is the final movement in the psalm), David rejoiced in praise of God, gave thanks for deliverance, and taught the fear of the Lord to succeeding generations. The psalm, so closely connected to David's life, stands as an example to those who face danger in the security given by their fear of the Lord. It is a model of courage and confidence, and profound gratitude, rooted in the assurance that God delivers those who "fear the Lord." RBR

Twenty-Third Sunday after Pentecost: Proper 26 November 3, 1996

Psalm 43
Micah 3:5-12
1 Thessalonians 2:9-13
Matthew 23:1-12

Pastoral Reflection

When life feels like
Night without vision
Darkness without revelation
Cries without answer,
When sun's light disappears,
"Blackened day" proffered as the special
and justice perverted,
When actions belie words
and appearance becomes motivation
Question the lies being told
Probe the seductions offered
False prophets may be peddling their wares.
The spirit of the Lord
enters the darkness
with the light of hope
urging, encouraging, pleading
The living God comes as a servant,
bearing burdens,
sharing sorrows,
at work in you. KP

Twenty-Fourth Sunday after Pentecost: Proper 27 November 10, 1996

Wisdom of Solomon 6:12-16
or Amos 5:18-24
Wisdom of Solomon 6:17-20 or Psalm 70
1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
Matthew 25:1-13

First Reading (Amos 5)

Israel's prophets, in particular, recognize that God's presence in the midst of the people is not an unmitigated blessing. Isaiah encounters God dwelling in the Jerusalem temple, just as the prevailing theology claimed (Isaiah 6). Yet Isaiah reacts to God's proximity with terror. He sees all too clearly the implications of the presence of a God whose holiness is like a burning flame in the midst of an unclean people. In the opening section of this passage, Amos likewise confronts a popular theology of God's presence with its terrifying reality. The people desire "the Day of the Lord." The term is not defined in this passage, but from other prophetic passages (Isa 19:16, 20; 23:15; 34:8; 47:9; 63:4; Jer 46:10, 21; 48:41; 49:22, 26; 50:27; Ezek 21:29; 30:9) it is clear that the Day of the Lord is the anticipated day of God's judgment on Israel's enemies, when God will draw near to lay the oppressors low and vindicate God's own chosen nation. Amos turns that comforting anticipation against the people. God's arrival for judgment will bring not light for Israel but darkness and the sort of terror compounded with disappointment experienced by one who has just escaped from a lion only to turn a corner and face a bear.

The opening section does not indicate why Israel's anticipation will be dashed.

The clear implication is that God's arrival as a judge will not lead to vindication because Israel is in fact guilty. God will stand in judgment on Israel just as God judges every nation (see chapters 1-2 for a similar frontal attack on Israel's ill-founded belief that it has a judgment-proof relationship with God). The second section of this passage may serve as an indication of why God's presence is such a threat.

At the beginning of this second section God declares in God's own voice, "I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies" (v. 21). We may judge that the people have not been neglecting such feasts nor the offerings due to God. Indeed, they have been bringing the very best, the fatted beasts. There has been no slacking in cultic piety nor is there any hint that Israel has been directing its offerings to the wrong altars, worshipping other gods. Yet God despises their offerings and instead commands, in words of unrivaled power, "Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream."

Neither justice (*mishpat*) nor righteousness (*sedaqah*) is expressly defined in the book of Amos. Rather, their *absence* is depicted in a series of prophetic accusations against the people, for indolence and oppression of the poor (chapter 4), for trampling the poor (5:11), for indolence again and indifference to the ruin of the people (chapter 6), for greed and cheating with false weights, reducing the poor to the necessity to sell themselves into servitude (chapter 8). Behind the accusations lies a positive vision of a just and righteous society, in which there is no room for individual pretensions or exploitation because all social relationships are measured against the primary relationship of the whole people to God. How is a pretension to be better than another by virtue of wealth to be justified if all Israelites stand in the same relationship to God? The poverty of one Israelite sets up inequities that tacitly deny that Israelite society is formed around its relationship to a just God and no other principle. If anything, Israel's relationship with God implies a positive obligation to restore all who have fallen out of society by virtue of poverty or low social status to the ranks of Israel. Yet in Amos' time indolence, indifference, and greed have destroyed equity within the nation.

Inequity destroys the just nation and—here is the radical part of Amos' understanding—it destroys the relationship with God. Ethics and religion cannot be separated because God has not separated them. God called Israel to be a righteous nation and established a relationship with that just nation. When justice and righteousness cease, no feasts or offerings can restore that relationship. RBR

Pastoral Reflections
for Proper 27 and Proper 29

Tune: All Saints New (*LBW* #183)
Meter: CMD

Let justice shape the way we live
Let grace be at our core
God's love for all transformative
God's will is to restore.
O may we live in readiness
Our faithful lives aflame
To welcome Christ who welcomes us
Our future life to claim.

Despite our grief, hope calls beyond
The pain of sin and death.
We trust in God and we respond
To Christ's life-giving breath.
Infused with life, God's Spirit-gift,
We live to serve and share
With those whose lives are now adrift,
Beset by deep despair.

For in the face of those in need
We view the face of Christ.
Come let us visit, let us feed,
The one who sacrificed
His life for us, and calls us now
To welcome and to clothe
The ones our world would disavow
Dismiss, demean and loathe.

"I seek the lost, bring back the strayed
And I will be your God.
Though I will judge, be not afraid,
Go spread my love abroad.
For when you love the lost and least,
You share your love with me.
Together we will keep the feast
Throughout eternity." KP

Twenty-Fifth Sunday after Pentecost: Proper 28 November 17, 1996

Psalm 90
Zephaniah 1:7, 12-18
1 Thessalonians 5:1-11
Matthew 25:14-30

First Reading

The background of this passage in Zephaniah is precisely the same as in the preceding week's reading in Amos. Verse 7 announces the impending Day of the Lord, the day of judgment and wrath. Unlike Amos, who must overturn the expectations of a people that still take the Lord seriously enough to believe that the Day of the Lord is a threat only to other nations and a day of vindication for Israel, Zephaniah must confront total indifference. The people of Jerusalem are saying, "The Lord will not do good, nor will he do ill" (v. 12). In Zephaniah's more colorful phrase, they are "thickening upon their lees," slowly spoiling like poor wine undisturbed in its flask.

Two practices have seduced the people into the conviction that God is irrelevant, incapable of taking any action. First is the worship of other gods. The priests are idolatrous worshippers of Baal (v. 4), people bow down to the host of heaven and swear by Milcom (v. 5), many have "turned back from following the Lord" (v. 6). God as determiner of events, as agent of history, has been displaced by the alien gods of the nations roundabout. Secondly, the leading classes of Israel have put their trust in their own abilities to control their individual destinies. They have begun to amass silver and gold and to trust in the ability of their material possessions to insulate them from all dis-

tress. This is the implication of Zephaniah's direct denial of those pretensions in verse 18, "Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them on the day of the wrath of the Lord."

To indifference and pretension Zephaniah opposes the reality of God's cosmic control of all history. The issue here is not to call the people to repentance, to shake anyone out of indifference. The issue is simply to set the record straight. God is the judge of all history, one indeed who will make a sudden end of all people (v. 18). God is about to act; the sacrifice (Judah) is already prepared and the guests (Judah's enemies) consecrated (v. 7). The answer to the people's indifference to God is not an argument hoping to persuade them. It is encounter with the full reality of the judge of all the earth on the Day of the Lord. RBR

Pastoral Reflections

So what do we have here? Is this an economics or finance lesson? Is it a lesson about stewardship of creation? Is it a lesson about personnel practices or labor relations?

I have always liked the Arch Book account entitled *Eight Bags of Gold*, and I've often used it with children in worship. But attempting to write on the text in this forum, I found it a difficult story filled with law.

I heard it as reinforcement for achievers and perfectionists; reinforcement for all the responsible types; reinforcement for the ones who are good at what they do, who get the good breaks and know how to capitalize on them. "Hip, hip, hooray, keep up the good work."

That's fine, but it's not gospel. It's law. Where's the good news for today? The first lesson is no help. Zephaniah speaks of "wrath, distress, anguish, ruin, devastation and gloom—not the text for gospel!

Thank goodness for the words in Thessalonians. "Beloved, you are children of the light.... God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him." There's the gospel! It is not what we do, but what Jesus Christ has done for us. I knew it, of course, but I wanted it to be clear in our biblical texts for the day.

I also didn't want to let go of the Matthew text. I revisited it with colleagues at a bishop's retreat. "Is there gospel here?" I asked. Among the replies: "Everyone gets gifts; there's no one who gets no talents." "Do not be afraid; God gifts us with all sorts of things and invites us to use the gifts, without fear." "What if the gospel is in the first sentence: God entrusts to us." There it was, right before my eyes. Gospel! The old indicative/imperative! God graces, we respond.

As a response to God's grace we are to be good stewards, to use our gifts responsibly and well, to live without fear. And, as our Thessalonian text reminds, to encourage one another. I thank my colleagues for the encouragement they gave! KP

Christ the King
Proper 29
November 24, 1996

Psalm 95:1-7a
Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24
Ephesians 1:15-23
Matthew 25:31-46

First Reading

Using dating formulas as reference points (the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin, 1:2; the sixth year, 8:1; the seventh year, 20:1; etc.), the book of Ezekiel stretches along a roughly chronological framework. This chronology is of a particularly "thick" order; it is not simply the march of events leading up to the fall of Jerusalem (recorded in 33:21 with the specific date "In the twelfth year of our exile, in the tenth month, on the fifth day of the month), but those cataclysmic events of the city's destruction climax the long relationship between God and Israel, the relationship which has been the driving force in Israel's history, the engine of history. Israel's part in that relationship, marked by unfaithfulness and impurity, has driven history to "a day of clouds and thick darkness" (v. 12, an image of the fearful Day of the Lord), made Jerusalem the haunt of jackals, her people exiles in an unfamiliar land.

In Ezekiel 34 Jerusalem has just fallen. What now? Israel's history has reached either its end or its turning point and awaits the first word it will receive from God. Will the engine of history be restarted or has God's judgment on that history been final? If God will renew the relationship with Israel, on what basis?

The first word is again judgment, now against Israel's shepherds, the political leaders who have led falsely. A litany of negatives mocks the expectations of a good king: You have not strengthened the weak, you have not healed the sick, you have not bound up the crippled, you have not led back the strayed nor sought the lost, and, in general, you have ruled through force and with harshness (34:4), leading to the scattering of the sheep over all the face of the earth (v. 6). These unjust and unrighteous shepherds bear responsibility for the judgment that has come upon Israel. They are unequivocally rejected for their failure to bring the blessings upon God's people which God intended in commissioning them. And in their place? A most extraordinary promise. God will personally become their shepherd, reversing the neglect of the rejected shepherds. The word from God is actually the promise of restoration. Running through the chapter are the sharpest contrasts between the actions of the errant shepherds and those of God, the faithful, caring shepherd. Every failure of Israel's shepherds is matched by a positive promise of God the shepherd: I will gather them, feed them, cause them to lie down, seek the lost, bring back the strayed, bind up the crippled, strengthen the weak. The litany is precisely reversed, culminating in the powerful summary, "I will feed them in justice" (v. 16). Judgment on the false shepherds removes leadership which has brought Israel to destruction. In its place is the nurturing, just leadership of God. The question "What next?"—so pressing in this moment of enveloping judgment—receives its answer in the figure of God the good shepherd, Israel's future.

Beside that figure stands another, David. The appearance of David in this vision of a restored Israel represents in one sense a deeply conservative view. God looks forward by looking back, behind the false shepherds who scattered Israel, to the prototypic good shepherd, David, who united and fed

Israel. God's promise to David's house (2 Samuel 7) is not annulled. Nor is the purpose of that promise annulled, namely to bring blessings upon Israel. God will truly restore Israel, not create a different Israel on some other basis than God's earlier promises. Once again God will use David as the instrument to unite Israel and bring blessings. David will be the mediator of God's saving relationship (v. 22) with Israel. The classic formulation of God's relationship to Israel, "I will be your God and you will be my people," broadens to "I, the Lord, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them" (v. 24).

This passage has strong Christian reverberations. The image of judgment between sheep and sheep (vv. 20-22) or sheep and goats (v. 17), an image of justice within the restored flock of Israel, is the background of the Gospel passage for the day. The figure of David, the one by whom God unites and feeds God's flock, points to the Son of David, sure token of God's gathering and feeding all who have been scattered. RBR

Pastoral Reflections

See Proper 27, page 317.

Thanksgiving Day
November 28, 1996 U.S.A.

Psalm 65
Deuteronomy 8:7-18
2 Corinthians 9:6-15
Luke 17:11-19

First Reading

At the heart of the Old Testament reading lies the covenant relationship between God and Israel as Deuteronomy conceives it. That covenant relationship is dynamic, in motion, and the movement is characteristically circular. The covenant begins with God's promises and blessings upon the people, God's goodwill toward Israel. Part of that goodwill is expressed through commandments, ordinances, and statutes (v. 11), the intent of which are to form a nation marked by harmony and justice within itself and faithful to God. The people respond to the goodness of God by keeping the commandments, their part in the covenant. In response to their observance of the laws, God continues to bring renewed blessings on the people. The circle is unbroken.

Deuteronomy 8 traces the circle, although the covenant is not mentioned explicitly until v. 18. The passage opens with a hymn extolling the richness of the land that God has promised to give to Israel and which Israel is now about to enter. The land God has chosen for Israel lacks nothing. It flows with brooks and springs, perhaps the most important requirement in an arid region. The land is well provided with varieties of crops, and the hills are full of iron and copper. Nothing is lacking in this rich land.

The very richness of the land, however, poses a problem, a disruption of the circular covenant relationship. When the people

enter the land and enjoy its riches, then they will think: We ourselves have earned all this wealth. This is the fruit of our own labors. They will forget God—the verb is significant—displacing God's acts in giving them the land with their own acts in taking possession of it. And here is the feared result of forgetting God: they will cease to keep the commandments, ordinances, and statutes which are their participation in the covenant. Then the circle will be broken and the blessings that originate in their relationship with God will be cut off.

Most interesting is what Deuteronomy proposes as the proper way to ward off the ironic threat that the very blessings given by God pose to the covenant relationship. There is no appeal to Israel's inherent decency, no call to do the sensible thing, no overtly religious demand. Rather, appeal is made to Israel's *memory*. Israel is to remember God's former acts of covenant faithfulness. Recall that it was God who brought you out of Egypt, who led you through the desert, who gave you water in the midst of that desert, and who fed you with manna. Standing against human pretension, the corrosive delusion that all the riches we survey are the product of our own efforts, is memory, honest memory, grateful memory of what God has done before our very eyes—drink, food, deliverance. Out of honest, grateful memory will arise faithfulness to the will of God, expressed here in the good laws of the covenant. So the blessings will continue; God will confirm the covenant. RBR

Postscript

Friends and colleagues in ministry: This issue brings to conclusion our featuring of the First Lesson during Year A.

I hope it encourages you to know that plans for Year B are well along. It is shaping up to be a year of cooperative writing by conferences and lectionary study groups.

Are you involved in a group which would like to tackle an issue as a project? Write to me at the address on page 302.

Yours,
Robert H. Smith

Salt and Pepper

Jerry L. Schmalenberger
President
Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary

President's charge to the graduates
May 19, 1996

The article in the *San Francisco Chronicle* was titled, "Pepper Spray Stuns Oakland Congregation." The story went like this: "A sixty-year old woman was hospitalized and twenty other Oakland churchgoers were treated for eye and throat irritation yesterday after a pepper spray canister accidentally went off inside a woman's purse. Paramedics said the pepper spray went off inside Green Pasture Church at 1743 Foothill Blvd., where about fifty churchgoers were gathered at about 1:40 p.m." And then this sentence was added: "The fumes spread, causing some church members to develop symptoms."

Jesus said in a sermon on another mountain, "You are like salt for everyone on earth" (Mt 5:13). I would like to claim for us today that we are pepper for the whole church bringing flavor, spice, and a stinging new dimension to our own and our people's discipleship. Sometimes being prophets—pepper "for everyone on earth"—makes the eyes burn and the tongue set on fire like Pentecost again.

That article about Green Pasture Church in Oakland concluded with the words, "The fumes spread, causing some church members to develop symptoms." I wonder what the symptoms were that developed from Green Pasture Church that day? Apostolic radical or grace co-dependency? Infectious witness syndrome? Obsessive compulsive servanthood? Mission complex epidemic? Pentecost heart transplant? Severe disciple-itis? "The fumes spread," according to the story, "causing some church members to develop symptoms." Oh, that we might go from this place to make the fumes spread and cause evangelical gospel symptoms to develop!

The treatment which might be prescribed for those evangelical symptoms could be a large and continuous regimen of hope and peace with Christmas incarnate Emmanuel, Good Friday forgiveness, Easter new life, and Pentecost spirit with us again.

Spray the pepper, my friends, that the fumes would spread and symptoms might develop from this hill as well.

This school of the prophets charges you through its Mission Statement to be pepper to everyone on earth just like Jesus asked that we be salt for everyone on earth:

1. "Know and believe the gospel of Jesus Christ, as revealed in the Holy Scriptures and proclaimed in the ecumenical creeds and the Lutheran Confessions"—seasoning for your own life.

2. "Witness to the gospel by word and action"—there's the pepper applied.

3. "Reflect theologically on, and do

ministry consistent with, the mission of God's people in a pluralistic and secularized society"—perhaps here's the sting of a prophet.

4. "Understand and creatively appropriate the various expressions of the gospel by diverse cultures across the centuries and around the world"—here's a wonderful flavoring.

5. "Empower all of the baptized members of the church for their ministry so that they can express the gospel in their daily lives of discipleship in the world"—and here pass the pepper to others invited to the Lord's table.

It was just a small article in the East Bay edition of the *San Francisco Chronicle*. It told of a pepper spray canister accidentally going off inside a woman's purse. The concluding sentence read, "The fumes spread, causing some church members to develop symptoms."

It is our prayer this day—the faculty, staff, Board of Directors, and church who have worked very diligently with you to study, equip, and prepare for your ministries—that you go from this place being the salt and pepper to the church and the world, that the fumes might spread and the symptoms develop. —Pass the pepper, please.

Change of address?

If you are moving, please send your corrected mailing label, or a photocopy, or any change-of-address form, to *Currents in Theology and Mission*, 1100 East 55th Street, Chicago, IL 60615, or call (312) 256-0751, or FAX to (312) 256-0782 (specify *Currents*)

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