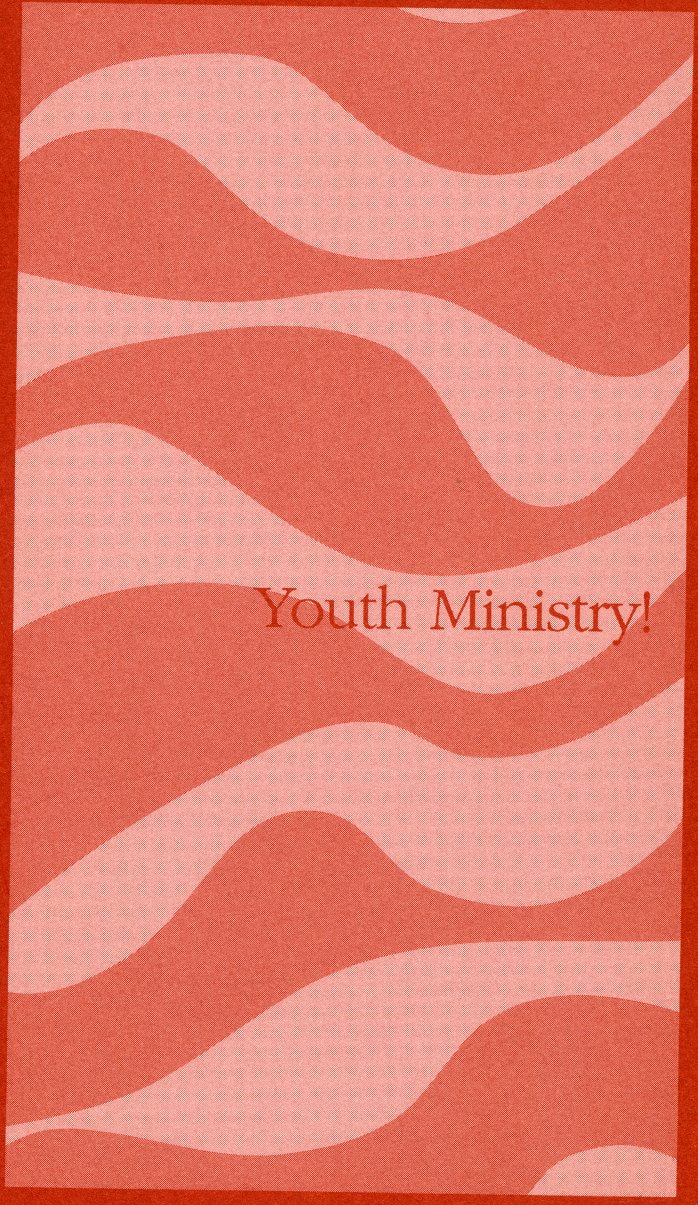
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Contents

Youth Ministry! 242
Ralph W. Klein

A Dedication to Youth Ministries 246
Paul G. Hill

Setting Trustworthy Youth Ministry Arenas 248
Norma Cook Everist

Youth Ministry: Why Is It So Hard? 252
Paul G. Hill

Three Thuds, Four D's, and a Rubik's Cube of Children's Sermons 259
James Nieman

Youth Ministry and Sexual Boundaries 264
Patricia Beattie Jung

Confirmation as Youth Ministry: The Task of Christian Formation 268
Craig L. Nessan

Youth and Worship 275
Ralph F. Smith†

Catechetical and Evangelistic Theology 280
Ralph W. Quere

A Pattern for Interpreting Biblical Texts 284
James L. Bailey

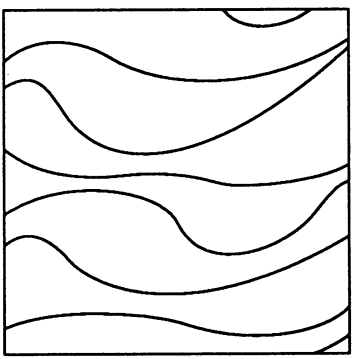
Introduction to the Bible 290
Gwen Sayler

Youth, Religious Cults, and World Mission 292
Wi Jo Kang

Book Reviews 294

Ministry with Youth in This Third Time of Testing
Roger Fjeld
Inside back cover

Drawings by Mitzi Miyamoto



Preaching Helps 300
Series C
Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost—Christ the King
Contributors: Janet M. Corpus, John Stendahl

Youth Ministry!

Here are a few, characteristic gleanings from the sixty-five references to "youth" in the NRSV:

—For you, O Lord, are my hope, my trust, O LORD, from my youth. (Ps 71:5)

—Remember your creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come, and the years draw near when you will say, "I have no pleasure in them." (Eccl 12:1)

—She [Israel] will respond as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt. (Hos 2:15)

—Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. (1 Tim 4:12)

Wartburg Theological Seminary has recently established a Center for Youth Ministries, and the faculty of the seminary publishes in this issue insights they discussed with the first group that was certified in this program in the fall of 1994. **Paul G. Hill** begins by introducing the Center and pointing up the challenges of youth ministry.

Norma Cook Everist outlines ways in which we can set trustworthy, healthy, and safe environments for youth ministry. These include relational, physical/temporal, cognitive, and emotional elements. A correlation of the three articles of the creed with the three uses of the law provides theological grounding for consistently trustworthy boundaries.

Paul G. Hill points out that understanding adolescence as a time when youth experiment, explore, search, and prepare for the adult world is a uniquely Western phenomenon. In secular America, in particular, adulthood is entered when one has become a consuming individualist. Youth ministry, therefore, may become unpopular if it calls into question

the core values of consumerism and individualism. A mentoring model for youth ministry is better than the "hire-a-youth-worker" model. Through small group strategy, we should aim at incorporating youth into the body of Christ worldwide. Youth should be led to ask about the talents God has given them and about ways in which God plans on using them. Discipleship among youth is defined by service, accountability, teamwork, and partnership.

James Nieman discusses the pros and cons of children's sermons. These sermons go "thud" not just by ignoring common-sense guidelines about developmental psychology, but primarily because they overlook the duties of any sermon in any time or place. The gospel equips children to confront the darkness with mercy and forgiveness, a tactic the world considers nothing short of neurotic. Children's sermons that forsake the wonder of tasting God's reign in order merely to be entertaining are like a gutted trout, lovely but lifeless.

Patricia Beattie Jung believes that whenever a minister's relationship with a parishioner becomes sexual, the boundaries necessary for church leadership and pastoral care have been violated. She acknowledges that the church is in transition with regard to this issue. If single ministers decide to date a member of their congregation, she recommends that the parishioner in question join a different congregation or the minister take a call.

Craig L. Nessan proposes that Christian formation is the primary goal of confirmation instruction. In instilling a Christian self-understanding in the lives of young people, the danger is that we aim too low intellectually rather than too high. Not to be neglected are the emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions of preparing for confirmation. Study of Scripture and Luther's catechism remain the backbone of the curriculum. The challenge of leading confirmation classes is one we must embrace with as much enthusiasm as we can muster since it involves the transference of the faith to a new generation.

Ralph F. Smith† avers that the purpose of worship for youth is to move them more deeply into life by moving them closer to others and to

God. There needs to be a happy balance between the familiar and the new. All of us must ask how we draw on the traditions of who we are and make them an integral part of our worship. Communion should be offered also to baptized infants and children. In eating the Lord's Supper together, we participate in its subtle connections between life and death.

Ralph W. Quere finds a way into the Lutheran Confessions via the Small Catechism. Like catechization, evangelization for Lutherans needs to take seriously the law/gospel approach and, normally, the bad news/good news sequence. True inclusivity invites all into a community where belonging bestows an identity and nurtures life together as a community of faith.

James L. Bailey presents exegetical techniques for youth ministry through an investigation of Mark 3:31-35. After 70 C.E., many Jewish Christians had to choose between joining the Christian movement and remaining with their blood family. The text demonstrates that "family" in the church includes all who do the will of God.

Gwen Sayler explores how our assumptions and experience affect interpretation. Confessional, historical-critical, and socio-rhetorical methodologies are useful for youth ministry. We learn from the dynamic interplay between the text in its context and the reader's context. Two blind spots attend our reading of the Bible today: its use of masculine language for God and humanity, and the possibilities for abuse in much biblical suffering/service imagery.

Wi Jo Kang explores the reasons why religious cults are so attractive for youth today. We counter these cults best by educating our youth to appreciate Christian values and by maintaining the centrality of Christ as Lord and Savior. The modern missionary movement was in large part a youth movement. Once again young Christians can let the light shine from their own place, leaven the world wherever they happen to be, and be salt to preserve the world from corruption.

In a back-page editorial, President **Roger Fjeld** refers to a third time of trial in America when our inherited institutions need to be creatively

adapted to meet the 20th century crisis of justice and order. If we can offer our youth a better, broader understanding of what it means to be steward, we can offer tools that will help this generation get on with its task. Those who understand discipleship as stewardship and stewardship as discipleship are the ones who will live most richly.



A recent survey showed that confirmation instruction and youth work rank among the least favorite tasks among many clergy. In our heart of hearts we know better: God's promised future will come about precisely through the adolescents entrusted to our care.

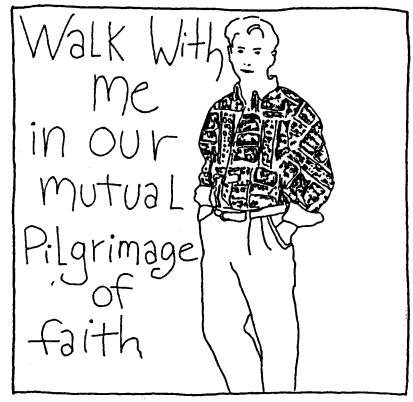
"Youth ministry" is an investment in the future; "youth ministry" is the faithfulness those young people display right now.

Power to you and them!

Ralph W. Klein
Editor

A Dedication to Youth Ministries

Paul G. Hill
Director of the Center for Youth Ministries
Wartburg Theological Seminary



Young people are gifted people with ministries to do. I am often privileged to witness this. Recently while visiting one of our Lutheran outdoor ministries with a strong horseback riding program, I walked through the barn to see a huge team of horses passively eating hay. To walk up to a 2,000-pound horse is an awesome and somewhat terrifying experience if you are not skilled with horses. All the horse needs to do is shift his weight and you could be crushed against a rail or wall. Expecting to meet some kind of "Marlboro Man" I asked some of the kids in the barn who took care of these horses. A slight, 16 year-old girl stepped forward and said she was in charge of the riding program and that these two monsters were hers. I was amazed that this young woman handled such horses and expressed my surprise. The rest of the kids in the barn laughed and encouraged me to watch. The young wrangler walked into the pen with the big horses, talked gently and sweetly to them, and coaxed them out of the barn and hooked them up to a wagon. The sight of this slight young woman leading these two horses was incredible. The horses would have done anything for her. The other kids knew they were seeing something special happen. They laughed and cheered to see one of their own doing her thing. I saw a teenager with a gift for horses, working at a Bible camp, sharing the joy of these animals and God's creation with other kids. I call that ministry.

Youth ministry is powerful and special because it appears in many forms, with unlikely kids surprising adults (and perhaps themselves) with amazing gifts and creative applications of those gifts. One of these serendipitous moments took place in our congregation after the Atlanta youth gathering. The Atlanta teens led the congregation in worship. Sermon time came, and the most unlikely teen in the group

entered the pulpit. He had his "2 B Alive" t-shirt on, minus the ring or collar. "Oh, boy," I wondered, "this looks high risk." He then gave a marvelous sermon on grace that lifted us all as only the gospel can. A church which fully incorporates young people into the life of the community is blessed, vibrant and alive.

Working with young people and their families requires commitment and skills. There have been times in our church when we have been less than enthusiastic about this ministry, sometimes with good reason. However, the net effect is that we are robbing ourselves of the joys and struggles of one dynamic of the body of Christ and denying our youth the enriching life of faithfulness. This needs to change.

From its inception Wartburg Seminary has been a mission seminary. The seminary motto, "where learning leads to mission," succinctly summarizes who we are and what we are doing. As the cultures and context for ministry changes, so does the focus of the mission. While redefining this mission under the title of "the globalization of theological education" it became clear to the faculty and board that we must address the issues of the young as we think about the way in which we prepare leaders. After all, 53% of the planet is under the age of 20.

A renewed commitment to youth and family ministry has taken shape through the establishment of the Center for Youth Ministries at Wartburg. The Center is designed to prepare many people, through short and intensive courses, for ministry with young people. It is our belief that a tidal wave of caring adults (and not just youth professionals and pastors) are needed to walk with young people in our mutual pilgrimage of faith.

However, because of the complexities of our society, the priesthood of all believers called to ministry with youth need training and skill development. The course offerings of the Center are designed to address this issue. At the heart of the program is the certification school. Through 130 hours of training, lay volunteers, professionals, and pastors can be equipped for ministry with youth. The training focuses on these questions: (1) Who are you? What is your character and faith? (2) What do we believe? What is the heart of the gospel we want to share? (3) What is the context for youth ministry? (4) How do we do youth ministry? Designed to be a small group experience, twelve students can be certified at one time.

> Fifty-three percent of the planet is under the age of twenty.

The Wartburg faculty has committed itself to applying their disciplines to youth ministry. The articles in this issue of *Currents*(including the back cover article by President Roger Fjeld) reflect some of their insights which they shared in sessions they led at the first certification school group in the fall of 1994.

To the youngest members of the body of Christ we commit this work.

Setting Trustworthy Youth Ministry Arenas

Norma Cook Everist
Professor of Church and Ministry
Wartburg Theological Seminary

Youth excite, challenge and perplex us. How do we set trustworthy, healthy, safe environments (arenas) in which to be together in youth ministry?

We do not want to be authoritarian leaders in youth ministry; however, we need to use appropriate authority, not in heavy-handed discipline, but in carefully setting the youth ministry arena.[1] We may be tempted to display a laid-back attitude which promises, "Anything goes!" A few months (or minutes) later, when things are out of control, in desperation or fear we suddenly change from *laissez-faire* to "Herr Pastor," confusing and frustrating the participants. If we maintain arenas with consistently trustworthy boundaries the youth themselves can fully develop their own gifts for ministry and leadership.

We can engage in a multitude of activities when we have a safe environment. But when we live always on the verge of things being dangerous (not adventuresome, but damaging), we will pull back further and further from the edge of activity, and from our own growing edges as well. We find ourselves using only methods and activities which are guaranteed to work, ones that don't call for doing anything new, going any place we haven't been before, stretching our minds, sharing our emotions, having any fun. But when the arena is carefully set we can explore role play, servant ministry, biblical simulation, probing discussion, camping, youth encounter trips—the list is endless.

Dilemmas we dread

What kinds of dilemmas have you faced or do you fear facing? The youth won't show up? They will come but there's a hassle and you're the only adult around? You plan a trip but there aren't enough drivers? You go to camp, but people bring along beer or drugs? We need to name our fears and then, with roles clear, plan strategies for being mutually accountable.

There are some things which no one can foresee: a tired battery, a sudden thun-

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[1] I use the terms "safe," healthy" and "trustworthy," each of which is important, interchangeably. In their book *Educating Christians: the Intersection of Meaning, Learning and Vocation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), p. 91, Jack Seymour, Margaret Ann Crain and Joseph Crocket use the term "hospitable and just space."

derstorm, a case of appendicitis. But even when the most unusual, unanticipated things happen, in a healthy, communal environment the group will have the trust to choose another option, and wisdom to delegate responsibility.

Paradoxically it is not the most free-wheeling atmosphere that provides the most freedom of activity. The laid-back leader who eschews communal accountability becomes the *de facto* authoritarian by keeping all the power within his or her own head. Negotiating a covenant takes time and work. When trustworthy environments are in place we can justly deal with conflict. It is in the safely bounded arenas where we can kick up a little dust. When the stage is set and everyone knows the plans we can be ready for the impromptu.

So how do we do that? What things do we need to attend?

Setting the arena

Some elements of a healthy environment for youth ministry which need our attention are the: relational, physical/temporal, cognitive, and emotional. There are no doubt others which you will wish to consider.

Relational. Youth ministry is ministry by, with, and among all youth in the parish. It is not ministry merely "about" or "for" youth. It may seem safer to objectify youth and do ministry *for* them, but that is ultimately not healthy, for it deadens rather than helps people grow. God involves and includes all youth. "Parish" means the congregation *and* its neighborhood. It may seem safer to include only the youth within the congregation, not their friends and their friends' friends. But that will eventually drive away even those we intended to keep. The gospel mandate is to do parish ministry, outside the gates. It may seem easier to merely talk *about* youth, but we are called to energize, not objectify.

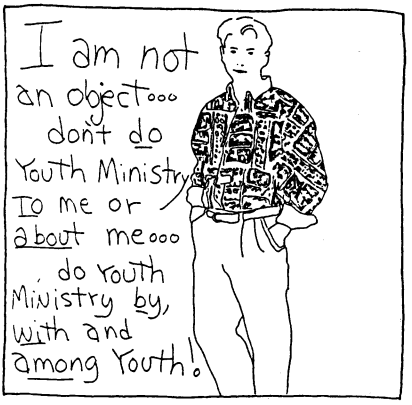
Effective youth ministry connects all ages in the parish in mentoring, serving, teaching and learning relationships. No one is exempt from doing youth ministry; no one is called to do youth ministry alone. The youth ministry arena may be more like a three-ring circus, for there will be many centers of action. The spotlight will be on many, not few. God invites, gathers, cares for all of us while we care for each other.

Physical and temporal. We need to set the time and place we intend to meet. That sounds more simple than we know it to be. Much youth ministry never happens because young people everywhere, in rural or urban areas, are simply too busy. They balk about coming or coming on time (so do adults), but they don't want to be left out. When the group leaves without someone because they weren't given the right time, ministry is hampered.

We can make time for each other, although that may require ingenuity. One small town youth group, whose members ride school buses to four different high schools, meets for an early breakfast at the parsonage. An inner city group meets weekly right after Sunday worship in the fellowship hall. Another group takes turns meeting in different suburban locations near where the young people have Saturday jobs.

The gathering place needs to be accessible, safe, known, and conducive to sharing thoughts and feelings. How we arrange the chairs, whether it's quiet and private enough to talk openly, whether newcomers can find the room—all these hinder or help what eventually happens.

Cognitive. Youth want to be challenged. We are designed to develop mentally and



created to grow. We create trustworthy arenas for youth ministry when all are able to participate at their cognitive level. Because of the inclusive nature of the Christian community people belong who might not choose each other as friends at school. Rather than aiming for the lowest common denominator, with everyone bored, we can encourage each person to share the faith in his or her own words.

The world measures and grades. Christians start with baptism; God's unconditional love is a gift. We therefore have an entirely different meeting of the minds. By acknowledging the presence of diversity and by inviting everyone to be present with all their gifts, the group begins no longer to compare, judge and exclude, but to think of creative ways to use the gifts of all. The very nature of the gospel calls for insights of all kinds. Learning in the Christian community is not linear or incremental. We invite people to bring absolutely every one of their "secular" questions and to root them in the very grace of God.

Emotional. Not only does the environment need to be physically safe, but emotionally trustworthy as well. We may be tempted to play on the aesthetic appetites and emotional rollercoasters of adolescents for our own pleasure (calling that exciting youth ministry), but we thereby abuse those entrusted to our care. We need to establish trustworthy emotional boundaries.[2] When those boundaries are absent or inconsistent, we will live in fear of each other's anger, ambition, or inappropriate use of sexuality and power. But with boundaries in place, we are free to be sexual beings, express our emotions, and share our confidences, knowing we will not betray or be betrayed. A healthy environment means keeping confidences, respecting and supporting one another, guiding, listening, and providing room for each of us to be real.

Theological perspectives

One might say all the above is simply common sense. And it is... but there is theological grounding for this approach to ministry.[3] Our beliefs undergird our decisions. One could call it a Law/Gospel approach to setting arenas for activity.

What kind of a God do we have? Do we have a God of chaos or a God of order? Do we believe we please God by right behavior or do we bring our brokenness and alienation to a God of grace who frees us through forgiveness? Is our youth ministry ingrown and self-serving, or are young people empowered for outreach?

No matter what the content of our talk, the ways we interrelate speak profoundly

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[2] See article by Patti Jung on page 264 of this issue

[3] For further development of this concept see Norma J. Everist, "The Community of Faith as Curriculum," in Marvin L. Roloff, editor, *Education for Christian Living* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1987), 73-81.

about our values, our belief systems, our God. We may say "God loves you unconditionally" and then expect youth to look, behave, and talk in our personal image. That's idolatry. We may encourage youth to be engaged in mission and then sabotage their emerging gifts for leadership. We misuse the law when, failing to provide a consistently healthy arena, we resort to legalistic demands. We misinterpret the gospel when we relate only at a superficially nice level, therefore keeping outside who we really are.

The Law/Gospel dimension provides a more helpful approach:

—Visualize the First Article of the Creed and the First Use of the Law as creating the arena for youth ministry. The first use of the law is as a guide to maintain discipline. We need a curb to keep human beings from hurting one another. This use of the law cannot work salvation, but it can serve as a curb to set the arena, to keep safeguards around the perimeters. By virtue of the First Article of the Creed, believing in the God who created heaven and earth, we are called to create orderly, bounded, carefully planned arenas to live together. God holds and guards us lovingly in our arenas of activity whether those be the church basement, a camp site, or the global village itself, creating sanctuaries for learning, praise, ministry, and mission.

—Consider the Second Article of the Creed. Jesus is present in and through the brother and sister in Christ, even our unknown brothers and sisters in Christ. Once the arena is set we can come together in Christ as we really are. We don't need to hide, nor leave our real fears and hurts outside the gathering. The Second Use of the Law shows us our need for Christ's forgiveness. We don't need to beat each other over the head with God's law. Actually sin, in all its manifestations of abuse, rebellion, alienation, and violence, is so real in the world and inside of us that we need to claim the safe place our covenant-faithful God provides so that we can deal with the results of sin. We can invite, probe, and talk about the issues which trouble us and our world, and then we can let the gospel do its work. The Good News will be real and specific and surprising. We will say it, sing, it, shout it, touch it, act it. We will experience the gospel, forgiveness, new life, healing, and reconciliation in a myriad of ways.

—Envision the Third Article of the Creed, and, if you will, a Third Use of the Law. We are not thrust back into legalisms, rules which measure and judge. We now are empowered to reach out with Good News, seeking to serve in life-giving ways. God's will is no longer foreign nor intimidating, but friend. The Third Article of the Creed makes real our belief that by grace we are the church, the communion of saints forgiven, empowered, and equipped for life-giving ministries in the world. We go forth together in ministry in the community, with a clear message of hope. This energy sends us beyond even the boundaries of our own arenas. And having sent each other out, we will desire to return for more growth, support, and love.

Theologically, then, we finally realize that we are not setting an arena for youth ministry at all. Community is a gift. We are set free from our own expectations and fears to claim and to become the trustworthy arena for youth ministry which God in Christ has already given to us.

Youth Ministry: Why is It So Hard?

Paul G. Hill
Director of the Center for Youth Ministries
Wartburg Theological Seminary

Introduction

It is no secret, within the church or most school systems, that working with youth is hard work. More than one pastor has struggled through confirmation instruction and looked for the day when he or she could move out of youth ministry. The road of youth ministry is littered with the remains of formerly energetic but now burnt-out youth volunteers and professionals. At the age of 43 I still enjoy working with youth, but I am fully aware of the hazards and difficulties of this ministry. Over the long haul of my ministry, it has helped me to understand that youth ministry is nothing less than counter-cultural or alternative-cultural ministry. With this insight and a lot of networking, I believe we can develop endurance and gain joy in working with youth.

I make a distinction in this article between the terms counter-cultural and alternative-cultural. Counter-cultural ministry is ministry with an attitude. It has a political agenda ascribed to it. Counter-cultural ministry is the more radical form of the two. The work of the Sojourners community in Washington, D.C., would be an example. Alternative-cultural ministry does not have the intentional political agenda. Our Lutheran camps are expressions of alternative-cultural youth ministry. The time youth spend at a camp is exposure to another way of life; it is an alternative. I leave it to the reader to decide whether their youth ministry is or should be counter-cultural or alternative-cultural ministry.

How is youth ministry counter/alternative-cultural? Consider adolescence.

American adolescence

In *Adolescence and Culture* Aaron Esman points out that all cultures have developed systems or methodologies whereby the younger generation is incorporated or enculturated into the larger adult social and communal system. Often identified with specific rites or ceremonies, the passage of the young into adulthood and absorption into the larger community takes place during the time of puberty.

The goals of these initiations may vary, however. For example, a male youth of ancient Sparta, Esman notes, "was destined to become a soldier in the army of a military despotism."[1] To this end Spartan youth

were organized in their teens for military training. Young males were seen as being in transition, but not in a period of experimentation and search for identity.

Other cultures have identified the goal of this youthful transition to be a realignment of affiliation. "In totemic societies of Australia the emphasis in these rites is on separation from the mother and symbolic rebirth into the world of men,"[2] comments Esman. Yet others, such as Eastern European Jewish mothers, mark their own feelings of ambiguity towards their newly menstruating daughters by slapping their cheeks. They express envy in this action and reestablish their adult authority—if only for the time being.

The common thread remains, however, that all societies have markers, rites, ceremonies or initiations for youth to enter adulthood and the larger community. As a result, "adolescence" as the Western world has come to think of it, is not a universal phenomenon. Many societies have developed clean, simple ways of incorporating the young into the world of the adults. Esman notes that "The bulk of evidence supports the view that adolescence, as we know it, is a cultural invention."[3]

Adolescence, understood as an extended period of time when pubescent youth experiment, explore, search, and prepare for the adult world, is a uniquely Western phenomenon. It is our unique creation, opportunity, and dilemma. In America it is the product of industrialization and the impact this economic form has had upon families, communities, and individuals.

Prior to industrialization American teens were seen as economic assets, and the church often played a helpful role in ushering teens into adulthood. Dr. Durwood Buchheim, professor emeritus at Wartburg Seminary, told me the story of when he knew he had entered the adult world. Growing up on a farm in South Dakota he knew he had made the passage when he was told to drive the tractor. He was now an economic asset. There was no question that he was an adult and expected to perform like an adult. In small towns, confirmation would often mark this passage. Dr. Ralph Quere, of Wartburg Seminary, notes that as late as 1937 his cousin was given long pants at his confirmation to replace his knickers. He was an adult. My wife Elaine told me she was given her first pair of high-heel shoes at confirmation. She was an adult.

In 1904 G. Stanley Hall gave to Americans the term "adolescence," describing this stage of youth development as "*Sturm and Drang*" (storm and stress). Normal adolescence for American youth was thought to be a time of turmoil, stress, conflict with authority and the larger society, sexual exploration, self-doubt, and broad swings of mood and concern. A popular myth of the 1960s and 70s which extended Hall's understanding of adolescence was the concept of the "generation gap." This gap is characterized by youth receiving their primary cues from their peers. Youth and adults are unable or unwilling to communicate with one another.

Hall's work has been disputed. More recent studies conclude that rebellion and upheaval are not the norm for youth growing up in an industrialized society. Notes Esman: "Most adolescents, even in our society, seem to have developed... a rather quiet transition from childhood to adulthood marked by mild rebelliousness... of independence in early adolescence."[4] It

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[1] Aaron H. Esman, *Adolescence and Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 5.

[2] Esman, 13.

[3] Esman, 16.

[4] Esman, 32.

seems "storm and stress" gets a lot of press and attention but distorts our picture of youth.

As a youth minister from the late 60s to the present, I would also question the legitimacy of the existence of "the generation gap." This is more of a caricature than a reality. Parents and adults who communicate in an authentic, caring way are effective in working with youth in a variety of settings. I recently had the privilege to certify for youth ministry a 66 year-old retired Wisconsin Dairies executive who has taught senior high Sunday School for 40 years. The kids love him and he them. The "generation gap" may be more of an excuse for youth and adults not willing to make the effort to communicate with one another.

Although we have debunked some of the myths regarding adolescence and youth, it is true, nevertheless, that in Western societies youth are experiencing a longer and more protracted period in life where they are neither fish nor fowl, neither child nor adult. Adolescence and young adulthood extends from the age of 13 to 25 or later. That is a long time to be in limbo with only the receiving of a driver's license and legal permission given to consume alcohol to mark any transitional stage.

What is significant for our discussion is to note that American youth are no longer seen as economic assets in their teens, rather they are economic liabilities. Their youthful years are increasingly lengthened as they prepare for immersion into a technologically sophisticated society. Those unable to prepare for this mainstream fall to the side in ghettos of poverty and despair. Within these enclaves different markers for transition to adulthood are developed which may have little to do with the dominant culture. In its larger context, however, the goal of our society is to turn everyone into an economic asset, and this gives us a clue as to what we have developed as markers into adulthood for today's youth.

I would argue that developing the passion and ability to be a consumer is one of the predominant ways in which youth move into the American adult mainstream today. It has become a universal marker for those who wish to grow up. The process of moving up on the economic ladder is a core value for our society. Many baby boomers, and I include myself in this group, are the full and grateful recipients of this gift from the generation that came before us. However, the noble goal for generations of American parents trying to give their kids a better life is being distorted. We are communicating to our children that their primary job is to become the next generation of consumers. Ask many parents today what they want for their children and they'll say, "I just want them to be happy." And happiness is equated with the consumption of resources, entertainment, adventure, meaningful experiences and fun. If you do or have these things, you are an adult in our society.

The second way youth become adults in our society is that they become individuals. To be an adult in America is to stand alone, be differentiated, be an island of independence and autonomy. We enculturate our children into our society by teaching them to move as single cells without connection to the larger body or common purpose. We teach them to drive around like bumper cars at the fair, following their own guide, bumping into others (intentionally or otherwise) without any larger traffic plan or destination. To be an individual is enough. Become a consuming individualist and you are an adult in America. Your passage is complete. I refer the reader to Robert Bellah's *Habits of the Heart* for an in-depth discussion of this matter.

Could it be that American youth minis-

try has bought into this value system as well? A complete analysis of this question goes beyond our current scope. A few questions for the thought mill will have to suffice. How often do we develop our youth programs based upon the criteria that "the kids'll have fun"? Do we design our youth ministries to entertain? Do we spend much of our preparation time designing program *for* the youth? Do our Christian educational models emphasize individual learning? Do we offer ways in which youth can enter the adult world of our congregations, or do we mirror the larger culture and "stretch their adolescence"?

Developing a response

I am convinced that youth ministry in this society is increasingly alternative ministry, if not counter-cultural ministry. That is why it is so hard to do. That is why so many youth ministers burn out and so many church leaders stay away from it. Churches and parents who clamor for more effective youth ministries in their churches may not like what they get, because that ministry will call into question the adult world's core enculturation values of consumerism and individualism.

What are the broad stroke outlines of this alternative ministry? Growing out of a vision of the gospel of Jesus Christ, youth ministry in this society emphasizes relationships, community development, discovering gifts, and discipleship.

Relationships. Whereas the society designs us to be freestanding individuals whose purpose is self-fulfillment, Christian youth ministry lifts up the corporate body of Christ of which we are a part. Ironically, many of the teenagers with whom I speak truly seek this sense of connectedness. I recall as a camp director reading thousands of evaluations of campers. When asked what the best part of camp was, 95% responded it was the relationships they developed with friends and staff. The recent and growing problem of gang development reflects a similar need. Gangs provide relationships, a community, an identity and a purpose.



Relational youth ministry involves caring adults walking the faith pilgrimage with youth. One congregation I know has identified and trained more than 100 adult mentors to be connected with the 100 youth of the congregation. The ministry is one on one. After an initial three month trial period, the hope is that a mutually supportive and mentoring relationship develops where youth and adults share gifts and travel together in faith. Whereas adolescence is ex-

tended in the dominant culture, through this mentoring relationship the youth really enter the adult world as expressed through the church. Contrast this model with the "hire a youth worker" model of youth ministry. The mentoring model involves the whole congregation in the lives of young people, while the 'hire a youth worker" model reflects the consumer mentality—we can hire someone to "raise our kids in faith." In spite of the repeated failures of the "hire a youth worker" model, we repeat the attempt, as if it is simply a matter of finding the right person. Can we think of innovative ways of replacing or combining these two models so that effective and alternative youth ministry can take place?

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The power of relational youth ministry affects the adults as well as the youth. I recall visiting with a friend in his mid 20s who was going to teach junior high Sunday School. Up to that point his lifestyle reflected the dominant cultural value, individualistic consumerism. His comment to me was, "Paul, I have to clean up my act! These kids are looking up to me." He was well aware of the tension between his faith life and his cultural values, and he knew that issue had to be resolved within himself. Happily, he chose to be an alternative leader. He took his corporate responsibilities seriously. He was transformed by his own call to youth ministry.

Are adult Christians willing to be transformed and be "role-models" of alternative ways of living? This question can get personal. One reflection of our Lutheran adult loyalties and value system can be seen in how we use our financial resources. The congregations of the ELCA, as a whole, have enough money in savings and investment accounts to generate in earnings the equivalent of the entire churchwide annual budget, over $70 million. Do our investment strategies and use of earnings reflect our propensity towards consumerism and individualism expressed through myopic congregationalism, or do these strategies have a corporate, relational focus? I am not suggesting that we ought to turn these earnings over to the churchwide ELCA. I am suggesting that how we manage our affairs is what our children will learn. What value system do our investment strategies reflect? The dominant culture? Alternative or counter-cultural options?

It was an embarrassing question indeed when a senior high student came to his pastor and asked why the congregation was spending $50,000 to get 14 parking spaces for the church when they had been taught of larger pressing needs for ministry.

If we don't understand why our youth are uninterested in church, perhaps it is because they don't see anything different in us. One can see how youth ministry has the potential to upset the status quo. Is there the possibility that our youth ministry may expose our idolatry to a glaring light?

Community Development. Youth ministry in this society can emphasize the nurturing

of community. Increasingly we are becoming a society of individuals or freestanding enclaves standing in tension with other enclaves. This is what our youth see and emulate. The enclaves are defined by political choices, physical prowess, race, gender, or some other criterion. Could it be that our church is just one more enclave in a sea of enclaves? Community development has to do with becoming an "intentional family," as Roland Martinson of Luther Seminary likes to say. Community development has to do with identifying and incorporating youth into the larger body of Christ worldwide. This kind of community development runs counter to the dominant values of individualism and individual consumer choices.

A number of years ago my daughter taught me the importance of this sense of community. After completing our typical American consumer orgy on Christmas eve we headed off to church for the candlelight vigil. My seven year-old was slow getting into the car because she had been digging something out of her room to bring to church. During the service the offering plates were passed, and she pulled out of her pocket a dollar bill. This represented a good part of her total life savings at that point. She put it into the offering plate. I said, "Amber, that's a lot of money for you to give!" She said, "that's okay, Dad, I don't really need it." She had a clear sense of the community and her responsibilities to it for which I never gave her credit.

If community development is the goal to help incorporate (dare we say enculturate?) our youth into the life of Christ, then creating small groups is the strategy. Jesus was a small-group leader. His core ministry took place in small groups. It was effective. A congregation I recently worked with is combining small groups with adult mentoring. They have trained 16 adult leaders to each work with groups of 4 confirmation age youth. (Note: you can get the whole group into one car!) Their youth worker or pastor does a large group presentation and then they move into small groups for study, reflection, and interaction. Perhaps those of us in youth ministry might consider putting more of our efforts into community building through small group development as opposed to program/entertainment development.

Discovering Gifts. All children are often asked in and out of church, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" The question presupposes that whatever we want to be will be our individual choice ("you'll be what you make of yourself") and that whatever we want will come in the future. In other words, the question reinforces the dominant value of individualism while postponing arrival into adulthood in the process. In my more cynical moments I wonder if the question has changed today. Have we taught our youth to now ask, "What do I want to have?" Secondly, "Depending upon what I want to have, what will I decide I want to do?" The individualistic consumer, fully enculturated, stands before us.

An alternative for youth ministry is to help adolescents ask the question, "What talents or gifts (charisms) has God given to me and how does God plan on using me?" The question presupposes that what we have and are is a gift. Secondly, it presupposes that the gift has a purpose and that purpose goes beyond ourselves. We usher our youth into adulthood when they discover they have gifts—and that those gifts have a purpose *now*. I'll never forget the day that our younger elementary church choir took leadership singing the liturgy while the congregation sang the responses. No longer were they just cute kids performing for their parents, they were gifted people

> No wonder our youth do not hang around our churches. Who wants to be pious?

using those gifts to help us worship God. We had moved out of the entertainment/consumer mode and into the relational/communal mode of youth ministry. Faith is transmitted when faith is expressed, explored together, and practiced.

Discipleship. Service, accountability, teamwork, partnership... these words are difficult to fit into the lexicon of individualistic consumerism. Yet these acts of living out the faith help our youth fully enter the life of the church, even as adolescents. Teens have two major needs: to have a sense of belonging and a sense of identity. Both needs are met through living out their discipleship. Last fall I was contacted by a church leader who was lamenting the disarray of their youth program. The kids were disrespectful and uninterested in the life of the church community in spite of the fact that they had a good core of adult leaders. As good students of the individualistic/consumer enculturation school well on their way to being absorbed into the dominant adult world, there was no reason that these youth would be interested in the ministry of the church. This leader made an appointment with me to lead the group through a community-building process. However, before that time came they managed to get enough of the group together to try a mission/servant event to Mexico. The group was transformed. My services were not needed because through the act of discipleship all the pieces had come together. An alternative vision had developed. Even as "adolescents in waiting" they had seen a truly adult role for themselves in the present as servants, disciples, community caretakers. They were empowered to lead... now.

Conclusion

Youth ministry is hard work. There are strong forces postponing the adulthood of our youth. There are strong forces developing our youth into proper consuming individualists. Into this milieu steps the underpaid youth worker, volunteer, overworked pastor, or camp counselor. Their ministry with young people is an alternative- if not a counter-cultural endeavor. Often the congregation has bought into the dominant cultural vision of adulthood and expects the church to bring a sense of piety to the budding consuming individualist. No wonder our youth do not hang around our churches. Who wants to be pious?

My point is that the Christian family and congregation, not just the youth worker, are doing youth ministry one way or another. Lack of involvement by parents and adults or unquestioned loyalty to the dominant cultural values of individualism and consumerism are forms of teaching our youth how to enter the adult world.

There is another way. With the vision and power of the gospel and an intentional emphasis on relationships, community development, gift recognition, and discipleship, we can usher our youth through adolescence and into adulthood to their benefit and to the glory of Christ. Long before the culture says they have graduated, they will be living as Christian adults.

Three Thuds, Four D's, and a Rubik's Cube of Children's Sermons

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"So... do you do children's sermons?" When you work with youth, it's a question you are certain to hear. And once your head stops reeling and your heart resumes beating, you may rightly sense a battle brewing in that innocent query. Preaching and young people has become one of those What's Wrong with Our Church Today topics, and the reactions to it are positively shrill. Read the recent literature on children's sermons, or start a conversation about them in your congregation, and you'll see what I mean. No one is wanting for an opinion. For some, such sermons are unwelcome intrusions into the worship, questionable at best and more likely a perversion. For others, ending the practice is unthinkable except as a way of displaying one's callous disregard for youth. The battle lines are drawn, but with few productive results.

I refuse to enlist in either camp. Detractors of children's sermons miss the challenge, it seems to me. Whether or not this fairly recent innovation is a good idea is irrelevant. Some are being done poorly, to be sure; others resentfully; still others brilliantly. But the fact is, they are being done, Sunday after Sunday, despite any ballyhoo to the contrary. Children's sermons are here to stay for the foreseeable future, and the challenge is what to do with that reality, like it or not. Supporters of children's sermons, I hasten to add, are equally off the mark. It takes considerable imaginative energy to regard such sermons as an aid to broad-based youth ministry. We must be frank about the actual practice here. Children, mostly between the ages of three and nine (a mere six year span!), come forward for a brief period during a liturgy in which they otherwise have no significant place. They then typically hear that the faith amounts to tepid moralisms and admonitions to social compliance. The unspoken message is no less harmful, an implicit admission that they're too young to get anything else out of the worship until, as if by magic (and in the midst of adolescence!), they become faithful young adults. And this one event each week is going to enliven all our youth to active and full participation? Again, a stiff dose of reality is needed.

Children's sermons, especially as currently practiced, are no single, miraculous remedy for what ails our youth, and we had best disavow such fantasies early on.

The question for us here and now about children's sermons is not "Ought they be done?" but the more difficult "*How* ought they be done?" That is, how can children's sermons represent a fuller form of proclamation, regardless of the sometimes dubious, sometimes delightful role they play? Both detractors and supporters miss this issue, this fundamental challenge of seeing children's sermons *as sermons* and nothing less. Indeed, many of the problems with their current use are virtually the same as those facing any sort of sermon. In a similar vein, a willingness to embrace the full proclamatory potential of children's sermons will go far toward ridding them of questionable practices and occasional excesses. We need to look seriously—not somberly, but with careful discernment—at children's sermons as moments for announcing the gospel. Anything else distorts the church, fails youth ministry, and is, if I may be bold, a counterfeit.

To make this clearer, briefly consider the "thud" of a sermon. Most any listener can isolate the moment (or moments) in a sermon when it fell flat. Perhaps a connection wasn't made, perhaps an expectation wasn't met, perhaps an opportunity to end in timely fashion wasn't seized. Any moment of failure that causes listeners to disengage is the "thud" of a sermon. Children's sermons usually have three. The first comes after the reading of the appointed texts once the children are settled in their places. The preacher then begins, "In the lesson I just read..." *Thud!* We blissfully assume the children were actually listening earlier and, like us, expect a connection between the readings and the sermon. Undaunted by this, the preacher then goes on to display some sort of object and ask "Now, what am I holding here?" *Thud!* Even if the children were oriented to the lessons, they now abandon that orientation and focus instead on the object before them. In the worst of cases, what follows are questions about the object that cause children to wonder how they can safely answer without humiliation. And for those who are still following things to this point, the sermon concludes: "It's just like that with..." *Thud!* Children, many of whom are not ready to handle abstract connections, simply cannot negotiate this leap in sermonic logic and turn instead to wave at Mom and Dad.

My purpose in noting the three "thuds" of children's sermons is not to urge the elimination of such preaching, but to show the challenges these sermons face in common with all forms of preaching. Children's sermons go "thud" not just by ignoring common-sense guidelines about transitions or developmental psychology, but primarily because they overlook the duties of any sermon in any time or place. To be sure, our own personal lists of the many duties of a sermon might differ at several points. Even so, I think there are four tasks most would consider essential, and to which children's sermons are equally beholden. (1) Sermons deeply engage the biblical text in order to announce the gospel. (2) Sermons use active, effective language purposefully shaped to achieve this evangelical goal. (3) Sermons attend to a specific context, sensitive to the hearers' experiences and abilities. (4) Sermons participate in a larger flow of language and ritual from which they are inseparable. Now, what would be the impact upon children's sermons of taking these four tasks seriously? Let's consider each in order.

First, children's sermons will be *dangerous*. I don't say this lightly. If we are earnest about biblical preaching to children,

then let us acknowledge the stakes. Gone is the thinly-veiled moralizing in order to make better citizens. In its place, children will find their lives traced on the horizon of scripture as God's own people—an experience that runs decidedly against the grain. It runs against the grain by recognizing that children know the sin and evil of the world and are unafraid to talk about it. It runs against the grain by treating children as more than just future consumers, but as ones worthy and longing to hear good news. It runs against the grain by inviting them to pin their hopes on a particular person, Jesus, and not on generic principles like niceness or warmth. It runs against the grain by equipping them to confront the darkness with mercy and forgiveness, a tactic the world considers nothing short of neurotic. Given all this, no wonder children's sermons are so often bland and tame. Why would we ever want to mess up our kids? Make no mistake: biblical, evangelical preaching will not create passive children whose faith has accommodated and whose hope is hollow. Its potential is truly disruptive.

Second, children's sermons will be *difficult*. Of course, we already know this, but I mean difficult in another sense. To put it bluntly, children's sermons take work. They must emerge from a process every bit as rigorous as that allotted for creating those twenty minute pulpit stem-winders. Truth be told, even greater effort is needed for children's sermons because we must imaginatively enter a world that is generally devalued and even despised. What is needed is a discipline, a pattern of planning that is consistently followed, come what may. Let that discipline begin, as with any sermon, by engaging the text. Dally with it, listening for what is wonderful, terrible, awe-inspiring, gracious. Consider the characters and events as a child would, and seek the help of children at this early stage. Next, dream about what it might take to help a child experience that text the same way you did. Place no limits on what you might try, bringing your senses and emotions fully to



bear. Having done that, then assess the resources for carrying out what you've imagined. And by resources, I don't mean props. (Remember the second "thud.") No, your resources are the words you choose: strong, active, vivid, poetic. What's more, your resources are the children before you and their families and friends in the pews. Can they help you carry out what you've dreamed of doing? Finally, give it shape. Have a goal for your preaching and a plan for getting there, but one with flexibility and fallback positions built in. Practice it, so that surprises can be handled with grace and care. My point by now should be clear. Children's sermons that result from a few ideas hastily assembled moments before the worship begins convey that the children are as much an afterthought as the sermon

intended for them. We would not dream of entering the pulpit so recklessly, nor should we so disparage our children.

Third, children's sermons will be *discriminatory*. To revise the slogan of liberation theology a bit, such preaching will display a "preferential option for the young"—ours, and God's. If we are unable to convey how the gospel matters to the weakest, most helpless members of our society, what possible difference can it make to anyone else? So for once, at least for the brief moments of the children's sermon, let our attention be strictly upon these least of all people, with no winks or sidelong glances trying to evoke a chuckle from the congregation. Attending to children in this way won't happen through weekly chancel encounters alone. Like any relationship with any parishioner, it takes time and even—dare we say it?—visitation. Children know when we respect and enjoy them for who they are right now, not who they will one day become. They sense whether we honor their feelings, desires, and genuine spiritual hunger, or just wish to place them into a cognitive pigeon-hole for purposes of crowd control. Only they can help us discover the words and symbols that speak deeply to their unique, individual experiences, and will resist being homogenized by cute stories that "all children" should love. Preaching scholarship has long noted that sermons are listener-centered. Children's sermons need to heed that message, too. Our best intentions mean nothing if we have made children's ears less important than our mouths.

Fourth, children's sermons will be *deep-seated*. One of our peculiar Protestant afflictions is overvaluing the sermon while undervaluing the larger liturgy in which it occurs. Thus, worship becomes a business agenda to be endured, while preaching becomes the main event, expected to address everything else lacking in the church—a burden it simply cannot bear. Given this, no wonder the children's sermon has become our weapon of choice in the war for our youth. We want to use the very best. But this thinking ignores the profoundly embedded nature of all preaching, including children's sermons. Such sermons exist alongside the many other ways we proclaim our faith: stories and songs, prayers and conversations, acts of mercy and discipleship to which we may not give a second thought, but which children quickly notice and long remember. This larger message began well before the children came forward and will continue long after they return to the pew. Without consistency between that message and the children's sermon located therein, the latter has no real hope of impact. What is more, these sermons participate in the dynamic flow of worship that has its own sensory and social ecology, its own active and rhythmic choreography. At its best, worship brings us to the threshold of wonder, the reorienting experience of tasting God's reign, if only in part. Children's sermons that forsake such awe in order merely to be entertaining are like a gutted trout, lovely but lifeless.

If they are to represent a fuller form of proclamation, if they are to take seriously the four essential tasks of any preaching, then children's sermons will necessarily be dangerous, difficult, discriminatory, and deep-seated. To these four "D's" about sermons let me add a fifth about the preacher. Those whose proclamation focuses on children must learn to be *discerning*. Whenever we meet fixed opinions about children's sermons, pro or con, we need the nerve and critical consciousness to ask two subversive questions: "Why is it done this way?" and "How do we broaden our vision?" Such questions are raised not to rock the boat, but out of a wider concern for healthy, congre-

gationally-owned youth ministry. As part of a comprehensive approach for speaking good news to all our youth, can we imagine innovative forms of children's sermons?

Recall for a moment the fad puzzle of the early eighties, the Rubik's cube. Imagine that the three layers running top-to-bottom represent diverse ages of young people: *children* (the traditional audience for children's sermons), *adolescents* (age ten through middle school) and *young adults*. Scant attention is shown the latter two groups in any preaching, yet each has distinctive spiritual issues, and neither can simply be considered "adults in waiting." Next, imagine that the three layers running side-to-side stand for various preaching contexts: *targeted* (a discrete group of recipients within a larger gathering, as with most children's sermons), *mixed* (when we try to reach multiple generations at once), and *segregated* (where only one age group is present). Yet we hardly consider the latter two settings, ignoring the way multivalent symbols can speak powerfully to diverse hearers, and overlooking the rich opportunities in educational, camping, or retreat events where youth alone are the congregation. Finally, imagine that the three layers of our cube running front-to-back signify different partnerships: sermons that come *to* the hearers (again, typical children's sermons and their passive recipients), emerge *with* them (a sharing together in the process), or are even done *by* them (with youth themselves as the preachers). To think that preachers alone make sermons happen is an illusion. All preaching is collaborative, and we need to seek the various gifts in the assembly that can help children's sermons unfold.

With such a Rubik's cube in mind, it is appalling to consider how limited our vision of children's sermons has been, where only *children* participate in *targeted* proclamation that happens *to* them. And yet there are, by my count, more than a score of other options available! What would happen if our so-called "adult" sermons were so rich in naming death and life that they spoke simultaneously to every hearer, whether age six or sixty? What would happen if our youngest children heard their siblings and baby-sitters witness in plain and playful terms to the hope that is within them? What would happen if, at a junior high lock-in, we mutually created a faith drama that only we in that private, precious time would share? What would happen? It would certainly be a fuller form of proclamation. Indeed, it would be sweet, good news.

If we are unable to convey how the gospel matters to the weakest, most helpless members of our society, what possible difference can it make to anyone else?

Youth Ministry and Sexual Boundaries

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Everyone knows this is a "hot" topic. The sexual misconduct of church workers is frequently a top religious news story. But many presume it is an issue for *others*. In contrast I believe everyone needs to wrestle with this issue; it does not just concern sexual predators. Establishing and respecting role-appropriate sexual boundaries is an ordinary task of the moral life.

The issue of sexual boundaries is an issue of personal and professional ethics. All of us—married and single, although in obviously different ways—are called to responsible sexual behavior governed by the norms of gratitude, justice, love, fidelity, authenticity, etc. We are required to establish sexual boundaries in accord with those norms. But beyond that, both lay and ordained ministers of the church have a responsibility to set and maintain sexual boundaries appropriate to their leadership role in the church, and this would certainly include youth workers.

In a way it makes no substantive difference in the development of this argument that our focus here is on youth ministry. Yet it must be noted that the negative consequences associated with boundary violations are intensified in the context of youth ministry. Part of what young people are learning to do is to recognize and establish their own sexual boundaries, and to discern and respect the sexual boundaries of others.

Because of their youth, a violation may be particularly harmful, and the spiritual stakes are high. An important dimension of a young person's developmental agenda is sabotaged by these violations because ministers are role models for the youth of the community and have a formative impact on them. Because they are still exploring what counts as appropriate boundaries, they are especially vulnerable to such irresponsible behavior.

What constitutes an appropriate boundary is a matter of considerable debate these

days. The church is "in transition" around this issue, and vigorous moral deliberation about this topic within the church would be healthy for all concerned. Toward that end, I offer the following argument.[1]

Off limits

All parishioners regardless of their age or marital status, including the youth of a congregation, their parents, and members of the congregation volunteering with the youth program should be sexually "off limits" to all church workers. This is required whether the minister is married or single, young or old. Why? Sexual relations violate the boundaries requisite for a healthy ministerial relationship. Ask any clergy spouse and they will testify to the virtual impossibility of a person functioning both as a person's lover and pastor. Church workers who pursue sexual relationships with parishioners deceive themselves when they think that they can sustain this "dual" relationship.

This is *not* just a matter of statutory rape, having an affair, or committing adultery, though these may be additional ethical concerns when ministerial boundaries are violated. Whenever a minister's relationship with a parishioner becomes sexual, the boundaries necessary for church leadership and pastoral care have been violated. This is so for two reasons.

Nonreciprocal risk-taking. First, when people become lovers, the *mutual* fulfillment of both partners is the goal of that relationship. The risks associated with their mutual vulnerability should be reciprocal. This is not the goal of the relationship between a minister and his or her congregant. In a ministerial relationship, strict boundaries are established so that the parishioner's needs—and his or her needs *alone*, rather than those of the church leader—are front and center. That is what enables parishioners to be so open with their ministers.

Like lovers, congregants risk being vulnerable with and dependent on their ministers, but they can do so for very different reasons. Lovers create safety for each other by engaging in reciprocal risk-taking. In contrast parishioners find that their safety is ensured by the ministerial commitment to and exclusive focus on the fulfillment of their needs. This is what it means to describe the ministerial relationship as a fiduciary relationship. Such a trust is betrayed if the minister allows the relationship to become sexual. Ministers take advantage of the fact that a trusting congregant's guard is down when they sexualize the relationship.

An imbalance of power. Ministers ought not relate sexually to parishioners for a second reason. There is an imbalance or disparity of power in the ministerial relationship. Ideally during courtship there is a reciprocal establishment of trust based on the safe keeping of intimacies mutually (and often gradually) shared. Parishioners enter into relationship with their ministers with their guard down. They presume they are safe with their pastors. When a pastoral relationship becomes sexual, the minister almost always has quite a bit of knowledge about their parishioner. In contrast the parishioner has little or only very selective knowledge of their minister. He or she is dependent and does not stand on a level playing field with his or her pastor. Given

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[1]This article is indebted to the thoughtful work of Marie M. Fortune, *Is Nothing Sacred? When Sex Invades the Pastoral Relationship* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989) and Karen Lebacqz and Ronald G. Barton, *Sex in the Parish* (Louisville, KY: Westminister/John Knox Press, 1991).

the special vulnerability associated with sexual intimacies, there can be no meaningful consent to sexual contact given this imbalance, regardless of the age of the parishioner. Furthermore, because the greater power belongs to the minister, the responsibility for boundary violations belongs exclusively to the church leader, regardless of who initiates the sexual activity or whether the congregant appears to willingly consent to it.

Sexuality and spirituality

Similar arguments could be made about other professionals. Students should be sexually "out of bounds" for teachers, patients for their physicians, clients for their therapists etc. Like other professionals, ministers are often viewed as sex objects. This is not simply a matter of physical attractiveness. Whether a church worker is good looking or not, many people experience the power, prestige, authority and influence of the office as sexy.

Furthermore certain aspects of ministry may increase the risk of sexual boundary violation. Like sexual desires, our spiritual desires spring from a well of longing for others and the Other that runs deep within human persons. These yearnings are intertwined. When we awaken one, we inevitably arouse the other. These feelings are easily misinterpreted. Those who preach, preside over rites of initiation, forgiveness and communion, and lead congregations in their ministries of service are gravely mistaken when they underestimate the impact on people's lives of what they do.

In addition ministry offers church workers access to the intimate details of people's lives. Church leaders often converse with parishioners about issues in their lives that those ministers may experience as sexually stimulating. Indeed people bare their souls to their ministers—and that kind of intimacy often proves arousing. Furthermore ministry is often lonely work. Ministers are notorious for their eagerness to please and desire to be liked, as well as their susceptibility to criticism and inordinate fear of rejection. All of which is to say: church workers must be especially clear and vigilant about maintaining appropriate boundaries.

> Whenever a minister's relationship with a parishioner becomes sexual, the boundaries necessary for church leadership and pastoral care have been violated.

Prevention

How can we prevent the violation of appropriate sexual boundaries? Certain work habits may prove effective in helping us cope with inappropriate sexual attractions. Having clear sexual boundaries does not mean ministers must avoid all physical or emotion connection with parishioners. It does mean that ministers must stay focused on the needs of their parishioners, and find soul-mates and spiritual companions outside the congregation.

Specifically, it is important that we know ourselves and recognize the significance for us of consistent emotional closeness. It is important to have this need for intimacy met in personally ethical ways. This will help us set and maintain clear professional boundaries. People who respond in fear or self-hatred to sexual arousal are probably more, rather than less, vulnerable to temptation, because they are not likely to be attending to their needs. In addition we need to stay self-conscious of the power and authority that accompany ministerial work and recognize that ministry is a significant part of our identity. We cannot stop being a person's minister for an hour or two, any more than a person can pretend not to be married for an hour or two.

We need to prepare ahead for intimate situations in which we might feel tempted by establishing clear patterns to and limits for our church work. We need to conduct ourselves in ways that are viewed as "commonly accepted practice." When we are unsure about the propriety of certain activities on our part, then we should consult with our peers or some other person or group who will review our conduct and to whom we will hold ourselves accountable.

We should avoid when possible or be extremely careful about boundary blurring behaviors. Many kinds of dual relationships may "occasion" sin. For example, while we may certainly socialize with and enjoy the company of parishioners, if possible we should not ask parishioners to meet our deepest emotional needs for intimacy. If viable alternatives are not available, then we will probably have to weigh the risks of establishing boundary-blurring friendships against the risks of not having our needs for emotional intimacy met.

We should pay attention to people's sexual signals, and trust our intuitions if they suggest something sexual may be happening with a parishioner. Finally we should not delude ourselves. Despite myths to the contrary, sexual passions are not "bigger than us"—we can not be swept away by them. People can and do keep their pants on. We can make responsible choices.

Single ministers who wish to date a member of their congregation who would otherwise be an appropriate partner have two courses of action from which to choose if no significant counseling relationship has already been established. (1) The parishioner could join a different church in the community and thereby free the minister from professional responsibility to him or her. Or (2) the minister could leave and serve a different congregation, and thereby end his or her ministerial obligation to him or her. Obviously both these options will prove costly to the congregation.

There are divergent viewpoints on whether it is helpful for adults to openly discuss their sexual feelings for one another. Some argue that the seductive power of these feelings is broken when the attraction is named; others contend that what might have been merely a "passing fancy" becomes far more serious when surfaced. However everyone agrees that it is not wise to discuss a sexual attraction to a young person with that same young person. Young people do not yet have firmly established sexual boundaries. It is however often the case that young people may name their sexual feelings for us. We must be prepared in such circumstances to help them maintain and respect boundaries appropriate to the ministerial relationship.

Confirmation as Youth Ministry: The Task of Christian Formation

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When teachers of confirmation assemble, war stories abound. The climate surrounding confirmation classes is stormy on every side. Students come against their will. Parents dread the extra burden of another commitment. Many recall the "good old days" when memorization was required and confirmands had to prove their knowledge. Educators debate the pedagogical value of alternative approaches. And teachers of confirmation wonder if the whole ordeal is worth the agony.

This article seeks to reorient us to some theological, historical, and practical basics in confirmation instruction. No radically new solutions will be proposed. Rather the purpose is to demonstrate that the structure which most congregations already have in place provides the foundation for a vital and necessary form of youth ministry which can play a crucial role in the Christian formation of a new generation—if only we give our programs the time and attention they deserve.

Biblical and theological foundations

Baptism and teaching go together. As we recall the great commission of Matthew 28:19-20, we are quick to recite the imperative of baptism but slow to remember that Jesus continued, saying, "teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you." The combination of baptism and teaching are at the heart of a theology of confirmation. The unconditional promise of God's grace (cf. Rom 6:1-11) meets in confirmation the element of responsible faith. The objective reality of God's visible baptismal word is embraced subjectively in trust. The *Lutheran Book of Worship* (1978) has done well in ritualizing confirmation as the "affirmation of baptism." The current rite points toward the integral relationship between baptism and teaching.

The number of biblical texts used to justify a "sacrament" of confirmation are few and ambiguous (e.g., Acts 8:4-20, Acts

19:1-7, Heb 6:2). Arguments have raged regarding the sequencing of these four elements: (1) baptism with water, (2) the laying on of hands, (3) the reception of the Holy Spirit, and (4) instruction in the faith. Neither the scriptures themselves nor historical practices in the church provide a definitive answer regarding the proper ordering of these components. Suffice it to say that a sound theology of confirmation must be based on a theological foundation which transcends arguments over these controverted passages. Nevertheless, an adequate theology of confirmation must give place to these four elements within its purview.

Historical overview: shifting tides

The earliest evidence of baptismal practice indicates a norm of adults seeking baptism together with their "households" (Acts 16:15, 1 Cor 1:16). Households would seem to include children and servants. Yet in the earliest missionary situation, as the Christian gospel was for the first time heard and received, it makes clear sense to acknowledge adult baptism as the normal practice. The texts from Acts suggest that baptism with water was accompanied by "the laying on of hands." This practice provides a basic antecedent for all later developments.

In the first three centuries the early churches introduced a lengthy and rigorous catechetical process prior to baptism during the Easter vigil. Varying in length from one to three years, the catechumenate allowed for only a gradual initiation into the mysteries of the Christian faith. Catechumens were dismissed from the liturgy prior to the sharing of the holy meal. Preparation and instruction intensified during the Lenten season immediately prior to baptism. The practice of this "arcane discipline" immersed the new believers in a sense of mystery about a life-long Christian journey and accented the break they were making with the surrounding culture. The element of instruction took on major significance. Baptism and teaching were clearly inseparable.

A dramatic change occurred beginning in the fourth century with the favoring of Christianity set in motion by the policies of emperor Constantine. As baptism gradually became a mark of citizenship in the Roman empire, the norm shifted away from adult to infant baptism. Although the number of baptized Christians increased enormously, the seriousness of Christian commitment may have diminished proportionately. When everyone gets baptized, the meaning of baptism gets "watered down." Augustine gives evidence of how this new situation impacted the practice of confirmation. The strong emphasis on instruction which developed in the prior centuries eroded. Confirmation was retained merely as a part of the ritual of baptism. After the washing with water, the newly baptized was anointed with oil and received the laying on of hands. This comes to count as confirmation.

In the Middle Ages, due to the large number of baptisms, bishops delegated to priests the authority to baptize while retaining for themselves the authority to confirm. Because the bishop could only occasionally make the rounds to perform the sacrament of confirmation, a gap in time emerged between baptism and the confirmation ritual. Theologically, this leads to a new interpretation: baptism is effective for the forgiveness of sins while confirmation brings the gift of the Holy Spirit. Hugo of St. Victor thus spoke of confirmation as a separate sacrament from baptism. In the developing medieval theology, confirmation was understood to bestow grace *ex opere operato*

Too often instructors fail to sufficiently engage the full intellectual capacities of confirmands, assuming they are not ready for the challenge.

by the very laying on of hands by the bishop. The need for instruction was rarely emphasized. The role of faith in the life of the confirmed was minimized.

The Lutheran Reformation addressed the lack of instruction provided confirmands. Confirmation was not a proper sacrament but a rite linked integrally to baptism—and increasingly to Holy Communion as well. The prevalent ignorance about the fundamental content of the faith among the baptized was a central motivation behind Luther's writing of the Small Catechism. Confirmation involved a time of instruction in the basics of the faith according to the sections of the catechism: Ten Commandments, Creed, Lord's Prayer, Sacrament of Holy Baptism, Confession and Absolution, Sacrament of the Altar, Morning and Evening Prayers, Grace at Table, and Table of Duties. The rite itself came to take place at the conclusion of a period of instruction.

In the post-Reformation period several forms of confirmation emerged. Frequently the rite became prerequisite for admittance to the Lord's table. In one common practice, the day of confirmation was preceded by a public examination. Although the context and forms had changed dramatically since the practice of the earliest church, confirmation reacquired the element of intentional preparation in the faith through instruction. The original connection between baptism and teaching given expression in Matthew 28:19-20 was renewed.

Contemporary practice: four dimensions

If the practice of confirmation is to be renewed again for our time, we must creatively interpret this historical heritage and our theological convictions in the vicissitudes of the present. One must be clear from the outset how one understands the very purpose of confirmation. Is it the prerequisite for participation in the Lord's Supper? Is it mainly a rite of passage into adult church membership? Is it an occasion for learning Luther's Small Catechism? Is it a time for building up a congregational youth group?

One might choose to answer "yes" to one or all of these inquiries. Yet, given the context of the contemporary church, existing in a milieu labeled "post-Christian" by many and experienced as such by pastors and church leaders who compete with a plethora of activities as they seek to offer confirmation classes, the primary goal of confirmation in our time needs to be *Christian formation.* In this respect our situation increasingly parallels that of the earliest church, with one major exception. Instead of preparing through instruction new converts for baptism and a Christian lifestyle, we aim to prepare the already baptized for an ongoing conversion to the Christian gospel. Our primary task becomes that of instilling a Christian self-understanding in the lives of young people so that they see

that loyalty to Jesus Christ makes a difference in who they are and everything they do. In this task we dare not assume that the church's youth already see themselves in these terms. Instead, confirmation instruction provides a major opportunity to contribute to the formation of a distinctively Christian identity.

At this point it seems worthwhile to comment on the debate surrounding the appropriate age for confirmation instruction to take place. A strong case has been made that confirmation should begin in early adulthood when an individual is ready to make the kind of serious commitment confirmation implies. At the same time, one could expect a longer period of instruction and a more serious discussion of issues. The renewal of the adult catechumenate in the Roman Catholic, Episcopal, and, increasingly, the Lutheran churches is a movement in this direction.

While the development of a new adult catechumenate is an effort to be applauded in its own right, there are good reasons to renew and not abandon the structure prevailing in most congregations of confirmation instruction between ages 12-15. Young people have entered at this age a new cognitive stage of development that enables them to engage in more abstract reasoning about the faith. Too often instructors fail to sufficiently engage the full intellectual capacities of confirmands, assuming they are not ready for the challenge.

Another important argument for confirmation in the early teen years is to provide the church's accompaniment with young people through the crucible of puberty. While to do so is to enter an emotional roller coaster, if one understands that mood changes and resistance are normal, then the church can provide a valuable service in witnessing to God's accompaniment of young people during this challenging time of transition. Most pragmatic of all is the argument for completing confirmation instruction before the actual rite of passage occurs at age 16, the obtaining of the driver's license.

Congregations do well to focus not only on the confirmation program itself but also on what they can do to prepare younger children for their future confirmation instruction. The best foundation for a successful confirmation program is laid in children's early years. Developing among parents a sense that they are the primary Christian teachers for their children is essential. Parents can be invited together with their young children for classes in how to fulfill the vows made in baptism. Children can be instructed by pastors and teachers with parents present in order to provide families with a common basis for Christian nurture in the home. In Sunday School, children's minds should be filled to overflowing with Bible stories in order to provide a basis for more critical reflection during confirmation years. Already in elementary years, children can be expected to memorize the Ten Commandments, Creed, and Lord's Prayer and can even become familiar with Luther's explanations in the catechism. Bibles can be presented to children at worship as soon as they reach the age where they can read. Instruction in the meaning of Holy Communion prior to confirmation can set the stage for a deeper exploration later. All of childhood can be punctuated with occasions of instruction which establish a pattern continued through the more intense preparation which occurs in confirmation classes.

As one considers the goal of Christian formation as the aim of confirmation instruction, there are four dimensions of a program that deserve careful attention: the intellectual, emotional, social, and spiritual. Each of these dimensions contributes

something essential to the process of Christian formation. We consider each of them in turn.

The intellectual dimension. Young people in early teen years are capable of more challenging intellectual questions than we typically acknowledge. The greater danger is that we aim too low intellectually rather than too high. Already in school they have been introduced to relatively difficult historical and scientific questions. We do well to familiarize ourselves with the intellectual level of the textbooks used in the public schools. Even in their early teen years, young people have the ability to think critically about Bible stories. They generally have a keen interest in discussing, for example, the Genesis creation stories or the story of Jonah and the whale. This provides a golden opportunity to introduce basics of the historical formation of the scriptures: the many types of literature contained in the Bible and their differing purposes, the variety of authorial viewpoints within the one Word of God, and the process by which the church formed its canon. A serious study of the Book of Revelation, for example, provides a tremendous opportunity to introduce the historicity of scripture by examining a book that holds fascination among their peers.

One needs to approach difficult questions without defensiveness. The teacher serves not as one who knows all the answers but as one who models the posture of a lifelong learner who attends to the Bible as God's Word rooted in history. This is not an excuse for ill preparation by the teacher. In fact, the teacher must be so well rooted in historical-critical issues that they pose not a threat but an opportunity for a deeper appreciation for how God reaches us.

By addressing critical questions about the Bible already in confirmation, the church may avoid the sense of betrayal often felt by young adults that the church deceived them about the historical origins of the Bible. The Bible is both affirmed as God's holy and precious Word for us in our lives and interpreted with an awareness of its historical contingency. Young people learn that one does not have to suspend intellectual judgment in order to be a Christian.

The emotional dimension. Confirmation instruction in the early teen years provides emotional accompaniment to young people through the physiological changes of puberty. In terms of Christian formation, the task becomes one of demonstrating the relevance of the Bible and Luther's catechism in addressing the life concerns of young teens. The chosen curriculum should facilitate the correlation of the existential questions of youth with the core of Christian belief in response to these questions, yet without sacrificing intellectual integrity.

As digressions inevitably arise in class discussions, these can be used creatively and consistently to ask the question: "How does a Christian respond in this situation?" For example, if in a discussion of the fourth commandment, a confirmand raises the issue of a school classmate who has run away from home, this can be used to consider how as a Christian, one can befriend those whose home life is so desperate that they seek to run away. Always the focus returns to the responsibility one has as a Christian to respond in a particular way, i.e., with moral conviction yet tempered by forgiveness as "the bottom line."

Given the mood swings and identity struggles of these years, the teacher holds in mind the importance of affirmation in the life of the confirmand. Visiting families in their homes, occasional phone calls to confirmands, and attending school activities send the signal that their lives are im-

portant to the teacher. Before and after class are important times for listening and being available for conversation. From these suggestions, one rightly notices that teaching confirmation can become considerably time consuming, when given the attention it deserves.

Within class itself, one is wise to look for opportunities to affirm individual insights and uniqueness. The message one hopes to communicate throughout the course is that of God's steadfast love for each of the confirmands. Where one fails on this score, one relies on the very same grace of God we trust for our own emotional well-being.

One rightly notices that teaching confirmation can become considerably time consuming, when given the attention it deserves.

The social dimension. If there is anything which is obviously important to teens, it is their relationships one with another. Psychologists speak of the individuation process which takes place as teens separate themselves from their families of origin. Confirmation class can itself become an experiment in the formation of community, i.e., Christian community. The nurture of friendships which takes place through confirmation will be a major determinant of the continued involvement of young people in the life of the congregation beyond the day of confirmation.

Where confirmands do not attend the same public (or private) schools, the task of community building is made more difficult. One must structure community building exercises into the curriculum. Class excursions can contribute to a sense of shared identity. Common cooperation on service projects, either within or outside the congregation, can do even more. In each of these ventures, an emphasis should be placed on the distinctiveness of what this group shares as followers of Jesus Christ.

Christians can have fun together, yet having fun is not the sole reason for our being together. We share in Christ a friend who teaches us, confirmands and teachers alike, how to befriend one another in compassion and forgiveness. Where violations of mutual caring occur, these can become especially poignant moments in learning what it means to be a community that looks to Christ for direction. The experience of community shared in confirmation class becomes a model for the experience of community in the congregation itself. Again, the aim of social activities is the formation of these young people as members of the body of Christ.

The spiritual dimension. Together the intellectual, emotional, and social dimensions contribute to the overall spiritual aim of confirmation: to invoke the power of the Holy Spirit in the ongoing process of forming a baptized child of God into a self-identifying member of Christ's church. As in ages past, we depend on the power of God's Word and the wisdom of Luther's catechism to be vehicles for the Spirit's work in our teaching.

In addition to the suggestions already offered, we would here stress the value of singing together and praying together as a confirmation class. Shared prayer petitions

based on imminent concerns and group songs bring us into the presence of Christ. Confirmands can furthermore be involved in meaningful ways in the worship life of the entire congregation. Confirmands should not be used merely as "token" young people but their gifts integrated into the life of the worshipping community—as acolytes, ushers, readers, assisting ministers, communion assistants, musicians, etc.—each task based on individual charism and proper preparation.

In the process of spiritual development, one ought not neglect the role of heroes in the lives of young people. As alternatives to music idols and movie stars, the church has a host of heroes to offer as models in the persons of the Christian saints. We have been woefully negligent in holding up the saints as models of the Christian life in previous generations. In many cases, video materials are available to enhance our awareness of the lives of the saints. As their lives become known, they serve as examples of how we too are challenged to remain true to the Christian gospel in our new generation. Closer to home, there is much value in the development of mentor relationships between confirmands and local "saints," members of the local congregation who are ready to develop a personal relationship with a confirmand. Materials are available to guide congregations in developing mentoring relationships with confirmands.

Conclusion

From beginning to end, confirmation in all its dimensions should aim toward the spiritual formation of young people as Christians. The study of scripture and the teachings of Luther's catechism remain the backbone of the curriculum. Teaching in connection with baptism, we recall, has been basic to confirmation from the time of the earliest church. Yet a contemporary approach gives due consideration to the emotional and social dimensions as well. Using the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds as guides, confirmation might well conclude with confirmands formulating their own statements of faith. These statements might not only summarize convictions but serve as statements of intent for a lifetime journey in the Christian faith.

The obstacles which we encounter today as we face the task of confirmation instruction are formidable. We cannot assume the support of families in the process. We cannot assume beginning confirmands know even the most basic facts. Yet the challenge of leading confirmation is one we must embrace with as much enthusiasm as we can muster. For what is at stake is of monumental significance: the very transference of the Christian faith itself to a new generation. May we, as generations before us, prove equal to this most fundamental of Christian responsibilities.

Resources

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has the following materials for congregational use, available from the ELCA Distribution Service:

The Confirmation Ministry Task Force Report
Shared Journeys: Mentoring Guide
Six Models of Confirmation Ministry
The Small Catechism in a Hungry World
Tools for Teaching Confirmation

Youth and Worship

Ralph F. Smith†

Ralph Smith was Associate Professor of Liturgics and Dean of the Chapel at Wartburg Theological Seminary from 1984 until he was killed in an automobile accident, November 25, 1994. This article was written by Norma Cook Everist from notes and an audio tape of the three hours he spent with Youth Certification School participants October 26, 1994.

The role of ritual is powerful in shaping our lives. Going around a room and saying our names is a ritual act. Another such gesture would be reaching out and shaking hands. To refuse to shake hands also says something powerful. As we engage in the ritual of shaking hands, initially we may not know one another, but it is a start.

All these things are experienced by people gathered for worship in the profound interplay between daily life and the gathered community. Our Sunday and Monday worlds have much to do with each other. Even when it seems boring or routine, in some way worship affects us. I would like to focus on two things: Sunday morning and the role of youth, along with everyone, in that poignant event of Word and Sacrament gathering.

The work of the people. When I use the word "liturgy" I mean that which Christians do, the work of the people, the work of the gathered assembly. The liturgy is Word and Sacrament, telling the specific story of God in Jesus. How we do that is the "rite." Even within a relatively fixed rite, there is some room for variation. No matter how common the rite, to say we use the *LBW* doesn't mean we all do or experience the same things. Each congregation uses it specifically; we can sense the particular spirit of a worshipping community. "Ceremony" is the way we enflesh the basic rite with such things as gestures, art, and architecture. We can't have liturgy without some rites, and to some degree, without ceremony of some kind.

What is the purpose of the gathering? One purpose of worship is to move us more deeply into life by moving us closer to others and to God so that both others and God come to matter more. The purpose of worship is not to separate us from life. When God brings us closer to Jesus we come closer to one another, and when we come closer to one another we come closer to Jesus. What creates the possibility of community for Christians being lived out in good ways is this central act of gathering around Word and Sacrament.

My experience with youth is that they understand and appreciate this. Like the rest of us, they often feel incredibly lonely and isolated, and they wonder about the meaning of their lives. They need relationships and friends. Often in worship we fail to hold that up in our preoccupation with

mechanical things and through being isolated in pews. It is not very intimate. We have to find ways to overcome some barriers so that we can build community.

Even in a very structured rite like the *LBW* there are many things we can do without going to alternative liturgies. We can simply have an offertory procession once in a while. We can use the Affirmation of Baptism instead of the Brief Order of Confession. The people can come forward and dip their hands in the water. Sacramental connections are powerful ways of ritualizing. If they don't experience it in the liturgy, youth will find other ways to ritualize.

We often have a hard time realizing embodiment, the body side of the sacraments. We are sometimes very word and head oriented. It is important for children to walk forward for the blessing. I remember as a child being left alone in the pew and wondering why.

As people grow into the life of the church, we need to help them know what it is that we do, and not simply "Because I said so!" We come into worship from different paths, as very different individuals, bringing different expectations and all sorts of things from the preceding week. The event of worship is supposed to create the possibility of connectedness while honoring our individuality. We are the body of Christ. We need one another, and we need the other to be the eye, hand, and foot that they are. Christian worship is unique in that it is radically personal and simultaneously radically communal.

The community exists first. We are called into the Body. The liturgy expresses community which already exists, and it also creates community. However, we can't rely on Sunday morning to create community if we have no interaction outside of Sunday morning. The gospel calls us to live out our community. Particular ritual actions help build community, such as the passing of the peace. But symbols can't bear the entire weight. Some people want a symbol to be and do more than it alone can do. Passing Christ's peace in this symbolic way is to say even when we don't like one another very much we are brothers and sisters in Christ. The ritual helps symbolize but can't on its own create. This is the strange tension of ritual. This is true in everything we do, including the eating, the drinking, and the singing.

The context. The context is everything. Just as some people tire of hymns and the liturgy, some people tire of always holding up hands and clapping. What we will need to work at very hard in the ELCA in the next few years is what it means to be Lutheran. There is a tension in the church right now between being faithful to the tradition and being genuinely culturally relevant, not just for the sake of youth, but for all of us. That tension is behind the questions about contemporary liturgies.

Worship will not be immediately accessible to everyone, so that you know exactly what is going to happen and so that you feel right at home. I don't think you should ever feel right at home in a community you don't know. That's also true even in families. If you are a Christian, and not a stranger to the faith, going to a new worshipping community is somewhat like going into someone's kitchen. You may not know exactly where things are, but there is enough to tell you it's a kitchen. There are the stove and refrigerator... the altar, the pulpit. But you don't know where the pots and pans, knives and forks are. There is a sense of familiarity—that's important—but there is also a sense of strangeness. You need to live in the community a while to find out where everything is and to feel at home.

In practicing hospitality to the stranger we need announcements and so forth so that people can enter the community.

Kyrie and Gloria. We sing these two words almost every Sunday. " Kyrie" means crying out to God in our stress and sadness, "Lord, have mercy!" On the other hand, "Gloria" is a shout of praise and thanksgiving. Take these two words and think about your life. What are the "Kyries" in your life? What is a "Gloria," that about which all you can do is utter a word of thanks? In any group I have ever been in, when we take time to share our Kyries and Glorias with one another we allow people to enter into each other's lives. It's not a counseling session but an exercise in community building as, in pairs, people listen to one another. As people begin to hear each other, they feel more comfortable sharing, too, particularly if this sharing is done regularly.

Over time how people experience the Kyrie and Gloria on Sunday morning is more rich and varied if they have done this with each other in a group outside of Sunday morning. Frequently the most important things that are going on in our lives are never talked about, never shared, never integrated with worship; but once we do, worship is a richer experience, more connected to daily life.

The freedom to be outrageous. We need the freedom to be both playful and even outrageous in working with youth in worship. We need also to ask the hard questions so we don't slip over the line. We as adults have often squelched youth. Humor is part of God's design. It's legitimate to push at the edge, but not just as gimmicks or to get attention. What we do needs to be integral to what's going on in the community and to the texts. We betray a basic sense of trust when we simply use gimmicks. But we do want the gospel to be heard more richly, and in new ways. We want to give people freedom to do things because of who we really are. Things that work from what a community knows itself to be are also translatable to another culture. Repetition is necessary. There needs to be a happy balance between the familiar and the new.

> We can't rely on Sunday morning to create community if we have no interaction outside of Sunday morning.

Authenticity and integrity. Two other words I want you to ponder are "authenticity" and "integrity." Authenticity means being oneself. Worship also needs integrity, not legitimacy or validity, but integrity. Integrity means being rooted so that what we do and say is faithful. Martin Luther said the only thing that matters in worship is what conveys Christ. That is what is clearly unique about us as a religious community in our pluralistic world. Our witness is not that other religious don't have something to say; this we cannot judge. But we do know that God is self-revealed in Jesus Christ.

Worship has integrity because it is based on Christ and allows people to experience the good news which is liberating. Whenever we put people in bondage with words or deeds this is not what the gospel is about. The gospel is a word of freedom and a word of challenge. The fundamental word of the

gospel is pure grace, self-giving. God is here for us, period. No strings attached! If I were Jesus standing in front of you it would not matter if you rejected me, loved me, didn't love me, liked me, didn't like me; if I am who I say I am, I am here for you. What's unique about the gospel is the relational way in which I understand God. It may be in human relationships that we most fully know Jesus as a human being. We need to strive for authenticity and integrity as preparers of the liturgy on Sunday morning and of other kinds of worship we do with youth groups.

Music. One of the components we need to think through is music. It creates the most controversy and the most power and energy. How to know what is appropriate and inappropriate we can't arbitrarily say. For example, what's most appropriate at weddings? Well...we *can* draw some lines... like helping the couple who wanted "Ain't Nothing but a Hound Dog" as their processional think through that maybe this was their song, but it was not the community's song. So we used it at the reception, where it was fun and we could all appreciate it. They were perfectly willing to make the change after our conversations. They cared and knew that I cared.

As to the interplay of worship and culture, the songs of Michael Jackson, like many songs, are informed by a religious ethos even though they are secular songs. We can listen together and discuss them. How does this song draw on our common religious base and how can we draw on it, too? Who are we as people of a religious tradition hearing this? What does it evoke? What about Jesus? And the people? What's at work here? What's happening? We need to put aside our baggage of what we may think of Michael Jackson personally and discuss the collage of images. There is power in youth and music and MTV.

How do we draw on the traditions of who we are and make them an integral part of our worship? Michael Jackson drew on a common history of America and integrated it in a way that was powerful. Youth recognize that this relates to the lives of people they know. It's a touchy thing, of course, what we use and don't use in youth groups. We have to take seriously that sometimes the culture says more clearly than we do what it means to be brothers and sisters together, not in Christ in this case, but in this culture. It's a mistake to instantly denigrate what comes out of the culture.

Confession and forgiveness. In worship there's an assurance that we are accepted. That is also a challenge. We need forgiveness and need to be reconciled to one another. We need to know what it means to live out the reconciled life. Then I need to treat you as though I really am forgiven and we really are reconciled. We can help one another experience this. All these things that are common to our human experience are going on in worship.

We could also take time in a youth group to say phrases of the Confession and stop between each phrase giving time for silence for people to reflect. This helps make connections between what happens in the liturgy and what confession and repentance and forgiveness are. What happens in our experience of confession? Confession works differently in a youth group meeting context, but it works only on the basis of what has already happened on Sunday morning when we are together with the whole community.

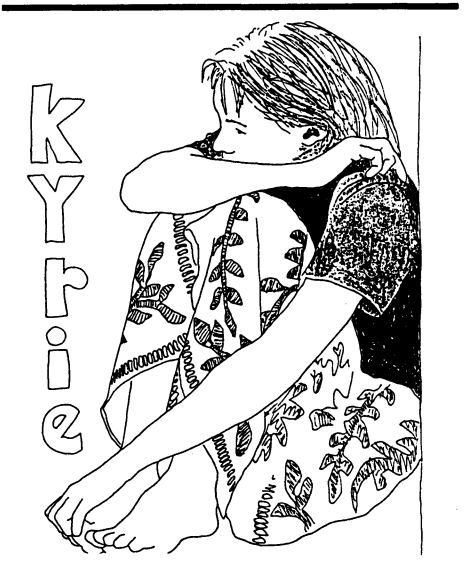
Here again we need ritual repetition. We draw on the resources we have as a worshipping community; however, we have to know the youth with whom we are involved to make use of it. Whether you are

a group of two or ten or a hundred, in any given community all the resources you need are there. Whoever you are in your context of farm or city, you have the power of the gospel among you on which to draw. By using parts of the liturgy in the youth group, you inform what happens on Sunday.

We haven't fully mined everything from the traditional worship we have. There is a lot there that can connect with people's lives: "Cast me not away from your presence;" "Create a clean heart in me, O God." When we have had a chance to think about our sins of thought, word, and deed, it makes the words of forgiveness all the more thrilling. There is nothing more profound than when we know we have heard someone confess his or her sins. The hard part is to hear and to accept the confession. It is not as hard to speak forgiveness. I have no doubt that the youth I have worked with knew what it was to hear one another and knew what it was to be forgiven.

Central symbols. Trust yourself and give yourself some freedom as a leader. Pay attention to the central symbols. How powerful it is to eat together. Jesus ate with the disciples. He celebrated the last supper with them. Eating and drinking the sacrament is also powerful because it relates to cultural eating and drinking. Dating is not all that different today than in my day. There is the intimacy of eating together, the shared meal you buy for each other. It includes the idea of gift. In many traditions eating together is powerful.

There is also something powerful about being left out. Being excluded from the table also has theological significance. Thank goodness our ELCA Sacramental Practices Task Force is going to address this. I have a clear bias as to how I would like that to turn out. Communing the baptized includes baptized infants and children. They don't have to be communed, but they can be.



We can also draw on the significance of water. People know what it is to wash, to bathe. Remind youth of their baptism and make it a regular part of devotions. Do affirmations of baptism; sprinkle one another. There can be some playfulness with this. We can make subtle connections with life and death symbols of water. You can draw out people's experiences with water. They will say things about nearly drowning, being afraid of water. Are we afraid? What does water do? How good it is to jump into a cool lake on a hot day or stand under a warm shower or sit and soak in a bathtub. Youth have those experiences as well as all of us. We can help each other make connections with what baptismal waters mean, being washed, forgiven. We must experience water every day if we are going to live.

We need to be cautious, of course, but we can use ritual and draw on what are already central symbols in the worshipping community and let them speak and live in our lives.

Catechetical and Evangelistic Theology

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How can one instruct youth workers in the Lutheran Confessions? Why not a new look at an old book, i.e. Luther's Small Catechism! Starting with experiences or memories (or, for youth leaders without Lutheran confirmation, at least impressions) of the Catechism seems to make the best sense. Christian identity and belonging are central catechetical themes: who I am and whose I am. Brief autobiographical examples re personal sinfulness dislodge pastors from any remaining pedestals, just as Luther's reordering of the sequence of medieval catechisms, by starting with the law, reveals sin and unmasks sinners. Quotations from the Large Catechism help us get to the gospel before finishing all Ten Commandments. (In the old days, we often stayed with the Commandments for a year before we got to the gospel: deadly—as the law is meant to be! But we did not come soon enough to the lively and life-giving—as the gospel is meant to be!) Thank God for the gospel in Luther's presentation of the first commandment!

The *holy* name and day in commands 2 and 3 and the parental "masks" in the 4th command represent and reveal God sometimes; other times the "masks" hide and distort God in the home, the state and the church. Such mothers and fathers of the nation, the church, and the home are meant to mirror God's "tough love" to keep community functioning in healthy ways; when tyranny or injustice, persecution or fleecing the flock, and neglect or abuse happen, then the portrayal of God and God's loving care are distorted. Commands 5-8 are fences and walls of justice where love of neighbor *and God* protect our neighbor from us and us from our neighbor. The rash of premeditated murders of family members, along with "random acts of senseless violence," incest, rape and sex outside marriage, drugs and muggings, Americans hauling and being hauled off to court: these are cause and effect of ignorance of and ignoring God's gentle requirements for safe communities. The final commands about coveting probe inner attitudes and desires and again unmask our idolatry. Paul's candor about this commandment's snagging and clubbing him to death (Rom 7:7-11) is clarified by his designation of covetousness as idolatry (Col 3:15).

What the law is and does (uses/functions) to show us our identity as sinners serves to illustrate the "bad news" dimen-

sion of the commandments. Then in the Creed comes the "good news" about our identity as God's good creatures, redeemed by Christ and made holy by the Holy Spirit. Luther's assertion, "I believe that I cannot... believe...," can be seen in relation to Ephesians 1 and 2, where God's choosing us in Christ is the prologue to God's saving us "by grace through faith." That faith comes through the proclamation of the gospel—the Spirit's instrument.

The role of the word and faith in Baptism proves confusing. Magical understandings from holy water to fire insurance and security blankets abound. How Baptism justifies, giving new birth and new life, in relation to faith is not easy to communicate. The juggling of grace, faith, and Christ (as in Augsburg Confession Article IV) proves difficult for us all!

The many contexts of forgiveness, public and private, and the role of the royal priesthood in "mutual conversation and consolation" is surprising and enlightening for many. The importance of hearing forgiveness from human lips—even of laity—finally begins to make sense.

Confirmed teenagers, by their absence from the Lord's Table (like their absence from the family table), ask: Why commune? The fact that eucharistic benefits are parallel to the benefits of Baptism (to which we can return daily in repentance) points to the centrality of living by the forgiveness of sins, "packaged" in words and water, wine and bread. These visible words, like the "audible sacrament" (Pelikan) of the word of forgiveness pronounced or proclaimed by laity or clergy, communicate the blessing of the Christ who is there for us as giver and gift. The present Lord who once gave himself *for* us on the cross gives his life *to* us in this sacrament. Faith alone receives those gifts. The identity given in Baptism when the Lord claims us and names us "children of God" is nourished and nurtured in the meal of the community to which we belong.

Like catechization, evangelization for Lutherans needs to take seriously the law/gospel approach and, normally, the bad news/good news sequence. (The sequence can be short-circuited when the evangelized expresses to the listening evangelist that the law has already been heard or experienced. Then the *listening* evangelist knows it's already time for the gospel.) A simple outline summarizes the scope of the Christian message:

(A) God's love in creation
(B) Humanity's fall
(C) God's love in Christ
(D) Salvation by grace through faith
(E) God's love in the church

The mnemonic device—(A) Creation, (B) Fall, (C) Christ, (D) Faith, (E) Church—hopefully helps one to remember the scope of the Christian message.[1]

Describing sin as guilt resulting from disobedience to and transgression of God's will, is readily understood in light of recent

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[1] Ralph W. Quere, *Evangelical Witness*: The Medium, Mission and Method of Evangelism (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1975), 25-43. Cf. Elten A. Zerby and Ralph W. Quere, *An Evangel for Everyone* Study Book (Minneapolis, Augsburg, 1981), 22-33. Cf. The credo of the New Life for All in Africa and Latin America is: "(1) God created all people for Life. (2) People, in their sin, have forfeited Life. (3) God came in Christ to offer people New Life. (4) People can receive this New Life by Turning from their sins to Christ in trust and obedience to the Community of New Life. (5) People knowing New Life are called to be faithful in all relationships." Cited in George G. Hunter, III, *How to Reach Secular People* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1992), 87.

tragic headlines: babies having babies, kids killing kids, and parents killing children. Not only in lawlessness but also in lovelessness and self-righteousness is the curse of the law experienced. Sin's destructive force

Not only in lawlessness but also in lovelessness and self-righteousness is the curse of the law experienced.

in our behavior can even take its toll on our identity as Christians.

Sin as bondage is more difficult to communicate. The *LBW* Confession of sins is a helpful starting-point. Fear of death and the devil (Heb 2:14ff), addictions, and even boredom are symptoms of human slavery to sin (Romans 6; John 8:31ff.). (Paul Hill contends that when youth say, "Boring" it's often another cop-out, or a dismissive statement meaning: "I don't understand!") The dangers of such willful deafness and blindness are pointed out in Isa 6:9-10, quoted so often in the New Testament (Mt 13:14ff; Mk 4:12; Lk 8:10; Jn 12:39-41; Acts 28: 26ff.). Such blindness and deafness should easily disprove assertions of the freedom of the will *coram Deo*. However, denying free choice re salvation is a tough pill to swallow. If we are responsible for our unbelief, we should get some credit for faith. God's sovereign freedom brings faith to those who believe that they *cannot* believe *by themselves* (and thankfully even to many who think they "can"!). Here again the Small Catechism helps by reminding us that the faith comes by the Spirit's work through the gospel. Unbelief is our fault and faith is God's fault!

Our *condition* as sinners is powerfully portrayed in such bondage of the will. "Original sin" describes the hereditary "origins" of our *identity* as sinners—fallen creatures of fallen parents in a fallen world.

Brokenness is a good modern term for this. Illustrations of its shame are seen in victims of abuse; expressions of its grief are experienced in floods and tornados, SIDS and AIDS, accidents and apathy. (The AAL/CMI study[2] asserts that apathy is a major characteristic of declining congregations.) Results of alienation and estrangement with the concomitants of anxiety and unbelief, ignoring and "dissing" (disrespect growing out of disregard) God—see Smalcald Art. III, II—are not only the problems of Generation X and Generation Next; they cut across all our generations—from the parents to the children "unto the third and fourth generations of those that hate Me" (Exod 20:5; cf. Rom 1:18-21).

The good news is that God will show mercy "unto the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments" (Exod 20:6). It's good news, however, as Luther points out, only because the One who becomes "the Lord your God" *gives* the faith that the First Command demands (*LW* 31:349). This promise to the "thousandth generation" should have returned Luther's "conclusion" to the commandments back to its original position as a

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[2] Alan C. Klaas and Cheryl D. Brown, *Church Membership Initiative*, 1993 (Appleton, WI: Aid Association for Lutherans, 1994), 19-25. Cf. John S. Savage, *The Apathetic and Bored Church Member* (Pittsford, NY: LEAD Consultants, 1976), passim.

law/gospel appendix to the first commandment!

As a prelude to the discussion of the gospel, one asks: What good news did *you* need to hear as a teenager? Adults say: "That I was accepted." "That I wasn't crazy." "That I didn't have to prove myself." "That I was protected." Jump-shifting to contemporary language for the offices of Christ as Prophet, Priest, and King, we need to ask: What language can we borrow to communicate the gospel teens need to hear today? Some of the interesting suggestions that emerged in a previous Youth Evangelism class are:

for Prophet/Vicar—news anchor, coach, friend, rock musician;

for Priest/Victim—doctor, grandparent, Mr. Rogers, Barney (whose love/hate responses may make him a victim of his success);

for King/Victor—warlord, quarterback, parent, principal.

Further work is needed on new images for the church as the community of faith, the body and kingdom of Christ and on the nature of belonging. The "gang" picks up one dimension but is highly problematic for numerous reasons.

The relationship between catechizing and evangelizing for youth leaders—and maybe for the rest of us—may help motivate and clarify witnessing for Lutherans. We should not become Calvinists or Barthians and opt for a gospel/law method and sequences in theology or evangelism. We should not become hemi-demi-neo-semi-Pelagians in our evangelism; not even synergists! However problematic the revivalists' "new measures" and methods were for 19th century "American Lutheranism," the new theology undercut and denied the sacraments' power that roots Lutheran identity. Similarly, in our opposition to synergism and our glorification of grace, we who are heirs of Luther's Reformation should not become universalists who ignore the need for faith or the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ alone! Finally, in our concern for inclusivity, we should not fail to call sin "sin" and call *sinners* to repentance so that youth may turn away from lords who bring death and to the One who overcame death and is Lord of life! True inclusivity invites all—old and young—into a community where belonging bestows an identity and nurtures life together as a community of faith and love.

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A Pattern for Interpreting Biblical Texts

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Pastors realize that responsible interpretation of biblical passages requires discipline and practice. Lacking a disciplined approach to the study of the Bible, we are apt to be anachronistic and ethnocentric in our reading of texts. Public lay leaders of youth also need to understand and utilize an organized pattern for studying biblical texts. This more disciplined approach seeks to counter our tendency to domesticate or trivialize (often in the form of moralism) biblical texts. Frequently biblical scholars remind others of the cultural gap between the Bible and our time, and what that implies for us.

> Given the cultural distance between the biblical text and the reader, the exegete learns to expect the unexpected, to encounter ways of thinking which appear strange and difficult. Recognition of this strangeness is fundamental to fruitful exegesis if we are to be kept from assuming that the meaning of the text is already self-evident, and from attempting to support a preconceived notion about it. The more sound and sensitive the exegetical process, the more accurately the reader can "hear" the text.[1]

In what follows, I outline a pattern for interpreting texts which has been developed and refined by a host of Bible teachers, thus essentially communal property, and is similar to many other exegetical outlines. We can apply the pattern to a study of Mark 3:31-35, a brief story about Jesus and his relatives. Due to the brevity of this article, I will not fully exegete this Markan passage in light of the interpretive pattern.

Preliminary engagement with the text

1. Determine the boundaries of the text. It is important to determine the boundaries of the textual unit you plan to study. A quick glance at the *New Revised Standard Version* discloses that Mk 3:31-35 is a textual unit that is distinct from what precedes and follows it.

2. Record your initial observations about the place and function of the text in the entire biblical book. In the case of Mk 3:31-

[1] L.E. Keck and G.M. Tucker, "Exegesis," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible,* Supplementary Volume (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976), 297.

35, reading the entire Gospel of Mark is an useful exercise. By doing so, one always gains fresh insights into the overall design of the Gospel narrative and the significance of the placement and role assigned to the text under consideration.

3. Read and ponder the text in English, posing and answering any questions that come to mind. Reading the text over and over again, even memorizing it, helps you to take it seriously. Then write down your tentative answers to questions such as the following: How is this text conventionally understood? How have you understood it? What are the features of the text not readily understood? What are the problems in understanding the text? To what issues in the first-century church might this text be responding?

Pose these and other questions to allow yourself to assess your current understanding of the text. It is helpful to recall your initial impressions, particularly if subsequent study changes your perception of the passage. Your preliminary thoughts about the text, though inadequate or even inaccurate, might echo common understandings brought to the text by those persons with whom you plan to discuss the biblical passage.

Systematic analysis of the text

1. Prepare a translation of the Greek of the text, or compare English versions of the text. If you know Greek, do your own translation of the text but then compare it with a fairly literal translation (e.g. *NRSV*) and a more paraphrasic version (e.g., *Today's English Version).* If you do not know Greek, compare some of the various English versions (e.g., *NRSV, New Jerusalem Bible, New International Version, Revised English Bible, New American Bible,* and *Today's English Version).* The availability of so many versions is both an advantage and disadvantage, since multiple renderings of Greek words and phrases can be not only illuminating but also confusing.

2. Determine the "literary form" of the text. The entire textual unit under consideration or a major segment of it may fit a literary pattern used in the ancient world. Scholars identify a host of literary forms in the Gospels (e.g., miracle story, pronouncement story, parable, aphorism, and hymn) and the Letters (thanksgiving, creed, hymn, diatribe, household code, and paranaesis or stylized exhortation). Already in an oral stage, some of these forms were communicated according to recognizable patterns. Once you identify the literary form and its basic elements, you can then analyze more precisely how a text under consideration matches the formal pattern. An author who knows the communicative conventions can manipulate patterns to surprise hearers or even to subvert their expectations.

Mark 3:31-35 is consistently described as a pronouncement story.[2] And what is a pronouncement story?

> Simply defined, it is a brief story about Jesus that culminates in a short, striking saying (and possibly an action) and reveals something of his character and facility in repartee when challenged by others. Both the specific situation de-

[2]There are helps in identifying literary forms in the New Testament. For example, see James L. Bailey and Lyle D. Vander Broek, *Literary Forms in the New Testament* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992) for short articles that define and illustrate the use of approximately thirty literary forms appearing in the New Testament.

A sensitive interpreter realizes that the content of a text (what is said) is inextricably linked to the form of the text (how it is said).

scribed and the response it prompts, normally by Jesus, are indispensable to this type of story.[3]

3. Analyze the inner texture of the passage. What words and phrases need to be explained? If the text is part of a narrative, what features of the story need to be carefully noted and explained (so, e.g., characters, geographical and temporal details, the development of the action of the story, how narration and speech are used)? If the story or passage includes a quotation, paraphrase, or an echo of a text in the Hebrew Scriptures, how and why is this done? In answering these questions, you can consult secondary resources such as lexicons and dictionaries that study the use of Greek words, biblical dictionaries that include articles on all subjects relevant to the Bible, and commentaries that explain specific books of the Bible.

A sensitive interpreter realizes that the content of a text (what is said) is inextricably linked to the form of the text (how it is said). It follows that you need to attend to the rhetorical and literary devices employed in the text. For instance, identify and analyze the use of features such as poetic parallelism, catch-words, repetitious patterns, bracketing devices, rhetorical questions, direct speech, hyperbolic speech, images and metaphors, and irony in speech and situations. Obviously this analysis of literary devices is tied to your awareness of how the larger literary form represented by the text as a whole functions.

You can best consolidate your analysis of the "inner texture"[4] by outlining the text. In this way you demonstrate the rhetorical strategy of the text, that is, how the text seeks to engage and even change an audience (both first century and contemporary). If the text is in narrative form, you need to outline how the story develops. If the text presents an argument (as in Paul's letters), you need to outline the course of the argument. If the text is poetic or hymnic, you need to trace its flow. In each case, you need to ponder the mood of the text with both its logical and affective impact on an audience.

The following brief outline of Mk 3:31-35 highlights the alternating use of narration and speech in the pronouncement story.

31-32a Narration: Jesus' mother and brothers are "outside"

32b Speech: Announcing their request to see him

33 Speech: Jesus who is "inside" poses a surprising question

34a Narration: describes Jesus' action of looking at those around them "inside"

34b Speech: Jesus answers his own question by his first pronouncement

35 Speech: Jesus explicates the first pronouncement by a second one.

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[3]Bailey and Vander Broek, 114.

[4]In the "Introduction" to the paperback edition of *A Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation of Mark* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), Vernon Robbins develops a socio-rhetorical method that attends to four kinds of texture in a text: inner texture, intertexture, social and cultural texture, and ideological texture.

Much more can be said about the rhetorical strategy of Mk 3:31-35. This brief story is rhetorically playful with the phrase "your mother and brothers." Used five times, mother and brothers (and sisters) enjoy enhanced meaning by the story's end. Jesus' question in verse 33 is pivotal for this shift in meaning. It is a surprising question because it causes hearers to think more deeply about family connections they tend to take for granted.

4. Analyze the literary context for the text. Some now label the literary context for a text its "intertexture," that is, its interplay with other biblical texts. As a careful interpreter, you need to analyze the placement of the text under consideration in the literary work of which it is a part. It is particularly important to read at least the two or three chapters that precede and follow the passage. In regard to Mk 3:31-35, what can you learn from this exercise? Why is the text placed where it is? What is its role in the unfolding of the Markan narrative?

To explore the literary context of this passage, you can examine Paul Achtemeier's outline of the early chapters in Mark:[5]

Jesus appears, preaching God's reign (1:1-3:6)
- *John the Baptist appears; the story begins (1:1-8)*
- *Jesus introduced (1:9-15)*
- *Jesus' ministry begins; he chooses disciples (1:16-20)*
- *Jesus teaches and heals (1:21-45)*
- *Jesus rejected; conflict with religious authorities (2:1-3:6)*

Jesus ministers in Galilee (3:7-6:6)
- *Jesus designates the twelve (3:7-19)*
- *Jesus designates true followers (3:20-35)*
- *Jesus teaches in parables (4:1-34)*
- *Jesus performs mighty acts (4:35-5:43)*
- *Jesus rejected; conflict with his own (6:1-6)*

Even a quick perusal of this outline offers a few insights regarding the placement and role of Mk 3:31-35. It appears rather early in the Markan narrative[6] and is included in Achtemeier's outline as part of 3:20-35 that carries the description, "Jesus designates true followers." Moreover, the first two major sections (1:1-3:6 and 3:7-6:6) depict controversy and conflict prompted by Jesus' activity and speech. In light of these observations, you would want to consider further how 3:31-35 relates to what has been narrated in 3:20-30 and the larger narrative themes of controversy and conflict.

5. Analyze the historical and socio-cultural situation of the text. You need to answer, at least in general terms, the following question: What are the historical circumstances for the composition and reception of the New Testament document in which the text under consideration appears? This involves date and place of writing, destination for the document, reasons for the writing, etc. Although there is scant evidence to answer directly such questions about documents in the New Testament, in most instances a consensus has emerged allowing a generalized picture of the time and historical setting. So, for example, most scholars date the Gospel of Mark just before or after the Romans' destruction of Jerusalem with its temple in 70 C.E. and then discuss the probable effect on the Christian community or communities addressed by Mark of the devastating war between Jewish resisters and the Roman armies.

You also need to think about the text you are studying in light of its first-century social and cultural context. Texts always

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[5]See *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (Doubleday Press, 1992) IV:546.

[6]The Gospel of Mark contains sixteen chapters.

function in social situations, but the interpretive problem we face is our ignorance of first-century Mediterranean culture. In the last twenty-five years considerable scholarship has addressed the need to understand better the ancient Hellenistic culture's many differences from our contemporary Western culture.[7] What do you need to learn about the Jewish and/or Greco-Roman culture which could illuminate features of the text or what was assumed by its author and recipients? In the case of Mk 3:31-35, the more you can learn about kinship patterns the better you will appreciate the provocative character of this pronouncement story. In light of the larger context of Mk 3:20-35, you might wish to learn about attitudes towards exorcists and how households and kingdoms functioned.

Contemporary engagement with the text

1. Synthesize the results of your analysis of the text. Now you need to articulate in a coherent fashion an interpretation of the text which you can defend. It is usually helpful to include in your summary the following: (a) what you consider to be a helpful translation of the text; (b) your reworked outline of the text that demonstrates how the story or argument unfolds, reflecting your analysis of literary form and features; (c) your insights into the function of the text in its literary context and social world.

Attempt to develop a concise summary of the text's message as you understand it. In stating its message, keep in focus the following questions: What is the primary issue or problem being addressed by this text? How might this issue or problem relate to the larger situation of the Christians being addressed? What rhetorical impact might the text have had on its original hearers?

We can only hint at what might be in a synthesis of a study of Mk 3:31-35, particularly as a part of 3:20-35. The larger literary unit juxtaposes the concern of Jesus' family about what he is doing, presumably in his exorcisms (see 3:21), and the Jerusalem scribes' charge that Jesus is accomplishing his exorcisms by using evil power (3:22). Mark apparently intends Jesus' clever argument in 3:23-39 as a refutation of the scribes and the pronouncement story in 3:31-35 as an answer to Jesus' own family. Mark 3:31-35 functions to engage the Markan hearers in considering the unthinkable in the ancient world: blood family has no irrefutable claim on Jesus or the Markan Christians. In fact, Jesus is shown redefining "family" for the church: the new family includes all who do the will of God.

Undoubtedly, relationship to one's kin must have been an issue for numerous Markan Christians (as was the case during Jesus' earthly ministry itself). Probably many Jewish Christians had to choose between joining the Christian movement and remaining with their blood family. A later text in the Markan narrative suggests that Christians left behind family and economic

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[7]See John H. Elliott, *What Is Social-Scientific Criticism?* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993) for a fine introduction to the methods and models used to understand the biblical world. He includes a comprehensive bibliography of the scholarship done since 1970. See also Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology*. Revised edition (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993); Jerome H. Neyrey, ed., *The Social World of Luke-Acts* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993); and Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels* (Minneapolis: Fortress , 1992).

security to follow Jesus, but they gained a new and larger family in the form of the Christian community (see especially Mk 10:28-31).

2. Offer your thoughts about the text's message for today. To take a particular text seriously in today's world, it may be helpful to pose the following questions: (a) In what ways, if at all, is your contemporary situation analogous to the first-century situation addressed by the text? (b) How do various aspects of one's social location (e.g., gender, class, race, education, family, geography) affect the hearing of this text today? (c) How does this text challenge and/or comfort us today? How is this text "good news" for us today? and (d) How can the "form" as well as the "content" of the text influence how we work with this text today?

If you use the text as the basis for dialog with a group in the church, consider how the text might transform our vision and behavior. Formulate specific key questions that you could pose for the group to discuss, and design simple activities, called "application exercises,"[8] which can help group participants appropriate the insights generated by the biblical text.

By way of example, we ask how Mk 3:31-35 engages us today. In light of Mk 3:20-35, we could ponder the difference between the opposition directed to Christians by the church's opponents and the pressure put on Christians by family members or friends. On occasions, family members can exert tremendous pressure on us to do their bidding rather than what we discern God's will to be in a concrete situation. Family members can be controlling and selfish. And, of course, we can be the source of this tension for one of our family members.

You could pose questions such as the following to invite a group of persons into a serious engagement with Mk 3:31-35:

What power can a family member or a close friend exercise over you?

How does it feel to go against the will of your mother or father?

Can you describe a concrete situation where you experienced a conflict between the strong wishes of your family (or closest friend) and "doing the will of God?"

How have you become a hindrance to a family member's doing God's will?

How do we know the will of God in a concrete situation?

Why does the text say "do" and not just "know" the will of God?

How can we misuse this text?

Why is this text really good news for us today?

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[8]See Walter Wink, *Transforming Bible Study*(Nashville: Abingdon, 1980) for a method of Bible study which employs carefully designed questions and application exercises.

Introduction to the Bible

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Wartburg's Youth School participants arrived for class with a "practical" agenda, eager to learn all sorts of ways to use the Bible to answer contemporary questions. Needless to say, meeting their agenda was a daunting task! I limit my focus to three issues central to the task of equipping lay leaders to study and teach the Bible.

1. Methodological approaches to the Bible. Generally, the Youth School participants approached the Bible as a divine, error-free answer book or as an ancient history text. From this perspective, biblical interpretation consists primarily of finding appropriate verses to answer particular questions.

The process of moving from this perspective toward a healthy, Lutheran hermeneutical approach proceeded in three steps. First, using "what the Bible says about homosexuality" as an example, students were challenged to reflect on ways their own assumptions and experience affect their interpretation of texts. Selected commentary readings helped them learn that even published interpretations are refracted through the lenses of the interpreter's experience. Exploration of texts in which the English translation doesn't match the Hebrew or Greek original facilitated further conversation and confusion.

Second, building on the students' growing unease, conversation moved in the direction of various historical methods in biblical studies. Using Norman Gottwald's *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985) as a resource, we discussed confessional, historical-critical, and socio-rhetorical approaches to the Bible. Situating their own methodologies within a broader historical context was freeing for the students. They were ready to explore alternate ways to approach and appropriate the biblical message.

Third, building on this enthusiasm, we explored the possibility that a helpful way to approach the Bible is to view meaning as emerging in the dynamic interplay between the text in its context and the reader in her/his community context. From this perspective, integral to the authority of the Bible is the power of its liberating vision to empower reading communities of every age. Inspiration includes the ongoing activity of the Holy Spirit in the encounter of the reading community with the text. Bible study is an ongoing dialogue between the text, its historical interpretations, and the contemporary community in its context. The task of the teacher is to invite people into the dialogue and to provide resources for the conversation. Rather than simply communicating information, teachers function as catalysts in the community's ongoing struggle to discern the shape of God's

liberating vision in today's specific contexts.

A major risk in this approach is trusting the ongoing work of the Spirit in the reading community. In the process envisioned in this method, there are no simple, neat answers to complicated questions. Instead, there is an invitation to deliberate together, to reflect on and celebrate life in all its ambiguities. Through study of the Bible, the community is empowered to live as partner with God in God's ongoing work of healing and wholeness-bringing, of justice and respect for all.

2. Knowledge of Bible content. It is no secret that many lay people lack basic knowledge of the content of the Bible. Included in this number are many congregational youth leaders. Because of time restriction, Youth School participants were given resources rather than an abundance of information. The Bible was approached as a literary collection. In this context, individual books were introduced under large headings (Torah, Prophets, Writings, Gospels, Epistles). A handout provided significant literary information on each book. Crucial socio-historical data for both testaments was noted on another handout. In addition, students were encouraged to make use of the following resources: *Harper-Collins Study Bible*,[1] *Harper's Bible Commentary*[2] (one volume), and *The Women's Bible Commentary*.[3] Throughout the discussion, sustained Bible reading was emphasized as integral to life in the Christian community.

3. Common "blind-spots" in interpretation. As a feminist biblical scholar, my own agenda includes raising awareness of ways in which biblical interpretation has functioned to hurt and exclude rather than to heal and include. Two "blind-spots" were highlighted for the youth school students:



(1) the use of masculine language for God/humanity; and (2) possibilities for abuse inherent in much biblical suffering/service imagery. My goal was for the students to realize that problems exist and to reflect how misuse of language affects them and those they serve.

Conclusion: Students were motivated to move from the "answer book" approach to the Bible to a process approach in which leaders and learners study together to discern where God's liberating vision leads us in these often troubled days. Further discussion regarding our responsibilities as educators to equip lay biblical interpreters for our congregations is critical.

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[1] JamesMays, general editor. *The Harper's Bible Commentary* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988).

[2] Wayne Meeks, general editor. *The Harper-Coollins Study Bible*(San Francisco: Harper/Collins, 1993).

[3] Carol Newsom and Sharon Ringe, eds., *The Women's Bible Commentary* (Louisville: Westminister/John Knox, 1992).

Youth, Religious Cults, and World Mission

Wi Jo Kang
W. Loehe Professor of World Mission
Wartburg Theological Seminary

Our mentor Martin Luther once said, "Youth is the seed and fount of the church." Certainly it is too much of a truism to say that youth are the future of the church and without them there is no church of the future. Yet the youth population in many Lutheran churches is declining due to the decreasing birth rate, the migration of young people from their church-based home towns to urban areas in search of jobs, and ineffective outreach programs that relate to young people. Once they have moved away from Lutheran communities, often Mid-Western rural areas, the Lutheran youth do not retain as strong a sense of ethnic and ecclesiastic loyalty as their foreparents had. As a result many of them fall away from the life of the church and in extreme cases they adhere to religious cults.

In adhering to religious cults, American young people are fond of new things, whether it be a new model of an electronic product or a new religious movement. With a strong cultural emphasis on "the now," American youth are not aware of the historical past in comparison to future events. American culture makes it easy for young people to reject their inherited values and beliefs, and to readily accept new ones.

In addition, Americans and American youth are very pragmatic and utilitarian. That which can help, be practical and expedient in their particular situation, is enough to encourage American young people to switch their religious affiliation. Like young people in other parts of the world, American youth struggle with adjusting to a fast-changing environment. The change from the second wave of industrial culture to the third wave of electronic culture, which Alvin Toffler talks about, is too rapid and influences every aspect of human life. Many young people struggle with such rapid changes and challenges of a "brave new world," and many of them become victims of drugs. These young people are often ignored and neglected by the church. In such a troubled life, with the loss of identity and sense of belonging, young people can be easily misled by new religious cults.

The attraction of religious cults in such a time of trouble are: introduction to the "basics of the religious life" of the cults; "friendliness" of the cult members; and finding a new "family" that will provide a sense and place of belonging. Although it is a totally controlled society without individual freedom, a troubled youth discovers the "happiness of cult community." In such a cult community daily necessities are all supplied and the individual is never left alone. Someone is always accompanying

the new member of the cult, even to the toilet. There is not enough free time allowed for individuals to write letters to parents and friends. The people in the cult community always smile and are on a high sugar diet to keep them hyper. They are surrounded by instant love with instant answers. The religious cult community is a totally dictatorial institution in which everyone is controlled. Members of such religious communities return to childhood behavior. They begin to act as infantile children and face difficulties when separated from other members of the cult. The youth lose their individual creativity and responsibility to build up their own lives.

It is a terrible tragedy to lose our youth, "the seed and the fount of the church," to religious cults, especially to those cults that reject Christian values and the Lordship of Jesus Christ. It must be a work of the devil to mislead the youth. To educate our youth to appreciate Christian values and maintain the centrality of Christ as our Lord and Savior is a crucial task of the church. Such guidance and education of the youth must be truly pleasing to God and hurtful to the devil. Again Luther said in this regard: "If an injury that really hurts is to be done to the devil, it must be inflicted through the young people who are reared in the knowledge of God, who spread God's Word, and teach it to others." According to Luther's admonition, "the rearing of youth in the knowledge of God" becomes the first step in assuring that young people are not misled by religious cults, but retain their Christian commitment with faithfulness to the Lord.

A few years ago while I was in Papua New Guinea, a pastor told me that an old Japanese soldier hiding deep in the mountain forest had been captured by the village people a few years before. The old soldier told them he was still in the war against Americans and Australians. The village people told him the war was over forty years ago, but he did not believe the news. In like manner many young people do not believe and accept the decisive event of forgiveness of sins and salvation that really took place in the life and teachings of Christ. Our task is to help nurture that belief.

But, thank God! There are many faithful Christian young people who are reared in the knowledge of God, do spread the good news of salvation and share it with others. In fact, the world Christian missionary movement designed to spread the good news of salvation in Christ throughout the world was initiated by young people in the 19th century. The Y.M.C.A., Y.W.C.A., Student Volunteer Movement for World Mission, American Commissioners for World Mission, and the China Inland Mission were all carried out by young people, especially by American youth.

Today American young people travel far more than their grandparents or their parents. Opportunities to study abroad and business possibilities overseas for the youth are abundant. Many international students are studying on U.S. campuses. This is a God-given Kairos, when young people can be reared in the knowledge of God, to spread God's word and share the meaning of Christian faith to others. The missionary movement of the 19th century and early 20th century, initiated and carried out by young people of the Western world, has been significant and praiseworthy. Once again young Christians of the Western world, especially American youth, can engage in true Christian world mission as partners to let the light shine from their own place, to leaven the world wherever the youth happen to be, and to be salt to preserve the world from corruption in faithfulness to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Let the youth of the church, "the seed and the fount of the church," be richly blessed by God.

Book Reviews

The Eucharistic Mystery: Revitalizing the Tradition. By David N. Power. New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 1992. xiii and 370 pages. Cloth. $29.95.

Power begins, "The memorial of Christ's death and resurrection is today celebrated amid the ruins" of four centuries of Roman Catholic piety inadequately supported by scripture or genuine tradition, and of "modernism"—specifically, confidence in the continual advancing (read: "perfecting") of civilization which the Holocaust, "the Bomb," and other examples of human suffering have shattered. Can the church's celebration of the Eucharist as the "memorial" of God's love and Christ's suffering address with any relevance the realities of a postmodern world?

Power believes it can—but its celebration needs "revitalization." Most in need of help is the authorized Roman rite which must not only be reworked, but *replaced* by rites which grow out of and reflect various cultures' own experiences and perspectives. Power asserts that this process is, itself, part of the eucharistic "tradition."

Most of the book consists of a painstaking study of three periods in the church's history: New Testament, Pre-Nicene, and Late Medieval, where Power asserts that "the tradition" underwent thorough reinterpretation and "revitalizing" to fit changed circumstances. Thumbnail sketches of contemporary Roman Catholic theologians' (Rahner, Schillebeeckx, et al.) attempts to reinterpret the last of these stages follow. Finally, there are two chapters of discussion of the sacrament itself, and of "memorial," and a chapter of suggestions for "revitalization."

Power's *apologia* against a single, rigid, *mandated* rite, to which the "powers that be" grudgingly admit only occasional accretions and appendages—but not full reworking—may not be necessary to convince readers who come from a tradition of often exuberant reform. Still, his survey of historical eucharistic tradition and practice, and of contemporary theologians' views, can be interesting and informative.

Yet his assertion that "memorial" is the heart of the Supper seems to obscure for Power the significance of the objective reality given *in* it: what Luther emphasized with his "for you." Power wants to know what *the church* can *do* with the Supper, rather than what *God* is *doing* in it. Much of what Power seeks in the Supper is already present, with or without a "revitalized" rite.

Still, for those crafting contemporary eucharistic prayers or preaching on the Supper, Power's concluding chapters can be worthwhile and thought-provoking. Be warned, however: this is for the serious reader only. Power's detailed historical study and convoluted "theologianspeak," without which contemporary systematicians seem incapable of writing, make this anything but light reading.

Keith Killinger
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

Studying John. Approaches to the Fourth Gospel. By John Ashton. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994. ix and 227 pages. Cloth. $45.00.

In 1991 Oxford University Press published *Understanding the Fourth Gospel* by John Ashton, University Lecturer in New Testament Studies at Wolfson College, Oxford. The present volume gathers eight essays, linked "only loosely and incidentally" (p. 1), two published during the writing of that earlier volume and six related to issues and publications on John written between January 1991 and September 1993.

They take up key issues in Johannine interpretation. "The Transformation of Wisdom" (5-35) argues that the concept of "available wisdom" lies behind John's prologue, a hymn to the incarnate word. "The Jews in John" (36-70) uses Josephus to hold that the way John uses the term "Jews" originates in the Jewish sects prior

to 70 C.E. "Bridging Ambiguities" (71-90) discusses the origins of the "high Christology" in John, tracing it to a development of the angelic messenger to a divine being in Judaism and early Christianity. "The Signs Source" (90-113) appreciatively, yet critically, evaluates Robert Fortna's reconstruction of that source and especially of Johannine theology. "The Shepherd" (114-141) critiques a recent collection of articles on John 10.

Ashton expresses strong reservations about some recent literary approaches to John in "Narrative Criticism" (141-166) and "The Discovery of Wisdom" (166-184). He discusses recent books by R. A. Culpepper, J. L. Staley, and G. Mlakuzhyil and an article by F. F. Segovia. They ignore the history of the text and use only the category of story to treat what is essentially a composite, literary text. In "Studying John" (184-209), he insists that historical and literary studies are intertwined. There is "no substitute for historical criticism" (185). He passes under critical review current literary criticism: Stanley Fish, who argues that meaning resides in the context, the modern reader, reader-response criticism, and deconstruction. He describes the often unexpressed assumptions underlying these methods in order to "make a distinction between understanding and application" (204-208). Contemporary literary criticism, he argues, relates to the latter and does not replace the former.

These essays are written in clear prose, never leaving the reader in doubt about Ashton's opinions and intentions. They invite dialogical reactions by inviting one into Ashton's mind as he thinks through these issues in current Johannine scholarship.

Edgar Krentz
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

Revelation. By Wilfred Harrington, O.P. Sacra Pagina 16. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press. A Michael Glazier Book, 1993. xix and 271 pages. Boards. $29.95.

Harrington's commentary (and the series of which it is a part) has a clear goal and a format to achieve that goal. As the series editor Daniel Harrington describes it, "The expression *Sacra Pagina* ("Sacred Page") originally referred to the text of Scripture. In the Middle Ages it also described the study of Scripture to which the interpreter brought the tools of grammar, rhetoric, dialectic and philosophy. Thus *Sacra Pagina* encompasses both the text to be studied and the activity of interpretation." (xi)

Harrington's introduction (1-41) discusses apocalyptic as literary form and dates the writing in the reign of Domitian (entirely on the basis of patristic evidence). He argues that Domitian did not persecute Christians; rather it was the local, Asian ruler cult that is a problem for them. Though Christians lived peacefully in Asia, John has "an unequivocally negative attitude to the Roman Empire and to the Asian society that reflected the values of the Empire" (10). John urges a reform movement on the Christian communities. His radical stance urged Christians not to be willing to "work within the contemporary social system" (13). A discussion of lines of interpretation, an outline of the book, a summation of John's theological perspectives, and a practical, useful bibliography conclude the introduction.

The commentary proper gives Harrington's fresh English translation, with headings to indicate structure and content, section by section. (Harrington prints out the translation on pp. 237-59 with the suggestion that one should read his translation of Revelation in a single sitting, to really appreciate the rhetorical power of the book. The translation is readable, in inclusive English that does not reflect the grammatical barbarisms of the Greek text. One could well read this text in liturgical assemblies.) There follow for each section comments on specific points of interpretation and then a section labeled "Interpretation" which discuss literary aspects, theological content, and suggest modes of relating the Apocalypse to the contemporary world.

Harrington's commentary is a useful addition to the extensive bibliography on Revelation that should help pastors who either preach on this book (there are 10 texts from Revelation in the three year lectionary) or teach it in adult forums. And scholars will find it equally interesting. The book is accessible, clearly written, and helpful for proclamation.

This is the fifth published volume in a new—and welcome—series of New Testament Commentaries. Earlier volumes include *Matthew* by Daniel Harrington, *Luke* and *Acts* by Luke T. Johnson, and *Galatians* by Frank Matera. All follow the same format, which should make this series a favorite of parish priests and Protestant pastors.

Edgar Krentz

Pseudo-Dionysius. A Commentary on the Texts and an Introduction to Their Influence. By Paul Rorem. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993. xiii and 267 pages. Cloth. $39.95.

Paul Rorem gives, in his own words, "a full chapter by chapter commentary" on the surviving works of the unknown author identified as Dionysius the Areopagite, now called [Pseudo] Dionysius. His works include ten *Letters, The Celestial Hierarchy, The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy, The Divine Names,* and *The Mystical Theology.* Rorem earlier published *Biblical and Liturgical Symbols Within the Pseudo-Synthesis* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984) and *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works* (New York, Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1987), in collaboration with Colm Luibheid.

This volume by Paul Rorem issues an invitation to scholars "to undertake the task of interpreting the Dionysian writing and evaluating their influence" (p. 5) and itself makes an impressive contribution to that task. Rorem provides a *vademecum* to these works, which examines the structure of each work, deals with issues of interpretation, indicates something of the influence the works have had through history, and provides abundant notes that call attention to the modern critical literature on Dionysius.

Dionysius introduced the term "hierarchy" into Christian theology, interpreted the liturgical acts of the [eastern] church in *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, stimulates the study of theology in the narrow sense as the account of God by interpreting the names of God in the scriptures, and, in his *Mystical Theology*, stresses the concepts of apophatic theology, the knowing of God through unknowing. This unknown sixth century author in many ways stands at the threshold between patristic and medieval theology. And Rorem initiates the reader into his thought as the reader works through the text Rorem aided in providing in the translation he helped to produce.

I have just one or two strictures. Rorem does not, in my opinion, ask whether the names in the ten letters are not all as fictive as is the name Dionysius attached to the corpus. Gaius is the equivalent of Smith or Jones in Latin (Letters 1-4), the names Dorotheus the deacon (Letter 5) and Sosipater, the priest (Letter 6) sound suspiciously like names used because of their meaning. One could treat in the same manner the names Polycarp (Letter 7), Demophilus (Letter 8), Titus (Letter 9) and John (Letter 10). He borrows the names Polycarp, Titus, and John from the New Testament and earlier tradition. In short, the names themselves seem to stand for "stock figures." I also wonder whether Rorem pays sufficient attention to possible Platonic influence in Dionysius, e.g. in the three subdivisions in each person, a clear allusion to the Plato view of the state and the individual in the *Republic* (p. 23). I wish that he had adopted the growing convention of classical scholarship of transcribing Greek names, not Latinizing them, e.g. Dionysios, not Dionysius. Finally, Oxford University Press makes it difficult for the engaged reader to track motifs through the book, evaluate the influence of modern writers on Rorem, or identify ancient materials Rorem cites, since the book has no index of subjects.

Nonetheless, this is a major accomplishment that will be a standard guide to Pseudo-Dionysius for the next generation. One hopes that Rorem will take the manifold comments about influence in the later church and develop them into a coherent history of Dionysian theology from the appearance of the texts themselves to the Reformation and beyond. It would complete a significant corpus of work. I congratulate my former faculty colleague at the Lutheran School of Theology and creative scholar on a major accomplishment. Read him and you just may also read Pseudo-Dionysius—and both will enrich you.

Edgar Krentz

Briefly Noted

For some strange reason Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's **Revelation: Vision of a Just World** (Fortress Press, $12) escaped the notice of this journal when published in 1991. As the year 2000 approaches, millennial speculation is bound to burgeon. Pastors who need a resource for interpreting the book of Revelation in the face of that biblicism will find this a helpful resource. Prof. Schüssler Fiorenza knows the historical and social settings of the book well, but concentrates on a rhetorical analysis that illumines the persuasive character of the polyvalent language of this fascinating biblical text. You will find this a very helpful book. Four years have not dated it at all! *Edgar Krentz*

Mennonite Peacemaking: From Quietism to Activism. By Leo Driedger and Donald B. Kraybill (Herald Press, $14.95). The authors (both sociologists who either are Mennonite or specialists about the Anabaptist tradition) have put together a very helpful history of the Mennonite Church in regard to its central witness. The book's title captures the plot and contains interesting information and exchanges among presently well-known theologians like Yoder and Kaufmann—both Mennonites. The book is of primary interest for Mennonites, yet can be read with profit by all interested in peace-studies and the concrete embodiment of "witness for peace" in particular denominations. *Reinhard Hütter*

The Harper Collins Study Bible. Edited by Wayne A. Meeks (Harper Collins, $40). This book brings together all of the Old Testament, New Testament, and the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical books of the Bible using the language of the New Revised Standard Version. The efforts and scholarship of the contributors to this work are welcomed, as are some of the maps which, prior to this work, have not been included in other Bible publications. With such an outstanding compilation of material in this work, it is disappointing to discover that the editor has omitted even a brief concordance. Also, the format of this work may be more of a hindrance to students of scripture than an aid. The editor boasts that this work contains sixty percent Bible text and forty percent notes, yet there are no textual flags which would serve to alert the reader to direct his/her attention to the notes. Additionally the notation format chosen by the editor may also be a hindrance to some readers. Instead of aligning the biblical references in a flush left configuration with each column, the editor has chosen a continuously running left-to-right style. Though this choice utilizes every space available for print, it may be more difficult for the reader to locate specific verses of interest. *Kathleen G. Kasper, LSTC*

Cambridge Annotated Study Bible. Edited by Howard Clark Kee (Cambridge, $36). After a 100-page introduction to the books of the Bible, this study Bible prints out the text of the NRSV with cross references in the inner margin and commentary in the outer margin. At the end of the book one finds a glossary, various tables, and maps (three for the OT; four for the NT). The only trouble with this book is that it does not measure up to the competition of the Harper Collins Study Bible! Harper Collins is written by many leading scholars instead of by one person (Kee is a NT scholar and his notes on the New Testament are much longer than on the Old), and the people who wrote the notes for Harper Collins have often published extensively on the book in question; Harper Collins includes the apocrypha; its notes are much much fuller—often half the page is notes; its type is much larger; it has 16 maps. Harper Collins should become the standard Bible used in parishes for the next generation. *Ralph W. Klein*

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Preaching Helps

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost—Christ the King, Series C

Can We Talk?

Joan Rivers does not have a patent on that phrase, but it has become a kind of hallmark of her blunt and outrageous humor. Her style is alternately "in your face" and engaging. Seldom dull.

The lessons for these days are anything but dull. Rarely monological. Usually dialogical, and dialogues of exaggeration, confrontation, revelation.

What a cast of characters. As good as anything on talk radio or daytime TV: Paul and Timothy, that Widow and the Judge, Ruth and Naomi, the crooked Steward talking to himself, the Rich Man definitely not talking to Lazarus but appealing over his head to Father Abraham. We have Jesus calling to Zacchaeus, God talking to Moses, Jacob wrestling with an Angel.

All of them talking. **Janet Corpus** and **John Stendahl**, our contributors, are friends of long standing who set out to collaborate conversationally on the texts for this last third of the Pentecost Season. They found that conversation over long distances, while not impossible, is certainly hard.

Conversation over short distances, say the distance from the pulpit to the pew, is also hard. Reuel Howe wrote a book years ago on Dialogical Preaching. I forget the exact title, but the image sticks with me. The

lessons for our season are full of stories of dialogue, dramatic conversations. And the task is to draw folks into that drama and those conversations, so that they hear the voice of God speaking to their hearts.

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Thanks to these pastors for letting us in on their conversations and for encouraging our own dialogues with our congregations. Can we talk? Yes! In fact, it's hazardous to our health if we do *not* engage in good talking Sunday by Sunday.

Let's keep talking!

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Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost October 8, 1995

Psalm 113
Amos 8:4-7
1 Timothy 2:1-8
Luke 16:1-13

First Reading

Two fine texts first, the passionate eloquence of Amos and the apostolic exhortation to lives of holy harmony and prayer. Contrasting and yet complementary, both worthy of emphasis and use. But impossible to avoid this Sunday is the Gospel reading with its peculiar words from Jesus. Plenty of folks out in Pewland will be mystified by this strange teaching. With the pedagogical perversity we may by now almost have learned to expect of him, Jesus commends as exemplary a dishonest steward. That model for Christian action may be made comprehensible when we consider that Jesus here draws on a type of *qal wa homer* argument, the kind of rabbinic *a fortiori* derivation of truth about righteousness from the realm of the common or wicked. ("If these..., then how much more..." *cf.* Lk 11:13, 12:24, 12:28.) That kind of argumentation may indeed be seen in verses 10-12, providing a good sharp moral to the story that Jesus has told.

Yet it seems to me that neither verses 10-12 nor the equally powerful saying of Jesus in verse 13 does function as a moral to the story. The tale of the dishonest steward seems rather to have its conclusion articulated in verse 9, and one would be hard pressed to explain how either the call to faithfulness or the choosing of the true master explicate the story of an untrustworthy steward trying to save his own hide. There is, moreover, no convincing resolution of this difficulty to be had by positing an economic system in which the steward was not really dishonest but just playing with his own profit margin. Such a fanciful exegesis would defy not only the apparent logic of the story itself but diminishes its drama and overlooks the designation of the servant as ὀικονόμος τῆς ἀδικίας (v. 8).

Verses 10-13 speak truths and warnings distinct from the implication of the parable. They are not unrelated to the parable, but they seem put at just this point in the text as a kind of corrective, as if a worried redactor thought Jesus' words too open to misunderstanding or too crude. Lest we, the readers and hearers, get things wrong with this difficult parable, we are offered two rather more accessible pieces of dominical teaching. The effect makes a difficult text more confusing, but it does also assure that at least a part of this pericope will bear an easily grasped and frequently needed word of exhortation.

Pastoral Reflections

How, then, shall we understand this strange tale of the dishonest steward and his bold campaign to find new patrons to shelter him from hardship or disgrace? If we let the story stand in the context of Luke's social gospel it may not be hard to imagine what is being described. First of all, a day of reckoning is coming, an audit of accounts. What hope is there for the one who has squandered the entrusted goods in selfishness and deceit? The tables will be turned, and where will there be a place for the unrighteous steward to eat? The parable provides an answer. A cheap, low-minded solution, practical and opportunistic. The thing to do is to ingratiate oneself with the debtors, to hustle and so get oneself new patrons, that they might give refuge in the time of judgment. They say

you can't "buy friends," but the crass world knows, and Jesus seems to agree, that you can—at least in some important, potentially lifesaving ways.

It is, of course, strange that the master should commend the steward who has cheated him by faking the books to cut a new deal with the debtors. But not so terribly strange if this is the same kind of master who figures in the other eschatological parables of Jesus, if this is the same master who has such a peculiar pay scale for his workers or such a gullible extravagance in welcoming home a wastrel son. If this master expresses divine wisdom—is indeed an image of God—then this commendation might begin to make sense to us. What the hustler did was to use the goods of his stewardship to make a place of welcome for himself on the day of judgment. In Jesus' words, he used unrighteous mammon to make friends for himself. And Jesus says we should do likewise, "so that they may welcome you into the eternal homes."

This counsel and exhortation fits within the Lucan awareness of the Kingdom as a place of economic reversal, where Lazarus eats and the rich man hungers. When the time comes, will those who now sit at table recognize in you a friend to welcome? What will you have done (with real money, not just with cheap words) to have made friends among those who will then have the power to save you? The motives of the dishonest steward are crass, but the story is therefore all the more effective in presenting the urgency of the issue. Using money to make friends among the debtors of the world, the last who will be first, is not a matter of virtue but of our survival. Would that the virtuous "children of light" had as much drive as this "child of this age."

The story is not a perfectly neat little allegory, but it is a mighty parable with an urgent call for those of us with wealth at our disposal to hurry and seek new arrangements before it is too late for us. Is it clear in our churches, as it is sometimes suggested in our nightmares and newspapers and affirmed in our scriptures, that our wealth will fail us? Is it clear that we will need friends among those who now seem only strangers and debtors in the world? Is it clear that the Eucharist itself, the great feast of free and costly grace, involves an act of economic redistribution, a sharing and a depending?

Such questions are not only consonant with the prophetic challenge of Amos; they are also (somewhat surprisingly) implications of the proverbs that are appended in verses 10-13. They may strike us as more law than gospel, but we who trust the gospel, who trust the saving love of Jesus, can perhaps therefore stand to listen to him when he challenges us thus. JS

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost October 15, 1995

Psalm 146
Amos 6:1-7
1 Timothy 6:6-16
Luke 16:19-31

First Reading

The theme of reversal is present in the texts from Amos and Luke. In Amos those who are at ease and feel secure, who lie on beds of ivory and lounge on couches, who eat well and sing idle songs, will be the first to go into exile! In Luke the rich man is finally in agony, thirsty and tormented; hungry Lazarus is carried by angels to be with Abraham. This theme is oft repeated in Luke. Drastic change, complete reversal is coming. Yet, reversal doesn't change relationships. Reversal only turns the tables.

The lesson from 1 Timothy provides an interesting counterpoint. Rather than emphasizing actual material conditions, 1 Timothy talks about the condition of the heart or will, about how our lives are oriented. Wealth alone or wealth in itself is not the problem here. Rather "those who want to be wealthy fall into temptation, trap, and many senseless and harmful desires [ἐπιθυμίας] that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the root of all kinds of evil is the love of silver, of which some desiring [ὀρεγόμενοι] have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains" (vv. 9-10).

Ἐπιθυμία is "desire" in the sense of *desire for*, as desire for honor, food, or wealth. Ὀρέγομαι is *to desire toward*, incline toward, or be drawn to; that is, on one hand, desire for wealth and, on the other hand, orientation toward wealth. In this passage, being drawn toward wealth, one wanders away from faith. Wealth and faith are alternative orientations. The text goes on (v. 16) to urge shunning "these things" (wealth, love of silver) and pursuing godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness.

Together the texts offer two perspectives on wealth. In Amos and Luke, wealth opposed to poverty is a state or set of conditions. The people in these conditions are set apart and opposed to each other. At death—in the end—these conditions are reversed; the relationship is not changed but turned around. The consequences are far reaching; the company we keep in this life is the company we keep forever. And because the rich man wasn't with Lazarus in life he can not be with Abraham.

In 1 Timothy, wealth is opposed to faith as an object of desire, as a focus or orientation in the world. Earlier in the text (vv. 7-8) we read, "For we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it; but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these." In an essential material way, despite the world's setting us in apparently unequal and even opposing relations, we come into this world equal and, in that, capable of mutuality. In faith, we are oriented toward the full realization of that mutuality rather than being subject to the "temptation, trap, and senseless and harmful desires" which, rather than making us wealthy, turn back our desire and plunge us into ruin and destruction.

Pastoral Reflections

Our society's great economic chasm is getting wider and deeper. Economic inequality has been on the rise in the United States since the 1970s. "We are the most unequal industrialized country in terms of income and

wealth, and we're growing more unequal faster than the other industrialized countries," said Edward N. Wolff, professor of economics at New York University.

"Wealth" refers to property in land, homes, other buildings, financial investments, savings, and such. "Income" refers to incoming money based on current wages and salaries as well as forms of deferred income received (e.g., pensions and Social Security).

Federal Reserve figures from 1989 (the most current as I write) show that the wealthiest one percent of U.S. households, those with net worth of at least $2.3 million each, owns nearly 40 percent of the nation's wealth. For comparison, consider Britain, a nation with a feudal legacy of large wealth and income differentials. The wealthiest one percent of the British population owns about 18 percent of the wealth. U.S. households with wealth of $180,000 or more, comprising the top 20 percent, have more than 80 percent of the country's wealth, a higher figure than in other industrial nations. On the income scale, the lowest earning 20 percent of people in the U.S. earn only 5.7 percent of all after-tax income paid to *individuals* each year. The top 20 percent of U.S. *households* in terms of income, those bringing in $55,000 or more in after-tax income, have 55 percent of all after-tax income. Since these statistics were gathered, the distribution of wealth and income in the U.S. has worsened.

Data for wealth and income distribution do not take into account such government economic programs as food stamps or Medicaid, which redistribute income toward equality. Neither do the data fully describe the social dimensions of differential access to education, nutrition, transportation, housing, health care, and other services which wealth and income afford and which perpetuate and deepen differences. If the data represent a great chasm, they only point to one dimension of that chasm. Such economic polarization is politically, socially, and culturally divisive. The data are also blind to differences of age, race, sex, language, nationality, and other factors along which our way of life discriminates, playing out economic inequities and laying the basis for deeper and wider divisions. We witness these divisions in our daily work lives, in our children's schools, in our communities, and in the life of the church.

Whether his wealth was inherited or acquired, despite his vast resources to do *something* the rich man never bridged the chasm—or filled it in, as Luke might put it (3:5). Some of us have the rich man's economic privilege to use differently from the way he did. In the U.S. we have democratic political rights, another means to affect the chasm. We have the power and face the choice either to dig the chasm and dig it deeper and wider or to fill in the chasm. In the light of Jesus' story of the rich man and Lazarus, how do we exercise our power as citizens in a democracy? How do we articulate and make choices affecting the wealth and income distribution of our nation? JMC

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost October 22, 1995

Psalm 95:6-11
Habakkuk 1:1-3; 2:1-4
2 Timothy 1:3-14
Luke 17:1-10

First Reading

Again here we are bidden to pay attention to Jesus' teaching in the record of the gospel. Second Timothy calls for attention and faithfulness to the apostolic teaching about Jesus, but the apostolic tradition eventually comes to convey also the words remembered and reported as *from Jesus* himself. There is no need here to rehearse common knowledge and familiar theories about "Q" and the source of the sayings. But let it be noted that there is something significant in the way in which the church pays attention to, or fails to attend to, Jesus as teacher. There *is* a strong tendency among Christians to make Jesus' rabbinic preaching so secondary to the narrative of Jesus' redeeming work as to be of little value beyond illustrating, ornamenting, or advancing the *story* of his ministry and passion. Many Lutherans, indeed, seem to look askance at the strong interest in Jesus the teacher evidenced by recent books on the historical Jesus; such an emphasis, it is argued, misses the point, substituting the figure of a kind of first century guru for the crucified and risen Christ.

Yet it is a striking aspect of the Synoptic Gospels—most radically in Mark but present in all three—that Jesus frequently points his audience away from their messianic focus on his person and back to his teaching. The *primary* mission of Jesus is indeed described not as his inevitable embodiment and enactment of the Kingdom but his teaching of it: not that people should wonder at how well he carried its power but that they should believe and do it themselves. Even the christologically pointed words from the cloud make another point, correcting the disciple who wanted to worship Jesus: "This is my beloved son. *Listen* to him."

It seems, moreover, that we are unlikely to have an adequate understanding of the ministry, suffering, and death of Christ—or of his resurrection—unless we consider what his teaching was about, what it was that he cared so much about. What was the teaching his followers saw rejected in his death and vindicated when he was raised? There is a reason that the tradition produced these mixtures of teaching and narrative, and it wasn't just, even in John, to adorn the drama or redemption with other words and signs. There is an interesting way in which our attention to Jesus' teachings in this long green season can be thought of as a reflection of the structure of Mark's Gospel. When Jesus is risen, the messenger tells the women—and us the overhearing audience—that he will be found back in Galilee. And so we are pointed back to where his ministry started, to try, perhaps, to get it right this time, knowing what we know. Back to "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ," to listen again, and maybe hear him as for the first time, no longer confusing admiration for the teacher with the learning of his lesson.

Pastoral Reflections

How passionately Jesus cares about people, about community, and most of all about the smallest and defenseless! The strong words about the millstone are here again, a warning worthy of underlining. Note that we are not just responsible for our own proper sins. Our responsibility is communal, and the crime of

another may be our guilt if we have led him into temptation, if we have caused a weaker sister to stumble. Watch out!

The prudence of locking your car or house may under this teaching involve not just the protection of your property; it maybe an act of concern for the one too vulnerable to temptation. But what of the ways in which we justify and indeed flaunt our wealth? Consider how we live in an economy fueled by envy and desire, by the felt need to have whatever is still lacking, what the neighbor has, what the people on television have. How much do we do to quell such appetite in ourselves, let alone to protect our children and the children of strangers from the forces of temptation? How do we teach, by word and example, away from such a culture of destruction? We are responsible.

Jesus' teaching invites, indeed calls us to live otherwise in the world. And that too is a communal calling. Together. Thus these words about forgiveness, this attention to the resilience of a community in the face of failure and sin. Here the count on required forgiveness is only seven; elsewhere we get as high as seventy times that, and, of course, even 491 times would not fall outside the realm of this teaching. But note that the injunction here involves both rebuke and forgiveness. Members of this community remain responsible to and for one another. Forgiveness, like words of challenge, is not the end but the exercise of that responsibility.

In the midst of this series of sayings comes the request of the disciples: "Increase our faith!" In this context it seems a particularly understandable prayer. How can they do these things with the little faith that they have? How can we? And perhaps we can hear in those words also the wise yet poignant words of the anguished father, "I believe; help my unbelief!"

Yet Jesus' response to his disciples here is different than to that man in need. Now the point is to turn away from the quantitative way of thinking about faith. Such a concept of faith is only one more invitation for people to measure themselves against each other. And when faith is thought lacking, it becomes by its death an excuse or a despair. But if so little as a mustard seed should be enough to do stupendous things, if even having the slightest measure is to possess the power of the Kingdom....

And so this collection of sayings moves on to the image of simple obedience. Doing the work of God does not take great glorious gobs of heroic faith. It is a matter of knowing yourself as a servant. (I appreciate the reasons for the NRSV's preference for "slave" as a translation for δοῦλος, but I am unsure whether it quite rings true in its modern resonance.) To keep faith is to be obedient in God's household, a servant of God's kingdom. To keep faith is not a matter of heroism, grandeur, achievement, or competition. It is just to keep faith.

But it may also be done in love rather than in resentment, with grace rather than stiffly, with dignity rather than in fear. It may be the kind of faith I think of in connection with the Archbishop Nathan Söderblom, whose epitaph is simply the reference "Luke 17:10." It may be the kind of faith kept by those servants who have also heard their master say, "I do not call you servants any longer...; I have called you friends." (John 15:15)

But still, first and without checking the mirror or comparing the neighbor, keep faith. JS

Twenty-First Sunday after Pentecost October 29, 1995

Psalm 111
Ruth 1:1-19a
2 Timothy 2:8-13
Luke 17:11-19

Reading and Reflecting

My wandering among these lessons began in a wrong way, which nonetheless bears telling. In the Gospel Jesus tells the lepers what to do, "Go and show yourselves to the priest" (v. 14). They do it. They are obedient. One leper turns back. (This turning back is what caught my attention. Reading the Bible, I tend to think in Hebrew. A repentance perhaps? שׁוּב? Not so in the Greek, ὑπέστρεψεν.) Jesus commends the leper who turned back, praised God, prostrated himself at Jesus' feet, and gave thanks. On the other hand, Jesus expresses concern that the others didn't also come back thankful. But, I protest, they were doing what Jesus told them to do! As they went they were made clean. Jesus had told them to go show themselves to the priest, so they continued on their way. Isn't that what they were supposed to do? Which direction were they supposed to be going in?

Having wandered off in the wrong direction myself, I started again, this time focusing on the lesson from Ruth. What did I find? In this opening portion of Ruth, the Hebrew word שׁוּב occurs nine times. It means simply to turn. It is also the word used for repentance.

Naomi is returning (v. 6) to Judah from Moab, having heard that the famine which had led her out of Judah was over, "the LORD had considered the people and given them food." At first her two daughters-in-law were returning (v. 7) with her to Judah. But Naomi tells them to return (v. 8) to their mothers' houses, which are there in Moab. "No," they respond, saying they will return (v. 10) with Naomi to her people. Twice more (vv. 11 and 12) Naomi tells them to return. Finally, Orpah does return (v. 15) to her people and her gods. Again Naomi implores Ruth to return, but Ruth refuses to return from following Naomi to share house, people, and God. In Hebrew it gets to sounding funny: Naomi says, "return." Orpah and Ruth say, "no, we will return." Naomi insists they return. It's dizzying.

How do we know what direction to go in? How do we know what direction will set our feet along the path God intends for us? In the story of Naomi and Ruth—particularly in these opening verses—movement with and toward God is movement in and amidst human relationships. God is present and at work here. In the intimate moments of our lives, not only household but also national and theological relations are shaped.

Naomi's return to Judah is precipitated by tragedies in her family, the deaths of her husband and two sons. She is bereft of the relationships in which she had a livelihood. But that is not all. The famine is over in Judah. The text puts this not as a matter of population, climate, and agricultural fertility but in terms of the LORD's relationship to the people. Naomi's daughters-in- law remain with her until she raises questions of their being in secure situations based on relationships—with their mothers and with husbands—which could provide livelihoods for them. She argues that remaining with her can not do that because she herself doesn't have the connections to provide their livelihoods, nor perhaps her own. Ruth, of course, persists rather than seek more promising relationships. Ruth's stubborn commitment to Naomi opened into a network of relation-

ships and possibilities so that even we know Ruth. She is the great-great... grandmother of our Lord.

Ruth remained in relationship with Naomi despite material, cultural, and even religious forces which pressed against that option. Isn't that what the tenth leper did in returning to Jesus? What is the difference between the tenth leper and the others? All were cleansed as they went off to show themselves to the priest. In this they were obedient to Jesus, whom they acknowledged as "Master." They were also being obedient to the law which taught that their cleansing be completed in the priest's ritual purification (Leviticus 14). Rather than respond to the material, cultural, and even religious factors which urged the tenth leper to do the same, the tenth leper turned to focus on Jesus. Rather than responding institutionally, the tenth leper responded interpersonally in and to the relationship in which cleansing and healing were possible. (Technically, use of the term ἐκαθαρίσθησαν [v. 14] suggests that Jesus had accomplished the lepers' ritual cleansing as well as their medical healing [v. 15, ἰάθη]. Jesus' words and the lepers' relationship with Jesus did not do what the priest would literally have done in deed but by other means accomplished in fact what the priest would have accomplished. The whole of it is that Jesus restores the lepers to the possibility of relationship in community.)

In turning to Jesus the tenth leper turns even from what Jesus had immediately prior told them all to do. This is faith. And it is a mystery of our faith worth meditating on. Having been restored, the leper listened and attended to the possibility of relationship and not the words merely. Christ is alive and in our midst. Every moment is new. Every moment is one in which to hear the Word anew and respond. Every moment is one in which to turn our attention again to relationship with Jesus and the promise of salvation. JMC

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Reformation Day
October 31, 1995

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

First Reading

We are, I trust, beyond the old anti-Roman uses of this festival. I suspect that the theme of the church's unity is preached as often on this day as the hearty bashing of Papists was in days gone by. There is, however, another division and prejudice to consider as we handle these texts and celebrate our theological heritage: Each of these texts, and the doctrine of justification itself, can too easily be read in the service of a more ancient heresy and sin, that of anti-Judaism.

The first lesson's powerful promise of ברית חדשה, first of all, will be twisted terribly out of its context and intent if we interpret that covenant as different in content from the old. The distinction here is not between law and gospel, Sinai and Calvary. It is rather in the appropriation of the covenant that the difference lies. The great and dreamt-of day is the one when the knowledge and fear of the Lord will come naturally. This time the law will be written on the heart, and no one will need to have it taught from without. The new covenant is that which will be kept because it will come naturally at last. Unless the continuity of the covenants is recognized, this passage gets heard as an ahistorical proof text, driving a Marcionite wedge between the Testaments.

The second lesson likewise should be handled with some care lest its reading play into the old stereotypes of Pharisaic Judaism as legalism versus the gospel of Christianity. That caricaturing view, so especially common in popular Lutheranism, not only bears false witness against the neighbor but diminishes the breadth and implication of Paul's teaching. It is not necessary to enter into the realm of Gentile boasting or Christian triumphalism—such as Paul warns against in Romans 11—to do justice to Paul's excitement at this discovered way of revisioning humanity, without pride and distinction. Much has been written on this aspect of Paul (including helpful work by my father, Krister Stendahl), but I fear Reformation Sunday speaking and hearing often falls into a more carelessly familiar pattern.

Finally, there is the reading from John 8, strong, gracious words pregnant with gospel but also bearing the taint of a deadly history. The familiar Johannine use of "Jews" to denote the rejecters of Jesus at first seems to find an exception here. These are "Jews who had believed in him." But soon those Jews too will fail to believe, and we will be launched into one of the ugliest confrontations between our Lord and his foes, one in which he makes explicit that they are children not of Abraham or of God, but of Satan (vv. 40, 44). Fortunately, this lection ends with the majestic 36th verse, just before the conversation deteriorates to the terrible words of enmity and demonization; nonetheless the stirring of that fratricidal argument may be sensed already, here in the stupidity of the Jews who would claim never to have been in bondage to anyone. So here again, let care be taken, lest these good and salvific words be permitted to nurture ancient hatred.

Pastoral Reflections

These annual texts are, of course, so familiar and frequently preached. Rather than offering a single analysis or approach that may quite likely be familiar, I'd like to sketch a potpourri of ideas. Somewhere here, I pray,

there may lie the beginning of a useful thought.

1. While there should not be a naive Christianization of the passage from Jeremiah, it is worth considering that for us the problematic and promise of that passage—the writing of the law on the heart—has received a peculiar sort of answer. We seem as far as Jeremiah from the day when catechism and preacher will no longer be needed, but the seal of what we call the New Covenant, established in the passion of God for the people, is in the incarnation of Christ, in his blood and his flesh. And therefore, we claim by our baptism, it is inscribed on us as well. We remain *simul peccatores*, sinners all the while, but might it be that already now the promised day has begun, that even now the sweet, acid waters of baptism are etching God's word and will on our hearts?

2. "I will...remember their sin no more." Imagine that! God has already forgotten so much of what we remember so fiercely, desperately, sadly. It seems so important to us, and God can't even remember it.

3. It might be interesting to approach Rom 3:19-28 with some thinking about what Paul means by faith here. It is clearly not fideistic assent to a developed system of doctrine, nor what some call "religion." We often say that it is "trust," but what does that mean when we unfold it? Is this something like the Hebrew concept of *emunah*? Is faith like or radically unlike what we call faithfulness? Does it perhaps even encompass the service of God not in obedience to the demand of law but beyond and apart from it? Or is that just more "works righteousness"? Can we explore these things in a way that's helpful and instructive and without becoming shrill or brittle in our commitment to this Lutheran language and tradition?

4. The inability of the Jews in this Gospel reading to remember their Judaism, their deuteronomic identity as slaves freed by the hand of God, is a key irony here. In that sense, Jesus is here the one who remembers and embodies the paschal calling of Israel. And what does this then also say to us who claim Luther as our father, or us who say we are Americans and always free?

5. Something funny happens in the metaphor Jesus uses in John 8:34-36, a fascinating shift. At the outset, the house is the house of Sin. But then somehow it becomes the house of God after all, the one where the Son has the authority to make the slave free. That peculiar transformation may speak powerfully of what it's like to receive the gospel, to learn the Truth hidden from the world.

6. In this fiftieth anniversary year of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's martyrdom, it might be worth reflecting on his quest for freedom, a journey which involved the acceptance of guilt and suffering. Bonhoeffer's life and his moving poem *Stations on the Way to Freedom* could serve as worthy resources for the consideration of what it means that the Truth will make us free. JS

Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost November 5, 1995

Psalm 121
Genesis 32:22-30
2 Timothy 3:14-4:5
Luke 18:1-8a

First Reading

While the thematic of the first lesson and the Gospel will probably engage us and our congregations more, this Sunday's second lesson offers us an opportunity to step back and consider the secondary, but in some ways antecedent, matter of hermeneutics. The beginning of 2 Tim 3:16 ("All scripture is inspired by God") is sometimes quoted as a proof text for certain views of scriptural authority and authorship. For some, of course, this verse refers to a kind of literal dictation of the scriptures from the lips of God to the mind of the writers. Some take it further to mean that every verse of scripture speaks with equal and full authority for us, or that no text may be contextualized or made relative to any other text or principle of scripture.

Such interpretations, however, seem to me a bit mechanistic. Being "inspired" (θεόπνευστος, God-breathed) is both more organic and poetically richer than the image of dictation. It has to do with what God did to the earth creature Adam, and what the risen Christ did to his disciples on Easter. There are, of course, many forms of divine inspiration, and we are in big trouble if it is exclusively in scripture, never in the words of poets and preachers and lovers and common folk that the living Word of God is spoken, inspired by the Lord and Giver of Life. There is, of course, a qualitative, difference in the authority for the Christian community of these words, the church's book, treasured and transmitted as the necessary and reliable source of story and teaching. Its canonical standing distinguishes it from those works about whose value and inspiration we may disagree.

But note that these verses do not speak of inspiration for its own sake. The point of scripture's being "God-breathed" is that God seeks to breathe through it into us. It is inspired in order to inspire. So we are to *use* it. The full sentence reads, "All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work." *Useful.* This is rather different from a propositional view of the Bible as an inerrant answer book. The sacred writings are there for communication, to reach people, to challenge and equip. The inspiration is not of a static collection of acts and truths; it is of words intended to move and help and challenge, words all available for the service and speaking of God's living Word.

Pastoral Reflections

With that hermeneutical excursus behind us, let us turn to the other two texts for this day. For all the differences between them, they both present us with images suggestive of human struggle with God. Jacob wrestling with the mysterious stranger on the bank of the Jabbok and the importunate widow bugging the judge to distraction have both functioned as icons of that deep mystery in which the divine will is vulnerable to the force of the human.

How can it be so, that God should be affected, moved, changed by mortals? A philosophical absurdity, an impertinence, perhaps even a blasphemy lies in that notion. C. S. Lewis made sense when he spoke of

prayer as our exercise, changing us rather than changing God. Learning how to say, "Thy will be done," and so shaping our own wills in conformity with the divine, that makes sense. Prayer as doxology and thanksgiving, teaching the grace of blessing, is, of course, also itself a gift. Even prayer as a work of transformative self-knowledge, opening oneself in trust and honesty, that too makes good sense. Such prayer is good and right, a sacred and healing task. But among the forms of prayer there is also asking, demanding, pleading, arguing, reminding, bargaining, calling God to task. And such supplication relies on the scandalous notion that God will be moved.

Even the great prayer of our communion, the Thanksgiving, carries the quality of this struggle with God. It is a prayer for the Kingdom, not just reminding ourselves of what God has done but reminding God of that blood-sealed Covenant with us, lifting up the body of Christ and the prayer of Christ, calling for the fullness of what we have known only in part and promise. "See here your beloved Son, and us with him, his body in us. Remember, O God, and have mercy. Your Kingdom come... on earth, not just in heaven... give us today...."

Perhaps it is best just to go on praying our intercessions and supplications without calling attention to the philosophical peculiarity of that enterprise. I suspect, however, that many in your congregations, as in mine, have sometimes wondered about the nature and efficacy of such prayer. Some, indeed, may have grown afraid of praying in honest desire or need, limiting their prayer lives to the noble quest for agreement with God. Some may want only to pray maturely, without naive expectations of an answer.

Mature, serenity-seeking, ennobling prayer is a good thing, worthy of commendation and nurture. But importunate prayer, trusting a good God to answer, is what Jesus commends to his followers this day. Even if we cannot make abstract sense of it, such prayer invites us to faith, lets us imagine ourselves as those who belong in the household of God, children with a claim on the parent, a right to ask, beg, and even to expect and demand. Such prayer joins us to our calling as God's children. And if we are then disappointed in our prayers, let our anger be also as that of children who trust love's hands to catch them in the end. As Jesus did.

Such prayer invites us also deeper into the mystery of the incarnation, for it bids us know God as one so in love as to become vulnerable to us, pinned down like Jacob's wrestler, nailed like Jesus, held by covenant and desire.

It may be questionable to lay this disquisition on prayer on the great story of Jacob at Jabbok's Brook. That text is far richer in meaning, to be sure. But still it is most consonant with both the knowledge that we may walk wounded and lame from our struggles with God, and yet be most surely blessed there, called and named anew. JS

Twenty-Third Sunday after Pentecost November 12, 1995

Psalm 34
Deuteronomy 10:12-22
2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18
Luke 18:9-14

First Reading

This story echoes that of the rich man and Lazarus. The Pharisee stood by himself praying. The tax collector is standing "far off" (18:13, μακρόθεν) just as the rich man looked up from Hades and saw Abraham "far away" (16:23, μακρόθεν) with Lazarus. In both stories Luke describes a reversal. For the rich man and Lazarus, it is a reversal of wealth and comfort. With the Pharisee and tax collector, we have a reversal of moral, religious, and honor status. The suggestion is that a great chasm is fixed not only in our economic life but also in our religious life.

Jesus tells this parable "to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others as nothing" (ἐξουθενοῦντας). They trusted in themselves. Obviously, they had lost faith in a basic sense. And yet, from the example of the Pharisee, we see that it is precisely in living out his faith, in *trying* to live out his faith—he was, after all, concerned about being righteous—that he got lost. And having gotten lost, he could regard the tax collector contemptuously, as nothing.

The problem is articulated not in terms of relationship with God. Rather, the problem lies in relationship with self and with others. The Pharisee's understanding of himself is based in a negation of others. Ironically, it is in his relationship with God that the Pharisee finds the basis for denying others, for setting himself in righteous opposition to sinners. "God, I thank you that I am not like other people." Yet, the text from Deuteronomy remembers, it was as other—strangers and slaves in Egypt—that God heard us and called us out. Precisely in our dealings with others is our relationship with God realized. Luther has a typically lively way of putting it. "The Christian also knows that God has said, 'If you want to love and serve me, do it through your neighbor; he needs your help, I don't.' This is faith active in love."

Pastoral Reflections

How amazing it is that our faith, which draws us together and teaches us our oneness, gets distorted by sin into a basis for separation among us. Maybe we should stop trying to live out our faith in any religious sense. In *Health, Money, Love*, Robert Farrar Capon writes that "Getting rid of religion... is always the first step back to love." We have to be wary about being religious. Being religious is not the same as being faithful.

This is what I think people are, at least in part, complaining about when they say they believe in God and are Christian but that they can't stand "organized religion." It's easy for us to respond, at least in our minds, that people don't get it. They don't understand that Christianity is in community and that churches just happen to be like other institutions. We need to make compromises in congregations just as we do in other areas of our lives. But not only the ideology of individualism has prompted people to chose life outside the church. The quality of life in congregations is also a big factor. It is simply too religious. All those pastors and members have become churchified as if faith could be domesticated.

Deuteronomy—and more especially a parallel in Micah 6:1-8—seems to weigh in with those disgusted with "organized religion." What does the Lord require? Fearing the LORD, walking in God's ways, loving and serving God, keeping the commandments, loving the stranger. Micah's version: doing justice, loving kindness, walking *humbly* with God. Is this what we do in our churches? Are these things even possible in many of our churches? We're probably best at loving kindness. Some of the others we do less well. Walking humbly with God is a strange formulation. Isn't walking with God something to boast about, something that accrues to our local respectability, college admissibility, and other such? Walking with God—even walking *humbly* with God—tends to make us better than other people. Isn't that so? And isn't it these things—the syrupy kindness, the lack of our doing and serving, and the self-confident propriety of our congregations—that people dislike about "organized religion"?

I love those people outside the churches who will not let me have an evening off, who refuse not to talk about God, who pester me with their taunting unbelief, who torment me with stories of what evil God has allowed in the world, who defy me to prove to them that Jesus ever lived or that there is a God at all. I know I'm not alone. Many of us smile with joy at that kind of faith, that kind of determination and need to resist a loving God who has a gentle iron grip on someone. So much of these people's energy is focused on God.

How can we bring the devotion of these "unbelievers" together with the story and fact of Jesus Christ? On the other hand, how can we free those who know and tell the story to trust that it's the story, not their knowing or telling it, that is decisive? Those of us on the inside ask ourselves some form or another of the first question. We do that in the context of what we call "evangelism." However wrongheadedly, we at least approach that question. The latter question is less on our minds because we are in the church and we think that we more or less—with a few words of grace spoken over us from time to time as a reminder—have an advantage (however undeserved) over those outside. But we're wrong when faith has become something we do rather than being an escapable fact of our being.

Maybe once in a while it's important to do something indecorous in church, something utterly unexpected and maybe even shocking, outrageous. Martin Luther is good for this. You can say something outlandish and then reveal that it's a quote from him. (This can only get you so far, but it can be helpful.) We need to break out of our religiosity and break forth in love.

The people who can best lead us in this are strangers, people who pass by our buildings, mill around on the corner, or even come in our doors unexpected, who call us into unanticipated relationship, who unsettle our sense of who belongs. The Pharisee let religion get between him and the tax collector. How about letting strangers get between us and our religiosity, between us and our hard rock churchification? How about taking the risk that the stranger is Jesus among us, that a somewhat unusual, slightly unsettling visitor walking in one day is the future of our congregation? JMC

Twenty-Fourth Sunday after Pentecost November 19, 1995

Psalm 145
Exodus 34:5-9
2 Thessalonians 1:1-5, 11-12
Luke 19:1-10

First Reading

The first lesson lays out this theophany with such strong words of majesty and grace, with the dramatic use of the divine Name, and the wonderful response of Moses, praying not for himself but for the sake of the people. For many, however, the latter part of verse 7 here will raise a problem of theodicy. How can a good God, one who has just in fact declared divine goodness, visit punishment on the innocent children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren of a sinner? Where so moral a question is raised it should not be ignored. The question also raises an opportunity to help folks find a richer and more helpful way of listening and understanding (a more realistic and evangelical hermeneutic, to put it academically).

Those who raise the issue of justice, who are troubled or offended by this text, are to be treasured. They are alive, paying attention, and they have healthy, biblical instincts. All the better, they are willing to speak out. It is terrible that more people did not recognize, and more did not challenge, the rhetoric of Naziism and racism sixty years ago. It is frightening today how easily seductive stupidity and hateful invective is accepted from pulpits and radios. To object to this notion of guilt may be to object to the Bible, but it is to do so with the prophets themselves (Jer 31:29-30, Ezek 18:1-4); it is to stand with the word against the world.

But clearly Exodus 34:5-9 and its many parallels are "inspired and useful," as the apostle would tell Timothy. Some would be tempted to argue that the point here is just the positive word, the affirmation of the far greater steadfast love of God, but that is an evasion of the edge at the turning of this verse. It is *important* to know that God is not only a God of forgiveness. And it is sometimes urgent for us to deal with this reality; the burden of sin does fall on innocent children, on our future generations. The proof of that is in our experience, in our history books, in our newspapers. The heritage of slavery and racism is a yet unfolding example for our land. The terrible devolution of parental sin, the burden of the past, is attested by psychology and sociology. This verse points us to a reality; the justice proclamation of the prophets and the grace of the gospel do not erase its truth in human history.

The issue of theodicy is, of course, real, and it is right and human to struggle with the questions of God's agency and responsibility for suffering. But the legitimacy of such questions should not deflect the terrible but useful sense of this text: its recognition of the peril and cost of sin, its warning to the people, the people for whom the blessed Moses prays in love and fear, its warning to us. Be careful, for what you do may fall not only on yourself but on your beloved children, on those who will bear your heritage.

Pastoral Reflections

But let us then turn to this favorite among the children's stories of the Bible. Zacchaeus, that "wee little man" up in the sycamore tree, gets the gift of the Lord's hospitality, which is, as so often, the opportunity to welcome him—"Hurry and come down for I must stay at your house today." This is so typically Lucan a piece of storytelling. For all its

concision, there is a human warmth and depth to it. We can hardly help imagining a background story: Zacchaeus the runty kid, teased on the playground, left out when they chose up teams, unfortunate in love; Zacchaeus getting revenge, a power in the town, exacting monetary tribute from those who had mocked him; Zacchaeus the more despised, traitor to the house of Israel. And now here he is, wanting to see Jesus, gripped by some curiosity which may contain the element of uncomprehended hope. The community's wall of backs is to him, no one will invite him in, and he has to pull his embarrassing little body up a tree.

Then all changes. The reversing invitation perhaps never heard as a child, certainly not heard for a long time, is now shouted by Jesus: "Hey, Zacchaeus, I want to come to your house." Jesus wants to come over and play, to be his friend. The great guest honors him, the despised man up in the tree. How that grace has spoken, still speaks, to the yearnings of countless others!

What is easily glossed over, of course, is that other Lucan theme in the remainder of the story: the economic implication of this hospitable grace. When Zacchaeus is rejoined to the house of Abraham, the sign of that return—the sacrament of that renewed covenant—is not just table fellowship with Jesus. It is dramatic and sacrificial reordering of his personal finances. (One wonders what Mrs. Zacchaeus might have had to say about her husband's giddy promises after their famous guest was gone.) This lost man is found, but so now he must lose the very wealth that he had thought was his salvation. Of course, it may have brought him no joy beyond revenge, and of course time and history would have taken it from him anyway, but to give it away must still have been hard. That is, unless he was intoxicated with the wine of Jesus' presence. And what about us? JS

Christ the King
November 26, 1995

Psalm 95:1-7a
Jeremiah 23:2-6
Colossians 1:13-20
Luke 23:35-43

First Reading

These three lessons provide varied images of leadership, each of which has implications for related images of community.

In Jeremiah, the leaders of the community are shepherds; the people are the flock. Shepherds herd and drive a flock together, gathering them in. Shepherds tend and feed the flock. The shepherds make their lives in the fields because they pretty much need to be with the sheep all the time. The flock tends to disperse. Sheep by nature keep wandering off. Without a shepherd there would there be no flock—only isolated sheep, scattered and lost.

The Lucan text begins by telling us that "the people stood by watching; but the leaders scoffed at Jesus." What a picture of people and their leaders! The leaders misbehave in the name of leadership; the people stand by. And they expect the same of Jesus. In this passage Jesus is called "Messiah of God, the chosen one" and "King of the Jews." Those who scoff and mock with these titles expect them to point to leadership which imitates the scoffers' own. The Messiah of God, the King of the Jews would save himself! The criminal sees things another way. An innocent person accepts condemnation to death along with the guilty. And the criminal recognizes this as leadership, "Remember me when you come into your kingdom."

There is a dialectic in the Colossians passage. Christ is before all things and, at the

same time, in Christ all things hold together. Christ is the firstborn of all creation and, at the same time, in Christ all things in heaven and on earth were created. Christ is the head of the body, the church. The leader is apart and not apart. The leader is differentiated, yet inhering in the community and cohering with and for the community.

It is hard not to favor one or another vision of leadership and community. Perhaps as often with the biblical witness, we see different visions articulated in response to different questions, different historical situations. What is the faithful vision for our time? How are we called to constitute ourselves as community? What leaders will be raised up?

Pastoral Reflections

Among some there is much talk these days about Christian values in our public life, much talk about making the United States a Christian nation. The term "Christian nation" is troubling since Christ's kingship gathers together all humanity. A Christian nation wouldn't be like other nations. A Christian nation would be willing to go a long way in order not to compromise love, in order not to use force against an enemy real or imagined. A Christian nation would be willing to lose, to die. *That* would be a Christian nation.

The thought of a nation willing to risk security and even its life in order not to use force, in order to uphold love, is unimaginable to us—and frightening. And we are already frightened, in part for our nation's security—food security, boundary security, military security, intelligence security, financial security. These fears take local shapes as global changes are played out in our regions, states, and local communities.

The United States is experiencing decline as an economic world power. And many of us are afraid. It is easy to look for enemies, particularly when our cold war foe has evaporated. Many have become willing to criminalize those whom God has sent our way (anti-immigration laws), willing to lock away those whom God has sent our way (three strikes and you're out), willing to torture with hunger and cold those whom God has sent our way (criminalization of homelessness), and willing to turn our backs even on the little children God has sent our way (cutbacks in child health, child nutrition, and family support programs)—willing to exercise these worldly powers because we ourselves are afraid, afraid of dying. And afraid of death, we become slaves to death.

But Christ is king. The God who delivered the ancient Israelites from slavery has delivered us from slavery to death and the powers of death. Christ is king. Our nation, our world, has not been lost to "godless liberals" nor to the Christian Coalition. The world belongs to God. What does this mean for us? It doesn't mean that we abstain from political life. Following Jesus' example our Christian vocation is to confront and resist the powers of this world—not only in the state and in our civic life but also in the church and in our religious life, for religious leaders and institutions also become entangled with the powers of this world. Following Jesus' example we confront the powers unarmed except with the weapons of the Spirit... unarmed yet unafraid.

Pilate, the Roman governor, an agent of the powers of this world, asks, "Are you the King of the Jews?"

And we answer, yes, amen, this is our king. This child of an unwed mother, born in a manger, this homeless, crazy fool who does and says baffling, amazing, endearing, and frightening things, this one arrested, convicted, tortured, crucified—all for us. This is our king. JMC

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Ministry with Youth in This Third Time of Testing

Roger Fjeld
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Ministry with youth has never been a piece of cake! It has always been subject to conflicting agendas and unrealistic expectations. Some want youth ministry to focus on education. Some want it to reassert Christian values at a time of heightened vulnerability. Some want it to center on activities that will "keep the young people in the church." Some want it to provide opportunities for service, channeling young energies in productive directions.

None of that is new and none of it necessarily mistaken. But neither does it necessarily understand that the world our children will inhabit will be dramatically different than the one in which older generations have dwelt.

There is always a changing of the guard as one generation succeeds another. But more is underway now than simply a changing of the guard. For at least a generation, the very basis of American society has come into question. Robert Bellah says in the introduction to *Broken Covenant*: "We live at present in a third time of trial at least as severe as those of the Revolution and the Civil War. It is a test of whether our inherited institutions can be creatively adapted to meet the 20th century crisis of justice and order at home and in the world."

Those other two crises centered around declared wars. This third time of testing does not, but it is nonetheless full of conflict; a clash of cultures and a contest of values. It is frequently bewildering to all of the participants: those who want to recover a usable past, those who want to stabilize the present, and those who sense that the future will be very different.

There is much debate about why this third time of testing is upon us. It was triggered in the 60s. Some point to Vietnam, to a war most young people came to believe was not their war. Some point to the series of prominent assassinations that undermined the nation's sense of confidence and stability. Some reach behind these events to a media revolution; particularly in relation to popular music and to the omnipresence of television. All of these and more have contributed to a crisis of values and a growing rejection of the way things are.

Young people, like human seismographs, feel the crisis even if they are not able to articulate its causes or identify its solutions. They *know* there is something awry; that the inheritance has lost value as a guide to the future. This can easily turn into an indictment of the older generations, and often does. There is a sense in which the

youth culture is disowning many of the values Americans have counted valuable during most of the nation's history. An old Quaker proverb says, "We do not inherit the land from our parents, we borrow it from our children... and have an obligation to return it to them undamaged." Our children believe they are inheriting a landscape that is losing its ability to foster the good life, that they are receiving damaged goods.

This crisis has very little to do with the approach of a new century and the beginning of a new millennium. These may indeed take on symbolic importance, but only if a coherent vision of a new future develops. Right now the mood is one of impatience or anger or apathy; a critique of the way things are, rather than a blueprint for the way things need to be.

The idea of "a new world order" has been tested by older generations of Americans as a description of the future. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War mark the end of an era. We won! One would have expected an extensive celebration and great appreciation for those who led us to that victory. But the celebration sputtered and the old leaders are being turned out of office. More chilling is the recognition that the new age begins with new dangers and new disorders rather than a new order. And the mood may be turning ugly as we approach the 21st century.

A new order may indeed emerge, if only because power is preferable to a vacuum. But that new order is not likely to come quickly. There is no "quick fix" of the kind that Americans have come to expect. There is no way of knowing whether, after 30 years, we are nearing the end or are still near the beginning of the "third time of trial." But Americans of every generation are beginning to harbor the suspicion that the future may be a very disagreeable one. And with the suspicion comes the temptation to seek private havens in the storm; leave everyone to fend for themselves.

What does all of that have to do with youth ministry? Complex social analysis is not the everyday activity of American youth. Most of them live more parochial lives and have more common wants and needs. But the youth culture invites them to doubt the future. They know, or at least feel, that there is a growing crisis. They do not rush off to college in order to rush off to a good job...because they know that college education no longer guarantees the good life. They do not easily commit to relationships ...because they are not sure they can sustain them in an unpredictable world. They live more for the moment than their parents and grandparents did. Some of that is self-indulgence, but some of it simply reflects their doubts about a satisfactory future.

The temptation for the church, in such a time, is to concentrate on recalling young people to an old vision. Focusing on behaviors—drug use, sexual promiscuity, violence, disregard for authority, etc.—we treat the activities of youth as rebellion against what is right and good. The task, in such a construct, is to lead them back to the way things ought to be.

But what if "the way things ought to be" lies before us rather than behind us? What if the vision needed for the future is a new one, not a reconstituted old one? What if the distancing of youth from the older generations is not only inevitable but also necessary? And if so, what will contribute to the emergence of a new vision adequate to the needs of the future?

It will help, of course, if we are at least able to grant that we are in a time of testing and able to have some sympathy for a different future and its needs. There could be some creative intergenerational dialog if it could proceed on the premise that the future will be something other than a reincarnation

of the past. In such a dialog every generation is teacher and every generation is learner. The ugly alternative is that every generation neither teaches nor learns.

In the long run, it is the young people who will have to shape their own future. It is their future, and they will have to inhabit it before they can order it. What can the church do to help prepare them for this?

Our best contribution may well be an enriched understanding of God's call to all of us to be stewards of life. "Stewardship" has too often been narrowly understood as the offering of money and energy for the mission of the church. That idea is not attractive to youth, especially if it is experienced primarily as a call to support the institution. This generation doubts the usefulness of all institutions, including the institutional church. If we can offer a better, broader understanding of what it means to be steward, we can offer tools that will help this generation get on with its tasks.

That better sense has to do with God's claim on the whole of life; God's gift to each for the common good. People in every generation need to understand that God calls us to a common destiny, a common future. The world emerging before our eyes is not yet a "new world order," and it may not be orderly in our lifetimes. Commitment does not come easy at such times. It is hard to subordinate the self to the other, even in the best of times, much less in times of disorder and cultural drift. But it is also true that life lived at the margins between the old order and whatever lies ahead is quite empty of meaning, unless one can find purpose and meaning.

What we know, in fact, is that those who find a discipline that at once binds and frees are the ones who will find most meaning in life. Those who come to understand discipleship as stewardship and stewardship as discipleship are the ones who will live most richly. If we contribute that understanding to each other, the generation that must shape the future will have been strengthened for the task.

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