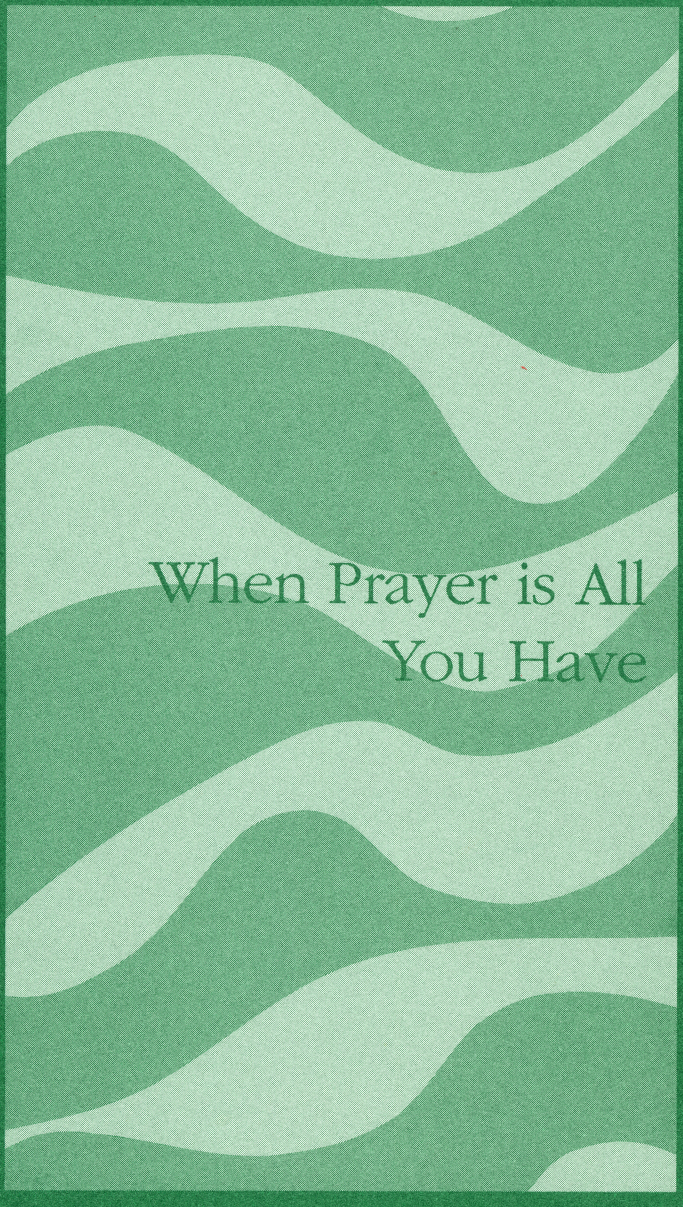
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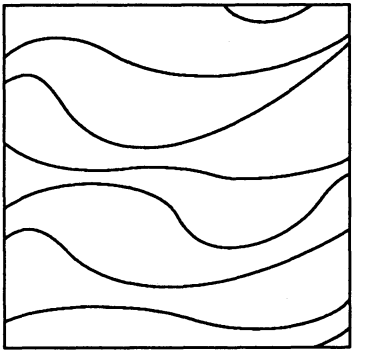
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Ninth Sunday after Pentecost—Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost

Contributors: Robert H. Smith, Lawrence Henning

When Prayer is All You Have

Quiet desperation. Spiritual loneliness. Self loathing. Terrors of conscience. Pain. Conflict. Despair. Burnout. Fatigue. Doubt. If—or rather when—any one of these terms defines our condition, there is only one resource big enough for our crisis, one God under whose wings we can really go for refuge (Ruth 2:12). The Psalmist cries "my God" precisely to the one who has abandoned her. From depths wide enough to include all conceivable troubles, the poet reaches out for one called Yahweh, helper in countless times past, hope for uncharted future years.

Jay C. Rochelle preached a "parting peace" to the community at LSTC when he left for a parish in Allentown by exploring five kinds of prayer for the spiritually rich. Start with lament, and then use prayer to remember the future in order to see the promises of God written on the end of time. Continue with prayer as a way to hope in the past and to make sure that the past no longer haunts us. Picture the present in prayer as full of the divine presence and a window for eternity. Embrace risk: prayer as risk-taking is the clearest sign that we believe in sheer grace.

Walter M. Stuhr notes that sexuality is the risky mixture of power, problem, and promise. Its over-riding purpose is human relationship, not to mention reproduction and pleasure. He discusses sexuality in the context of the office of the ministry and asks whether sexuality is a problem to be solved or a promise to be realized. We should give greater place to marriage in our mission and ministry, but also give due consideration to the possible blessings of sexuality beyond the structure of marriage. Structuring an understanding of sexuality is not only a matter of drawing boundaries, but also a matter of removing the barriers which limit the realization of sexuality's promise.

Harold Vogelaar issues an invitation for us to initiate interfaith dialogue. In places like Chicago, with its 300,000 Muslims and 100,000 Hindus, and in almost every other of our places today, there are mountains of ignorance, misinformation, and disinformation about the beliefs of others. The challenge is how to affirm the generous spirit of people toward others without diminishing or destroying their faith. Hands willingly united, whether in work extended or in prayer raised, can become symbols of minds that are open, of creeds that refuse to be closed, and of hearts unlocked. It is impossible to overemphasize the importance of personal encounter for making religious dialogue meaningful.

Craig L. Nessan writes about the disaster involving the Branch Davidians in 1993 and reports that some of their core convictions about the nature of God, the world, and scripture are shared broadly in popular religious culture. Scripture is understood in many places as a magical book containing predictions about the future, and the world is understood dualistically, with the forces of God arrayed against Satan. Some people blindly trust in a charismatic leader as God's chosen instrument. The article investigates the real setting of the Book of Revelation and calls on the church to develop leaders skilled in dealing with alienated young people. We need to interpret what is murky in scripture in the light of its clear center.

Andrew M. Weyermann continues his series on preaching by proposing that it's the task of the preacher to proclaim the center that holds. The fundamental reason why a preacher does not preach the gospel is an inadequate diagnosis of the hearer's situation. Sermons explore acts of the flesh which the preacher has experienced and the hearer can identify with. Unfaith underlies loveless and unjust deeds. The purpose of the sermon's diagnosis of the hearer's situation is to remind us how much we need God's compassion and how much we must be compassionate to all people. Through a sermon for Maundy Thursday we learn that the cross is God's healing memorial by which we can safely forget past sins.

Stephen Goodwin and **Lewis Groce** review the history of confirmation. It started as a rite in which the bishop confirmed baptisms

done by others, and it eventually became a separate rite. What once had been understood as a completion of baptism was acknowledged as a sacrament in the 15th century. Within the framework of a Lutheran understanding, however, baptism needs no bishop or human agency to confirm what God has accomplished. Rather, to affirm one's baptism is a life-long response, whereby we continually recall the new identity with which God has graced us in baptism. The church's continued validation of what we call "Confirmation" significantly undermines the important ministry of continuing education for all the people of God, especially adults.

Theodore Jungkuntz calls into question the use of the expression "God's unconditional love." This expression pictures God as a permissive parent who has no other motivating power than the unconditional acceptance of every human being regardless of that person's response. God's free gift always implies an unqualified demand. "Unconditional love" does not properly describe the love of the vulnerable God revealed in Holy Scripture.

Other features of this issue include a poem by **Mary Ellen Hansburg** and a back-page editorial by **President Jerry Schmalenberger.**

Most days we have a lot going for us. We easily ramble through concerns as diverse as the articles in this issue, we offer strength to those in need, we provide refuge, shelter, and a port for many in storms. But sooner or later, if not daily, it is our turn to be tested and we are the ones who are standing in the need of prayer. Then—when prayer is all we have—we come to know up close and personal that living Word who stands by our side upon the plain with his good gifts and Spirit.

When prayer is all we have, we aren't exactly broke.

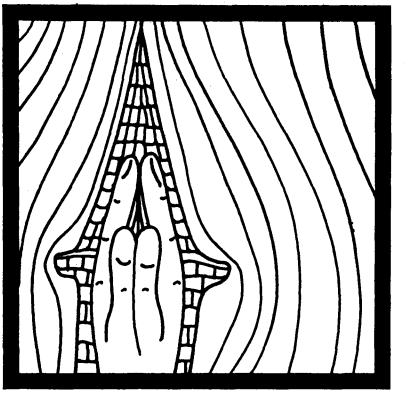
Ralph W. Klein
Editor

When Prayer is All You Have

Jay Cooper Rochelle
St. Timothy's Lutheran Church
Allentown, Pennsylvania

This sermon was preached by Professor Rochelle as he left LSTC in March to accept a call as pastor of St. Timothy's Lutheran Church, Allentown, Pennsylvania.

Text: Luke 13:31-35



This morning I am reminded of a line from a song by Bruce Cockburn, "I feel like I'm living in a hologram." Even more than that, I see myself as a hologram shrinking down to a small ball of light, which will in turn become a laser beam. Several weeks from now this beam of light will be pointed eastward and travel some eight hundred miles, until it will suddenly hit the streets of Allentown, PA, and presto! before other eyes will be the next hologram, or incarnation,

of JCRochelle. Only this time the incarnation will use its full name, Jay Cooper Rochelle, as a sign of change and coming to a new wholeness.

Let me state clearly that I do not identify with Jesus in today's Gospel; no LSTC pharisee ever came and warned me to leave this place. It is more than a little spooky, however, that the Pennsylvania Dutch and Moravian founders of the cities in the Lehigh Valley originally wanted to call the city I am going to "Jerusalem," and you ought to know that it is surrounded by three other cities and towns called Bethlehem, Nazareth, and Emmaus. But enough of this.

My real interest in this text is in the prayer of Jesus, and I want to use Jesus' prayer to talk about all kinds of prayer and especially my sense that all I have left is prayer. So if I titled sermons, the title of this one would be "When prayer is all you have."

In our Gospel, Jesus engages in lament, which is a yearning before God for some other reality than the one in which you find yourself, an accusing and a convicting of the Holy for not being quite powerful enough to overcome the gap between image and reality. Jesus is about to negotiate that narrow passageway of death with no promise to come to the other side, and his lament is at once a statement about himself and about Jerusalem. On one hand, the lament for Jerusalem is that they didn't know what they had when they had it, and they won't have this opportunity again. On the other hand, the lament implicates Jesus because he was unable to communicate fully the nature and purpose of his mission so that more people would have seen it and followed.

When Joe Sittler was dying and I was visiting him in the last weeks of his life, he lamented that the whole of life was "so damned inconclusive," that he had so much unfinished business, so many unfulfilled and incomplete thoughts. He was lamenting that there was no sense of roundedness to the whole thing, that his life was going to break off without conclusion. It was a lament, not of the "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem" type, but in a more pedestrian and measured sense, namely that every life, all our efforts, all of our connections and relationships leave so much to be desired, so many avenues uncharted, so many thoughts unexplored, so many interests without the time to follow up on them. Perhaps the real force of lament is not so against God but against the self, against the feeling of dreadful and woeful incompleteness when we move from one phase of life to another, from one life to another, from life to death. Lament is also about the guilt we feel when we go through the changes; it is the guilt that accompanies the knowledge that everything we did was never enough.

Prayer is all I have left these days. I see myself from outside; I see this Rochelle who goes through the actions and rituals of closure, seeking to neither deny nor dissimulate, but to remain present to taste separation and sadness at its bittersweet best. Sometimes I say, even mockingly, Who was this guy? And I remember the words of another Bruce Cockburn song,

Tie me to the crossroads when I die,
hang me in the wind till I get good and dry.
And the kids that pass can scratch their heads and say, "Who was that guy?"
Tie me to the crossroads when I die.

Oh, but there is so much more to it than lament. Let me tell you four additional ways to pray that define me as the days go by. Please listen. It will be good for you.

First, prayer is a way to remember the future. When all you have left is prayer, one

way you pray is to remember a future you once glimpsed, a future in which the resolution to all the senses of incompleteness you carry in your heart will come to pass. The future will be remembered as a time for wholeness, where the loose ends are tied up, not here of course but on a grander scheme than my puny mind can envision. In some way, what you might have become in any given place is revealed to you, not to taunt you but so that you may know that it all could have happened if things had been different, and the feeling that will come with such a prayer is one of rest and quiet, a sense of fulfillment even in the midst of all the inconclusiveness.

This kind of prayer allows us to see the promises of God written on the end of time through the power of the resurrection, and then to project those promises back from God's future to our time.

Second, prayer is a way to hope in the past. We live in many unresolved conflicts, many unforgiven sins, many unconquered temptations: all those demons that afflict us in the wee hours of the morning before the dawning of the light. Far from trailing clouds of glory, we find ourselves with a trailing cloud of manure and no broom to sweep it up, and we cry out in agony, forgive me oh forgive me you dead and lost and forgotten people from my past whom I hurt. So we hope in the past, we hope in the curative power of time, the healing power that comes when the past remains past and does not rise up to taunt or to haunt us. In a very deep sense, this is the meaning of letting-go, that the past is allowed to be the past and that we are allowed to claim it in a transfigured, if not fully redeemed, way.

One of my closest friends lives along Penn's Creek in a cabin he slowly transforms into a palace, with rotting Volkswagen buses in the front yard—it makes the place look like Montana—and the creek runs along the road by his house. One day Bruce and I were talking and he said to me in all seriousness, "you know there are a lot of guys who are going to wake up at the age of seventy-five, look back and say, 'My life wasn't so bad after all; I wish I had been there to live it.'" Prayer as hope for the past enables us to fulfill our wish to live our lives.

I think the closer you get to any end, the more does the present moment open to a depth that we normally don't notice but which is always there.

Third, prayer is a way to picture the present. I suppose the simplest way to say this is that I picture the present as full of the Presence, the Holy Presence that transforms even the simplest moments into windows for eternity. I think the closer you get to any end, the more does the present moment open to a depth that we normally don't notice but which is always there. Simple conversations take on a weightiness that ordinarily eludes us, merely because they may be the last words we will pass between us, and hence they become deeply revelatory of the sources of connectedness and love that bind us together as human interbeings.

One of the major gifts I wanted to bring to LSTC was a contemplative silence in which the holiness of the ordinary might be

experienced. If I personally ever had any success in this place, it was in those moments when we recognized the holiness of the ordinary, the sacredness of the commonplace, when tables in the refectory became translucent to the Lord's Supper, when moments of conversation were transformed into moments of prayer. God, people! That's what it is all about. It is so easy to forget this in the rush to fulfill institutional requirements of both seminary and synod that we can drown in details and lose sight of the mystery that brought us all here in the first place. Wake up! When you leave here today, don't forget to splash the cold baptismal water on your face to, once again, remember the God who brought you this far by faith.

> When we embrace risk, we are in a deep sense entering into petition.

Fourth, prayer is a way to embrace risk. When I take a risk, I am betting that there is another way to be Jay Rochelle than I have experienced before. I am betting that Jay Rochelle might become less of a racist than he is; that he might be more loving than he now appears to be; that he can live without certain modes of behavior or certain crutches for his consciousness. I am beseeching the God who is unknown to me to be present with me in a new state of being that I have not yet experienced. Prayer as risk-taking is the clearest sign that we believe in sheer grace, because the risk is that paths unexplored and uncharted will hold surprises for us in the form of a more fulfilled and fulfilling life in common with others than we now know.

Right now, my primary prayer is this risk-taking. I haven't a clue if this leap into the new will bring me fame and riches and happiness. Thus far, none of my leaps into the new has brought such things. But something more important than this will happen. I have enough of a track record in taking risks that I believe God will be revealed to me and to others in this new setting in surprising, grace-filled ways, on the strength of past performance, you might say.

To tell the truth, I am hoping the next holographic projection of Jay C Rochelle will be "the sage," in which a subtle but dazzling combination of learning-become-wisdom and experience will emerge which now eludes me, and whereby I might offer people a refuge beyond the vicissitudes of division and strife.

I have not used the customary ways of naming prayer, like thanksgiving and intercession, confession and adoration. In my own way I have named these, albeit in different words. When we hope in the past we engage in confession and intercession, confession for the wrongs we have committed and intercessions for those whom we have wronged, and we also give thanks for all the ways in which our lives led us to the place where we are.

When we remember the future we engage in thanksgiving and adoration, in the pure praise of the One who will bring all of our futures into a wholeness we cannot yet imagine.

When we picture the present, we engage in thanksgiving for the inscape of those things which on the surface appear so ordinary but which are filled with the gran-

deur of God's presence. Another word for this is adoration, that contemplative stance which puts us in a primal silence before the wonder and mystery of the world, a silence that is not oppressive or repressive. It is the silence which comes when the holiness of everything is so apparent that we have no choice but to be quiet before it.

When we embrace risk, we are in a deep sense entering into petition. When we take risks, we are praying that we might enter, through the effort and hassle of change, into a more full understanding and realization of ourselves, which is the nature of petition.

So then I have become five kinds of prayer, recalling lament with which we began.

Two final, comments, please: first, prayer is a form of resistance, a subversive activity, an act of guerilla faith. For when we pray, we place ourselves before the God whom we can never know or capture in our words or our concepts, and we are asking for ends and goals which we can never predict or prophesy. Prayer is a form of defiance in the face of an increasingly hostile and uncompassionate world, it is to take the great risk that at the bottom of it all is not the empty glass that held your Bass Ale, but rather the Lover of the universe who embraces you and brings you into common family, on common and level ground, with all the others gathered at the table—much as the mother hen gathers her chicks.

Evagrius of Ponticus, a fourth-century Christian thinker, said that to pray is to become a true theologian; and to be a true theologian is to pray. He meant that God's true nature and meaning are unveiled through the medium of prayer, that prayer is the only form of "knowing" whereby we grasp the incomprehensible, learn the unteachable, define the infinite, and discover the heart of the eternal. Prayer puts us in the realm of pure "theoria," or beholding. At prayer we see the *shekinah* of God which our words can only intimate. Such knowledge embraces your intellectual endeavors and transforms them into true theology and you into a true theologian. Ah, but this is to talk of mysteries which we can only stammer about.

Don't forget your prayers and God bless you all.

Human Sexuality and the Office of Ministry

Walter M. Stuhr
Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary

This article is a revision of an address delivered at a Pastors and Professional Leaders Conference of the Sierra Pacific Synod, ELCA. The theme of the conference was "Spiritual Leadership and Sexuality: Power, Problem, Promise."

According to the sequence of these three P's, one apparently has to work through the power issues and other problems of sexuality before one gets to the promise of sexuality. Biblically speaking, it really ought to be the other way around, since the first biblical word on the subject of sexuality is that it is a part of that created human existence which God declares "good." Nevertheless, when we speak from our experience, whether as church or society, we seem to move immediately to the problems of sexuality.

In *Howard's End*, the novel by E. M. Forster, first published in the United States in 1910, Forster writes:

> In a long letter [Margaret] pointed out the need of charity in sexual matters: so little is known about them; it is hard enough for those who are personally touched to judge; then how futile must be the verdict of Society. "I don't say there is no standard, for that would destroy morality; only that there can be no standard until our impulses are classified and better understood." (Chapter XXXI, p. 296)

Perhaps that's the problem in a nutshell. Almost eighty-five years later we are still trying to classify and better understand "our impulses."

The first word the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America spoke on the subject of sexuality had to do with the "problem" of homosexuality and ordained ministry. Indeed, in that case, the ELCA intentionally rejected the claim that the "promise" of sexuality applied to homosexuality, insisting that it be relegated to the "problem" category. The second word that the ELCA has been forced to speak on the subject of sexuality again has to do with the "problem," this time the problem of sexual abuse and ordained ministry—again ordained ministry.

The same trio of P's seems to apply to ordained ministry—power, problem, and promise. Among all of its members it is its ordained ministers with whom the ELCA is particularly troubled these days. And it is all around the issue of sexuality—homosexuality, sexual misconduct in professional relationships, and the fragility of clergy

marriage relationships. All are indicative of the fact that we don't have sexuality figured out, either as a church or as its "spiritual leaders," and neither in our understanding nor our practice of sexuality. At the same time, ordained ministers are expected to be among the leaders in our churchwide deliberations and teachings concerning sexuality, as we now seek to arrive at a social teaching statement on human sexuality.

For all its problems, we do continue to remind ourselves of the God-given goodness of ordained ministry in itself—of its promise. "Together for Ministry," the Final Report and Recommendations of the ELCA's Task Force on The Study of Ministry, affirms on the basis of New Testament scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions that the ordained ministry is "divinely instituted," that

> The means of grace requires that there be persons to speak the word and administer the sacraments. God calls such persons through the church to fill the office of ministry. (p. 16)

Indeed, this affirmation of ordained ministry is institutionalized in the ELCA Constitution:

> Within the people of God and for the sake of the gospel ministry entrusted to all believers, God has instituted the office of ministry of Word and Sacrament. (10.21)

It is important that, in coming to terms with the problems related to sexuality and ordained ministry, we establish at the beginning that in themselves they are "good" things, that we can be comfortable with affirming them, indeed with being identified personally with them. We can then approach them from the standpoint of promise to be fulfilled rather than as problem to be corrected. "Together for Ministry" establishes the basic goodness of ordained ministry. We will return to the matter of sexuality.

It is instructive to note another conclusion of "Together for Ministry," namely, that in determining the particular structure that will order the office of ministry, we must be careful that that structure facilitates rather than restricts that which constitutes its goodness—namely, by means of the proclamation of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments, "that human beings might believe in God and through Christ be reconciled to God" (p. 18). It is the *meaning and purpose* of the office of ministry, then, not its form, that is to take precedence. So, the Report concludes,

> The office of ministry, divinely instituted, can be humanly structured in various ways. Christians are free to order the office of ministry in ways that creatively reflect God's mission through the church and the centrality of God's ministry to all people through the means of grace. (p. 16)

Furthermore, the structure of the office of ministry is to be informed by considering its meaning and purpose in the context of contemporary information and experience. So, "Together for Ministry" refers to the contemporary American and global context for ministry, noting that

> [the] imperative to express the gospel and God's will for the world in terms which are understandable and applicable to needs in an ever-changing world has been a constant one, from the New Testament through later times, in Luther's day, and down to the present day. (p. 1)

Discussing human sexuality in the context of the office of ministry makes sense for a number of reasons. To begin with, ordained ministers are deeply involved in the issues

of sexuality, both personally and professionally. We are a part of the problem; we are expected to be a part of the solution. But, in addition, our reflection on ordained ministry has given a number of clues for how we might go about considering human sexuality. First, it is important to establish the value of the issue at hand; and questions of meaning and purpose are a part of the value question. Second, the matter of structure follows from, rather than precedes, the matter of meaning and purpose. Third, consideration of information and experience from the contemporary context helps us to move from meaning and purpose to structure.

A member of the churchwide staff, speaking to one of my classes, noted that the two "hot issues" for the ELCA have been sexuality and ministry. We have been simultaneously engaged in trying to figure both of them out. I want to suggest that the issues run not just in parallel, but intersect one another in significant and potentially helpful ways.

Now, back to the issue of human sexuality. How are we to value sexuality? Can we be basically affirming of our sexuality, or must we be on the defensive about it from the start? In our opening paragraph, we asserted that the first word to be put in for sexuality, from a biblical perspective, is a good word. Sexuality has its origin in God's creative activity. In the opening chapters of Genesis we find a clear statement that humanity and the earth and the cosmos of which they are a part exist by the intent and power of God, and in order to serve God's purpose. The rest of scripture assumes and affirms this. And within the creation narrative are these words:

> So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it.... And God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. (Gen 1:27, 28, 31)

The human species, along with the various species of plant and animal life, and earth and the universe, is created by God. That alone endows the human species, along with the rest of creation, with meaning—significance, value. But only of the human species is it said, "in the image of God." How are we to understand "in the image of God"? Cuthbert Simpson, writing in the *Interpreter's Bible*, states:

> ...there can be little doubt [that] bodily form was, to some extent at least, involved in the idea of the divine image. [But]...in Hebrew thought the body was a part of the whole person and necessary to [the person's] complete being... [So it is much more than that the human being looked like God.] ...image included likeness... in power of thought, power of communication, power of self-transcendence. (Vol. 1:484-85)

Consider within that context, the statement "male and female [God] created them." According to the structure of the whole sentence, it seems to be an elaboration of "in the image of God." We are to understand sexuality, in which is rooted our physiological maleness and femaleness, as included in "image of God." For one thing that tells us that sexuality takes on that greater meaning, significance, value, which comes from being created, and created in the image of God.

However, since almost all organic life is sexual in some way, some even to the extent of having the same or a similar physiological sexual system as humans, it must not be the physiological system that is in the image of God. It must rather lie in the realm of "power of thought, of communication, of

self-transcendence." It is the physical sexuality—maleness and femaleness, as experienced and expressed through the God-like capacities of thought, communication, reflection, and decision, that gives sexuality the meaningfulness of "image of God"—that constitutes its promise.

We can take it one step further. In Gen 4:1 we read, "Now the man knew his wife Eve; and she conceived and bore Cain...." Here is established a direct link between "being male and female" and "be fruitful and multiply." Adam, the male, joins with Eve, the female; she conceives and gives birth (bears fruit) and the human species is increased. The context requires us to interpret "Adam knew Eve" as "Adam had sexual intercourse with Eve," or "Adam had sexual relations with Eve."

Someone has determined that the Hebrew word translated "to know," a form of which is used here, appears 943 times in the Old Testament, only 10 of which clearly refer to sexual intercourse. The more common use is illustrated by Amos 3:2, in which God says to Israel through the prophet, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth." It is the same word, yet here it refers to the unique relationship of love and faithfulness that God has established with this people. Realizing that the same word refers to both God's knowing of us and our knowing of the other, adds a very concrete, earthy dimension to our understanding of God's love for God's people. It also adds a very exalted, god-like dimension to our understanding of the expression of sexuality between human beings.

It is within this meaning of sexuality as included in "image of God" that God blesses the man and the woman, and beholds them, with the whole of creation, as "very good." We must note here, in the context of sexuality as blessing, that Adam's "knowing" of Eve and the conception and birth of Cain follows the fall into sin and the subsequent "curse": I will greatly increase your pangs in child-bearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you (Gen 3:16). So right in the beginning we have the biblical/theological origins of the problem as well as the promise of sexuality. Sexuality is not the cause of, but it participates in, the cursedness as well as the blessedness of humanity.

Sexuality is not the cause of, but it participates in, the cursedness as well as the blessedness of humanity.

But what is the purpose of this meaningful—meaning-filled—dimension of human existence? From this same passage (Gen 1:28) it is rather simple: the purpose of sexuality is related to being fruitful and multiplying, filling or replenishing the earth. The reference here is to reproduction, clearly. But does reproduction exhaust the purpose of sexuality? This is a part of the problem of sexuality. From the biblical understanding, as well as from our own experience of sexuality, it seems like "overkill" if the only purpose of this total reality that we call human sexuality is reproduction. For animals and plants seem to reproduce quite adequately without the "image of God" dimension that we have identified.

There is, of course, another narrative of

creation woven into these early chapters of Genesis:

> Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner." ...and the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.... Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. (Gen 3:18, 22, 24)

Here we see the two meanings of "to know" brought together. If it were only for the sake of reproduction, the "knowing" of sexual intercourse itself would be sufficient. But there is to be a new relationship in which one leaves the family of birth, in which the two become one flesh, not as an occasional act but as a description of the long term relationship. For this more inclusive relationship we clearly need the dimension of "knowing" present in the love and faithfulness of God for God's people—with all of the intimacy, joy, sharing of pain and pleasure, mutuality of purpose, conflict and companionship that is present in that relationship.

We acknowledge and affirm the physiological dimension of sexuality. But as biblically-informed people, we move beyond physiology to grasp the full value—the full meaning and purpose of sexuality. And here is what I take to be the overriding purpose and promise of sexuality: human relationship. It is in relationship that our full humanity is both demonstrated and realized, both what we can be as humans and what we can accomplish as humans. And for many people at least, both for what one can be and do for oneself, and for what one can be and do for others, it is the "knowing" relationship in its most comprehensive dimensions with one other person that seems to be crucial. It is our sexuality that moves us toward such a relationship, and is an essential part of sustaining and developing that relationship.

The relational significance of human sexuality was emphasized in the Lutheran Church in America statement, "Sex, Marriage, and Family":

> Scripture portrays us as relational beings whose true humanity is realized in faith and love with God and neighbor.... We do not merely have sexual relations, we demonstrate our true humanity in personal relationships, the most intimate of which are sexual.

The comprehensive nature of the "knowing" relationship was noted in the American Lutheran Church statement, "Human Sexuality and Sexual Behavior":

> Human sexuality includes all that we are as human beings. Sexuality at the very least is biological, psychological, cultural, social, and spiritual. It is as much of the mind as of the body, of the community as of the person. To be a person is to be a sexual being.

The draft statement of the ELCA, "The Church and Human Sexuality," carries forward the relational language in our understanding of sexuality:

> From the perspective of biblical faith, human beings are created by God as persons of dignity who are essentially relational. As sexual beings, we are drawn into intimate, life-giving relationships with one another. The Triune God's relationship with us grounds our relationships with one another. (p. 3)

Sexuality then is not an incidental human characteristic. It is constitutive of our personhood, our true humanity. In itself, it is a part of who we are; as it moves us into relationship, it contributes to who we and the other become. There is more to sexuality than having babies, although that is

It is in relationship that our full humanity is both demonstrated and realized.

included. And there is more than having fun, although that is included. Sexuality has to do with human well-being and wholeness, in the most comprehensive understanding of those terms.

In the light of this positive view of sexuality, how do we come to the point of dealing with sexuality so predominantly as a problem to be solved rather than as a promise to be realized? Why do we tend to respond to sexuality in terms of regulation more than affirmation? The simple experience of widespread sexual abuse is an obvious answer. The intrusion of sin into God's good creation adds a problematic dimension to everything that is good about creation.

William Countryman, a New Testament scholar, in his book *Dirt Greed and Sex*, shows how the developing Old Testament treatment of sexuality also contributes to the regulative approach. Countryman demonstrates how concerns for assuring and undergirding purity and property came to dominate the Old Testament material on sexuality (suggesting the narrower concept of sex as something we do, rather than of sexuality as constitutive of who we are). He sees the New Testament, particularly the record of Jesus in the Gospels, moving the concern back into the more inclusive understanding of sexuality that we have been developing here. In fact, Countryman concludes:

> The New Testament's positive account of sex is that it is an integral part of the human person, particularly as joining us to one another, and therefore has a right to be included in the spiritual transformation which follows upon our hearing of the gospel.... Sex, therefore, is to be received with delight and thankfulness. It is a gift of God in creation which also reflects for us the joy of God's self-giving in grace and the perfect openness of true human life in the age to come. (265-66)

Thus, Countryman, in employing the vocabulary of spiritual transformation and God's grace in relation to sexuality, underscores our churches' understanding of personal and relational well-being and wholeness in addressing the full significance of sexuality.

Recall now what "Together in Ministry" said constitutes the goodness of ordained ministry—speaking the Word and administering the sacraments "in order that human beings might believe in God and through Christ be reconciled to God" (p. 2). As Lutherans, of course, we want to be careful not to ascribe a redemptive function to sexuality. That is the work of the gospel and faith.

But this does place sexuality squarely in the midst of the redeemed life, the life in which sin has been overcome by justification, that is, the life of true well-being and wholeness. Here is a significant point at which the matters of ordained ministry and sexuality converge. In our own sexual behavior, and in our teaching and counseling about sexuality, we are not engaged in matters peripheral to our ministry but in matters which impinge directly on the life which is to follow upon having heard the Word and participated in the sacraments.

Dr. Peter Rutter, another speaker at the

The structuring of sexuality is not an end in itself but a way of assuring that the goodness inherent in sexuality will be realized.

Professional Leadership Conference, writes of the contribution of sexuality to human well-being and wholeness in his book, *Sex in the Forbidden Zone*:

> Profound needs for healing and self-validation infuse men's sexual fantasy. Although many men who exploit women are in touch with no motivation more complicated than simple sexual desire and opportunism, I believe the search to heal a wounded sense of self is what underlies most destructive sexual behavior in men. (61)

It is a real sense of the need for healing, and a valid sense of the healing power of sexuality, that moves the man toward the woman in the professional relationship. It is an inappropriate structuring of sexual behavior that causes the man to engage in overt sexual behavior within the "forbidden zone."

Now we have come to the matter of the structuring of sexuality. Dr. Rutter has something very specific to say about sexual behavior in the professional relationship. Draw a clear boundary: keep sexual behavior out of the forbidden zone. But note why. Because it violates the trust with which the woman enters the relationship; but also because sexual behavior in the forbidden zone is ultimately destructive rather than healing. In other words, the boundary, the particular structuring, follows from the purpose of the professional relationship and of sexuality, not from the existence of the boundary as an end in itself.

As with ministry, the structuring of sexuality is not an end in itself but a way of assuring that the goodness inherent in sexuality will be realized. Before we rush to conclusions about the structuring of sexual behavior, then, it is important that we take the time necessary really to convince ourselves of the basic goodness of sexuality and to clarify the nature and purpose of that goodness—to establish the context within which to understand these "impulses."

It is significant, I think, that much of the criticism of the ELCA's "The Church and Human Sexuality" has ignored this draft statement's introduction on how we understand sexuality—its meaning and purpose—in the light of theology and the scriptures, and gone right to the matter of the structuring of sexuality. It is as though there are certain conclusions we must come to regarding the structure of sexuality, regardless of the conclusions we come to scripturally and theologically about the meaning and purpose of sexuality.

Critics also seem to be unwilling or unable to accept the draft statement's acknowledgment of contemporary information and experience as relevant considerations. "How people understand and express their sexuality is deeply affected by culture and society, as well as by religious perspectives," the draft notes in its Preface (p. 2). "Deliberation also needs to be informed by the testimony of those among us who are gay or lesbian and by current understandings of sexual orientation," is asserted at another point (p. 13). (Some critics even suggested that stipulating that "us"

includes gay and lesbian persons revealed a built-in bias of the draft.)

But contemporary experience, cultural changes, and information from other sources have regularly been taken into consideration as the church has moved from biblical and theological understandings to decisions about structure and practice. We noted this in the discussion of ministry. The general acceptance of divorce and remarriage and of contraception by ELCA Lutherans illustrates this practice in matters of sexuality.

There seems to be no disagreement with the statement's condemnation of all forms of sexual abuse, those practices which abuse rather than build relationship and are clearly destructive to human well-being and wholeness. Here it seems quite appropriate to structure sexuality in terms of drawing boundaries. Dr. Rutter has drawn one such boundary. Laws against rape and incest are also appropriate boundaries. Provisions for preventing sexual harassment in the workplace are also appropriate. Any form of coercive or manipulative or exploitative sexual behavior should be considered out of bounds.

Since sexuality has to do with relationship, mutuality is an essential ingredient in appropriate expressions of sexuality. The Presbyterian study of sexuality, "Keeping Body and Soul Together," proposed something similar to mutuality, "justice-love," as its informing principle for appropriate expressions of sexuality. Justice-love is "right-relatedness with self and others," and "seeks to correct distorted relations between persons and groups and to generate relations of shared respect, shared power and shared responsibility" (14.506-07, 511-12). Whether the term used is mutuality or justice-love, sexual abuse clearly violates the criteria for appropriate expressions of sexuality.

If we feel secure in stating that sexual abuse is inappropriate structuring of sexual behavior, can we be equally secure in stating that marriage is *appropriate* structuring for the expression of human sexuality? With a simple combination of scriptural and experiential evidence, "The Church and Human Sexuality" says "Yes!":

> Jesus placed the faithful, mutually loving, permanent "one flesh" union of male and female at the core of the church's teaching regarding marriage (Mk 10:6-9; Mt 19:4-6). Countless generations have realized sexual and personal fulfillment through the sacred union of marriage. (8)

Do we then draw the boundary line around marriage as the *only* approved zone for the full expression of human sexuality, on the assumption that everything within the marriage zone is appropriate to the purpose and meaning of sexuality, and everything outside the zone is inappropriate?

I propose that we evaluate that assumption on the basis of pastoral experience, that is, the experience of ordained ministers as they have observed and counseled with those who are in a sexual relationship, both married and not married, both heterosexual and homosexual. Are mutuality, well-being, and wholeness always present inside the marriage relationship and never present outside the marriage relationship? My judgment is that the conclusion of such evaluation would be that sexual relations inside the circle of marriage are not immune to the problems of sexuality, nor are those outside the circle totally devoid of the realization of the promise of sexuality.

If that conclusion is correct, it would suggest that it is not the formal structure of marriage that itself makes an appropriate sexual relationship. What is the implication of such a statement for the structuring of sexuality? We could simply bracket it and invoke the "nevertheless" response—nev-

ertheless, we must insist on limiting full expression of sexuality to the marriage relationship. Regardless of the record of how sexuality is experienced, both within and outside of marriage, marriage remains the only *permissible* structure for the expression of sexuality.

Another alternative would be to continue to affirm marriage as defined in the ELCA draft statement—"the faithful, mutually loving, permanent 'one flesh' union of male and female"—as the structure for full expression of sexuality with the greatest biblical, traditional, and experiential support; but then, taking our contemporary information and experience into account, make it a particular mission more intentionally and effectively to teach, prepare for, give long-term support, and demand accountability for marriage so-defined. We would continue to hold marriage as the ideal, and so structure our support of it as to give it the best possible chance to be the context within which the promise of sexuality can be realized. The church's rite of marriage would be reserved for those who are ready to enter into and participate and persist in marriage, as a major expression of their Christian vocation.

This might mean fewer but better marriages. While strengthening the integrity of the marriage relationship, however, this would also intensify the alienation already felt by those large numbers in our congregations for whom marriage is not possible or desirable. What about those who do not have the "gift" for marriage, or whose circumstances preclude entering into marriage under the conditions described above? Can we do anything more than "just say Yes" to them as persons, and "just say No" as far as expression of sexuality is concerned?

Again taking contemporary experience and information into account, we could recognize the possibility of sexual expression, within the meaning and purpose of sexuality, in other than the marriage relationship. I have in mind, for example, gay and lesbian couples who are in long term, faithful, mutually loving relationships. Heterosexual sexual relationships that are entered into with a considered sense of the personal integrity of and concern for the well-being and wholeness of each other, might be recognized as having validity as well. Recognition might mean nothing more than an affirming attitude; it might also mean some ritual of blessing, where desired. Casual, exploitative, non-accountable sexual relations would not fall within the church's understanding of the meaning and purpose of God-given sexuality.

One of the controversies which faced the early church was whether the benefits of the gospel could be extended to those who were outside the "structure" of circumcision. The apostle Peter was called to Jerusalem to defend his having eaten with, even baptized, uncircumcised Gentiles. Peter responded:

> And as I began to speak [to the Gentiles], the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as it had upon us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, "John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?" (Acts 11:15-17)

Experience challenged traditional understandings of structure. The evidence of God's blessing outside the accepted structure led to an abandonment of the structure, not the dismissal of the evidence. I am not proposing that we abandon the structure of marriage for human sexuality. In fact, I have suggested that we give even greater place to marriage in our mission and ministry, but also that we give due consideration

to the evidence of the blessings of sexuality being present beyond the structure of marriage.

What then distinguishes the church's teaching on human sexuality? It is that human sexuality is *God-given*, and that therefore we are accountable for caring for and using our sexuality in ways that are appropriate to the meaning and purpose with which it is given. As Christians, the care and use of our sexuality is included in our Christian vocation. It is the contention of this article that the meaning and purpose of sexuality does not convey a "law" of structure for expressing sexuality. We have reason to give special place to the structure of marriage; but we are free to recognize other structures within which the meaning and purpose of sexuality is being fulfilled.

Parallels to conclusions of "Together for Ministry" are apparent in the preceding paragraph. Parallels to the methodology of the Report have been identified in the body of this article. Parallels in the current "state" of both the office of ministry and human sexuality have resulted in our tending to approach both of them more as problem than as promise, and people tend to look for tighter regulatory measures as the "bottom line" response. Certainly attention to boundaries is valid. But if we conclude that sexuality, like the office of ministry, is an essentially good thing, then structuring is not only a matter of drawing boundaries in order to confine the problem of sexuality but also a matter of removing the barriers which limit the realization of its promise.

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On Interfaith Relations

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The changing religious landscape in North America

"The religious landscape of America has changed dramatically," says Harvard professor Diana Eck. To make her point she turns on the slide projector and for 45 minutes the audience is treated to a collage of mosques, temples, watts, gurdwaras, and other shrines that dot the landscape of America from Maine to California. When she finishes you realize the religious landscape has changed, dramatically! To underscore her point, she asks people to compare the American 1893 religious scene when the first World's Parliament of Religions was held in Chicago with what prevails today.

In 1893, as part of the Colombian Exposition's attempt to highlight America's grand achievements, the World's Parliament of Religion was organized largely by Protestants with help from Roman Catholics and Jews. Religious leaders from other faith traditions, ten major ones, were for the most part "imported" from abroad. Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, Sikhs were still thought of as people who did not belong to "us," that is to white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant America, and therefore were to be seen and experienced as foreigners coming for a visit. Even that, it seems, was difficult, for when Japanese Buddhists arrived in California, some "greeted" them with signs saying, "Japanese are not welcome!"

With such an attitude widespread among Americans, it's little wonder that people like Anagarika Dharmapala, a Buddhist monk from Ceylon, and the Hindu Swami Vivakananda from India, made such deep and lasting impressions on those who actually heard what they had to say. It was so different and contrary to what was anticipated. After all, the Parliament's principal organizer, John Henry Burrows of the First Presbyterian Church in Chicago, had characterized Hinduism as little more than idolatrous nonsense and four years after the Parliament went on to write a book titled *The Christian Conquest of Asia.*[1]

But if the first Parliament was dominated by Christians, primarily Protestants who used the Lord's Prayer to close each session, the 1993 Parliament of the World's Religions was quite different. To begin with, its planning committee was more diverse than the entire first Parliament! This time Protestants were conspicuous by their small numbers. Roman Catholics had a stronger showing than mainline Protestants,

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[1] Robert J. Schreiter, "Interreligious Dialogue: A Hundred Years On," *New Theology Review* 6:3 (August 1993), 6.

but conservative evangelicals refused any participation.[2] Instead, among the 125 different faith groups present, Hindus, Buddhists, and Muslims were most prominent.

More importantly, the vast majority of the 6,000+ who registered were American citizens, many from the Chicago area. A few statistics reveal this city's rich religious diversity. In contrast to 1893 when Chicago had no mosques, temples, or watts, the city is now home to 100,000 Hindus, 160,000 Buddhists, 2,500 Jains, 500 Zoroastrians, 2,000 Bahai, 15,000 Native Americans, and some 300,000 Muslims.

What such data indicates is that the 1993 Parliament could have achieved nearly the numbers and diversity without even leaving the environs of Chicago. The same could be said for many other large cities across America. We don't know, of course, what this changed landscape actually looks like, because while the census bureau wants to know how many bathrooms we have, they do not ask if we have any religious convictions. Some would say it's best that way. What we do know is that people of other faiths can no longer be thought of as exotic strangers living somewhere else. Today they are neighbors, colleagues, friends and fellow citizens, co–participants in civic affairs, and allies on social issues. Religion in the United States is now a microcosm of the world's religions. As Roland Miller has written, "the small city of Mainville has become an international community. Religious pluralism is an obvious reality."[3]

Just what this new religious terrain may come to mean for us as Christians and the kind of responses it will provoke are still unknown. Some are unaware of the new scene, others alarmed by it. Most are probably ambivalent, including mainline Christians, which may account for their near absence at the recent ParliamentWR. Certainly I know of no document issued by the NCCC or other national church body to be as forthcoming as what the British Council of Churches wrote in April, 1977. Facing a similar situation in England, the Assembly of that body declared that it:

> believed the presence in Britain of significant numbers of people of faiths other than Christian to be within God's gracious purposes and welcomed the new opportunities this presents to Christians both to learn from those of other faiths and to bear witness to their own faith.[4]

One could wish for such a document here, but in its absence let me venture three brief observations.

First, it appears that from the perspective of a secularized, existential culture of liberal humanism, the more religion is touted or the more religiously plural America becomes, the greater the pressure to keep all expressions of religion private and out of the public square. Some writers even accuse certain institutions in the States of so defaming and debunking religious vocabulary as to make *homo religiosus* seem an extinct species.[5] Stephen L. Carter in his new book, *The Culture of Disbelief*, is one

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[2] Officially institutions like Wheaton College and Moody Bible Institute discouraged their people from attending, but unofficially many felt the need to come and did so.

[3] *Lutherans and the Challenge of Religious Pluralism*, ed. Frank W. Klos, C. Lynn Makamura and Daniel F. Martensen (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1990), 2.

[4] Kenneth Cracknell & Christopher Lamb, *Theology on Full Alert* (London: The British Council of Churches, 1986), 7. In their look at theological education in Britain, the authors consider these statements to have "profound implications for theological education."

[5] Cracknell & Lamb, 9.

Religion in the United States is now a microcosm of the world's religions.

of these. Carter makes a telling argument that current American law and politics have so trivialized religious devotion and seconded it to civil religion that God is reduced to a hobby, or a mere opinion. "The message of contemporary culture seems to be that it's perfectly all right to *believe* that stuff... but you really ought to keep it to yourself, especially if your beliefs are the sort that cause you to act in ways that are... a bit unorthodox." Cuddhihy's earlier book on the same theme spoke of the offense many Americans feel if asked their religious conviction.[6]

Second, the presence of this new multifaith dimension is beginning to breathe new vitality and depth into theological education. Evidence our own concern with the subject. In the past a multifaith consciousness was kept alive by the study of the ancient world of Greece and Rome, and by a widespread familiarity with classical philosophy, at least among the clergy. While these gods of the classical world were safely dead and constituted no threat to western Christendom, and so probably encouraged a sense of superiority, they did provide a radically different way of understanding practice and belief, and some perspective from which to view Christian thought. In recent times, however, these classics had even waned, and allusions made to them by such devout Christians as Milton had to be relegated to footnotes and commentary.[7] Happily, such banishment is now being reversed, due not to a surge of neo-classicism but to the presence of large numbers of Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and others who offer a living interfaith experience and refuse to be relegated to mere footnotes. Just how this growing encounter with people of other faiths and the secular thrust to debunk and marginalize all religion will be dealt with by our seminaries remains to be seen.

Third, it is essential to remember that when Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and others come to America in large numbers, they are adapting to a whole new context which profoundly impacts their style of faith and practice. Muslims and others in North America are developing attitudes quite distinct from the Asian context. As one Vietnamese monk in Phoenix said, "We must take the plant of Buddhism out of the pot and plant it in the soil of Arizona."[8] Hindus from India, also, who were never asked, "What do Hindus believe?" are now having to answer that question in many forums across the United States. We are told that the Northern California Businessmen's Association has published a simple reference card to the "Ten Commandments of Hinduism," a real innovation in a tradition that has never been codified or formulated in such a way.[9] Much more research needs to be done on how different traditions are learning to live with each other in the Ameri-

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[6] John Murray Cuddhihy, *No Offense: Civil Religion and Protestant Taste* (New York: Seabury Press, 1978).

[7] Cracknell & Lamb, 9.

[8] Diana L. Eck, "Challenge to Pluralism," *Nieman Reports, The Nieman Foundation at Harvard University* 47:2 (Summer 1993), 49.

[9] Eck, 49.

can context and how this new blending will influence the struggle of us all to remain loyal to the past without sacrificing the need to be contemporary.

I now move on to some key issues in interfaith relations.[10] I list these issues under the headings of Action, Reflection, and Prayer.

Action (dialogue of life)

Under what some call a dialogue of action and others a dialogue of life,[11] the issues for the most part are practical and pastoral, yet all involve theological questions, sometimes complex ones, which require the serious attention of those engaged in ministerial formation.

1. A major issue confronting our expanding multi-faith society is the mountain of ignorance, misinformation and disinformation about each other! We are sometimes discouraged at how little some beginning students know of the faith and practice of Christianity. While this is lamentable, it pales beside the ignorance that exists vis-à-vis people of other faiths. Much, of course, is being done on public TV and radio to provide more accurate information, yet national networks, news media and magazines often reinforce stereotypical images. Other religions are portrayed as primitive, inferior, or as antagonistic to western civilization.[12] The sin of bearing false witness still makes it extremely difficult to hear a fair presentation of the faith of another.

Overcoming ignorance begins with personal relationships, people getting together to share their faith journeys. It seems so simple to meet and greet neighbors, but it isn't. For some it's easier to speak to their pets than to a neighbor who may appear 'different.'[13] Overseas we used to say that interfaith dialogue needs to be among people and not systems, yet how to befriend those of other cultures and faiths without being offensive or patronizing can be a taxing hurdle. Further, we teach children never to talk to strangers, yet as they grow older encourage them to welcome and love the stranger. It seems paradoxical. Our challenge is how to develop an early unselfconscious etiquette which respects people who hold convictions different from our own and who eat, dress, and pray in distinctive ways. If this isn't done early, we risk developing the attitude of a women in Detroit, who said of her Indian neighbors: "I just can't stand the smell of their spices."

Conquering ignorance includes building community relationships. When nurtured, community events can often provide space for personal relations to develop. Local clergy associations can be the catalyst for inviting religious leaders from other faiths either to join or at least to consult together on community matters. One challenge facing many local councils of churches is whether to join larger interfaith councils, and if they do, how inclusive ought such councils to be.

Daunting for many churches is a request by another faith community to use

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[10] I am deeply indebted to Cracknell and Lamb in their book *Theology on Full Alert* for the outline used in describing key issues.

[11] John M. M. Kaserow, "Gathering Together to Pray: A Special Mode of Public Presence in Interreligious Dialogue," *New Theology Review* 6:3 (August 1993), 18.

[12] A prime example of the latter is Bernard Lewis' article, "The Roots of Muslim Rage," in *The Atlantic* (September 1990), 47–60. His article implies that the fundamentals of Islam are incompatible and therefore at enmity with Western civilization.

[13] A Pakistani woman in California told me she had a neighbor who always talked to his dog, but never to her family.

part of the church facilities for their worship and fellowship, even temporarily. I recall a few years ago in Jersey City, NJ, how a venerable old church refused to host a workshop on Christian-Muslim relations because Muslim neighbors would be invited to participate! The pastor only discovered this deep antipathy when he broached the consistory about the meeting. Later this same church refused to allow a Christian congregation of Indian origin to use its basement as a temporary place for worship. They did so on the ground that since 'Dot bashing' gangs were at that time harassing and intimidating Hindu women, an act of hospitality towards Indians (even though Christian) might invite upon the church the anger and harm of such bands and their sympathizers.

In Chicago a Lutheran pastor shared quite a different story. During the Gulf War he decided to put to the test our Lord's command to love the enemy and invited Muslims from a nearby mosque for conversation. Finally, after several meetings, he confessed to these new friends that he couldn't imagine now how he could ever have thought of Muslims categorically as enemies! But he had—and many still do.

An eventual goal for communities might be to acknowledge publicly that other faith groups exist in their midst and have the right to practice their faith authentically and to define themselves by their own terms of reference. But such recognition comes only with great effort.

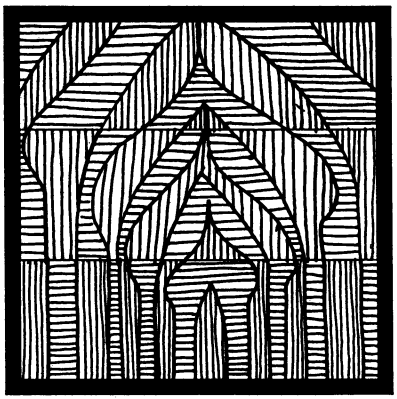
Combating ignorance can include making common cause. This is extremely important in cases where there is open discrimination, misrepresentation, or racial harassment, especially if it is dressed up as religious conviction. Positive examples of this are statements issued by the NCC and the Muslim Council of North America during and after the Gulf War in which they jointly decried a flood-tide of anti-Arab sentiment.

What needs to be guarded against in all attempts at making common cause are hasty and superficial alliances that link some people against others solely on the basis of faith. One hears, for example, that Muslims are the natural enemies of Jews and Christians, or that the Abrahamic faiths need to band together against other all other faiths, or that people of all faiths need to stand against those who embrace humanistic secularism. Such simplistic calls for solidarity against others bear within them the seeds of great destruction.

2. *Faith issues in education.* In many ways schools are becoming the frontier where different cultures and religious orientations encounter each other most intimately and dramatically. The picture of a white Anglo Saxon boy sitting by the side of a turbaned Sikh boy of Indian origin is getting to be a common sight in many schools in England. Fortunately such early integration is now possible in some of our own schools, though opportunities like this also bring challenges and force difficult decisions. Examples:

Should provision be made for communities of people who want single-sex education? Muslims and others are building private schools as one way to solve this problem, but it is costly and often impossible. In public schools, demands by Asians (and others) for dress and curriculum modifications for girls, need always to be balanced with the possible damage and psychological injury caused by segregation.

Should there be the teaching and/or practice of any religion in public schools? In some ways the current proscription on prayer (and on religion in general) may be related to our failure as Christians to provide opportunity for other faith traditions to feel included in public expressions of faith.



By being exclusive we may have forfeited what little opportunity we had. The current concern for prayer in schools could provide space for fruitful debate on the role of religion in public life if the issue is taken seriously.

How should we approach ethnocentricity in American education? Classes in history, geography, and American literature sometimes convey a sense of the overall superiority of European culture in a way which makes children of other cultures, Native American, Hispanic and African American, feel devalued and even invisible. The images and language used in text books to depict people often are biased, degrading, and sometimes downright wrong. Recently a colleague of mine bought a child's alphabet book. Every letter was depicted by an animal except I; it pictured a Native American. This is gradually changing in some states, but the process is slow and painful.[14]

3. Pastoral care and service to people of other faiths. Several areas of ministry come quickly to mind:

• The pastoral care of people in interfaith marriages. For many, especially Jews,[15] this is an issue of excruciating pain and difficult to discuss. Yet the phenomenon continues, and not only between Christians and Jews. Muslims report that because many of their men marry Christian girls, parents of Muslim girls, to find suitable partners for them, have resorted to importing young males from Muslim countries, often with sad consequences.[16] Yvonne Haddad estimates that in Canada "two out of three Muslim women are marrying men who were not previously Muslim." Often during workshops we are approached by people who have a sister, daughter, or close friend who is dating or married to a Muslim. They want to talk and they need resource material. Fortunately, some churches have responded: The British Council Churches, for example, has good materials as does the Presbyterian Church USA and the Roman Catholic Church.[17]

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[14] Douglas John Hall gave two excellent presentations on this issue at ELCA Global Mission Events during the summer of 1992. These can be obtained by writing to ELCA headquarters in Chicago.

[15] John Borelli in his article "Pastoral Care for Interfaith Couples—A Beginning," *New Theology Review* 6:3 (August 1993), p. 30, lists these startling statistics:

"*Dovetail*, a bimonthly newsletter for Jewish-Christian families, launched in 1992, estimated in its premier issue that there are over half a million Jewish-Christian couples in the United States and that the number grows by forty thousand each year. With fewer than six million Jews, perhaps one out of every four adult Jews in the United States is married to a Christian, and one in three is married to someone other than a Jew."

[16] Reported at a Christian-Muslim conference on Interfaith Marriage convened by the NCCC in Toronto, 1989.

[17] For helpful information on the subject I recommend the article by John Borelli entitled "Pastoral Care for Interfaith Couples–A Beginning," in the August 1993 *New Theology Review*.

• There are calls for pastoral care in times of festivals or in sickness and death. I can remember in Bahrain being invited to a Hindu wedding and then called on to bless the couple and their marriage. At times of death I've been asked by Muslim families to pray for and with the family of the deceased. Increasingly Christian chaplains in America are confronted with similar situations where their skills and services are called upon by others. They need training to know how to respond.

There is a need for Christians to serve people of other faiths and to be affirmed and encouraged in this, especially where refugee communities are involved. In Minnesota last year, it was a joy for me to talk with Lutherans of Swedish descent who were totally involved in caring for Buddhist refugees from Vietnam. Pastors must and often do play key roles in determining whether such ventures will be positive or negative. Again, all immigrant communities need a lot of assistance in such things as learning language, social customs, and shopping and in securing technical advice regarding social security benefits, housing and employment. Only if you've lived in a country where no one speaks English can you appreciate how important it is to know the native language. Any help local churches can offer is often greatly appreciated. The challenge is to make such help unconditional, a task not always easy.[18]

Reflection (dialogue for Christian educators)

1. Christian education. The model we use to teach our children about other people has to take into consideration the faith of such folk. Why do other people believe differently? Why aren't other religions as good as Christianity? Has God given them their religion? What will happen to them in the end? Such difficult questions can no longer be avoided. Yet how they are dealt with will depend in some measure on how the Bible itself is studied and seen as belonging to a larger pluralist context, and whether we own a deep appreciation of the Jewishness of Jesus. Sunday School teachers will also want to relate what they teach to what is being taught about people of other faiths in the local public schools. Is there a great discrepancy and if so, what can be done?

The Religious Education Association, an organization which includes Jews, Christians, and Muslims, can offer some help. In November of 1994 they held a conference in Chicago that focused specifically on interfaith issues. The aim was to set classroom learning in the community context; to learn how to nurture one's own community without isolating it from the larger context. Themes on faith to faith, culture to culture, and private to public provided the focus.[19]

2. Dialogue and proclamation (dialogue of faith). Here we encounter issues that continue to be a source of controversy within the Christian community, among clergy and lay alike. Some honestly feel that dialogue, even as defined by the WCC or the Vatican in its "Guidelines for Dialogue between Christians and Muslims," somehow fails to capture and may even run counter to the deepest intention of the gospel. A few years

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[18] A Muslim friend told how when he came to the United States as a student, he was invited to live with a Christian family. When they discovered, however, that he had every intention of remaining Muslim, they asked him to leave. They preferred to be hospitable to potential converts.

[19] Some of the material was published in the *REA Journal* 89:4 (1994).

ago Dr. James Burtness wrote, "Does anyone out there care anymore whether people believe in Jesus?" His conclusion was that precious few do, even among church people. Many Christians in mainline denominations, he said, simply collapse the formula by "grace through faith" into "by grace," leaving the initiative in salvation entirely to God with little regard for faith in Jesus as a vital human response. The result, he said, is a gradual erosion of evangelism, a diminished emphasis on the Great Commission, and a withering away of mission activity.

A similar alarm was sounded early in 1991 in a papal encyclical on missionary activity entitled "Redemptoris Missio."[20] In it Pope John Paul II warns that "Missionary activity specifically directed 'to the nations' appears to be waning," and so subtitles his letter "On the Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate." It is intended, he says, to counter "the spread of new theological ideas" which have caused some people to wonder:

> Is missionary work among non-Christians still relevant? Has it not been replaced by interreligious dialogue? Is not human development an adequate goal of the church's mission? Does not the respect for conscience and for freedom exclude all efforts at conversion? Is it not possible to attain salvation in any religion? Why then should there be missionary activity?

The encyclical is a forthright expression of the church's traditional position that the gospel needs to be proclaimed openly and boldly, based on Jesus' teaching, "no one comes to the Father but by me (Jn 14:6). The focus is on the uniqueness of Christ and dialogue is played down. As a public document open for all to read, it has stirred considerable controversy, and I hope the CCGM (Chicago Center for Global Ministry) will encourage us to study it together.

A few years ago James Burtness wrote, "Does anyone out there care anymore whether people believe in Jesus?" His conclusion was that precious few do...

Another Vatican publication addressing the same issue and released later in 1991 was called "Dialogue and Proclamation," appropriately so since it was written by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. It too asks the question: "If interreligious dialogue has become so important, has the proclamation of the Gospel message lost its urgency?"[21] and goes on to say there is need in the church for both dialogue and proclamation. One does not exclude the other. The document offers some of the finest Catholic thinking on the subject, and I sincerely hope the CCGM will encourage and enable us to study its findings. What I find encouraging is that people of other faiths were invited to comment on the paper during its development. I believe this is the way the church ought

[20] This encyclical preempted and in some ways undermined the later paper on Dialogue and Proclamation.

[21] A document released June 20, 1991. Printed in *Origins: CNS documentary service* 21:8 (July 4, 1991), 1.

always to write documents on matters of interfaith relations.

The ELCA in its document, *Commitments for Mission in the 1990s*, addresses the same dilemma, and states that both proclamation and dialogue are integral to the total mission of the church. Commitment Four says, "We are committed to interfaith conversations and dialogue," for the purpose of "understanding persons of other faiths," of listening "to what God has to say to us through these conversations," and through them of witnessing "to the crucified and risen Christ."[22]

Presbyterians, likewise, are deeply committed to dialogue and proclamation. In a brochure entitled "Interfaith Guidelines on Dialogue," they state that "dialogue is not only an activity of meetings and conferences. It is also a way of living out Christian faith in relationship and commitment to... neighbors," and that "this in no way replaces or limits our Christian obligation to witness."[23]

The debate, of course, is engaged on many levels. Here in Hyde Park, everyone I interviewed agreed there must be both dialogue and proclamation but conceded more needs to be done on the parish level to explain why both are important. Many in parishes, they said, are ready and eager for reasoned discussion. The challenge is how to affirm the generous spirit of people towards others without diminishing or destroying their faith. One professor said that, at the beginning of class, when he has asked students which form of evangelism they prefer: proclamation, witness, or dialogue, Lutherans generally choose proclamation (which he defines for them as one-way conversation) as the best way to evangelize. This often gets modified, of course, as people learn to see the issues more clearly and to meet personally those of other faiths. Three things generally impact the debate:

1. Personal encounter. In scores of workshops I've conducted over the years, people have repeatedly said that when Muslims were present, everything changed. We cannot overemphasize the importance of personal encounter for making dialogue meaningful. Yet personal encounter alone may not lead to dialogue. I once conducted a workshop in Kinderhook, NY, where I invited a Muslim to be present. He came, and participated with a missionary who had worked in Pakistan for 25 years. After our meeting the missionary told me he had never experienced such conversation with a Muslim before. Years of encounter in Pakistan had apparently not led to dialogue. This failure may be due, in part, to an attitude he had displayed early on when he told the audience that only people who "believe all roads lead to the same place" would engage in dialogue. His confession to me then, at the end of the meeting, I took to be a kind of lament. Yet such attitudes and subsequent misconceptions are widely held.

2. Opportunity for authentic witness. People want assurance that dialogue does not preclude sincere witness. Most who have engaged in genuine dialogue know the importance of being ready to give an account of one's faith, and to do so with sensitivity and in terms which can be understood. Such encounters do require careful training, but so does any formal account of the faith which pastors may be asked to give on any number of occasions. I have often cautioned Christian students that while it's important to know something of the faith of others, it's even more important for the

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[22] *Commitments for Mission in the 1990s*, Division for Global Mission, ELCA, 3.

[23] "Interfaith Guidelines on Dialogue," Office on Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations, Presbyterian Church (USA), nd.

students to know why they are Christian and to be prepared to articulate that. (Documents mentioned above may be of particular help in this.)

3. Care for possible converts. Dialogue and conversion are not mutually exclusive, though conversion is not the purpose of dialogue. But if and when people make a conscious choice to join another faith community, is there a willingness and a readiness to care for them? and for their families? Often such people require understanding and counseling, not least for the sense of guilt they may feel or be made to feel at the break with family tradition and perhaps with the family itself. In the case of converts to Christianity, they will need real but unobtrusive acceptance by their new church family and at the same time freedom to be critical of it. In the case of converts from Christianity, the family will need encouragement to keep that member in their support and care and to surround him or her with selfless love.

Prayer (dialogue of the heart/ spiritual formation)

Praying *for* people of other faiths and praying *with* them: the difference can be startling!

Praying for people of other faiths. Dr. Bijlefeld used to speak of living among, with, and for people of another faith, and always challenged us to journey towards that last goal. Praying for the "other" is probably the surest way to start the journey, yet often such intercession is neglected in both formal liturgies and in books of public prayer. Where it happens most often, perhaps, is in personal prayer, though even here it can be difficult. "How does one pray for a Muslim who intends to remain Muslim?" I was once asked.

Praying with people of other faiths. This may be done formally, as joint worship, but if so it will often draw controversy,

Praying *for* people of other faiths and praying *with* them: the difference can be startling!

since to pray with the other implies our affirmation of their prayer, and we may not be ready for this. Fears of syncretism and compromise, of being disloyal, create a profound dis-ease. I have personally participated in joint worship during Thanksgiving services, when Martin Luther King, Jr., died, and during a vigil for peace in the Middle East at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City. Guidelines in such ventures are crucial and need to be carefully observed.[24]

In a fascinating article entitled, "Gathering Together to Pray: A Special Mode of Public Presence in Interreligious Dialogue,"[25] John Kaserow describes how sometimes by praying together, people involved discover how the faith of others enables them to appropriate the Mystery of

[24] Gradually more resource material is being published. One of the earliest was Kenneth Cragg's little book, *Alive to God: Muslim and Christian Prayer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970). It is a collection of Jewish, Christian and Muslim prayers to be used personally or in corporate settings.

[25] Kaserow, 18.

reality and to be shaped by it. Kaserow calls this the dialogue of religious experience and of spiritual formation, and says that because prayer, meditation, and ritual are so integral to our understanding of God, this kind of dialogue or shared prayer "can be the lens which focuses those areas where the mystery of ultimate reality is encountered, is transformative, and is most richly symbolized."

Kaserow goes on to describe in considerable detail what happened in Assisi, Italy, on October 27, 1986, when representatives of the world's religions gathered together to pray and to fast for peace.[26] It was, he writes, a "ritual moment," an "ecumenical gathering" that transformed those involved and "signaled their desire to give new shape and form to the human heart and [to] this world fractured by evil and attitudes that lead to division, destruction, and dissolution."[27]

He writes further that "there was no search for a 'religious consensus' among participants nor an attempt at 'negotiating faith convictions' because 'every human being must sincerely follow his or her conscience with the intention of seeking and obeying the truth.' The gathering attested," he continues, "that in the quest for peace 'humanity, in its very diversity, must draw from its deepest and most vivifying sources where its conscience is formed and upon which is founded the moral action of people.' The day at Assisi, therefore," he concludes, "was a 'day for prayer and for what goes together with prayer: silence, pilgrimage, and fasting.'"[28]

The conscious intention, he writes, "was for all to 'gather to pray,' rather than for all 'to pray together' in the same fashion.[29] No one tradition's mode of prayer was allowed to form the norm for all others. Each set of symbols had to be authentic within its own tradition." But he adds that it was the careful ritual structuring of the event that allowed a "plurality of expressions" to actually form a "field of unity."

Such experiences, all too rare, bring us, perhaps, to the threshold of what it means to live for one another. They also bring to mind the importance of what Kenneth Cragg wrote in the preface to his book, *Alive to God: Muslim and Christian Prayer.*

> "So let them pray" is, then, no idle escapism. It is not an invitation to spirituality against technology.... On the contrary, it means the realization of a true humanity within the accomplishments and the perils of civilization. More utterly than ever before in history we have both blessing and destruction in our hands. They have need to be uplifted hands and, if uplifted, why not sometimes joined?"[30]

Here perhaps is a clue to all we have been trying to say: "hands... joined"! For hands can only be joined when they are open. Joined hands become the antithesis of clenched fists. More than that, hands willingly united, whether in work extended or in prayer raised, can become symbols, even expressions, of minds that are open, of creeds that refuse to be closed, of wills revealed and of hearts unlocked. The challenge is to make the "sometimes joined" more frequent.

—Prepared for the Faculty Forum of the Chicago Center for Global Ministry

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[26] Kaserow, 21.
[27] Kaserow, 22.
[28] Kaserow, 22.
[29] Kaserow, 24.
[30] Cragg, *Alive to God*, 11.

When Faith Turns Fatal: David Koresh and Tragic Misreadings of Revelation

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Many labels have been used to describe the distorted thinking of David Koresh, leader of the Branch Davidians in Waco, Texas: psychopath, paranoid, megalomaniac. One of the most perceptive diagnoses may be that Koresh suffered from acute Narcissistic Personality Disorder. It is important to assert clearly from the outset that a tragedy like this one which took the lives of nearly 100 human beings hinges on the persuasive influence of a leader like Koresh. Without an attractive, intelligent and convincing leader, groups lose their cohesive power. I will leave to others the analysis of Koresh himself, however. Personally, I am doubtful if anyone will ever begin to comprehend what went on in his mind in the years, months, and days leading up to the fiery inferno of Monday, April 19, 1993.

My intent is to examine the religious ideas that attracted people to follow Koresh by joining the Branch Davidians. This is a subject noticeably absent from the media analysis. News coverage has emphasized how cults prey upon lonely, insecure individuals by offering them a sense of belonging and a version of the truth that satisfies their searching hearts. The emphasis is on the psychological neediness of those who follow. Reference is usually made to specific brainwashing tactics: lack of privacy, intense and lengthy periods of instruction, strict control of food, deprivation of sleep, forbidding contact with the outside world. While such psychological factors are at work and intrinsic to the indoctrination tactics of such groups, such explanations are also insufficient for understanding the appeal of a David Koresh. For at the core of this movement are claims to religious truth. One cannot adequately understand David Koresh and the Branch Davidians without analyzing their religious worldview. And what you discover when you examine their religious ideas is that some of the core convictions about the nature of God, the world, and scripture are shared broadly in popular religious culture.

Anticipation of the End

The Branch Davidians are scarcely the first to adhere to a religious worldview which anticipated the imminent end of the world. In the seven years I lived in Southeast Missouri, I was aware of three waves of apocalyptic expectation. The first was

widely speculated upon in the fall of 1988 with the publication of the booklet: "88 Reasons Why the Rapture Could Be in 1988" by Edgar C. Whisenant. This booklet had a wide circulation, having been mailed at no charge to countless churches and available at many religious bookstores. On the basis of his biblical interpretation, the author predicted the Rapture would occur shortly prior to September 21, 1988 and the beginning of World War III at sunset on October 3, 1988. These predictions created a stir among many students in the public schools and also among some at the University.

The second wave of such speculations accompanied the prediction of a severe earthquake for December, 1990, and the third followed shortly thereafter with the outbreak of the Persian Gulf war in January 1991. A longer view of history would note that such expectations have been alive in every generation since New Testament times. Apocalyptic thinking was particularly acute as the year 1000 approached, a year which was believed to be significant for the culmination of the past era and the initiation of a new one according to the references to a millennium in the Book of Revelation. Joachim of Fiore established the year 1260 as pivotal for God's initiation of an "age of the Spirit" wherein peace and harmony would commence. At the time of the Reformation, the European scene was rife with apocalyptic millennialist expectation. The threat of Muslim armies approaching Vienna and the Protestant conflict with the Roman church appeared to be clear signs of the end. Martin Luther identified the pope as the Anti-Christ. Such movements always appear to have been particularly attractive to those belonging to an underclass whose economic success and social betterment were blocked by factors beyond their control.

Branch Davidian roots: Adventist expectation

The history of one particular millennarian group, the Millerites, is especially important for understanding the background of the Branch Davidians. Under the leadership of William Miller (1782-1849), whose predictions were based on his interpretation of the biblical books of Daniel and Revelation, this group—estimated to number 50,000—expected the return of Christ to take place between March, 1843 and March, 1844. When this period passed, the date was recalculated and set for October 22, 1844. Large numbers sold their possessions and gathered on a hilltop in upstate New York, only to be once more disappointed. While many became disillusioned, others reorganized to form the first Adventist churches. A number of schisms divided the Adventist movement due to disagreements about various points of doctrine and about the timetable of events to occur. Various recalculations of the end time were made, each ending in disappointment. One creative explanation contended that the Second Coming did indeed take place in October, 1844, but it was a heavenly not an earthly occurrence. On that date the names written in God's Book of Life became fixed.

The most successful of these groups became known as the Seventh-Day Adventists, so named because of their adherence to Saturday as the correct day of worship. Adventists have been distinguished by their strictures concerning health, medicine, and diet. The Seventh-Day Adventists, in time, have become less sectarian and entered the mainstream of American religious life. They have been lauded for their contributions to society, especially in the areas of health and medical care.

Other Adventist groups remained marginal, however. The Branch Davidians are

the result of a series of schisms within the Seventh-Day Adventist Church.[1] They derive from the Davidian Seventh-Day Adventists, founded in the 1930s by Victor Houteff. Houteff, an immigrant from Bulgaria, settled in Texas after breaking with the Seventh-Day Adventist group. Houteff had published a book contending that the Adventists had become lax. The church needed to be purified before Christ's imminent return. He attracted a number of followers to his semi-communal farm in Waco before the group began to dissolve after his death in 1955. His widow, Florence, moved the group to its now infamous location following Victor's death. The group swelled in numbers in 1959 when Florence Houteff predicted that the kingdom of God would arrive on Easter Day of that year. Hundreds of Adventists sold belongings, quit jobs, and gathered in Waco for the event. The believers anticipated a sign from God, perhaps the outbreak of a war in the Middle East. After a few weeks, the incident began to be referred to as "The Great Disappointment."

Only a core group of about 50 remained, and these were involved in a power struggle. A man named Ben Roden rose to the top and gave leadership until his death in 1978. It was under Roden's leadership the group came to be called the Branch Davidians. After his death, Ben Roden was succeeded by his wife, Lois. Her leadership soon waned, however, particularly after a new revelation came to her that the Holy Spirit was feminine. Eventually, following a lengthy and even violent contest for leadership with George Roden, son of Ben and Lois, Vernon Howell seized leadership of the Branch Davidians in 1987. Vernon Howell legally changed his name in 1990 to David Koresh: "David" after Israel's king from whose descendents the Messiah was to arise and "Cyrus" after the Persian king who in the sixth century B.C.E. acted as a savior to Israel by authorizing the homecoming of the exiles from their Babylonian captivity.

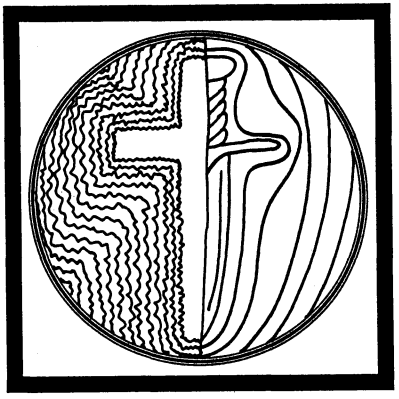
Koresh brought to the Branch Davidians his charismatic leadership, his ready familiarity with the Bible, and a growing conviction about his own role as God's representative as the end of the world drew near. He successfully recruited many new members for the group, even from places as distant as Britain, Australia, and New Zealand. At one point he traveled to Israel in order to convert Jews, the catalyst which he thought would initiate a war leading to the final battle of Armageddon. Eventually, Koresh revised his prediction and began to locate the final battle in Texas where the faithful would engage the American army from their "Mount Carmel."

Key elements for an apocalyptic worldview

What are the religious beliefs that served to convince many intelligent individuals to commit their lives to the Branch Davidians? As one reads and reflects on the religious worldview of this group, three primary characteristics emerge.

1. Scripture is understood as a magical book containing predictions about the future. Biblical books are not interpreted with reference to their original historical context and the meaning for an original audience. Instead magical connections are made between biblical verses and events occurring in contemporary history. Koresh

[1] For news reports and analysis of the Branch Davidians see *Time* 131 (May 3, 1993):29-43; *Newsweek* 121 (March 15, 1993):52-62; and *Newsweek* 121 (May 3, 1993):18-31.



explained to the Branch Davidians, for example, that they were equivalent to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego of Daniel 3 in that God would deliver them from the fiery furnace.

Koresh laid particular emphasis that the symbols of the book of Revelation were coming to pass in the historical present. With reference to the passages such as Rev 6:1-17 and 16:12-21, Koresh claimed to be the Lamb of God who was worthy to open the seals which accompany the unfolding of history's end. As one surveys the contemporary scene, there is no shortage of examples of war, famine, pestilence, and death to which Koresh could make reference in explaining how the events accompanying seals 2, 3, and 4 have already come to pass. Seal 5 had been opened as Branch Davidians were martyred in the initial attack by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms on February 28. No doubt the Branch Davidians soon expected some natural calamity, an earthquake perhaps or planetary sign, to mark the opening of the sixth seal. All of these events would lead to the Battle of Armageddon which Koresh predicted to take place in Texas between the forces of God, i.e., the Branch Davidians, and the forces of Satan, i.e., the American government. It is no coincidence that, as the days in the compound went by, Koresh engaged in an attempt to compose a definitive interpretation of the Book of Revelation. The Branch Davidians operated with the deep conviction that the Bible is a book filled with magical predictions about the future and about the end times.

While their interpretation of the Bible is an extreme case, the Branch Davidians are by no means alone in holding such a magical understanding of the Bible as a book full of predictions about the future and especially about the end of the world. As we have seen earlier with reference to the rise of Adventism, many of the roots of contemporary millennialist thought can be traced to the nineteenth century. The theory of dispensationalism, which periodized history into distinct "dispensations," was given prominence in the writings of the Englishman John Nelson Darby, and was widely disseminated by those who employed the interpretive schema of the *Schofield Reference Bible*. Those who adhere to dispensationalism anticipate a final historical period in which an Anti-Christ will be instrumental in leading an alliance of ten nations and an apostate church into a final battle with the army of God. With the victory of God's saints at Armageddon, the millennial rule of Christ at Jerusalem will begin.

Such dispensationalist currents are still alive and well on the contemporary scene. Particular reference must be made to two books, both million sellers, which operate with a similar hermeneutic. *The Late Great Planet Earth* by Hal Lindsey, first published in 1970 and by now having sold over 18 million copies, argues that the various symbols of the Book of Revelation refer to events taking place in our time.[2] The re-establishment of Israel in 1948 is a major indicator, according to Lindsey, that we are

living in the last days. The vast armies of Communist China, the military strength of Russia (sic!), the origin of the European Economic Community, the contemporary Ecumenical Movement, a weakened United States, and Middle Eastern politics, all have key roles to play in the events predicted in the Book of Revelation, according to Lindsey. All the events now unfolding will lead up to the final battle of Armageddon and the final return of Christ to rule for a thousand year reign. Lindsey believes it belongs to the very nature of biblical prophecy to make predictions about the end times.

Along similar lines is the book *Armageddon, Oil, and the Middle East Crisis* by John F. Walvoord.[3] This book sold over a million copies, especially at the time of the Persian Gulf war. Like Lindsey, Walvoord sets forth a checklist of contemporary events which he identifies as predicted by the Bible. Among those events soon to occur are these:[4]

* The Middle East becomes the most significant trouble spot in the world.
* A world clamor for peace follows the continued disruption caused by the high price of oil, terrorist incidents, and the confused military situation in the Middle East.
* Ten nations create a united Mediterranean Confederacy—beginnings of the last stage of the prophetic fourth world empire.
* In a dramatic power play, a new Mediterranean leader upsets three nations of the confederacy and takes control of the powerful ten-nation group.
* The new Mediterranean leader negotiates a "final" peace settlement in the Middle East (broken three and a half years later).
* The Russian army attempts an invasion of Israel and is miraculously destroyed.
* The Mediterranean leader proclaims himself world dictator, breaks his peace settlement with Israel, and declares himself to be God.
* The new world dictator desecrates the temple in Jerusalem.
* The terrible judgments of the Great Tribulation are poured out on the nations of the world.
* Worldwide rebellion threatens the world dictator's rule as armies from throughout the world converge on the Middle East.
* Christ returns to earth with his armies from heaven.
* The armies of the world unite to resist Christ's coming and are destroyed in the Battle of Armageddon.
* Christ establishes his millennial reign on earth, ending the times of the Gentiles.

Again, it is the understanding of these authors that the Bible is a book of magical predictions about the future. Both Lindsey and Walvoord use their interpretation as a means to encourage people to convert to Christianity and so count themselves among the saved who will be raptured to heaven before the final tribulation begins.

The popularity of these books and many others like them establish the Bible as a book containing magical predictions about the future. It is this type of thinking that serves as the soil out of which cults can emerge and grow. Those whose religiosity

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[2] Hal Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970).

[3] John F. Walvoord, *Armageddon, Oil and the Middle East Crisis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990).

[4] For the following predictions, see Walvoord, 221-23.

has been shaped by these popular notions about the Bible are far more likely to be receptive to the persuasion of a David Koresh.

2. *A second characteristic of a religious worldview susceptible to distortion is dualism.* In a dualistic worldview, the world is divided into two conflicting camps. On the one side are the forces of God, representatives of the good and defenders of the truth. On the opposing side are the forces of Satan, representatives of evil and defenders of the lie. "Our" group has secured a secret knowledge to which the others either have no access or are blind. Such a worldview builds a sense of solidarity among members of the "in-group." Group members need to remain loyal lest they fall under the influence of the enemy. Social pressure is applied to maintain uniformity. Appeals are made to God's sanctioning of our group over against God's rejection of the opponents.

Dualistic thinking provides a ready explanation for suffering and evil. They are the consequence of the work of the enemy. The world's evil is explainable as the result of the disbelief and disobedience of the enemy. Our group's suffering is the result of our being persecuted by the forces of evil. In the face of such persecution, we must become even more steadfast, even unto death.

All people are influenced by dualistic thinking to a certain degree, particularly during times of stress and conflict. We all tend to identify scapegoats upon whom we blame the world's ills, which in turn exonerates us from responsibility for our actions. When situated within a religious worldview, however, dualism tends to become absolutistic. If I represent *God's* truth, I dare not yield. If I defend *God's* cause, I will even sacrifice my life—or take the life of another—to be true to the one who will hold me accountable at the Last Judgment.

3. *The third and crucial element in the religious worldview of the Branch Davidians and similar groups is trust in their charismatic leader as God's chosen instrument.* Such leaders are scarcely the monsters they are often portrayed to be. They are very personable, intelligent, appear self-confident, and exude an aura of assurance. They also operate with the sure conviction that they have a special insight into God's will which they have a responsibility of conveying to their followers. David Koresh operated with the conviction that he was God's new Messiah. Like King David of old, he surrounded himself with his own "mighty men" who were prepared to bear arms and fight for their leader. He claimed sexual favors from the women of the group, justified by his intention to found a new Davidic dynasty. He engaged his followers in lengthy periods of Bible study in which he instructed them in the proper interpretation of scripture. Those loyal to him submitted to his authority as God's chosen instrument. Even after the bullets and fire which killed Koresh and his followers within the Branch Davidian compound, certain other members of the group regretted that they too did not perish for the cause.

Misreading Revelation

The religious ideas which contributed to the demise of the Branch Davidians are founded to a large degree on a tragic misreading of the Book of Revelation. Many are extremely ignorant about the historical context in which this book of the Bible originated. Many are unaware of how this book has in virtually every generation ignited apocalyptic hopes, doomed to end in great disappointment.

The genre of Revelation is that of Jewish/Christian apocalyptic literature. Between 200 B.C.E. and 400 C.E., there circulated a number of apocalyptic writings. Within the first centuries of Christianity these included the Apocalypses of Peter, Paul, Thomas, and Stephen. Of these, the Book of Revelation is the only apocalypse which was accepted into the New Testament canon. Apocalyptic literature in general is characterized by visionary authorship, a dualistic worldview, the active involvement of angels and demons in human affairs, dramatic symbolism, numerology, and the expectation of God's imminent intervention to bring human history to an end.

The occasion for the composition of the Book of Revelation appears to have been a severe persecution of Christians in Asia Minor during the reign of the Roman emperor Domitian around the year 95 C.E. The author of the book was a man named John of Patmos who based his writing on visions from God to give hope and encouragement to the Christian faithful who were enduring imprisonment and even death at the hands of the Roman government. All loyal Roman subjects were expected to participate in the Roman cultic rituals which included obeisance to and worship of the Roman emperor. The local officials in Asia Minor were rigorous in enforcing this requirement. When Christians, out of their greater loyalty to Christ, refused to participate in such ceremonies, they became the object of discrimination, persecution, arrest, imprisonment, and even martyrdom.

John offered his book as an encouragement to the churches in Asia Minor to remain faithful in the face of this intense opposition. The situation had become so desperate that God must soon intervene in dramatic fashion to punish the Roman emperor and his cohorts and to vindicate the Christian saints. Consistent with first century Christian belief, John expected the imminent return of Christ to bring an end to this time of tribulation and to usher in a new era when God's people would live without fear, sorrow or death.

David Koresh operated with the conviction that he was God's new Messiah.

The cryptic symbols of the Book of Revelation have their primary reference to persons and events taking place at the time of its composition. For example, in Revelation 6, the Lamb of God worthy to open the seven seals refers to Jesus Christ himself. The calamities surrounding the opening of the seals 2,3,4 and 6 refer to events which characterize every period of history, including that of the first century: bloodshed, famine, pestilence, war, and earthquakes. The "souls of those who had been slaughtered" in the opening of the fifth seal refers to those Christians martyred by the Roman government. The main symbols for the Roman empire are Babylon and a beast. Rome itself is variously represented as Sodom, Jerusalem, and a harlot. The Roman emperor is depicted as the Anti-Christ and as a beast.

The symbolic numbers of Revelation are extrapolations of the number of perfection, 7, and the number of completeness, 12. The symbolic number of the saints, 144,000, thus represents the complete number of the new Israel (12 tribes times 12,000 per tribe).

The repeated use of the number seven refers to the fullness of time. The number 666 is the number of the emperor who pretends at the perfection of 777 but is really an imposter. The number 3 1/2 years (or 42 months) refers to a period of time which seems an eternity but which will soon come to an end, i.e., the time of persecution.

Masterful commentaries have been written which establish the end of the first century as the proper context for understanding the Book of Revelation and its symbolism.[5] Christians at that time anticipated God's dramatic intervention in history through natural disasters and the defeat of Rome which would accompany the final return of Christ and the vindication of the Christian faithful. Yet most people are ignorant about this scholarship. Because of the universality of the events portrayed through Revelation's symbolism—famine, pestilence, evil leaders, evil nations, war, earthquakes, etc.—every generation can potentially read contemporary occurrences back into its pages. Indeed, every generation has had those who have tried to do so. Most of these expectations have merely given rise to "great disappointment." The expectations of a few, like David Koresh and the Branch Davidians, have ended in tragedy. The potential for the misuse of the Book of Revelation is great, especially among those ignorant of its historical origin and the history of its misinterpretation. As the year 2000 approaches, marking the arrival of a new millennium, the number of novel and misguided interpretations of Revelation are likely to increase. Hopefully none will prove so tragic as the story of the Branch Davidians.

Clearly there are important lessons to be learned from the Book of Revelation—about perseverance in the face of persecution, about resisting the idolatrous claims of governments, about hope for a final resolution of history. But these are lessons only learned by careful study of the book in its own original historical context. Those who employ the book to make magical predictions about current events and God's imminent intervention to end history not only distract energy away from addressing the world's problems but feed a religious mindset which is susceptible to the machinations of a David Koresh.

Educational imperatives

Members of churches, particularly parents of adolescents, are rightly wary of the attraction of unscrupulous religious personalities and groups upon our youth. What can be done to stem their influence? First, the church must take seriously its educational task. Members of congregations must be instructed in the fundamentals of historical critical study of the scriptures. There remains a significant gap between what pastors have learned about the original context of biblical writings and the tenets of popular religion held by many members regarding the use of the Bible. Christians must learn to be wary of those who rip verses out of context in order to promote their own idiosyncratic version of the truth.

This educational task must begin already with our youth. One of the most serious errors we make in our confirmation and post-confirmation education of young people is the failure to sufficiently chal-

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[5] George B. Caird, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966); Gerhard A. Krodel, *Revelation* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989); M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1989); and Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991).

lenge the intellect. While in high school and in college young people are learning many expansive ideas about science and philosophy and literature, the church often fails to provide an interpretation of Christian truth commensurate with other learning. Again, the church must discover ways of introducing youth to the original world of the Old and New Testaments and the historical process by which the Bible developed, while at the same time demonstrating its status as the living Word of God.

This educational task becomes acute when and where other groups promote an alternative, what has here been called "magical," approach to the Bible. If another church, for example, invites youth from the community to watch sensational movies about the Book of Revelation which purport the end is near in order to persuade youth to convert and join their ranks, this is the very moment to organize a Bible study to provide an historically informed understanding of Revelation's enigmas.

Another important educational task is to teach the dangers of dualistic thinking. While the Bible contains its share of dualistic thought patterns, a danger arises when a group manipulates these today to support its own cause and to denigrate, even demonize, an opponent. Given the crimes of the modern world against those who have become scapegoats, the church must be vigilant in unmasking dualistic thinking as one of the dynamics by which great evil has been perpetrated. In its place one needs to learn the value of self-critical thinking, especially in a world where "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23), including ourselves.

A final task the church must undertake is the continual development of leaders skilled and committed to ministry with young people. The church must fully commit itself to accompany young people in their transition from childhood to maturity, not abandoning them along the way. Where the church can provide numerous adult mentors, lay and clergy, who are living testimony to the love of God for youth—who honor youth as persons with legitimate gifts and legitimate questions—there is less opening for the influence of a David Koresh. Where, however, congregations fail to integrate young people into the mainstream of their life together, into both worship and service, there increases the likelihood that youth will search for other answers to their questions.

The tragedy of the Branch Davidians provides a learning moment for the church. We are challenged to undertake the task of education in our congregations with new vigor and wisdom. We are challenged to renewed commitment in ministry with young people. And in all of these tasks, we are challenged to measure our faith by the grace, love, and forgiveness of Jesus Christ. While we are obliged to understand their origins and purpose, the center of the Christian faith does not revolve around obscure and fascinating passages in the Book of Revelation. Instead, the core of the Christian faith is centered in the gospel of Jesus Christ, crucified and risen from the dead. We are called upon to interpret what is murky in the scriptures in the light of this glorious and clear message of hope. To the degree that we keep this teaching at the center of our concern, the church guards against those who would manipulate the Bible according to their own self-serving and potentially destructive agenda.

Preaching to and from the Center

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Meditation toward the gospel: diagnosis

"...The centre cannot hold." W. B. Yeats' apocalyptic image has haunted many in the West throughout the 20th century. But even while things fall apart, it's the task of the preacher to proclaim "the center that holds." The preacher confesses "in Christ all things hold together" (Col 1:17).

Sermon preparation is, at heart, meditation. The preacher reflects on life moving to Christ—the center—and from the center out to new life. The Desert Fathers practiced centering prayer. Luther spoke of driving or pushing toward Christ. Such meditation to and from the gospel center is the focus of the next two articles in this series.

Meditation from lived experience moves one toward the center, toward diagnosis of the need for Christ. Meditation on God's saving deed in Christ pushes one out from the center, toward new life. This is prognosis, based on the benefits of the gospel.

Of course, this isn't as simple as it first appears. The truth is, the diagnosis is determined by the center. The nature of one's law criticism is determined by the nature of one's gospel. Otherwise, the sermon risks becoming pure ideology. God does not come simply with an answer to a question the hearer is asking. God comes in Christ with a question the hearer must learn to ask: "What is it about you and the human scene that made it necessary for God to raise the crucified Christ from the dead?"

The pastoral question

Whenever I respond to a sermon in which there is no gospel, I ask pastoral questions: "What need in the hearer's life was the preacher trying to meet in this sermon? What is the hearer's problem?"

This is less apt to be abstract than a more theological approach: "How was Christ used in this sermon? Why was Christ necessary?" The theological and pastoral questions do stand in correlation to one another.

The fundamental reason a preacher does not preach the gospel is an inadequate diagnosis of the hearer's situation. The reason the preacher did not proclaim the gospel was there was no felt need to do so.

Physicians train in the art of diagnosis for life. As patients, we want an accurate diagnosis. When the problem is clear, the

options for prognosis also become clear. The preacher's diagnosis of the hearer's spiritual problem is no less exacting. I find, however, that diagnosis often is inadequate in sermon preparation. The result is that the prognosis is also inadequate.

The word "salvation" means to heal, to liberate. What the preacher needs to clearly ask is: "Heal what? Liberate from what and for what?" Not just any healing and liberation will do. The hearer's felt need does not set the agenda. Rather, it's determined by the hearer's actual need—exposed by the good news that "God raised the crucified Christ"—that actually does set the agenda.

Levels in diagnosis

A husband fails to bring flowers to his wife on their 25th wedding anniversary. The preacher must ask: What does this action have to do with God raising the crucified Christ from the dead? The answer may be, Nothing! Then the incident is not suitable for preaching.

Meditation toward the gospel takes the simplest of events and drives them to the Risen Christ. When this connection is made between life and the Word, the preacher is ready to proceed with sermon preparation.

Let's consider four levels in a diagnostic process that link the failure to bring flowers to the gospel. These levels do not occur in order or in isolation, but are dimensions of a complex thought process that often is scrambled. They don't have to appear explicitly in the sermon. This process itself clarifies the issue for the preacher.

Level 1—Acts, behaviors, and sins. Often the easiest starting point for reflection is a narrative that exposes human behavior that is dysfunctional, loveless, and unjust. These incidents not only ground the preacher in reality, they afford concrete points of reference for the hearer when the preacher speaks of "sins."

Many biblical texts, however, offer no narrative clue. Instead of specific behaviors, they offer second-level diagnostic material—law, flesh, sin, etc. Sometimes the text offers only the christological affirmation, "Jesus is Lord." The preacher is left without a clue for an answer to the question, "So what?"

Sermons become vague, abstract, and unreal when terms like "flesh" are not incarnated in acts of the flesh which the preacher has experienced and the hearer can identify with. To assert "the devil tempts us everyday" is a bold statement, but without meaning unless the preacher can answer: "When was the last time the devil tempted you, and what behaviors resulted in your defeat?"

Conversely, sermon content is reduced simply to prudence, pop psychology, and moralism if the first level diagnosis is not driven to the underlying cause of the behavior. Behaviors are symptoms of underlying maladies. The preacher moves from symptom to malady by asking, "Why?"

A husband failed to bring flowers home to his wife on their anniversary. "Why?" Perhaps his car broke down and the florist closed before he could get there. If that's all there is to it, there's no reason for the preacher to use this story.

Level 2—Person, unfaith, Sin. Why else might the husband have failed? It might be that his brain synapses are not functioning: he simply forgot. Then he needs a physician and not the Risen Christ. But the clinicians remind us our forgetting and remembering are often rooted in deeper matters. Behavior is a symptom: The loveless deed is a sign of an anxious being. The sins can be tied to sin with a capital S.

St. Paul's usage of "sin" and "flesh" refer to a state of being, not just behavior. Acts of sin are expressions of a person turned in on himself or herself. The prob-

lem is not what the hearer does so much as who the hearer is. The hearer *is* a person who does not fear, love and trust God above all things. This unfaith underlies the loveless and unjust deeds.

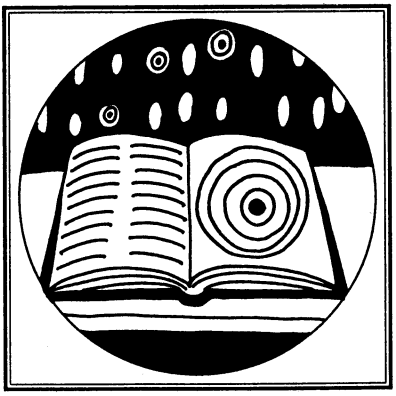
The husband's failure to bring flowers to his wife could be rooted in many unfaith expressions. He's having a mid-life crisis and has lost focus on his marriage. He's a workaholic who often forgets his wife and family. He's stressed out in mortal fear of losing his job. All are signals of sin and the flesh.

But the matter lies deeper still. Now that the preacher has told him what is wrong, why doesn't the husband simply pull himself together and stop all this destructive behavior? This brings us to the next level of diagnosis.

Level 3—Powers, systems, evil. "For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rules of the present darkness..." (Eph 6:12). The husband's problem is not just an individual one. His actions and his unfaith anxiety occur in a social context in which supra personal systems and powers of destruction are at work.

The husband is captive in a consumer-oriented, affluent society. Success and self-worth are defined by the accumulation of wealth, power, and prestige. Our society sells "short cuts"—the promise of love through lust and without sacrifice. Empirically, death has the last word. Psychologically, we cannot conceive of our not being.

This level of diagnosis exposes the complexity and ambiguity of the hearer's situation. The failure to keep systemic issues in mind leads to naive and moralistic preaching. Poverty, for example, is viewed simply as an individual's choice not to work. The result is the "haves" go home justified and the "have nots" simply get



castigated. The truth is the principalities and powers are at work, and the "haves" bear some responsibility for this destructive work. The self-justified indifference of the "haves" over against the "have nots" adds guilt upon guilt.

But the matter lies even deeper. We still have not answered: "What has the husband's failure got to do with God raising the crucified Christ from the dead? For this to happen we need ask "Why?" once more.

Level 4—Reality as a Whole, God. "Things fall apart. The centre cannot hold." Yeats offers an intimation of the ultimate diagnosis. Reality as a whole is falling apart, and our experience is that God the Center does not hold all things together. The gospel proclaims God's answer to the hearer's experience of the absence and judgment of God in the world.

Why doesn't the husband trust with heart, soul and mind the One who declares: "I care for you. Have no anxiety about tomorrow" ? Because there is no eloquent proof in human experience that this is true. Every day in every way we experience the absence and the judgment of God.

Is this true? Certainly many would argue for the opposite. They would affirm, "Grace is everywhere and is self validating

in common human experience." This is the crucial issue in diagnosis. Is the problem simply sins and evil? Or is God also the problem?

What is meant by the absence of God? It is not just the dark night of the soul that occurs from time to time. It is not just the experience of a husband whose loss of his job lands him in deep depression. The absence of God is experienced in human history—in which the force of evil has decayed every civilization, and the power of death has dismantled every individual. It is not yet clear to us, who can only see through a glass darkly, that God wins over the principalities and powers. We can only trust.

But the closing chorus of Eliot's "Murder in the Cathedral" reminds us that we, too, like all other human beings, are those

Who fear the injustice of men less than the justice of God;
who fear the hand at the window,
the fire at the thatch, the
fist in the tavern, the push into the canal,
Less than we fear the love of God.

If everyone had stood up and refused to allow the first Jew to be sent to a concentration camp in Nazi Germany, there could have been no "final solution." In the face of evil the common person fears the push into the canal more than she stands in awe of God.

People are responsible. Why then do we capitulate, so often and so easily? One reason is that, in our experience, God is an underachiever. Bad things happen to good people. Good things happen to bad people. Reality as we see it doesn't lend credence to the providence of a gracious God. So in the crunch, we cannot trust with our whole being that God's rule of grace is stronger than the force of evil.

If the absence of God were not problem enough for faith, the presence of God can compound it. For a believer God's absence often is seen as a sign of the presence of God's judgment: We make our bed with evil, and God gives us up and lets us sleep in it.

The judgment of God is everywhere all the time. The retribution of God is a necessary element of the creative, preserving work of God in the world. That retribution is not only necessary, it's inevitable. If there were no system of retribution for good and ill, nothing at all would hold together.

As a white American, I cannot escape the judgment of God for my part in a racist system that began when Africans first were brought here as slaves. We all are paying the price for that evil in our land, and we'll continue to do so for generations.

This necessary, inevitable and comprehensive judgment is the reason we cannot trust with heart, soul and mind by our own reason or strength. We trust what we create as a defense mechanism against the truth. We create religion—even our version of Christianity—as a way to insure God is on our side. We concoct ideologies that justify our ambitions and our cruelties.

In this case the husband is judged by God both as oppressed and oppressor. Oppressed by Mammon that equates worth with work and success with wealth, he is judged for his idolatry. Oppressing his wife by demanding more than he gives, he is judged for his injustice. This pervasive judgment in the fabric of his whole life will either drive the husband to despair or to live with illusions.

This is the law that is God's law. St. Paul joins the tyranny of law with the force field of death that locks the hearer in unfaith (1 Corinthians 15).

Without the retributive judgment of God things would fall apart immediately.

With the retributive judgment of God things come apart eventually. That is why the scripture envisions God creating a new heaven and a new earth.

(We are now at the doorstep of the gospel. The gospel proclaims God's deed in Christ by which all things are held together. The next article will deal with prognosis from the gospel. Even now some intimation of God's "Yes" in the face of God's "No" is required.)

As to the absence of God, St. Paul boldly asserts: "All things work together for good for them who love God." But what does that mean for the husband who loses his job, his family, his life? Certainly we cannot read from the pages of his biography that everything turned out for the best. The fact is it didn't.

No, but we can offer a promise that is the basis for faith in the gracious providence of God in the husband's life. "...neither... principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth... will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8:38-39). The love of God exploding on the world scene in the form of suffering grace through the Crucified Christ is stronger than evil and death. God in raising the crucified One seals the promise that "all things work together for good to those who trust in the Lord."

As to the judgment of God, we can proclaim the happy exchange God makes with us in Christ. "For our sake God made Christ to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor 5:21). This is the promise that evokes repentance and the faith by which our forgiveness is assured in spite of having to live with judgment and alienation.

Not everyone will agree with particular diagnosis toward the gospel, but every preacher must have a way to connect life with the gospel word. Whatever diagnosis a preacher uses, it should strive to meet three basic tests for truth.

1. Does it follow from the central biblical witness that God, in raising Christ from the dead and sending the Spirit, established a new age, worked a new creation and began a new rule of grace? Christ came "once for all." The resurrection of Christ signals God's victory over evil and God's forgiveness for all humanity. Easter is the hinge of history, the point on which faith stands or falls.

2. Does it encompass the whole truth as best as the truth can be perceived? On the surface, life is not always as ambiguous and fated as described in this analysis. There are bounties of God's love in nature given to all people every day. True, but the test for faith is in the heat of sin and evil in the world. What a preacher says about trusting wholly in the power of God's grace over all sin and evil must stand the test after Auschwitz: Could you say it to the children in the death camps?

3. Does it maximize God's compassion for the hearer and so enable the hearer to be compassionate? The diagnosis should serve humanity as God made the Sabbath for humanity. My favorite drama is Eugene O'Neill's *A Long Day's Journey into Night.* Ambiguity and fate hang like the fog over the Tyrone family. Every time I experience this three-hour family ordeal, I experience the need for compassion: compassion for the characters, for me, for all people. O'Neill exposes all the flaws and power of fate not to humiliate the Tyrones or to make the audience feel depressed. Simply, the truth cries out for compassion.

The purpose of a diagnosis is not to create a need that does not exist. Truth is truth. The purpose is not to make the hearer feel guilty, so he will out of self-interest accept the rewards of the gospel. Guilt

before God is God's verdict whether we feel it or not. The freedom to be guilty in truth is a gift of the Spirit through the gospel.

The purpose of diagnosis is to remind us all how much we need God's compassion and how much we must be compassionate to all people. The purpose is to get our minds ready to answer the pastoral question: "In what way does the hearer need God's compassion given to us all in the crucified Christ?"

As a postscript I offer a portion of my Maundy Thursday sermon, "Remembered and Remembering," that illustrates a brief meditation that leads to the gospel.

Excerpts from a sermon

We not only need to be remembered, we need to remember. Imagine a person without memory. This is a person without language, imagination, rational reflection, or conscious awareness. This is a person without a self identity because he or she cannot remember all the relationships that make for self-identity.

The loss of memory is the loss of self. This is the dread of Alzheimer's disease. James Thomas, a victim of Alzheimer's, wrote in his diary shortly before losing all memory: "Every few months I sense that another part of me is missing. My life... myself... are falling apart. I can only think present thoughts now. Someday I may wake up and not think at all... not know who I am. Most people expect to die someday but whoever expected to lose their self first?"[1]

To have an identity we need to remember, but there is much about ourselves we don't want to remember. The American people have spent a generation both trying to forget and trying to remember the Vietnam War. The pain of that war was so severe that we rushed to forget. And so we acted callously toward the war veterans as we repressed our guilt, hurt, and anger.

You see the dilemma. Sometimes we need to remember the very things we want to forget. If we forget the things we need to remember, they return to haunt us. We become spiritually ill. The truth is we *cannot* forget the things we need to remember; we can only suppress them.

"...Do this in remembrance of me." This invitation of our Lord is a call to our true identity. It empowers us to forget in spite of remembering. When we remember our Lord's passion and death for our past sins, we are able to remember what we want to forget. We remember God's grace to us so we can forgive and be forgiven—that is, forget in spite of remember.

On November 13, 1982, the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial in Washington, D.C., was dedicated. The black marble wall with the names of soldiers who died in that war stands as a prayer for healing. Seeing the names and remembering the sacrifice somehow unites the living and the dead. Remembering is painful, but because of the grace in that place, the remembering leads to forgiving. The paradox of genuine forgiveness is that we forget in the very process of remembering.

The cross is God's healing memorial by which we can safely forget past sins. The cross is God's memorial where we gather to remember that in Christ our past sin is forgiven and we are free to move into the future joined in forgiveness. We remember the Lord's death until he comes because before the cross, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:1). There is only God's grace to us all.

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[1]Donna Cohen and Carl Eisdorfer, *The Loss of Self* (NY: W. W. Norton, 1986), 22.

What Are We Confirming?

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Language and our use of language is the vital essence of human communication. The meaning of words can, and often does, change over a period of time according to its usage. This, of course, presupposes that when a word is first used it is universally accepted as meaning the same thing. In approaching an understanding of what we call "confirmation," it is necessary to define who the "we" is. Additionally, there is need to examine the origin of this word in an effort to more fully understand what we as Lutheran Christians mean when we use this word and how our use of it relates to similar or dissimilar usage by other Christians.

The term "confirmation," used initially at the First Council of Orange (441),[1] came to be recognized as the episcopal act of confirming baptisms done by local priests. The Eastern church developed a practice of allowing priests to fully baptize using a chrism (oil) which the bishop had blessed. The Western, i.e. Roman, practice was to have the local priest baptize with water in the name of the Triune God. Subsequently, the bishop with the laying on of hands and use of oil for anointing, confirmed and completed the baptism. Such "confirmation," while an intrinsic part of baptism, was understood as an episcopal act and not a divinely mandated sacrament in and of itself. Indeed, baptism without confirmation might well be thought of as a "provisional" or "conditional" baptism; some might argue, no baptism at all!

With the passing of time, and possibly to further emphasize the difference between Eastern and Western practice (especially after the Great Schism of 1054) the custom developed whereby this episcopal act called "confirmation" was postponed until an infant had gained a degree of maturity. By the thirteenth century, confirmation was well established in Western practice as a rite quite separate from baptism, and the Council of Cologne (1280) forbade confirmation before the age of seven years. It was not, however, affirmed as a sacrament until the Council of Florence (1439) when Eugene IV issued the papal decree, "*Pro Armensis.*"[2]

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[1] Arthur C. Repp, *Confirmation in the Lutheran Church* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), 14 n. 4.

[2] Repp, 14.

The historical link between baptism and confirmation is readily recognized. In declaring confirmation to be a separate sacrament, the Church of Rome declared that a baptism without chrism and/or the laying on of hands was complete. What had been previously understood as a completion of baptism was now acknowledged as a new sacrament. While this answers questions concerning the "provisionality" of baptism, it fails to lay any theological foundation for this new sacrament. Since baptism is now declared to be complete, what is it that needs to be confirmed?

Between the First Council of Orange in 441 and the Council of Florence in 1439, the meaning of the word "confirmation" radically changed. Usage in the ensuing centuries has done nothing to clarify the understanding or meaning of "confirmation."

Within a century of Eugene IV's decree establishing confirmation as a sacrament, Martin Luther had been excommunicated and the Reformation was well underway, rejecting the notion that there was any validity to the sacrament called confirmation or indeed any other sacrament except the divinely mandated Sacrament of the Altar and the Sacrament of Baptism. Martin Luther said in 1520 that it was "sufficient to regard Confirmation as a certain churchly rite or sacramental ceremony to other ceremonies such as the blessing of water and the like."[3] Two years later Luther was ready to describe this sacramental ceremony as "monkey business" and "fanciful deception"[4] and "mumbo jumbo."[5]

Martin Luther and the reformers totally rejected the Roman practice of confirmation and returned the laying on of hands and use of chrism to its rightful place as an integral component of baptism which did not require episcopal participation or completion. Indeed, confirmation was acknowledged to be at best, an episcopal nicety "to adorn the office of Bishop, that they may not be entirely without work in the church."[6] A baptism within the framework of a Lutheran understanding is thus a complete and thorough baptism needing no bishop or human agency to confirm what God has accomplished.

So, it is, then, that the post-Reformation practice or rite called confirmation must not be confused with the Roman (and Episcopalian) sacrament of the same name. (Would that Lutherans had always used the term "Affirmation of Baptism"—see *Lutheran Book of Worship*, 1978, 198.)

It is recognized that Luther did sanction the use of a "rite of passage" following a period of study (*catechesis*), but he saw no need for it admitting only that he "would permit Confirmation as long as it is understood that God knows nothing of it, and has said nothing about it... it is a purely human contrivance."[7]

Luther himself had no enthusiasm for this rite, and it was the other reformers, especially Martin Bucer, Philip Melanchthon, John Bugenhagen, and Georg Witzel who advocated some type of "pseudo-Confirmation." It is true that Luther did approve the Brandenburg Church Order (1540) and subscribed to the Wittenburg Reformation (1545) which make provision for such a rite, but a letter to Prince Joachim II of Brandenburg dated December 4, 1539, indicates that he was not altogether in favor of this provision which he called "Witzelisch" in reference to Georg Witzel who subse-

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[3] "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church," *Luther's Works* 36:92.

[4] "The Estate of Marriage," *Luther's Works* 45:24.

[5] "The Estate of Marriage," 8.

[6] "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church," 91.

[7] "The Estate of Marriage," 24-25.

quently reverted to Roman Catholicism.[8]

It is thus seen that in the mid-sixteenth century there was no uniformity of understanding or practice vis à vis confirmation within the Reformation church. Throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries there seems to have been much diversity. Confirmation was not officially sanctioned in Sweden until 1811.[9] In Germany it was not officially recognized in Leipzig until 1803, Dresden 1812, Frankfort 1813, Lübeck 1817, and Hamburg 1832.[10] This rite among Lutheran Christians called confirmation must be understood as something entirely different from the pre-Reformation sacrament of the same name. Between the Council of Florence (1439) and the early nineteenth century (see above), usage of this word "confirmation" had radically changed once more. Whatever it is that Lutheran Christians mean by "confirmation" today is not what members of the Church of Rome or the Anglican/Episcopal community mean.

The adoption and/or adaptation of ecclesiastical vocabulary has historic precedent. The word "catechism" described the process used in preparing people (adults) for baptism and was customarily in question and answer form. When Luther prepared teaching material for adults and children he chose the word "catechism" because the Small and Large Catechism utilized the question and answer format. To subsequently treat an individual who has undergone instruction in the faith as if such an instruction were a preparation for baptism is to confuse the identity of a would be "confirmand" with that of a "catechumen." Only the form, not the function, of Luther's teaching material was that of a catechism.

When form and function are confused, the adoption of ecclesiastical vocabulary is misleading. Luther never intended for the Small or Large Catechism to be exclusively used by those preparing for baptism or "confirmation." It was his primary intent that they be used for the ongoing instruction of the baptized people of God because he was a strong advocate for the life-long process of education and instruction in the faith. Similarly the continued use of the word "confirmation" is, at best, confusing.

This confusion is readily seen in the contemporary phrases, "being confirmed" and "making confirmation." "Being confirmed" reflects the historical act of a bishop confirming a baptismal identity; while the phrase "making confirmation" reflects a post-Reformation understanding of a rite during which individuals declare their affirmation and celebrate their baptismal identity. The use of both these phrases puts a synergistic emphasis upon human activity (whether bishop or baptized individual) rather than celebrating God's baptismal grace. Baptism is the significant one time event. Our celebration of God's action in baptism is better understood as a life-long process.

It is enough that we are baptized children of God. What has been fully accomplished in our baptism needs no confirmation. The response which we are free to make and which we have a need to make to our baptism is to frequently, if not daily, reembrace that identity. The action of affirming one's baptism is not a singular event to be thought of as either a Christian Bar-Mitzvah/Bat-Mitzvah signaling the entrance of an adolescent into adulthood or an ecclesiastical graduation ceremony marking the completion of one's Christian education.

To affirm one's baptism is a life-long response whereby we continually recall the

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[8] *Luther's Works* (WA) 8:622-23.

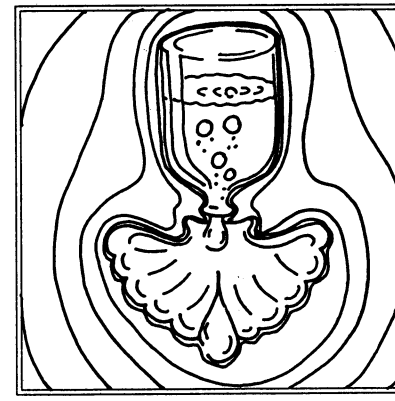
[9] Repp, *Confirmation in the Lutheran Church*, 83.

[10] Repp, *Confirmation*, 28.

new identity with which God has graced us in baptism. The study of God's word, our ongoing learning, and our upbuilding of one another as the body of Christ are ways in which we recall and are called again to that identity. Ongoing study and education are as central to our growth in faith as the proclamation of the Word and participation in the sacraments. Obligating youth to a comparatively short period of study followed by an ecclesiastical rite of passage lacking in theological foundation is not only inconsistent with our understanding of and response to baptism, but contradictory.

It is past time to abandon the current confused practice referred to as "confirmation." We do more harm than good. By allowing this historical mutation to remain untreated, we facilitate its insidious growth. Generations of Lutheran Christians have attempted and are attempting to address adult questions with adolescent answers all because we perpetuate the myth that their educational process has been completed. It is too late for preventative medicine; we need radical surgery.

When we remove a couple hundred years of tradition, we discover an amazing truth: we confirm nothing. Christians simply and joyfully celebrate daily the gift which God freely and completely bestows upon us in baptism. Once we dispense with our ecclesiastical graduation ceremony, then we can honestly and with integrity affirm the centrality and importance of continual education for our journey in Christian faith and life. Commitment to Christian education and study of God's Word is vital for all the baptized, not just for children and youth. The church's continued validation of what



we call "confirmation" significantly undermines the important ministry of continuing education for all the people of God—especially adults.

A radical new thought? Not really. Here is how Luther concludes the Preface to the Large Catechism:

> Therefore, I once again implore all Christians, especially pastors and preachers, not to try to be doctors prematurely and imagine that they know everything... let all Christians exercise themselves in the Catechism daily, and constantly put it into practice... let them continue to read and teach, to learn and meditate and ponder. Let them never stop until they have proved by experience that they have taught the Devil to death and have become wiser than God himself and all his saints... To this end may God grant his grace! Amen."[11]

[11] Luther's Large Catechism, *Book of Concord*, 361.

Analysis of a Slogan: "God's Unconditional Love"

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Slogans, like language itself, are part of life—part of what it means to be human. Already in Old Testament times we can observe certain expressions becoming like slogans in their usefulness: for instance, "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" or "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord." With no context to assist in the interpretation of these slogans, one could infer a meaning altogether different than that intended, namely, that the God revealed in the Old Testament is only one God of many. Or in the New Testament the slogan "Jesus is Lord" without any context could mean that Jesus is neither more nor less than a Roman emperor.

The Lutheran Reformation gave birth to its own share of slogans, the best known being "grace alone; faith alone; scripture alone." Again, without any context these slogans could be twisted to mean something far different than what the reformers intended, namely, that good works are completely irrelevant for Lutheran Christians. In all of these instances it is clear that the slogans are useful only if interpreted by their original scriptural contexts.

Recently I have begun to think about a slogan much used in Christian circles today, the expression "God's unconditional love." It seems to me that this slogan is more and more losing its scriptural context and taking on a meaning which is perhaps dictated more by humanistic psychology and its talk about a child's need for the unconditional love of its parents. And this in turn seems to be further secularized as meaning in the final analysis: "Ultimately anything goes. Simply express unconditional acceptance of your child." Thereupon this secularized meaning is read back into Christian theology in such a way as to make God over into a permissive parent who has no other motivating power than the unconditional acceptance of every human being regardless of that person's response. Does this sound familiar? And is it scriptural?

Just as with a slogan like "grace alone" we have to ask ourselves in what specific

sense that is true, so as not to make irrelevant the good works which are to be evident in a Christian's life, so also with the slogan "God's unconditional love." We have to ask what specific scriptural sense that expression can have and what sense it dare not have, if we are to remain faithful to God's word.

"God's unconditional love"

I'm not aware of any English translation of the Bible which uses the adjective "unconditional" to describe the particular nature of God's love. The closest equivalent is probably the RSV's phrase "steadfast love" (see, for example, Deut 7:9 and Psalm 136 throughout; in these instances Coverdale translated *chesed* with "lovingkindness" and the KJV with "mercy"). The nearest New Testament expression is the word "grace." What all of these words mean to convey is the sure love of God which, despite persistent waywardness among God's people, will not let that people go. Such "unconditional love" is described in those hymn-like verses of 2 Tim 2:11-13, where in conclusion we hear: "if we are faithless, he remains faithful for he cannot deny himself," that is, that self which is "love."

Now, is what scripture means by the "love of God" which is utterly faithful to God's covenant of grace with people, especially as that covenant is fulfilled in Jesus, what people generally mean today when they speak of "God's unconditional love," a love with no strings attached?

Imagine the following scenario. A member of your congregation has not joined the congregation for worship around Word and Sacrament for over six months because in all his spare time he is building a house which will enable him to move his family out of a trailer which has been their home ever since he married five years ago. You have tried to contact him, but he lets it be known that he is not interested in any talk about church attendance until he has completed the building of his new home and has his family settled in it. In fact, he is not even interested in your help, if it is "calculated" to get him back to church before he has completed his home. How should you respond to such a brother?

> With no context to assist in the interpretation of slogans, one could infer a meaning altogether different than that intended.

God's unconditional and vulnerable love

As I have thought through some such cases in "pastoral care," a number of options have come to mind; but only one of them has seemed clearly scriptural.

1. A person could simply "lay down the *law*" and threaten excommunication if that individual didn't show up in church and at the Lord's Table before the end of another month. There is no doubt that God's will is being disregarded by this brother (one could cite Ex 20:8-11 and its NT interpretations and application in 1 Cor 11:17-

Persistently unrequited love ultimately brings its own reward—some version of damnation—with it.

34 and Heb 10:23-25). However, such a legalistic approach would hardly soften the brother's heart and effect the desired change.

2. One could proclaim and demonstrate the *gospel* of "God's unconditional love" as that is popularly understood today. That is, one could refrain from bugging this brother about his church attendance and simply find opportunities to speak and incarnate "God's unconditional love" to him and his family. It should be a "no strings attached" approach, with nothing which might say or suggest that not attending church for over six months is a problem (at most it's a problem in that we miss him but it's supposedly not a problem for the Lord who loves "unconditionally").

3. Or, finally, one could take the *law-gospel* approach and work with the assumption that God's love is not only a free gift (gospel) but also implies an unqualified demand (law). By definition love is relational and longs for response. And persistently unrequited love ultimately brings its own reward—some version of damnation—with it.

We can illustrate this by looking briefly at Jesus' parable of the vineyard in Mt 21:33-44. Here the "vineyard" stands for the kingdom of God as that is manifested in the church. It is a place of provision and safety for those who agree to participate. The "householder" (God) does not bug the participants by being present in a controlling sort of way; rather he gives ample space for people to participate in a trust-relationship allowing for considerable freedom. However, he does have expectations which express the fact that this is a *relationship* and not a do-your-own-thing arrangement.

In making his expectations known, the householder remains vulnerable to the "tenants'" response. However, the householder's servants do not communicate a type of unconditional love which in emotional self-protectiveness says, "We don't care how you respond; we're just here to help you out, no strings attached." The householder finally goes so far as to send his own son in utter vulnerability, while at the same time he nevertheless still wishes to collect the "rent" which gives expression to the relationship. Notice how Jesus concludes the parable. He solemnly warns that the kingdom of God will be taken from those who refuse to produce the fruits of it (see also Isa 5:1-7). Thus, whatever the expression "God's unconditional love" might mean, if true to its scriptural context it dare not be twisted into meaning the love of a God who doesn't care how or whether we respond, a God who remains invulnerable, untouched by and beyond such rejection and simply continues forever to tolerate an abusive situation.

Conclusion: "Unconditional love" without genuine vulnerability may perhaps describe a certain kind of humanism, but it does *not* properly describe the love of the vulnerable God revealed in Holy Scripture.

Silence

in
the
company
of my own
reflection,
veils
of
mist
descend
across the mind.
no
voice
more silent
than mine.
in
the
depth
of that essence,
the mystery within
echoes.
silent
as a shadow,

i hear
my name
called,
God speaks:
silent
as a shadow
echoes the mystery within.
in the depth
of the essence,
my voice silent.
across the mind,
veils of mist
lift.
in the reflection
of my own
company,
God spoke
and i heard
my
name.

Mary Ellen Hansburg

Book Reviews

For the Soul of the People: Protestant Protest Against Hitler. By Victoria Barnett. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992. x and 358 pages. Cloth. $30.00.

This is an excellent book—for the sheer volume of information it conveys about an important historical period (including an excellent bibliography!) but also for the insight it provides into the political and personal significance of the church in the world.

Two things set it apart.

One is Barnett's careful attention to historical context. She begins in the late nineteenth century, at the end of the German Empire under Kaiser Wilhelm II (the period during which those active on all sides of the church struggle were born), devotes significant attention to the Weimar Republic and the rise of Nazism before the war, and continues through the post war period up to the time of reunification. This attention to context is a corrective to the tendency to isolate the church struggle as an "heroic" period of resistance coterminous with the war.

The other is the care with which Barnett avoids the hero worship one sometimes encounters in accounts of Confessing Church leaders like Martin Niemöller and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. She attends to the structure of everyday life in which Nazism rose to power and flourished as well as the structure of everyday life that emerged in Germany after its defeat. Of particular importance is her account of the difficulty that the whole Christian church in Germany—those who joined the Confessing Church and those who didn't—had confronting its own anti-Semitism.

Without "demonizing," she paints a chillingly detailed picture of the little compromises in which institutions and individuals engage everyday for the sake of survival and emphasizes the extent to which people "just like us" can become complicit in horrors like Nazism. She avoids painting the Confessing Church as a political resistance movement but does not neglect the political significance of confession—whether in the "established" church or out. This is important in a "post Cold War" world where capitalism appears to have emerged victorious and unchallenged. As long as there is a "confession," it has political significance. Barnett, like many of the "radical" Confessing Church members who survived the war, sees this as bearing an inherently revolutionary potential—a potential realized neither in "heroic" resistance nor in "heroic" devotion to the Fatherland, but in consistent embodiment of the gospel in the everyday.

That is a lesson that would please Bonhoeffer immensely, I think, and it is reason enough to read Barnett's book with care.

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Chicago Center for Peace Studies

Christian Social Ethics. A Reader. Edited by John Atherton. Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1994. 410 pages. Paper. $24.95.

This reader, put together by a British theologian—Canon Theologian of Manchester Cathedral, who was for many years involved in the issues of urbanization and industrialization in Great Britain—provides a useful introduction to Christian social ethics. The book focuses on the one theme that has emerged with new urgency since the collapse of the socialist countries in Eastern Europe: economy. Yet the book does not focus on texts by (Christian) economists but on texts by Christian theologians and ethicists focusing on the problems inherent in a modern highly industrialized capitalist world.

Atherton organized the texts in three parts. Part one is entitled "Christian Socialism" and presents the main representatives of Christian Socialism in England (Maurine, Westcott, Temple, Tawney, Preston) followed by American Protestant social thought (Gladden, Rau-

schenbusch, Niebuhr, Bennet, Wogaman). Part two attends to liberation theology (Duchrow, Gutiérrez) and part three to modern Christian conservatism (Sumner, Griffiths, Novak). The selection of authors is balanced, fair, and—from a Protestant perspective—quite representative. Yet one would have wished the inclusion of some more radical (in the sense of more unconventional) authors who might challenge the very framework of a Christian social ethics and its construal of the "economy."

This volume can serve well as a textbook for college or seminary students who are in need of a first introduction to mainly Protestant thought on economic issues. An annotated bibliography provides helpful orientation for deeper and more substantive explorations of the subject-matter.

Reinhard Hütter
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

Transformed Judgment: Toward a Trinitarian Account of the Moral Life. By L. Gregory Jones. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990. xi and 189 pages. Cloth. $22.95.

When we follow the "conventional wisdom" of the present time and age and ask what Christian ethics is all about, we should expect to hear "values" and "decisions." It is the refreshing nature of Greg Jones' book that we encounter neither term. Rather we learn the reasons why discussions about "values" and "decisions" are all too often frustratingly unsatisfying! These discussions neglect the central importance of character formation for moral judgment and of our central convictions, our friendships, and the core practices of our lives for the way we see and describe the world morally. Exactly these issues are the theme of the book: the Christian moral life as informed by Christian convictions and as shaped by the friendships and particular activities Christians are involved in.

The book is organized in three main chapters which develop a clear pattern: "Learning to Describe Actions, Persons, and the World," "Learning to See and Act Rightly," "Learning to Live in the Mystery of the Triune God." Jones' central claim is that we learn to describe, see, and act rightly by being formed and transformed through the central practices and friendships of the Christian community. The book's central metaphor is "friendship." God has befriended humanity in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And we are called to become nothing less than God's friends, to participate in the mystery of the Triune God. Here Jones draws strongly on Thomas Aquinas who understood God's happiness to be the life of friendship between the three persons of the Trinity. The Christian life has a *telos*, namely, friendship with God, which is the goal of our transformation. In and through this transformation we become "persons," living in a befriended relationship with God and humanity. Concrete friendships and particular practices are the contexts in which this formation and transformation of our character takes place. In the last section of the book Jones gives an interesting account how the practices of baptism, eucharist, forgiveness-reconciliation, and interpreting scripture serve as these forming and transforming practices.

The book offers a theologically informed account of plurality in the Christian community. The "others" are gifts for us; in befriending them we are called again and again to self-critically question our own ways of seeing, describing, and acting. This diversity in unity is understood as the Holy Spirit's presence causing an ongoing "puzzlement" which makes us grow continuously.

Jones' book is an important and welcome contribution to the present debate on what Christian ethics is all about. It not only shows how the Christian moral life, sanctification, and the Christian community's convictions and practices are inextricably interrelated. It also suggests how the Christian moral life and God's trinitarian life are interwoven, with the reality of "friendship" in the very core of it. An understanding of the Christian life with which we should befriend ourselves!

Reinhard Hütter

What Is Social-Scientific Criticism? By John H. Elliott. Guides to Biblical Scholarship. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994. ix and 174 pages. Paper. $12.00.

Here is a reliable, densely written, yet clear guide to one of the most productive of recent advances in exegetical method, written by one of the seminal scholars who developed the method. Social-scientific criticism is a new tool for the practitioner of historical criticism, not a replacement of it. Elliott defines it as "that phase of the exegetical task which analyzes the social and cultural dimensions of the text and its environmental context through the utilization of the perspectives, theory, models, and research of the social sciences." (7)

His guide is divided into seven chapters that define the method, discuss the need for it, delineate its rise since 1970, outline its presuppositions and procedures, present and evaluate critical assessment, and finally identify nine contributions to exegetical and historical understanding. Four appendixes compare the foci of social sciences and historical criticism, give a table of data inventory for synchronic and diachronic analysis of early Christian groups, and give models for interpretation, with bibliographic references. A glossary of terms and a classed bibliography complete the volume. There are, unfortunately, no indices.

It is not a criticism to say that the volume not only presents the method, but is a strong argument for its use. Elliott consistently uses examples from relevant New Testament scholarship to clarify his discussion—though he does not always give alternative interpretations of the same data. For example, he interprets the church of 1 Peter as a messianic sect, a group of alienated people who structure their life to maintain their identity. He does not present David Balch's alternative interpretation of 1 Peter, which argues that this church is seeking to find its place within the society of Asia Minor.

Elliott documents his work with massive reference to the relevant secondary literature listed in his bibliography. While one of the very useful features of the work, this is also frustrating. He uses the social science method of citing authorities within the text (author's name, date of publication, page numbers), not footnotes. But he does not indicate in what section of his classed bibliography the authority is listed. But this is small critique of a work that will surely become one of the basic guides to this type of biblical scholarship, thus fulfilling the claim the series makes in its title. And many will rise up to call him "blessed."

Edgar Krentz
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

Kinship and Marriage in Genesis: A Household Economics Perspective. By Naomi Steinberg. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993. xii and 162 pages. Paper. $12.00.

Steinberg uses a cross-cultural sociological methodology to assess why the "line of promise" develops in Genesis 11-50 as it does. She is particularly interested in showing how the culturally determined status of the various wives of the patriarchs led to the selection of the principle heir in each case. Issues of wife selection, monogamy/polygamy, inheritance, and family division constitute her central avenues of investigation. After a chapter introducing her social science methodological model, she turns her attention to the Sarah-Hagar Cycle, the Rebekkah Cycle, and the Leah/Rachel Cycle in that order. She sees the alternation between genealogy and family narrative as indicative of a literary pattern focused on the telling of family story. Therefore she regards the genealogies as intrinsic to the story structure.

Her study is a purely social science exercise, and she does not give a specifically feminist reading of gender-related issues. She seeks to provide an alternative way to approach the biblical text beyond the usual literary models, making particular mention of the work of Martin Noth as typical of the dominant literary approach. Her examination of the structure of the social world depicted in Genesis leads her to the conclusion that the family stories in Genesis were constructed to shape community identity in post-exilic Israel by specifying the ancestry of the true Israel. Unfortunately, she does not explain why the post-exilic social world is necessarily the most appropriate setting for the

kinship structures in the text, nor does she examine parallel societies contemporaneous with post-exilic Israel or with the early patriarchal era the text purports to represent. Hence, the degree to which the social system described in the text may be characterized as accurate traditional memory or literary artifice is left unclear. Despite this, Steinberg leads the informed reader into consideration of the social world created in the text, and treats it seriously in a fresh manner as a social system (albeit idealized?). In this she has made an important contribution to the Genesis literature.

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My Brothers' Place: An American Lutheran Monastery. By George Weckman. Lawrenceville, VA: Brunswick, 1992. xviii and 70 pages. Paper. $12.00.

St. Augustine's House is a little known Lutheran monastery, after the Benedictine pattern, in Oxford, Michigan. Weckman has been associated with the monastery since 1957.

In this short book Weckman intends "to review the history and provide a description of this place, its life, and an apologia or defense of its existence." This is an ambitious goal which is not achieved. The book often reads like a quickly done undergraduate term paper: a topic is quickly discussed and then shunted aside to introduce yet another topic which is just as quickly discussed. The obscurity of the book's publisher and its high price also count against the book.

The first two chapters, together almost a third of the book, discuss the life and influence of the monastery's founder, Arthur Karl Kreinheder. The most disappointing chapter of all, "Monasticism and Lutheran Theology," follows. In ten short pages Weckman justifies Lutheran monasticism in light of the confessions, theology, and Lutheran history and tradition. Two chapters, perhaps the best in the book, address the "usefulness" of monasticism and contemplation in modern America. One chapter discusses daily life at St. Augustine's House. The concluding chapter stresses the continued need and makes a call for American Lutheran monasticism.

Despite my reservations, I liked this book and consider it very important. The witness of centuries of church history attest to the need and "usefulness" of monastic orders. The ELCA has deaconesses and deacons. There is an order of Lutheran nuns in Scottsdale, Arizona. A Lutheran Franciscan community ministers to the poor in Florida. An order is forming in the New England area dedicated to the revival of Marian piety within Lutheranism. The need is obvious. Reading this book is a step in understanding the need and helping to meet it.

The book is available from St. Augustine's House, P.O. Box 125, Oxford, MI 48371, and from Brunswick Publishing Corporation, Route 1, Box 1-A-1, Lawrenceville, VA 23868.

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Opposition to Paul in Jewish Christianity. By Gerd Luedemann. Trans. M. Eugene Boring. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989. xxii and 370 pages. Cloth. $29.95.

Luedemann's book is a massive study of Paul in the light of Jewish Christianity and Jewish Christianity as the matrix for Paul's theology. As the title indicates, it is a story of conflict between radically divergent understandings of the significance of Jesus.

Luedemann first presents a short, helpful survey of research into Jewish Christianity from Ferdinand Christian Baur to recent study. The body of the work falls into two major sections. Part I studies "Anti-Paulinism during Paul's Lifetime," while Part II traces "Anti-Paulinism in the Post-Pauline Period." The volume concludes with an appendix evaluating the tradition of the flight of Jewish Christians to Pella before the Jewish-Roman War, extensive documentary notes, a full bibliography, and indexes of authors, biblical references, and other ancient sources.

Luedemann argues that during Paul's lifetime both the more open and the conservative Jewish Christians in Jerusalem opposed Paul's claim to apostleship, especially since Paul op-

posed nomism. After Paul's death opposition came from those who stood in the Syrian-Palestinian tradition with its stress on nomism; for these opponents Paul's apostleship to the Gentiles was no longer a problem.

Though the title page does not indicate it, this is volume 2 of *Paulus, der Heidenapostel* (*Paul, Apostle to the Gentiles*), a major, three-volume project in Pauline studies. Fortress Press published *Paul, Apostle to the Gentiles: Studies in Chronology* in 1984—unfortunately already out of print. We await the third volume dealing with Paul himself. The present volume introduces us to problems Paul, always apparently in the minority, raised for people of his day and beyond. Fascinating reading indeed.

Edgar Krentz

A Theology of the Cross: The Death of Jesus in the Pauline Letters. By Charles B. Cousar. Overtures to Biblical Theology. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990. xiv and 194 pages. Paper. $13.00.

After previously writing a commentary on Galatians, Cousar here presents a view of the death of Jesus in all the authentic (seven) Pauline letters. He accepts the division of 2 Corinthians but not of Philippians. The book is written out of the "self-indulgent context" (Brueggemann in the Editor's Foreword) of the '80s and is a dialogue with the German exegetes of the '60s and '70s (Käsemann, Conzelmann, Stuhlmacher, Schrage, Kertelge, a.o.). Cousar does not believe that a strong distinction should be drawn between crucifixion language and death language as some do.

The five chapters discuss Jesus' death in relationship to God, to human sinfulness, to the resurrection, to the people of God, and to the Christian life. Cousar emphasizes that God's initiative and plan is carried out in the crucifixion of Jesus. "The exegesis of 1 Cor 1:18–2:5 yields a striking picture of God's purposes in the story of the crucified Christ." It is important to know that Jesus' death was not an action contrary to God but in agreement with God's plan. Other passages offered in rather full exegesis are Rom 3:21-26 and Rom 5:6-8. Although it is true that Jesus was obedient to this plan, I am not convinced that Cousar is right in saying that "through the faith of Jesus Christ" in Rom 3:22 and elsewhere is to be understood as a subjective genitive, i.e., that it refers to Jesus' own faithfulness. I prefer the interpretation of "faith in Jesus Christ" as Paul makes clear by adding "for all who believe." Cousar argues that the expression "The Crucified God," going back to Tertullian, is not used explicitly by Paul but is not far away from Paul's teachings. On the soteriological significance of the death of Christ, Cousar convincingly argues for the objective and universal character of the atoning death of Christ with the exegesis of Rom 3:24-26, 4:24-25, 6:1-11, and 2 Cor 5:14–6:2. In view of Paul's metaphorical language, the three traditional views of the atonement have the tendency to take his statements too literally. Cousar also sees correctly that sin is understood by Paul as a power, ruling over people until they are freed through Christ. He does not discuss the problem of the "I" in Rom 7:14-25. Jesus' death is not a vicarious substitution but a participatory event. A change of allegiance takes place. The cross and the resurrection belong inseparably together. Both play a decisive role in the drama of salvation. The resurrection is a promise for the future. The people of God include both Jews and Gentiles and are characterized by faith in Christ and by the centrality of Christ's death because it has torn down the wall of separation between Jews and non-Jews. Therefore the unity and holiness of the church are important. Although they are derived from Christ, they also remain a constant challenge to us. Cousar interprets the "body" in 1 Cor 11:29 as referring to the church, having to do with the way in which the members of the community treat one another. In discussing the Christian life, Cousar states that the passages about suffering "on account of Christ" of which Paul speaks are unsettling and disturbing for him and generally for most Christians in North America because they have not experienced suffering for Christ's sake but that they are comforting to suffering Christians throughout the world, that God's power is made perfect in weakness and nothing can separate them from God's love. It seems to me that Cousar could

have elaborated more on Christians who advocate social justice and peace efforts and who by doing so may very well be subject to suffering, even in our society.

The book is helpful in clarifying Paul's teachings on the cross of Christ and relating it, briefly at the end of the chapters, to our contemporary situation.

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The Romans Debate. Revised and Expanded Edition. Edited by Karl P. Donfried. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991. lxxii and 372 pages. Cloth. $19.95.

As the subtitle indicates, there was an earlier edition (1977). While the older edition was in typescript, the new edition is printed in attractive regular printing fonts. The new edition not only contains all that was in the earlier edition but is expanded by an additional preface, an additional introduction, and a significant number of new articles. While the first edition was primarily concerned with the purpose of Romans and emphasized the prominence of the historical-critical method, the new edition by the additional essays shows the more modern achievements of sociological research and rhetorical analysis. Most of the essays were previously published elsewhere, some as parts of commentaries, but there is one original contribution (Lampe). Stuhlmacher's first article was translated by Reginald and Ilse Fuller. Another welcome addition is a section on the theology of Romans. At the conclusion of the Introduction 1991, Donfried summarizes the results of the debate, stating that there is consensus on Romans being addressed to the Christian community in a particular historical situation, that there are more than one purpose, that Romans 16 as well as chapters 9-11 are considered integral parts of the epistle, and that rhetorical devices are used, without denying the historical specificity of Romans. He also lists issues which are new or unresolved: the complexity of the Roman communities, the stage in the development of Roman Christianity, the structure of Romans in view of the rhetorical analysis, the *primary* theological intention of Paul, and the status of law in Paul's theology.

The essays in the first volume, reprinted here, may be summarized as follows: Günter Klein, Donfried, and Wolfgang Wiefel consider the letter to be primarily concerned with the specific situation in Rome while Günther Bornkamm, Jacob Jervell, and Robert J. Karris consider it a more general epistle, perhaps concerned more about Jerusalem and indicative of Pauline theology as such. T. W. Manson thinks chapter 16 was directed to Ephesus while the others accept the general integrity of the epistle. Wilhelm Wiellner directs the attention to the rhetorical analysis of the letter, followed by Martin Luther Stirewalt, Jr., who compares it with letter-essays. The more recent essays are grouped into three sections, first: Historical and Sociological Factors, a continuation of the previous discussion.

F. F. Bruce continues the debate with a new essay (1981) which presents to a large extent the traditional view that Paul desired to introduce himself to the Romans in order to be supported for his journey to Spain and for the presentation of the collection to Jerusalem. He puts it nicely into the period when the expelled Jews (including Jewish Christians) returned to Rome, causing some reentry problems.

A. J. M. Wedderburn argues against Schmithals' theory of two Roman letters and for the importance to Paul of the collection for Jerusalem although it is not mentioned prominently in Romans.

Francis Watson advocates the existence of two separate congregations, Jewish Christian (the weak) and Gentile Christian (the strong), in Rome, and sees the purpose of Romans in the attempt to unite them for worship. (But would Paul not have stated this more clearly?)

Peter Lampe convincingly argues for the Roman destination of the entire letter, including chapter 16, analyzing the names and social positions of the individuals named.

Peter Stuhlmacher also accepts the integrity of the entire letter and sees the purpose in the exposition and clarification of Paul's gospel vis-à-vis the criticism Paul knows to be rampant in Rome.

It seems that the tendency today is toward

the integrity of Romans and an understanding of the epistle as directed to the situation in Rome.

The second section deals with the Structure and Rhetoric of Romans. James D. G. Dunn's essay, with frequent references to his two-volume commentary, argues against divisions and for the rhetorical and theological coherence of the letter.

William S. Campbell takes a new approach in considering chapter 3 as the key to understanding Romans. He demonstrates how the questions at the beginning and end of this chapter are answered in later chapters; both the righteousness of God (in keeping his promises to the Jews) and the rectification (=justification) of the sinner are important. According to him the letter deals with the actual situation in Rome, an incipient Marcionism, and intends to establish peace in Rome. Campbell is correct in seeing chapter 3 as containing the central statement of justification by faith; it is more difficult to see its special relationship to the other chapters since the whole argument of Romans may be seen as coherent.

Robert Jewett struggles with integrating the rhetorical structure of Romans with the rhetorical textbooks of ancient rhetoricians and in comparison with other modern exegetes. He also sees Hebraic numerical schemes superimposed on the (Hellenistic) rhetorical outline. These attempts, to my mind, seem forced because they never fit exactly and interpreters disagree so much that no useful purpose is served by these endeavors. For Jewett, the climax of Romans is found in the peroration in chapters 15-16.

David E. Aune focuses on the genre of *logos protreptikos*, speech of exhortation, intended to win converts and attract young people to a particular way of life. He describes various examples of such speeches and sees Romans as such an exhortation in an epistolary frame. The epistle probably was worked out by Paul over a few years' time. Chapters 9-11 are for him a digression from Paul's real purpose. This detracts from the occasional character and the unity of the letter.

The first essay in the theological section is by Dunn. He argues that Paul deals with the law in opposition to the Jewish covenant theology in which it divides Jew from non-Jew, haves from have-nots, those within from those without, and becomes a source of ethnic pride and a sign of privileged distinctiveness.

Lloyd Gaston argues that the salvation of Israel depends alone on God's faithfulness and will take place because some Jews (including Paul) have responded to the missionary task (to Gentiles). For Gaston, this does not mean that Jews would believe in Christ. However, if this were correct, then Paul would not have to "have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in [his] heart." (Rom 9:2)

J. C. Beker sees Romans as an occasional letter maintaining both the equality of Jew and Gentile in Christ and the priority of Israel. Stuhlmacher emphasizes that the theme of Romans clearly is the gospel of the divine righteousness in and through Christ testified to by Paul. Despite warnings by Stendahl, which need to be taken seriously, it must be maintained that the fundamental meaning of the gospel is justification by faith. The terminology of Paul was probably familiar to the (Gentile) Christians in Rome from the synagogue worship services. The "righteousness of God" is at the same time the gracious activity of God himself and the end result of the divine work in the form of the righteousness granted to the sinner. According to Stuhlmacher, this insight was not the late fruit of Paul's reflection but an initial implication of his understanding of Christ on the way to Damascus. This essay is a fitting conclusion of this book on the Romans Debate, calling us back again to the center of Pauline thinking.

By concentrating on essays, it is unavoidable that other contributions, such as commentaries, reference works, New Testament introductions, and monographs are neglected. As is usual in such collections, there is no clear focus because every contributor has his (no women are included in the essays) own interests.

A rich bibliography is offered as the beginning of the book; various helpful indexes conclude it.

Wilhelm C. Linss

Briefly Noted

Jesus and Divorce. By George R. Ewald (Herald Press, $9.95). Ewald's laudable aim is to encourage certain church denominations to become more evangelical and compassionate in their approach to divorced persons. He bases this appeal on the model Jesus provided in his teaching about marriage, divorce, and celibacy. Ewald's discussion of the relevant texts, though sensible in many ways, ignores most pertinent commentaries and studies written during the last ten to fifteen years (e.g., those of Gundry, Guelich, Meier, Patte, Luz, Furnish, Murphy-O'Connor, Countryman) and relies almost exclusively on secondary literature published during the 1960s and 70s. In developing his picture of Jesus dealing with marriage and divorce, Ewald facilely sets aside Mk 10:1-12 and accepts Mt 5:27-32, 19:3-9, 19:10-12 as accurately representing the teaching of the historical Jesus vis à vis the Hillel-Shammai rabbinical debate regarding Deut 24:1. Without question, Ewald assumes the Pauline authorship of the Pastoral Epistles. Hence, whereas most of his suggestions regarding the church's witness to marriage and its ministry in divorce and remarriage are solid, his biblical interpretation lacks credibility at many points. *James L. Bailey, WTS*

Recently scholars have stressed using literary critical techniques in Bible study. **The Bible and Modern Literary Criticism: A Critical Assessment and Annotated Bibliography** (Greenwood, $65), by Mark Powell, gives a critical evaluation of recent research (pp. 1-19) and a classed bibliography of 1,749 items, each annotated with summary and evaluation (pp. 21-411). Categories include the philosophy of language, sociology, linguistics, narratology, semiotics and structuralism, rhetoric, reader-oriented approaches, and deconstructionism, method, each Testament and individual books, evaluations, and implications for homiletics, theology, and literary studies. It is a trustworthy guide, enhanced by detailed indexes of authors, titles, and subjects. Users will notice gaps in areas they know. If only one could download the basic bibliography as a computer file and add to it! Perhaps the Society of Biblical Literature would consider such electronic publishing.

Edgar Krentz, LSTC

Vernon K. Robbins' **Jesus the Teacher** (1984) was a pioneering socio-rhetorical study of Mark. Reviewers praised it for stressing the elements in Mark that fit well into the ideology of the Mediterranean world. In a reissue (Fortress, $16.95) Robbins describes his method (more clearly than he himself could in 1984) and surveys [Markan] scholarship since that time. The ideal is to unite literary approaches with a reading of the "social-economic-political-military world." He reviews Elliott on 1 Peter, Chad Myers and Burton Mack on Mark, Bernard Scott on the parables, and Clarice Martin on Acts 8:26-40. Some reviewers challenged Robbins for undervaluing historical concerns in favor of literary insights; his introduction recognizes the problem, but does not solve it. Still, the introduction is a contribution to the ongoing debate on exegetical method for today. *Edgar Krentz*

D. Moody Smith gives a valuable contour map of Johannine scholarship in **John Among the Gospels: The Relationship in Twentieth-Century Research** (Fortress, $12.95). He traces developing, changing, and dissolving solutions to the problem of the relationship of John to the Synoptics in chapters titled "John among the Gospels: The Problem and Its Earliest History," "The Independence Theory" (B. W. Bacon, H. Windisch, P. Gardner-Smith), "The Formation of a Consensus" (C. H. Dodd, After Dodd [numerous scholars]), "John and Luke: A Parallel Consensus" (J. Schniewind, F. C. Grant, J. A. Bailey, P. Parker, F. L. Cribbs, R. Maddox), "The Renaissance of the Problem: Passion Narratives" (A.

Dauer, R. Baum-Bodenbender), "The Dissolution of a Consensus" (M. E. Boismard, F. Neirynck, A. Dauer, H.-P. Heekerens, H. Thyen, B. de Solages), and "Retrospect and Prospect" (H. Weder and K. T. Kleinknecht). A valuable guide to a fascinating—and probably insoluble—problem. The scholars named above are only a sample of those listed in the bibliography and reviewed in the book. Read it to trace the contours of changing opinion. *Edgar Krentz*

Martin Hengel is writing a series of books delineating his understanding of the history of Christianity. In **The Pre-Christian Paul** (Trinity, $21.95) he traces Paul's life from birth to his activity as persecutor. He discusses the significance of citizenship in Tarsus, Paul's education (Hellenistic Tarsus or Hebraic Jerusalem), Pharisaic study of the Law in Jerusalem, Greek education in Jerusalem, and Paul's life activity as persecutor. He puts forward three hypotheses: that Paul was of lay nobility by birth, could have received a Jewish-Greek rhetorical education in Jerusalem, Paul was a militant persecutor of the Greek-speaking Jewish-Christians in Jerusalem because they challenged the Torah. Hengel's control of the enormous amount of ancient and modern literature is magisterial (60 pages of notes), his evaluation of Paul's letters and Acts as historical sources conservative, his writing clear, his contribution great. I shall commend this book to seminary students; pastors will find it fascinating and informative. *Edgar Krentz*

Christian Ethics: A Historical Introduction. By J. Philip Wogaman (Westminster/John Knox, $19.99). One of the seniors of Christian ethics in America has written his *magnum opus*. It is a one-volume survey of the history of Christian ethics from its beginning to Vatican II and liberation and feminist theologies. Such an enterprise is daunting and highly risky due to the sheer scope to be covered, yet also laudable because there are almost no books of this kind available to college and seminary students. This could very well become a standard textbook in seminary classrooms for introductory courses in Christian ethics. *Reinhard Hütter*

Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts. By Eberhard Busch (Eerdmans, $29.99). Barth is back! Eerdmans needs to be praised for having reissued the long out-of-print standard biography of one of this century's most influential and important Protestant theologians. Busch's work which draws strongly on letters and autobiographical sketches of Barth is still the unsurpassed standard account of a unique life and immense theological work in its historical and political context. Photographs and maps enrich this highly readable volume.

Reinhard Hütter

The Evils of Theodicy (Georgetown University Press, $12.95). Terrence W. Tilley has written a highly interesting book on theodicy, which is much more than just that. By drawing upon speech-act theory he is able to unmask the moral and practical implications behind the communicative actions of speaking and writing that brought about some of the classic texts about God and evil: *The Book of Job*, Augustine's *Enchiridion*, Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*, Hume's *Dialogues*, and George Eliot's *Adam Bede*. Tilley's ambitious goal is to unmask theodicist discourse as an inherently destructive practice. A book worth reading and a thesis worth pondering. *Reinhard Hütter*

Moral Fragments and Moral Community: A Proposal for Church in Society. By Larry L. Rasmussen (Fortress, $11). This book has grown out of the Hein/Fry Lectures of 1991/92 delivered at the Lutheran seminaries in Berkeley, Chicago, Columbia, and Gettysburg. In this highly readable book Rasmussen draws on many theological, sociological, and literary sources to weave together a thoughtful and highly critical analysis of contemporary U.S. society in its global context and the church's vocation in the midst of this. A communitarian vision, the common task of restructuring a moral community, and the eschatological way of life of a messianic community are the underlying grid of the book. An overall thought-provoking book, yet more so in its critique and analysis than its constructive account. *Reinhard Hütter*

The Church and Morality: An Ecumenical and Catholic Approach. By Charles E. Curran (Fortress, $9). Also grown out of the Hein/Fry Lectures of 1991/92—delivered at the Lutheran seminaries in Columbus, Dubuque, Philadelphia, and St. Paul—the book offers a taste of how ecclesial identity shapes the church as a community of moral discourse. Yet the author attempts too much in too little space, so the book cannot function as an introductory text nor as advanced reading on a higher conceptual level. It serves best as capturing the present situation of moral struggle and division among most mainline denominations on central moral matters. Yet its constructive suggestions do not surpass conventional wisdom. *Reinhard Hütter*

Living the Discipline: United Methodist Theological Reflections on War, Civilization, and Holiness. By D. Stephen Long (Eerdmans, $11.99). This very interesting book does a lot all at the same time. It takes United Methodism as a test case for the inherent tension and inner contradiction in its attitudes towards war and peace and takes this very tension as an occasion for pointing out central ecclesiological problems in United Methodism which the author addresses with a theology of discipline inspired by John Wesley's *Sermons*. This small book shows convincingly how ecclesiological, ethical, and political questions are inherently linked together. A well argued and highly readable book written by a United Methodist theologian with a United Methodist audience in mind; nevertheless it is of high relevance for other Protestants.

Reinhard Hütter

Prof. Willi Marxsen's final work seeks the New **Testament Foundations for Christian Ethics** (Fortress, $17) by reconstructing how differing New Testament writers present the Christian God affecting their lives. After giving a prolegomena on method, he discusses an ethics oriented toward Jesus and Paul's ethic (23-227) and then has brief discussions of other NT writings in a section titled "Developments and False Developments." Here he devotes special attention to Matthew and to Christology in 2 Thessalonians, the Pastorals, James, 1 Peter, Colossians, Hebrews, and the Johannine School. A brief epilegomena argues that Christian ethics is always an aspect of Christology. He stresses the "indicative" in Christian life as they key to any imperative. There is little scholarly apparatus, outside of indexes and a very brief bibliography. Marxsen writes clearly, stimulates thought and reflection, keeps the reader's interest, and will aid proclamation. *Edgar Krentz*

Ain't Gonna Study War No More: Biblical Ambiguity and the Abolition of War by Albert Curry Winn (Westminster/John Knox, $10.99) is a biblical meditation and exegesis on the Bible's ambiguity about war and peace. The author focuses on the theme of *shalom* and argues for the abolition of war. While the book might be of interest for beginners in this area it does not offer anything new beyond Auckermann, Trocmé, Yoder, Eller, Hauerwas, Lasserre, and some others. It falls, rather, both conceptually and in regard to detailed exegesis behind some of the earlier accounts. *Reinhard Hütter*

A Community and a Perspective: Lutheran Peace Fellowship and the Edge of the Church, 1941-1991. By Steven Schroeder (University Press of America, $17). Steve Schroeder has done an important service to the historiography of both Lutheranism and the history of Christian Peace Witness in the United States by writing the first account of the fifty years' history of the "Lutheran Peace Fellowship." When we think of peace-witness Lutheranism does not come to mind first. Thanks to Schroeder's tale it will from now on come to mind—even if not first.

Reinhard Hütter

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Preaching Helps

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost—Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost, Series C

Dead Center

Pentecost is so long that we divide it up and parcel out its Sundays over three issues of *Currents* and Preaching Helps. As I tried to keep track of where I was, I found myself thinking of this installment as the middle section. And then the silly idea arose that this section is the dead center. Where did that use of the word "dead" come from, anyhow? As in "dead right, dead wrong, dead center." In those phrases, "dead" means "exactly."

In these days Lawrence Henning writes Reflections which help all of us get to the dead center of the texts from Luke. He has been serving since 1987 as Pastor of Messiah Lutheran Church in Twin Lakes, Wisconsin. Before entering Wartburg Seminary (from which he graduated in 1987) he earned a Ph.D. in Counseling Psychology at the University of Virginia (1978) and worked as Staff Psychologist at army hospitals in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and at Fort Ord in Monterey, California.

Pastor Henning has two teenage daughters and writes that he "shares with them a passion for rock 'n' roll (when it's honest, like The Cranberries and Pearl Jam)." It is obvious to me that he does listen well to the sounds and words of our culture and our own psyches and Luke.

He brings a lively sense of what kills and what makes alive to his pondering of the texts. He notes that "this was an interesting stretch in Luke. Jesus is tough-talking as he approaches Jerusalem." Pastor Henning knows how to help us hear God's voice for us in that tough-

talking Jesus. You'll find real help in Larry's words as you yourself wrestle with these texts.

In writing the First Readings I concentrated on Luke, as Larry does in the Pastoral Reflections. As I wrote, I found myself wondering how we can be as freeing and vivid in our communication as Luke was in his. What liberates and reconciles, of course, is the story of Jesus, told in terms of its power to kill and to make alive.

Does preaching help? Dead right! Preaching helps move people to "dead center," to contact with the heart of the universe, to oneness with God.

Good Preaching!

Robert H. Smith
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Ninth Sunday after Pentecost
August 6, 1995

Psalm 15
Genesis 18:1-10a (10b-14)
Colossians 1:21-28
Luke 10:38-42

First Reading

What are we to learn from Mary and Martha? Especially as we are gearing up to celebrate the fact that we are now 25 years from the ordination of Elizabeth Platz.

A long tradition promotes Luke as "the Gospel of women," but more recently the word has gone out that Luke's Gospel may actually be "the most dangerous" text in the Bible for women (Jane Schaberg in *The Women's Bible Commentary*).

Luke certainly pictures women as included among Jesus' disciples. But, says Schaberg, Luke's Gospel "deftly portrays them as models of subordinate service." Only men occupy the power center of the young Christian movement, and only men are allotted significant responsibilities.

Schaberg believes that Luke attempted to meet various needs, "such as instructing and edifying women converts, appeasing the detractors of Christianity, and controlling women who practice or aspire to practice a prophetic ministry in the church." Luke pictures numerous transactions between Jesus and women (in the Gospel) and between male leaders and women (in Acts), offering those pictures of women as "role models" for female readers. They are almost without exception "prayerful, quiet, grateful women, supportive of male leadership, forgoing the prophetic ministry."

That description of Luke-Acts may strike our ears as harsh or depressing, especially if we have appealed to Luke as a "friend" of women and champion of new and inclusive community.

What about Mary and Martha? Is Jesus pictured as praising women who leave the kitchen and enter into spiritual conversation with him? Does Luke portray Mary as model of the new woman, no longer defined only by traditional roles (wife, mother, cook) but now freed to enjoy equality with men in a role traditionally held only by men, that of student and scholar of the religious treasure of the spiritual community?

Schaberg worries that Mary (and most women in Luke-Acts) remain so silent, not really conversing but only listening, sitting at the feet of men rather than standing in the company of the saints as equal partners, both listening and speaking.

Against that view, it can be said that Luke features Priscilla (Acts 18:26) as a teacher of Apollos and remembers Philip's unnamed daughters who had the gift of prophecy (Acts 21:9). And he recalls the prophecy of Joel: "your daughters shall prophesy" (Acts 2:17f.).

The first Christians, male and female, found in Jesus a disturbing, subversive, liberating energy. In their encounters with it, they were like a youngster confronting fire or electricity for the first time: fascinated, elated and even giddy, but at the same time frightened, alarmed. Twenty-five years after that first ordination of a woman in American Lutheranism, many (alarmed? fearful?) still resist the leadership and colleagueship of inspired and dedicated women.

The story of Martha and Mary counterbalances the account of the Good Samaritan: men and women should be as proactive in service as that Samaritan, and women and men should sit at Jesus' feet. The active Samaritan and the contemplative Mary are models for all of us. RHS

Pastoral Reflections

"Just do it!" says Nike, because you are what you do. My daughter Anna is a junior in high school and has started to gather information on colleges (talk about sobering!). She has received some scholarship forms including one for a "church leadership" award. And, of course, applying means proving that she's *done* enough in the Body of Christ to be worthy of recognition.

You are what you do, and your life is what you make it. Where is that more true than in parish ministry? If "my" church is going to thrive and grow, isn't it because I make it happen through *my* persistent, creative and seeker-friendly doing? I'm writing this in January, parochial report time, when the churchly powers-that-be want to know exactly how we are doing. In my synod we even receive computer-generated bar graphs comparing our performance statistics over the past five years.

And even when Jesus comes to visit, it becomes another occasion for more doing. Is our music catchy enough? Have I made people feel comfortable and welcome enough? Is my preaching engaging enough? Have I done enough?

Martha is no stranger to us. When the guest comes, this assertive, responsible host is doing what has to be done (while her sister sits on her duff!). But in the midst of her doing, the guest offers a rebuke which at heart is liberation: "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing" (v. 41). With this guest, strange things take place; with him the rules are turned around. For this guest has not come to be served, but to serve. This guest is not waited on, but becomes the host himself. And as host he excludes no one from his guest list, including these women who were traditionally excluded from rabbinical teaching.

And when this one comes to visit me, there is nothing I can do to make my house or myself ready enough, clean enough to invite him in. Instead I find that as gracious host *he* has already invited *me* into his house, into his heart, into his death, into his resurrection and his resurrected body the church. When this Jesus comes calling, my relationship depends never on what I do but on what I'm given. Like Mary I can only wait and receive the gifts of the visitor: life, identity, freedom, purpose.

1. This text provides a good occasion for exploring the relationship between being and doing, grace and discipleship. In last week's Gospel, Jesus ends his story of the Good Samaritan by commanding, "Go and do likewise!" ("Just do it!"?) It might be worthwhile to examine the apparent contradiction of the two texts and to press them through to their inner connection: our *given* identity in Christ gives us the freedom to *do* for his cause in the world.

2. Martha has often been given a bad rap (including overtly sexist put-downs). This story, along with her presentation in John, point to a strong, assertive, responsible good friend and sister who nonetheless, like us all, stands in need of freeing and identity-creating grace. LHH

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost
August 13, 1995

Psalm 138
Genesis 18:20-32
Colossians 2:6-15
Luke 11:1-13

First Reading

Why should we pray? We've heard all the objections to petitionary prayer. "If God already knows everything...." "Is there a God who even cares?..." "How can God hear all those prayers rising up at the same time?..." "If I am praying for rain and a 'neighbor' a hundred yards away is praying for sunshine...."

The Gospel encourages Luke's community and our own to pray. Jesus did not respond to his disciples' request by teaching them, "Fear not, the mysterious Ground of Being knows your needs, and therefore your puny petitions are superfluous." Jesus himself prayed, even wrestling with God in a great contest of prayer until his sweat fell like drops of blood from his forehead (Lk 22:44), and that is encouraging. And he not only told his disciples to pray but gave them words in case they found themselves wondering what kinds of words might be appropriate (the Lord's Prayer), and to top it all off he told parables designed to move us out of silence and skepticism into simple syllables and sensible speech to the Great Giver.

Luke's is the "Gospel of Prayer." Nine times Luke portrays Jesus at prayer (5x in Mark, 3x in Matthew, 2x in John). In this Gospel alone, Jesus prays at his baptism, prays when he selects the Twelve, prays before Peter's confession, and even prays from the cross. And in this Gospel Jesus offers three parables of prayer not found in the other Gospels (11:5-8; 18:1-8; 18:9-14).

All that praying is part of a long biblical tradition of bold trusting that we are not alone, that we are loved into existence by a transcendent personal Presence, that we are heard and beheld and treasured, that our petitions on our own behalf and on behalf of others are not shouted into an unfeeling void. Abraham's bargaining with God in Genesis 18 is a classic and unforgettable encouragement to speak from our hearts to the Heart of the universe.

In Luke and in the other Gospels Jesus speaks freely and gladly of God as "Father." That address was uttered not in contrast to "Mother" but in contrast to "Fate" or "Chance," which in the ancient world was credited by millions as the great impersonal governing force of life, possible to be manipulated by sacrifice or magic or to be understood by having your horoscope cast or the liver of some animal read. Fate held sway in the minds of millions then as "luck" or "hormones" are blamed or credited today. Jesus said, "No, not fate or luck, not genes or hormones. God is more like a good parent who knows how to give good gifts to beloved children." RHS

Pastoral Reflections

"Ask and it will be given you" (Lk 11:9). Speaking of asking, how about the bargaining that Abraham does on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah in the Genesis text? He could have stayed out of it. No skin off his back. But instead he boldly butts in and challenges God to do the right thing. The dialogue sounds like dickering over a used car. But Abraham is not playing games. He is pressing God to be God, to be the God of abundant mercy. It is worth noting that Abraham doesn't pray for the escape of the righteous.

Instead, he prays for the whole city, that the guilty be spared for the sake of the righteous. (See Brueggemann's comments in *Genesis*, John Knox, 1982.)

The guy has some chutzpah, challenging God when he could have easily minded his own business. Why does he do it? For a couple of reasons, I think: (1) God invites the challenge. At first God considers hiding the plan from Abraham, but then reconsiders (vv. 17-19). Abraham will be in on God's intentions. There is at least some opening in providence for Abraham's intercession. (2) Abraham knows with whom he is dealing. Abraham has known God's mercy for himself.

Abraham provides a model of bold prayer. Much of our prayer is too polite. For Abraham, Moses, and Jesus (Gethsemane) prayer is actively wrestling with God. Too much was at stake to be polite, not to be passionately honest—even blunt—with God. What is at stake for us and for our world? And can part of our calling still be to press God to be God? Isn't that what it means to pray as Jesus taught us, "Your kingdom come"?

Luke 11:5-13 raises the perennial issue about so-called "unanswered prayer." I heard many easy answers on this question in my 37 years as a layperson. Most were less than helpful, some were downright harmful. I think a little theological humility from the pulpit is called for on this issue. All I can do this Sunday is say what I know:

God wills abundant life for us.

God yearns to hear from us (Isa 65:1-2) and takes our prayers, complaints, outbursts, and even "sighs too deep for words" (a *gift* from the Holy Spirit, Rom 8:26), and reckons with them to do God's will for the sake of God's creation, including us. *How* God works all that out is often mystery, sometimes painful mystery. There is much we cannot and will not know this side of eternity. But the cross and resurrection reveal a God with big ears and a huge heart. LHH

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost
August 20, 1995

Psalm 49:1-11
Ecclesiastes 1:2; 2:18-26
Colossians 3:1-11
Luke 12:13-21

First Reading

Here is one of a series of vivid stories about the seductive character of wealth found only in Luke. Others include the Dishonest Steward (16:1-13, 18 Pentecost), the Rich Man and Lazarus (16:19-31, 19 Pentecost), that "arch tax collector" Zacchaeus (19:1-10, 24 Pentecost), Barnabas (Acts 4:32-37, 4 Easter Year B), and Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11).

Who could ever forget (or fail to be challenged or encouraged by) Mary's Canticle: the Lord, God my Savior, "has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty" (Lk 1:53)? Or the picture of Mary entering the temple while bearing her offering of two turtledoves, the gift of the poor (Lk 2:24)? Or the portraits of the early Jerusalem community where members shared all they had, so that no one was in want or need (Acts 2:44-45)? Most of us too glibly speak of money and possessions as "blessings." Reading Luke is an exercise in rethinking the meaning of possessions.

The parable of the Rich Fool teaches us that "You can't measure a human life by simply toting up a person's net worth." "A person with a pile of treasure who is not rich towards God is a real fool."

As we move from this Sunday to next, an interesting paragraph is omitted from the lectionary. The omission (12:22-31) mirrors the themes of the Rich Fool and is Jesus' own commentary on the parable. Jesus continues talking about "barns" (vv. 18, 24) and the length of life (vv. 19, 25), about things "rich" and things "little" (vv. 19, 29). Above all, Jesus continues to talk about God, the mysterious and subversive ruler of the universe, superabundant source of all good (vv. 20-21, 24, 28, 30-31).

"All is vanity," says the Preacher. All human planning, however small or grandiose, which ignores the limits written into our beings by God is vanity. All human scheming which thumbs its nose at the reality of God is unrealistic and doomed from the outset. Omitting God from the equation, the way the rich man did, is truly vain.

Imagining that we can secure our lives by our riches or knowledge or power is exposed as a piece of foolishness by the simple and universal fact of death. In fact spending our days in the attempt to save our lives will mean that we actually will lose our lives. Nothing is better, says Ecclesiastes, than to live each day under God and with God, gratefully receiving from the hand of God the basics of food and drink and the awesome gift of life itself. Sounds like words of Jesus in next week's Gospel.

Paul in Colossians surprisingly, or perhaps not so surprisingly, climaxes a vice list with a warning against "covetousness," which he defines as "idolatry" (Col 3:5). And the wrath of God, not peace or security, is the harvest of such covetousness. The following paragraph in Colossians, outside the second lesson, places "love" at the climax of a list of virtues. Covetousness marks the "children of disobedience" (3:6), while love is the mark of "God's chosen ones, holy and beloved," who dwell joyfully "in the one body" (3:12, 15). RHS

Pastoral Reflections

In response to bickering over inheritance (is this all too familiar to you?), Jesus tells a parable. In the parable, the rich man carries on a conversation, but with whom? A friend? Spouse? Rabbi? A world relief agency? God? No, with himself and only himself. No one else is allowed into the conversation. His language is dominated by "I" and "my." The foolish rich man stands in the midst of God's creation, on God's ground with an abundance of life nourished by God's sun and rain, and can only speak of "my" crops, "my" barns, "my" grain, and "my" goods. He even speaks of "my" soul as if it were one more possession. The more consumed he is by greed, the more isolated he becomes, not just from God and his neighbor but even from himself. When he walls himself off from his neighbor and God, he ends up denying who he is: a chosen one of God created and called to use his gifts in relational service to others. The paradox of narcissism is that underneath the veil of selfishness is an impoverished soul. Ample goods stored in bigger and bigger barns are not going to feed the hunger buried deep within the man's starving self. But for the moment (before God has a few words with him) he cannot see through his truly *self-defeating* delusion.

It's worth noting that there is no evidence of dishonesty or misconduct on the man's part. We're not talking insider trading here. And who knows how he got to where he is? Maybe he had a childhood rough and poor enough to get him on Oprah. No matter. He is now in bondage to narcissistic poverty and cannot free himself.

This is a parable for our age and not just for "them" (you know—yuppies, Reaganites, whomever). It's a story for us all. We are all tempted to get sucked into greed, not because it feels good but because we start

believing that the way to "somebodiness," security and peace is through bigger and bigger barns and whatever we would try to store in them: wealth, applause, approval, affection, popularity, pastoral signs of "success." But barn building is self-absorbing and isolating.

The goal of proclamation is to expose the self-absorbed and therefore imprisoned soul underneath the greed (law), not to do it in, but to feed it real food so that it can be set free to be its true God-intended, relational, serving self (gospel). If we burn down our old barns, what does God build in their place? What life? What freedom? What security? What purpose? Questions for the day, I think. LHH

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost
August 27, 1995

Psalm 33
Genesis 15:1-6
Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16
Luke 12:32-40

First Reading

The Gospel for this Sunday continues the themes announced in all three lections last Sunday, but moves from how not to act (not like the Rich Fool, not being anxious about food or drink or clothing or span of life, not being covetous, not surrendering to the vanity of trying to secure your life by amassing wealth to enjoy yourself and to pass on to your heirs). From those negatives Jesus moves to mind-boggling positives: Sell your possessions, give alms, get a purse than can hold heavenly treasure.

This is not the wisdom of Wall Street, nor is it intended to be. These severe words are shock treatment, designed to rattle our cages and blow our minds, clearing out the habits of old thinking.

Where do we wish to have treasure? On earth? In heaven? Among our cronies? In the eyes of the Almighty? Do we even want to be "rich toward God" (Lk 12:21)?

Fear paralyzes us. Fear of loss, loss of substance, loss of power, loss of freedom, loss of self, loss of life. Fear of death. Fear of all the little deaths that threaten each day, and fear of the big death at the end. Denial is a classic and habitual strategy for dealing with the fear. Denial is supported and made plausible (for a time at least) by our little displays of power and vitality: money, prestige, and the enjoyment of status.

The long paragraph on "waiting for the master to come home from the marriage feast" (12:35-40) is a poignant commentary on the vanity of our strategies of denial. They are vain, and they are unnecessary. Every life and indeed all of history will end. But they end not in darkness but at the feet of the returning Lord. He is coming, he is coming at an unexpected hour, he is coming with blessing for those who are "awake." Awake is everywhere described by Luke as a posture of faith and love and joy. Back to the beginning, "Fear not, little flock, for it is God's greatest desire to give you nothing less than the kingdom!" (12:32) RHS

Pastoral Reflections

There are at least two kinds of fatigue: good and bad. Good fatigue comes from giving all you've got to make a difference as a called, hopeful child of God; giving all you've got and *then* letting go and trusting that God will do something good with your best, even if imperfect and mixed-motivated, efforts. That

is good fatigue. That's the kind of tired that makes for a good night's sleep.

Bad fatigue comes from feeling as though anything you do is not going to make a bit of difference or may even make things worse (e.g., "the negative Midas touch"). Psychologists have labeled this kind of fatigue *learned helplessness*. (There is a large body of research on learned helplessness from the University of Pennsylvania involving dogs and electric shock that I won't go into!) Learned helplessness may look like indifference or apathy, but it is not necessarily evidence of lack of caring. People may have passionate desires for their lives, the world, and God's reign, but learned helplessness is a profound sense of powerlessness to do anything about those desires. Does this ring any bells for you as you look out at the faces in the pews (who indeed may *look* apathetic)? Does it ring any bells when for the eighth time this week you are ready to chuck the whole ministry thing into the trash heap and take up selling mutual funds—not for lack of caring, but because all your efforts seem to backfire?

Learned helplessness is deep and contagious sleep. But in the Gospel text, Jesus calls for alertness (vv. 35-36). And we know what that alertness is: not a retreat to the mountain top to chant mantras waiting for the END, but with open and expectant eyes engaging the world with all its brokenness. Jesus' call for alertness means taking the risk to do what we can as people of hope, trusting Christ's victory in the end and his faithful and gracious presence in the meantime.

But learned helplessness is deep sleep. What can wake us up out of that? Jesus' Holy Reveille? I don't know. I think it may take more than his command (i.e., law) to be dressed and ready for action (v. 35). It takes more than law for me when I'm sinking into helplessness and powerlessness (say after last Wednesday's lousy confirmation class, or when marriages are falling apart in spite of my best efforts to "help").

In verse 37 Jesus' call to alertness takes a strange twist. The slaves are not only to be ready for action, but to *be served, to receive* from the master. Maybe the key to moving beyond the debilitating sleep of learned helplessness is first of all not readiness for action, but opening our weary eyes to the one who comes among us to serve us (we are back to Mary and Martha!). Maybe we should take him at his word, drag ourselves to his table—emptiness, powerlessness, helplessness, fatigue and all—and see what he can serve us in his Holy Meal. Maybe then his reveille can fire us up... again... for another week. LHH

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost September 3, 1995

Psalm 82
Jeremiah 23:23-29
Hebrews 12:1-3
Luke 12:49-53

First Reading

A sword rather than peace? How strangely these words of Jesus ring out in Luke's Gospel, which in so many ways is the Gospel of peace. Angels sang at Jesus' birth, "Peace on earth!" (2:14), and in this Gospel alone the crowds shouted, "Peace in heaven!" (19:38) when Jesus entered Jerusalem.

But the coming of the Prince of Peace subverts and contradicts the princes of this world, the "princes" who wield power in senates and temples, in councils and courts, in banks and coffee houses, in inner sanc-

tums and in public squares. The Prince of Peace is perceived as a threat by Caesar and Pontius Pilate, by Annas and Caiaphas, by kings and generals, by every profiteer who loves counting his money, every husband who abuses his wife, every father who rules the roost with an iron fist, every mother-in-law who makes life miserable for her son's wife, every child who neglects mother or father. The Prince of Peace inaugurates a strange new order.

Jerusalem resisted, and Jesus said, "Would that you knew the things that make for peace, but they are hidden from your eyes" (19:42).

The reading from Hebrews stops short of the word "peace" (12:14). Up to that point the author describes the godly life not as a warfare but as a tough contest, a race to be run in the footsteps of Jesus the great trailblazer and pioneer on the upward path. The life of Jesus was no peaceful coexistence with the norms and powers of this world. He ran as "pioneer and perfecter of our faith," faithful himself and faithfully drawing us along the same path toward the same victorious goal. Jesus went all the way to the ignominy of the cross, disregarding its shame and not letting it bar him from traveling the path of fidelity. He lifted his eyes from earth's beguiling treasures and kept his gaze fixed on God, on God's promises, on God's reality, on true and eternal joy.

The author worries that his readers have become weary of the racing, that they will not endure to the end, that they are becoming depressed and overwhelmed by the hardships of the race. He reminds them that, whatever their hardships, they have not yet suffered wounds like soldiers in battle. Then he shifts his images and speaks of parental discipline. Like a concerned parent, God disciplines us for our good. Still the author knows that "all discipline seems more painful than pleasant," and yet peace with God, harmony with God, will yield a harvest of righteousness. RHS

Pastoral Reflections

Where is the warm, friendly Mr. Jesus who would welcome us to his neighborhood? Not in this text. This is a fired-up Jesus threatening (promising?) revolutionary change. He is fast approaching Jerusalem, and he knows there will be fierce opposition from the holy keepers of the status quo. But he also knows God has had enough of the status quo. Jesus was not heading to Jerusalem to leave things as they were. He was going to burn up the old and make way for the new. Some may join him and some may oppose him, so division will be inevitable, but either way business as usual is over.

For those political revolutionaries in his hearing (Judas?) it must have been an exciting speech. "All right! Sharpen the swords! The battle is looming. Let's burn the Roman scum and their cronies to the ground!"

But what happens to the revolution and to the fire? No guerrilla attack, no stockpiling of weapons, no avenging angels. He doesn't even lift a finger to stop the "enemy." Again, for the militant revolutionaries in his midst, the disappointment must have been profound. And would they have been wrong in their disappointment? "I came to bring fire to the earth" (v. 49). But what kind of fire? And where is it today? In the midst of horrific violence and evil, where is the evidence of Jesus' fiery revolution? To get at and into this question, let me suggest a risky exegetical and devotional exercise. Instead of our ready-made answers, allow some space and time for "purposeful agnosticism." Don't answer the question too quickly. Face the evidence to the contrary. Wrestle with the Holy Spirit. Is the fire kindled in the wood of the cross still

burning? Where? Only in the endtime with perhaps some proleptic glimpse now? Or does Jesus' fire burn even in the meantime? On a grand scale? In the ordinary underside of history? Nowhere?

To state the obvious, "purposeful agnosticism" as a means to allow the Holy Spirit to move us beyond preconception is probably not an exercise best left for Saturday night. The Holy Spirit deserves some room to work.

Regarding the business of Jesus bringing division and not peace, I recommend checking out Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, and within it reading Ivan's short story, "The Grand Inquisitor." The book is long (hey, it's a Russian novel) but the story is not. It is a powerful treatment on Christian freedom and the refusal of Christ (unlike his church) to enforce peace from above at the expense of human freedom, including the freedom to say "no." LHH

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost "Grandparents Day" September 10, 1995

Psalm 117
Isaiah 66:18-23
Hebrews 12:18-24
Luke 13:22-30

First Reading

My AAL appointment book, in addition to reminding me that this is the 14th Sunday after Pentecost, says that this Sunday is Grandparents Day. Should we substitute the Hallmark calendar for the liturgical calendar? Or can we find some common ground, perhaps by asking about tradition and roots and ancestry?

The author of Hebrews, especially in chapter 11, tells his Christian readers that they have remarkable ancestors in faith: Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Jacob and Joseph, Moses, Rahab and Gideon, Samson and David, Samuel and all the prophets and martyrs, women and men. They surround us like a cheering section in a vast arena, as we run our race (last Sunday).

In profound ways we enjoy gifts they did not have. We have all heard parents and grandparents speak of what they endured, how hard life was in the old days, how easy we have it by comparison. The author of Hebrews compares the throng of Christians of his own day with the Israelites of the past. They gathered under Moses at Mount Sinai with its blazing fire and storm and the awesome voice of God like trumpet or thunder. We are, as it were, gathered at a new "mountain" with angels in festal array under Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant.

Life is easier for us than for our ancestors gathered with Moses. God's character and will are clearer. We have enjoyed better gifts from God. So "let us be grateful... and let us offer acceptable worship, with reverence and awe." (Heb 12:28)

Like the author of Hebrews 11, Jesus speaks of "Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets" as model ancestors. The shock in the Gospel narrative is that Jesus says that many who were outside the family entirely will sit at table in the kingdom with the great patriarchs and matriarchs of Israel's past, while insiders may be thrust out. Jesus seems to echo words of John the Baptist who scolded the crowds who came to him at the Jordan: Don't bank on the fact that you have Abraham as your ancestor. It is not enough simply to have ancestors of faith, ancestors of hope, ancestors of courage, ancestors of great love. You must do your own trusting,

your own loving, your own daring, your own responding to the gift of God in Jesus Christ.

Isaiah foresaw a great and startling family, not sharing blood, not sharing politics, not sharing history, not sharing language or ancestry. But they all give God glory. RHS

Pastoral Reflections

For the second week in a row, we hear Jesus doing some tough talking on his way to Jerusalem. In a response to a question often heard in confirmation class ("Pastor, what about Buddhists? unbaptized babies? Jeffrey Dahmer?"), Jesus says, "Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able" (v. 24). If you're going to get into this party (i.e. the Messianic Feast) you had better get your act together; you had better strive to be all God wants you to be; you had better be talking Jesus' talk and walking Jesus' walk. Status, reputation, or even your American Express card can't get you in the door. Only righteousness *earns* admission.

If I take Jesus literally here (and how else could I take him?), I am more inclined to give up than give it all I have. With a lot of naivete (denial?) at age 37 (!), I thought that once I got ordained I'd be beyond some of my unrighteous struggles. Yeah, right! Seven and a half years later, I'm writing this the day after an unholy argument with my daughter, in which I played a quite unhealthy part. This is not to mention my rationalized apathy about struggles of my brothers and sisters near and distant. "Go away from me, all you evildoers" (v. 27). Whoa! Is that *my* teeth gnashing I hear?

The only alternative I can see to giving up in response to this tough-talking Jesus is to follow him down the road, follow this one who talks of closed doors as he ends up outside the city gates, himself, hanging on a cross.

I need Jesus' tough words. I need him to show me how to walk and talk. I need him to break through my denial and force that long, honest look in the mirror. I need him to remind me what discipleship is all about, and it is *not* about glib sloganizing.

But I also need his cross, need him to earn my righteousness, need him to break through the door and find a way for us, need him to set me free *from* my giving up and *for* self-forgetful service for his cause. Like moving beyond my apathy for brothers and sisters in God's creation; like doing better with my daughter, for her sake and not my own. LHH

Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost "Citizenship Day" September 17, 1995

Psalm 112
Proverbs 25:6-7
Hebrews 13:1-8
Luke 14:1, 7-14

First Reading

Here's another one. "Citizenship Day." I haven't a clue about who gave us this one or what patriotic readings have been designated for the occasion. I am also trying to imagine what greeting cards the artists and poets have designed for our costly consumption.

The readings do not include Paul's words on our citizenship being in heaven (Phil 3:20-21), but every syllable of the New Testament articulates the conviction that a new regime has broken into our old existence through the ministry, death and resurrection

of Jesus. Every paragraph brims with the good news of the new order called the "sovereignty of God" or draws implications for our living from that enormous breakthrough. The language of politics or citizenship runs through the New Testament from start to finish: Kingdom of God, Jesus as Lord or Messiah, sitting at God's right hand, God or Christ enthroned in heaven, people of God, benefactions of amnesty (forgiveness) and peace.

Jesus did not succumb to the temptation of the devil to fall on his face and worship the old enemy. Jesus is not the ruler of an old-style empire but is the exalted Servant-Ruler of the universe and of all things visible and invisible.

He came among us "as one who serves" (Lk 22:27). And his life and death are a rebuke to anyone who seeks the chief seats. He had his seat among the lowest of the low, among criminals, at the end. And yet this Humble One could promise: "Today you will be with me in the royal park, in paradise." Strange kingdom, odd citizenship. The old values are turned on their head.

The new kingdom and citizenship subvert the old. But then Jesus speaks more directly and less parabolically to his host (and through him to us): "When you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind" (Lk 14:13). That's a Lukan crowd. Note the repetition in v. 21, and note also the contrast with Matthew's concerns, articulated in Mt 22:10. Matthew thinks in moral or ethical terms of "the good and the evil," and how God's grace is large enough for all those among whom we moralizing mortals make our neat discriminations. But Luke's heart has been touched by the way God's mercy embraces the hurting, the hassled, and the helpless.

Citizenship in the new order calls for enacting mercy as God is merciful. Those acts of mercy may seem foolish to citizens whose hearts are loyal to dying regimes, but no deed of mercy will be overlooked "at the resurrection of the just" (v. 14).

And Hebrews says the same thing. We live in a fallen world, where prisoners (in the ancient world mostly political prisoners) and ill-treated were a commonplace, where spouses were no more faithful than in our own time, where money spoke loudly as also today. In such a world the author calls upon readers to lift their eyes and hearts to God (the great and final arbiter of destinies and righter of all wrongs) and Jesus Christ who was not destroyed by the cross but who is "the same (great and living one) yesterday and today and forever."

Love of sister and brother rather than love of money is his slogan, and here is that wonderful echo of Genesis 18: "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some (like Abraham and Sarah) have entertained angels unawares." And we may entertain Jesus unawares, as he comes among us in the hungry and the naked. RHS

Pastoral Reflections

In high school, the protocol was clear; unstated, but clear. "Hoods" sat at one table, "jocks" sat at another, and those who didn't quite fit in (my group) sat at whatever table was left. And when I was in the military you knew exactly what your "place" was in that society as well. You wore it on your collar. Even at the lunch tables at Wartburg Seminary there was a definite, if implicit, protocol. Seniors sat at the table nearest the coffee and juniors and middlers dared not trespass.

Considering the importance of protocol and rank (stated or otherwise) in our society, our practice at Eucharist is pretty sloppy (or is it?). People sit where they want to and come to the table in no regulated order (or do they?). Maybe there should be some explicit seating arrangement, perhaps in order of

societal importance (I wonder where my brother who is blind and works at a sheltered workshop would sit?), or perhaps in order of financial contributions to the church. ("This pew reserved for tithers.")

But, of course, it's not our meal and we are not the host. And what does the host say about proper protocol/etiquette at *his* supper? "When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host" (v. 8). Jesus is being more than Mr. Manners here; he's laying out the protocol of the kingdom. "For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted" (v. 11). This is a whole new way of being beyond the power games of our status-obsessed culture.

Jesus' call to humility is not an invitation to become a self-absorbed doormat. His brand of humility is freedom: freedom from having to prove your worth by playing the old power games and freedom to love *oneself* for the sake of God and others (see Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Love of God*). And his brand of exaltation is not rising above at the expense of the other; it is being raised together with the other. In his feast there is power, but not power *over* others. It is power for and with others.

In 14:12-14, Jesus moves beyond seating protocol to the guest list itself and the list is instructive: include "the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind." When we remember who the host of the meal is and follow *his* protocol and invite whom *he* puts on the guest list, the Eucharist becomes, in this rank and status-obsessed world of ours, a powerful glimpse of the new world, a foretaste of the radically-open feast to come.

Places in the Heart was one Hollywood movie that understood the meaning of the Lord's meal and the protocol of the kingdom. At the end of the movie, seated together in a country church were murderers, adulterers, racists *and* their victims, all sharing the eschatological feast. LHH

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost
September 24, 1995

Psalm 10:12-15, 17-19
Proverbs 9:8-12
Philemon 1 (2-9) 10-21
Luke 14:25-33

First Reading

In the immediately preceding parable of the supper, the whole emphasis is on God's astonishing invitation to the dinner, embracing the broken and blind, without any calculation of their worth or merit. Now comes the other side of the coin: the call to extraordinary efforts on the part of those who hope to participate in the banquet.

Because of the references to family members (v. 26), this sounds very much like the Gospel for Pentecost 13 (Lk 12:49-53). The mention of the cross (v. 27) echoes Luke 9:23-27. Starting a demanding task without sufficiently thinking of the cost and then quitting (vv. 28-30) sounds like Luke 9:57-62.

Jesus is talking of serious commitment not to be entered into casually. Elsewhere Jesus says that disciples who give up easily are like sprouting seedlings withered by the first hot day or choked out by the thorns of worldly care or riches (8:4-15). Here he says such would-be followers are like a braggart of a builder who talks big and lays an impressive foundation but then has to abandon his pet project because he runs out of cash. Or

like a pathetic king who beats on the war drums, stirs up the citizens and calls out the troops but then when he sees his royal counterpart coming with a larger army has to eat crow and sue for peace.

Philemon found himself in a situation which tried his discipleship. How far would he bend, how hard would he swallow, how much was he prepared to break ranks with his fellow citizens, with custom, with prevailing laws and sanctions? Would he act as a citizen of this old world and punish Onesimus severely? Or would he do what Paul asks and receive the runaway slave Onesimus as a "brother"? Here is no parable or metaphor but a tough human situation. Would Philemon continue on the path of discipleship, or would this incident break Philemon's resolve to bear the cross in the footsteps of Jesus? RHS

Pastoral Reflections

Didn't Jesus attend the right workshops? He's drawn a huge crowd and has them in the palm of his hand. And does he try to make everybody *feel* comfortable and welcome? Does he try to satisfy the *needs* of the many "seekers"? Apparently not. Apparently he is more interested in truth than in comfort. In blunt language Jesus lays out the cost of the kingdom. God's reign will not come without sacrifice, struggle, and pain. Embracing God's new future will mean letting go of much of the old. So, Jesus tells the crowd just what they're in for if they continue to march in his parade. And it doesn't take long for many to disappear. At the end, even the Twelve are nowhere to be found.

I think a significant challenge of this text is helping people think about what crossbearing may mean in their particular and real lives. It is good to point to Bonhoeffer (especially in this 50th anniversary year of his hanging), Romero, and others who have literally put their lives on the line for their faith. But I also think that we proclaimers (who, for the most part, live a comfortable, middle-class life) need to reflect honestly *with* our people about what radical crossbearing means in our particular communities. For me to preach this text with any kind of authenticity and integrity, I need to get real. I need to think through in concrete ways what it means for the actual folks who gather on the corner of county roads "O" and "F" in Twin Lakes, Wisconsin, to "carry the cross and follow Jesus" (v. 27). What does it mean in the daily grind of our ordinary lives? How do we do that with faithfulness in our individual lives? How do we do that as a community? How do we do that as part of the holy catholic and apostolic church? Only pointing to dramatic and heroic historical examples can be a way of avoiding the call of Christ to *me*, to *us*, although it makes for easy preaching.

The disciples abandoned Jesus when the going got tough. But Jesus, amazingly enough, does not abandon them when he starts his Easter parade. When hearing the tough demands of discipleship in this text, hope comes from knowing the gracious persistence of the Risen Lord. In spite of many failures to heed his call—even in the concrete moments of ordinary life—he is not done with us (even *us*!) yet.

People may need help in dealing with Jesus' call to hatred of family and self (v. 26). This, of course, is not a call to general affective revulsion. It is a call to ultimate allegiance. Jesus is going to the cross and followers, if need be, must possess "the willingness to leave family ties, the willingness to face radical self-denial, and the willingness to give up one's material possessions" (Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to St. Luke X-XXIV, Anchor Bible*, Doubleday, 1985, p. 1062). LHH

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost October 1, 1995

Psalm 51:1-18
Exodus 32:7-14
1 Timothy 1:12-17
Luke 15:1-10

First Reading

What we have in 1 Timothy is a mini-biography of Paul, depicting him as one of God's premier "prodigal sons." He ran from the Lord, blaspheming and persecuting and insulting him (not the church, but "him"!—1 Tim 1:12). Paul is described as "chief of sinners" (v. 15), number one (*protos*) among sinners.

The turnaround came when Paul "was blessed with mercy," when grace "overflowed toward him in superabundance" out of the Lord's agape. And the Lord's mercy was granted him so that he (Paul) might show what Christ's perfect patience looks like.

What shall we say about the strange language of Exodus 32? The Lord is portrayed as burning with a hot wrath and as desiring to consume the wayward people, but then Moses the kindly intercessor, full of patience, talked the Lord into easing up on Israel! Who is the merciful one here? Does God really have to be warned about losing face? And acting so hastily as to destroy any possibility of carrying through on solemn ancient promises? All of this is of course human articulation of human meditation on profoundly mysterious transactions between God and humans called by God. The inspired storytellers picture the Lord of the Universe like a human king, like pharaoh, just as proud, just as zealous and jealous, holding sway in a heavenly space surrounded by courtiers and counselors, dissuaded in this particular case by the great Moses, as Abraham earlier twisted the arm of the Lord (Genesis 18).

If not this kind of language, then what? What is it that moves God to be merciful to us? What is it that we really merit from our Maker? If God really desires our allegiance, our commitment and loyalty and love, in fact our whole heart and soul and strength, and we regularly fail to yield it to God, then how is it that God continually weeps over us and patiently waits for us to return, and graciously receives us when we do? What story will we tell to express some glimmer of the divine patience and grace?

Jesus told parables of painful loss and joyous recovery: the diligent search for a lost sheep and a lost coin. What story should we tell in order to publish abroad the grace of God? Paul told his own story in 1 Timothy 1. RHS

Pastoral Reflections

Where do we fit in this text? Are we among the tax collectors and sinners surprised by the radical grace of this holy man who would invite even us to this table? Or are we among the religious holy folk who grumble about who else has come for dinner? The parables were harsh words to the Pharisees, but to the tax collectors and sinners they were words of amazing grace.

I need to hear it both ways. In spite of wanting to see myself as "gracious and welcoming," there are times when I wonder about the people Jesus invites into his fellowship. Now is one of those times. I'm in the midst of one of those situations where, from my mature (?!) perspective, some parishioners are making mountains of molehills and acting like two-year olds fighting

over the shovel in the sandbox. And right about now, I'm not sure I like Jesus "welcoming these sinners" (v. 2). I can be quite accepting of "humanity." It's real human beings that cause me problems. I can be especially intolerant of intolerance, "fearing not that I'd become my enemy in the instant that I preach" (Bob Dylan, *My Back Pages).* Whether we are tempted to exclude others categorically (i.e. bigotry) or individually, or both, we all need Jesus' parables in this Gospel as law to force the hard look in the mirror.

But, of course, it's as gospel that the parables do their "proper" work. Jesus' parables are a metaphorical telling of the old, old story. We have a God who does whatever it takes, even the cross, to seek us out when we are lost, even when our lostness is hidden under "Pharisaic" posturing, even when we are lost for the thousandth time. We don't need any canned illustrations to preach this one. It's the truth of our life. We are the sought after, the constantly being found. And to think, God sings and dances (even boogies) with the angels when God's amazing grace finds and frees us.

A word on the Pharisees: In Luke, the Pharisees serve a narrative function as part of the opposition to Jesus. As such, their portrayal is no doubt historically skewed. Still, within the narrative, and with a sympathetic reading, they can be a powerful mirror for ourselves, our judgmental but changeable selves (see Robert Tannehill, "Should We Love Simon the Pharisee? Hermeneutical Reflections on the Pharisees in Luke," *Currents,* June 1994). LHH

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A Long Shot Prevision

Jerry L. Schmalenberger
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Some are designating our time as the post-Christian era with the decline of the Christian church. Lutherans seem to have gotten on the band wagon. And the estimation of our decline seems to come more from those inside the church than outside! Of course, if we only gather "our own" Scandinavian and German people into Lutheran congregations and train caretaker clergy, this forecast will probably prove self-fulfilling.

Years ago I sat at the feet of theologian T. A. Kantonen at Hamma Divinity School, a department of Wittenberg University. He often spoke of the "resurgence of the gospel," describing the movement of the gospel much like high and low tide or the ebb and flow of waves on the seashore. He insisted that the gospel returns again and again with renewed strength.

At this time of low tide, I'm wondering if Lutheran Christians are not on the verge of being rediscovered. Probably it won't be the Boomers (or their children, the Busters), but perhaps "Generation X" who find that the Lutheran faith really speaks to them again. Here's why I think so:

Our theology is perdurable, resilient, and relevant to the present time and especially to the future, into which we are moving rapidly.

Justification by grace through faith speaks to a search for spiritual dimension, healing, and radical forgiveness as the world becomes more vulgar, base, and crude. We have the "other worldly" which many long for. We have a radical, undeserved love which the new generation might be seeking again as a way to deal with each other and receive gratefully for themselves.

The priesthood of all believers could speak to future generations as well. In a day when paradigms for ordering society are undergoing dramatic changes, a day when hierarchy isn't acceptable, so many are searching for meaning in life's routine, and life is bone-jarringly real, we have a theology which can equip all the baptized to do ministry all week long. The spirit of the Peace Corps is still alive, and many will search for something in life more meaningful and fulfilling than sitting in front of a computer screen rearranging information.

The authority of scripture will serve us well also. Too many who represent Christianity use scripture to support bigotry and hate. We have a different approach. We do not require that you check your brains at the church door in order to join. We do not have to renounce scientific investigation, but we do have God's words for setting life's priorities, answering many of life's profound questions, and a basis on which to make complicated decisions and achieve a daily focus on God's presence in our lives. We have in the Bible an authority for our lives and a ground for moral deliberation.

Our realistic concept of sin will always be helpful in instructing us how to live with each other in community and do workable social engineering.

IBM unveiled its new television commercials on New Year's Day and premiered its slogan: "Solutions for a small planet." As a continually reforming church, we can remain dynamic rather than static, always newly applying our sound theology to the shifting conditions of our culture and times. We need not become obsolete or irrelevant to current reality. How's that for a solution for a small planet?

Our concept of stewardship speaks to a generation worried about the world's capacity to feed all its population. Our solution comes from knowing about the responsibility of resource inheritance for future generations and the love of neighbor, which also applies to care for non-human lives and natural resources. We can talk with reason about the horrible stewardship of war, crime, lousy parenting, thoughtless conception, poor health practices, the rape of the land, and abuse and prejudice of other people.

In an age of addiction to wealth with less and less intimacy and more and more privatization, we have a gathering place where isolated people can come and sing, touch, unembarrassingly love each other, and share the marvelous *shalom* of God. Unlike millions who feel no secure roots, no stabilizing tradition, and cruel detachment from people and places, we have pageantry, rich music, social intercourse, beautiful art, and wholesome dignity dramatized. It's a solution which we name worship and liturgy and can adjust to fit whatever culture may seek to appropriate.

Still another solution in a time of juvenile crime, breakdown of family and family values, is the Lutheran way of Christian education, first communion, confirmation, ministry, and enrichment of parenting. We have a deep concern for and a present help in keeping marriages together and family life protected and enriched.

In a day of emerging global culture, we already have in place a world-wide family.

I know it's a very long shot, but is it possible that fifty years from now church historians might describe our time as a brief decline in membership and cultural significance for Lutherans, and the near future as a time of being rediscovered because of our relevant theology and solutions for this small planet?

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