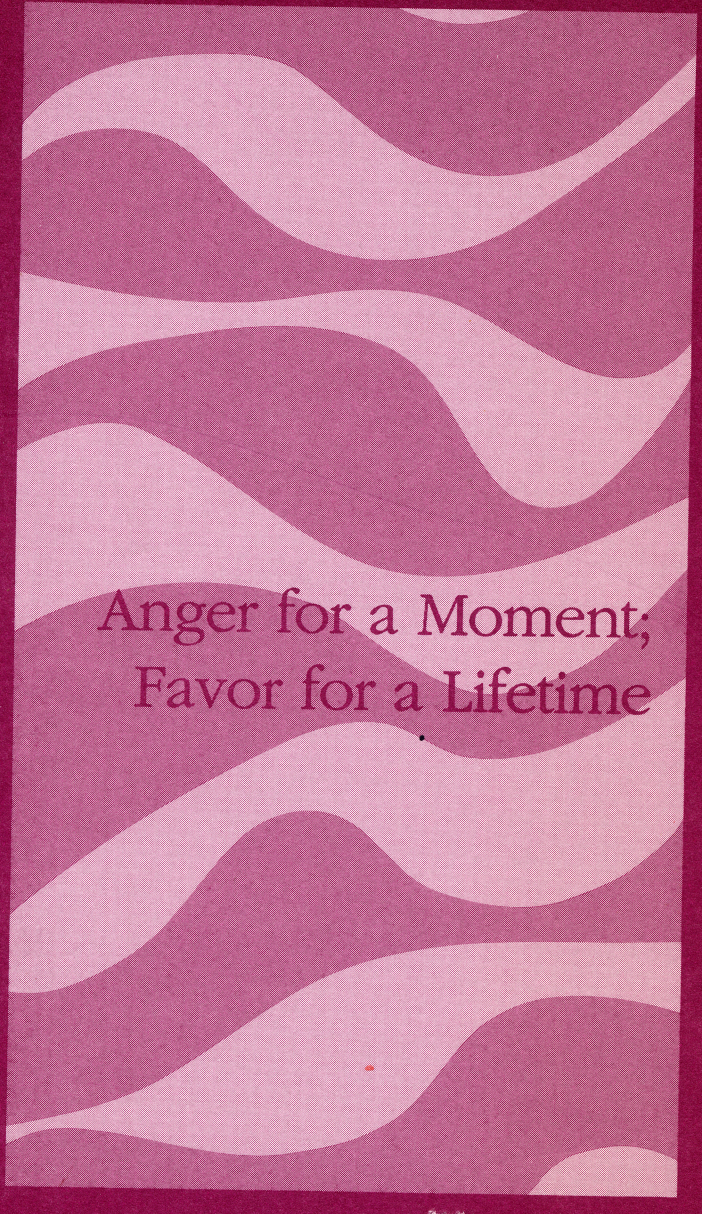
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Anger for a Moment; Favor for a Lifetime

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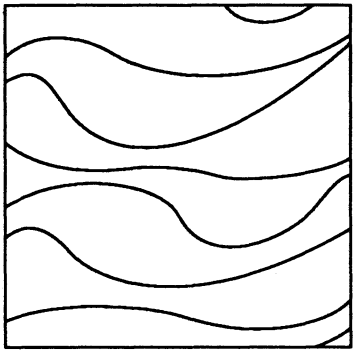
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Anger for a Moment; Favor for a Lifetime

Psalm 30 has long been one of my favorites. The phrases in the above title are part of the reason—God's almighty power *is* known chiefly in God's mercy. The hard bargaining of the psalmist provides a second reason why this psalm lies in my hall of fame: God, it's in your own best interest to keep me alive. If I would die, there would be one less person to praise you (v. 9). That's the best cure I know for burn out. The final verse in this song of thanksgiving quotes the psalmist's full-bodied vow: "so that my liver may praise you and not be silent." OK, that translation results from a tiny emendation, but so does the NRSV's, which then chickens out with a pallid "my soul" praising God. But the liver in ancient Israel was the seat of emotions, sort of like the bottom of our American hearts. My liver refuses to be silent for our uncommon God.

Jay C. Rochelle (who recently accepted a call back to the parish) recalls Bonhoeffer's conviction that exegesis ought to lead to Christ's self disclosure in the present from his place as Lord of the future, and that grace cannot be detached from the proclamation of Christ's death and resurrection. He then uses such exegesis on the Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon discusses how one might live faithfully as a disciple of Christ in an evil age. When Christ calls people, according to Bonhoeffer, he bids them come and die. The mystery of Scripture is that through its words we hear *the* Word, and in its declamation we experience the self-presencing of the Holy in the ordinary.

John R. Albright reports that the story of the Christian faith in Africa is being rewritten as hundreds of thousands are joining the Afri-

can Independent Churches each year. Back of this "Zionist" movement is an attempt to reclaim African tradition and reject western civilization without saying no to salvation. The strength of the Zionists lies in their ability to bring people together. Ironically, their growth tends to be greatest where the white presence was most ubiquitous. As the gospel is actively told, the story disrupts all human plans to tie it down.

Jerry L. Schmalenberger calls us to be stewards of the marriage covenant and the family unit. Quoting Scripture, Luther, and our liturgies, he hails the family as stewards of culture and wisdom. It is within the family unit that we can best live out our Christian ethic and model a servant ministry. Those who lead parishes will want to look at ways we can reduce the stress on individuals and family members in our fragmented society. There are special lessons for the family in each of the seasons of the church year.

Gary R. Jepsen builds on Krister Stendahl's ideas to lead readers through the book of Romans. The central theme of Paul's great letter is the relationship between Jews and Gentiles and how they fit into God's plan of salvation. Both Jews and Gentiles are under the power of sin; both are in need of God's grace. Gentiles have no reason to be haughty because of their inclusion in the people of God, and God will even find a way to redeem all who have been disobedient. Paul encourages Jews and Gentiles alike to put aside all causes of dissension and to embody more fully the grace they have been given. On the basis of this tour through Romans—worthwhile as a trip in itself—the author probes Paul's discussion of homosexuality. Is it a sin? Is it possible to go and sin no more?

Andrew M. Weyermann proposes that good preaching happens when the gospel of God in Christ is used by the Spirit to create and nurture the Christian life of the hearer and the community. There is no explicit gospel unless God is the subject of the sentences in our sermons and unless they announce God's work in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The preacher offers the hearer the benefits of Christ's saving work. That's the Spirit's way of redeeming, forgiving, adopting, creating, and giving new life to the hearer.

Craig L. Nessan observes that Jesus offered good news to the poor and radical criticism of the rich, and that his position on poverty and riches contributed decisively to his eventual arrest and crucifixion. The evangelist Luke domesticated that message for his day, when the wealthy had started to become Christians, and tried only to inspire Christians to deeds of charity and benevolence. Liberation theologians do not let us forget that Jesus urged total abandonment of wealth. We are tempted to interpret Jesus so as to accommodate his dangerous memory to our conventional standards and values. Historical criticism helps us to recover the more radical word of the historical Jesus even as we are nurtured each Sunday by the gospel of Luke.

In a sermon **Marc Kolden** describes the sign of the cross as a scar in the very center of God. We are commanded to rejoice with those who rejoice and to weep with those who weep so that God's presence can be effectively with them. **Kenneth R. Storck** provides a fresh Easter story on the back cover.

Lord, be my helper! (Ps 30:10). Twenty years ago Phyllis Trible reminded us that to be a helper is often the role of a superior (like God) to inferiors like humans, or from peers to one another. Hence Eve's help to Adam flowed from her parity, not her submission.

This year we will sing many songs of thanksgiving for the silver anniversary of American Lutheran women helping through ordained service. From the bottom of our livers.

Ralph W. Klein
Editor

Bonhoeffer and Biblical Interpretation: Reading Scripture in the Spirit

Jay C. Rochelle
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

Biblical interpretation

> One cannot simply read the Bible the way one reads other books. One must be prepared to really question it. Only then will it open itself up. Only when we await the final answer from the Bible will it be given to us. That is because in the Bible it is God who speaks to us.[1]
>
> —Dietrich Bonhoeffer's letter to Rüdiger Schleicher, April 8, 1936

In an essay entitled "The Interpretation of the New Testament" from August 1935, Dietrich Bonhoeffer outlines an exegetical approach to the New Testament rooted in textual studies, and he hints that the historical-critical method may easily become a manipulation of the text. He identifies his own approach to scripture as "presentation," by which he means that exegesis ought to lead to Christ's self-disclosure in the present from his place as Lord of the Future.

Bonhoeffer says that most attempts to render the text relevant fail, because they are rooted in our subjective search to find what we already know. Even if we assign lofty names and concepts such as 'eternal verities' or 'universals' to these matters, the truth is that we search scripture to have it underwrite our own predilections and desires for what it will say. We seek to correlate our own religious insights to the textual "disclosure." These insights always come from our past consciousness, and thus no new thing, no new word can break in upon us when we meditate on the textual witness. The new—the resurrection, if you will—always comes from the future of faith, and dead forms of interpretation preclude such a spiritual eruption.

In the 1936 letter from which our epigram is taken, Bonhoeffer tries to explain his fascination with the Bible to his brother-in-law Rüdiger Schleicher, who often espoused the theological Liberal position in their conversations. At the time, Dietrich

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[1] *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Meditating on the Word*, David McL. Gracie, trans. and intro. (Cambridge: Cowley, 1986), 43ff.

was beginning to write *Cost of Discipleship*. He says,

> This is how I read the Bible now. I ask of each passage: What is God saying to us here? And I ask God that he would help us hear what he wants to say. So, we no longer look for general, eternal truths, which correspond with our own 'eternal' nature and are, therefore, somehow self-evident to us. Instead, we seek the will of God, who is altogether strange to us, whose ways are not our ways and whose thoughts are not our thoughts, who hides himself from us under the sign of the cross, in which all our ways and thoughts have an end.[2]

Thus there is a turning evident, one might call it a repentance, as Bonhoeffer seeks for new footing from which to read scripture in an age of the furies.

If our thoughts are not God's thoughts, if there is a strange and alien quality to the message of scripture, then relevance is not the issue: the fact, the *address* is the issue. The factual address of the New Testament cannot be known by a reliance upon the past, since the fact of faith is that the kingdom of God always breaks in upon this present age through the death and the resurrection of Christ; this inbreaking always comes from God's future to shatter and rebuild the meaning of our present.

As we read the essay on interpretation, we suspect that Bonhoeffer overthrows exegesis in favor of reading the New Testament from a theological perspective. The exegesis he refers to is really a theological position, as when he says,

> The presentation of New Testament texts means the exegesis of them as witness to the Christ as the crucified and risen Lord who calls [people] to follow him, exegesis in the certainty that Christ is the subject of the interpretation. This witness is to be understood strictly as witness to a unique happening.[3]

This interpretive approach has a number of characteristics.

1. We might call this an *eschatological perspective*, suitable and understandable in an apocalyptic era; Bonhoeffer is proposing that we see the present in the light of the end of history announced in the cross and resurrection of Christ and anticipated at the parousia. The church lives in the interim, the gap between already and not yet, and Bonhoeffer sees the urgency that attends this position with growing clarity as the Third Reich gets underway. The church must find a sure footing on which to stand, and the eschatological perspective provides the planks for such a platform.

> The church of Holy Scripture—and there is no other 'church'—lives from the end. Therefore it reads all Holy Scripture as the book of the end, of the new, of Christ.... The Bible is nothing but the book upon which the Church stands. This is its essential nature, or it is nothing. Therefore the scriptures need to be read and proclaimed wholly from the viewpoint of the end.[4]

2. This eschatological perspective may be taken as a first step in interpretation. But the theology of the Word calls for a second step, as well; this is *the Christocentric step*: the referral and reduction of all scripture to its center in Christ. Here again Bonhoeffer takes up a position with clarity. He conceives of the New Testament as a "witness of the promise of the Old Testament fulfilled in Christ. It is not a book which

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[2] Gracie, 45.

[3] "The Interpretation of the New Testament," *No Rusty Swords*, ed. E. H. Robertson (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 320.

[4] *Creation and Fall*, trans. John C. Fletcher & Kathleen Downham (New York: Macmillan, 1976), 8.

contains eternal truths, doctrines, norms or myths, but it is a unique witness of the God-man Jesus Christ."[5] Thus the Bible witnesses to Christ as event, and it witnesses to the *whole* Christ; so, for example, we do not interpret miracles as a pointer to Christ, so to speak. We interpret miracles because they come from Christ. The same is true of the parables and all the rest of the New Testament witness. Because Christ, therefore text.

Theories of the verbal inspiration of scripture are useless and in fact damaging to the witness, since they take our attention away from the witness-character of the text and try to place our security, albeit false, in the text itself.

> In the exegesis of Scripture we find ourselves on thin ice. One can never stand firm at one point, but must move about over the whole of the Bible.... Verbal inspiration is a poor substitute for the resurrection! It amounts to a denial of the unique presence of the risen one. It gives history an eternal value instead of seeing history and knowing it from the point of view of God's eternity. It is wrecked in its attempt to level the rough ground. The Bible remains a book like other books. One must be ready to accept the concealment within history and therefore let historical criticism run its course. But it is through the Bible, with all its flaws, that the risen one encounters us.[6]

The New Testament as *text* is, therefore, nothing in and of itself. It is our relationship to the text, one might say our discipleship under the text, which is of primary importance. Bonhoeffer is clear on this point:

> The New Testament... is nothing *in* itself, but bears witness to something else; it has no value in itself, but only as a witness to Christ... its words and statements are not in themselves true and eternal and holy, but only insofar as they bear witness to Christ—i.e. let only Christ himself be true.[7]

It is our relationship to the text, one might say our discipleship under the text, which is of primary importance.

Thus Bonhoeffer is able to make, on the basis of this interpretive criterion (witness to the death and resurrection of Christ as central divine act in history), a place for allegory: while it is not the committed form of exegesis for the church, nonetheless

> The allegorical exposition of Scripture remains a splendid freedom of the church's exegesis, not as a false means of proof, but as a celebration of the fullness of the witness to Christ in Scripture.[8]

Bethge appends notes to the manuscript on "interpretation" to reconstruct its conclusion; there Bonhoeffer once more underwrites his viewpoint, an important point for us reading *Cost of Discipleship*: here he says that

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[5] *No Rusty Swords*, 317.

[6] *Christ the Center*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 73f.

[7] *No Rusty Swords*, 318.

[8] *No Rusty Swords*, 321.

> Protestantism proclaims life from grace alone because it is witnessed in Scripture. This becomes untrue if it is debased to a principle of grace. As soon as the proclamation of grace closes the way to Christ, it becomes apostasy and falsehood.[9]

Thus the Lutheran heresy, we might say, is to detach a principle of grace from the existential address of the Christ who comes to us in, but not of, the scriptures. Only as we are addressed in Christ may we continue to speak of grace; grace cannot be detached from proclamation of Christ's death and resurrection or it ceases to be grace... or becomes, as Bonhoeffer will call it in the *Cost*, "cheap grace" not only as justification of the sin but as the absence of any connectedness to the origin of grace in God's love in Christ.

Meditation is an action of the Spirit which opens us to the text and opens the text to us.

As with Karl Barth, then, we see Bonhoeffer struggling to establish a beachhead in modern society from which to proclaim the Bible once more. It cannot be in the concept of relevance; it cannot be in the idea of bringing previously thought-out "eternal verities" and then discovering them in a New Testament shape. In both these cases, the norm for interpretation is within the interpreter herself. It must not be so among us, says Bonhoeffer: "The intention should be not to justify Christianity in this present age, but to *justify the present age before the Christian message*,"[10] which is the call of neo-orthodoxy: scripture needs not be rendered relevant to us; we must be rendered relevant to scripture.

3. A third aspect of Bonhoeffer's interpretative approach to scripture is that one comes to scripture in a *meditative frame of mind*. To meditate is to wait upon the word of scripture, and this

> is not a vacuous waiting, but a waiting on the basis of a clear promise. Often we are so burdened and overwhelmed with other thoughts, images, and nonsense that it may take a long time before God's Word has swept all else aside and come through. But it will surely come....[11]

Meditation does not promise either "new ideas" nor "unexpected, extraordinary experiences." If we center our attention on the Word alone, we are to leave the consequences to its action; for it will act within us to bring renewal, transformation, and a vision of the presence of God in ordinary reality. Meditation is an action of the Spirit which opens us to the text and opens the text to us.

Thus all true movement in biblical interpretation is, for Bonhoeffer and as Harrelson pointed out in his study, a movement from the present day to the Bible. The only necessary first step is a theological position which sees Christ as the center of the biblical witness.

4. Bonhoeffer's approach to the text of scripture for preaching is not under consideration here, but may be referred to in the

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[9] *No Rusty Swords*, 323.

[10] *No Rusty Swords*, 310.

[11] *Life Together*, trans. John Doberstein (New York: Harper & Row, 1954), 82.

work by Clyde E. Fant (see bibliography); let it suffice to say that, for Bonhoeffer, the sermon is approached as the sacrament of the Word. So our fourth point is that *Christ comes to us in the word of proclamation*; sermonizing functions under the rubric of the incarnation, mediated by the Spirit at work in the proclamation. In careful preaching which hews to the form of the text, Christ will present himself anew to the listening congregation.

> The word of the sermon is not one species of the genus 'word,' but rather it is just the opposite: all of our words are species of the one, original Word of God which both creates and sustains the world.... In the sermon the foundation for a new world is laid. Here the original word becomes audible.[12]

God determines what Word is, and thus orders the direction of all our words toward salvation.

Overstatements?

In Bonhoeffer's work *Koenig David* ("King David"), there is so much christological interpretation as to render the text embarrassing to read. It is probable that Bonhoeffer is following the lead of Wilhelm Vischer, whose work entitled (in English translation) *The Witness of the Old Testament to Christ* (1934) he knew. But as Harrelson points out, Bonhoeffer in *Koenig David* "simply removes the Bible of the Jews from their hands."[13]

Bonhoeffer adopted a theological criterion for the reading of scripture which sounds doctrinal in character, despite his own *caveat*; his language about interpretation comes from the doctrinal heritage of Lutheranism, but—and this is important—we must credit his attempt to pry himself out of a position which pre-judges the meaning of scripture before allowing it to speak.

Given the historicity of the text, we have no choice but to adopt criteria for interpretation of an *a priori* nature. We who view texts from the hermeneutic of suspicion know that even so professedly simple an approach as that of textual criticism may be guilty of distorting the text.[14] There is a studied naivete in Bonhoeffer's approach which we may graciously assign to the critical nature of the times in which he was living. He took the cleanest approach to scripture available to him, and that involved returning to Reformation principles, for which we cannot fault him.

By adopting the criterion that all scripture points to Christ, and by permitting allegory as a technique, Bonhoeffer opens the door to an interpretation of scripture that could play into the hands of enemies of the Jews. It may be true (as Kuske, 1976, tries to show) that his view shifts over the rest of his life, but in 1936 the argument is flawed because he fails to take seriously the historic character of the text, and rushes to 'christianize' the whole Bible. "If the Old Testament has no meaning for faith apart from its meaning in Jesus Christ, then those who—in faith—do not declare Jesus to be the Messiah are simply left without their Scripture, are they not?"[15]

On balance, we must assert that, by taking an exegetical stance which read the Old Testament almost exclusively from the

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[12] "Lectures on Preaching," in Clyde E. Fant, *Worldly Preaching* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1975), 130.

[13] Walter Harrelson, "Bonhoeffer and the Bible," in *The Place of Bonhoeffer*, ed. Martin E. Marty (New York: Association, 1961), 129ff.

[14] Interestingly enough, Bonhoeffer notes this himself in his footnote to Matthew 5:22 in *Cost of Discipleship*.

[15] Harrelson, 130.

perspective of Christology, Bonhoeffer managed to salvage it for the church; the issue is whether he did so at the expense of the Jews. Powerful forces in the Third Reich, however, were at work to support the Marcionite hypothesis (the God of the Old Testament is not the same as the God of the New Testament, hence we may safely jettison the former), including some of the major Old Testament scholars of the time. We cannot know what Bonhoeffer's full slate of motives were in his christological exegesis. His career is filled with instances of support and protection for the Jews from both humanitarian and theological bases ("no one can sing Gregorian chant who is not protecting the Jews"), even while he read Hebrew Scripture from a christological perspective.

On the interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount

The Sermon on the Mount is the basis for a series of sustained meditations on the meaning of Christ which became the book *Nachfolge*, "Following," translated into English as *The Cost of Discipleship*.

Bonhoeffer, in *The Cost of Discipleship*, is reading the Bible in much the same way as Kierkegaard suggested a century before, as a "handbook for those about to be sacrificed." And if he disregards a certain amount of textual questions in the process, he does not do so unwittingly. He does so because he is trying to read it in such a way as to answer, for his life and the lives of others, how one might live faithfully as a disciple of Christ in an evil age. So we turn to a consideration of some options for interpretation of a particular text, or series of texts, among which Bonhoeffer had to choose his own pathway.

Bonhoeffer's teachers at the University of Berlin included many greats of the Liberal approach to Christianity, beginning with Harnack, and including Deissmann, Sellin, and especially the New Testament scholar Hans Lietzmann, whose massive work in the history of the textual evidence for the Eucharist remains a primary source for consultation today, and who saw Bonhoeffer come and go as an instructor at Berlin. It is worth noting that Lietzmann, in private correspondence to a Swedish friend in 1936, said: "Now our most gifted young teacher has turned into a fanatic; he declares that 'there is no salvation outside the confessing Church.'"[16] So the latest in textual studies were available to him, and we see him turning to a number of different sources, including the work of a conservative scholar like Adolf Schlatter, who was the only professor he highly regarded from his Tübingen days. From Schlatter he would have learned to "read the whole Gospel with reference to Jesus, for it was written on his account."[17]

Bonhoeffer at one point lists, for the students at Finkenwalde, his own choices of principal works for sermonic preparation as Calvin, Bengel's *Gnomon*, the works of Kohlbrugge, Vilmar, Schlatter, and Lietzmann's commentary.[18] Schlatter's commentary on Matthew was published in 1929.

In *The Cost of Discipleship*, Bonhoeffer undertakes to interpret the Sermon on the Mount from the apocalyptic-christocentric perspective mentioned above. The Sermon on the Mount has inspired many

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[16] Eberhard Bethge, "The Challenge of Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Life and Theology," Alden-Tuthill Lectures, CTS REGISTER (February 1961), 3.

[17] Cited in Eduard Thurneysen, *The Sermon on the Mount*, trans. Wm. Childs Robinson, Sr., with James M. Robinson (Richmond: John Knox, 1964), 17.

[18] "King David," *Gesammelte Schriften* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag), vol. IV, 260.

different interpretive approaches. The contemporary Mennonite scholar Clarence Bauman lists no less than *nineteen* approaches to the interpretation of the Sermon within the last century.[19] Bonhoeffer's interpretation is covered in a chapter subtitled "The Sermon on the Mount and paradoxical obedience." He cites a letter Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote to Reinhold Niebuhr on July 13, 1934, where Bonhoeffer explicitly says that the difference between the Confessing Church and the Reich Church lay in a "different understanding of the Sermon than the Reformation's." Bauman criticizes Bonhoeffer for attempting a duplicitous form of discipleship:

> Pacifism and tyrannicide do not lie along the same path except in the very qualified way Bonhoeffer affirmed both within the Lutheran two-kingdoms stance. Whatever Bonhoeffer said about discipleship and resistance, this frame of reference remains intact. For the disciples, *Nachfolge* meant leaving all and 'going with Jesus.' For us, according to Bonhoeffer, it means 'Word and Sacrament.'[20]

Bauman's judgment is too harsh; Bonhoeffer *is* interested in *Nachfolge*, *and* supports the Lutheran understanding of the Presence of Christ.

If we turn to the Reformation sources, we see that Luther interprets the Sermon on the Mount toward what he calls a middle ground between the "leftists" who obliterate the teaching of Jesus and lead us forward with the so-called 'evangelical counsels' and the "rightists" who want to follow the Sermon literally toward no private property, no defense. Luther contends that the world cannot run this way, but must be structured along the lines of civil righteousness (the first use of the law). On the other hand, Luther struggles to understand how the Sermon might be applicable to our lives

Bonhoeffer, in *The Cost of Discipleship*, is reading the Bible... as a "handbook for those about to be sacrificed."

and does not fall into the position exhibited by many "Lutherans" in their interpretation, namely that the Sermon is an appeal to an impossible ideal which brings us to our knees in order that we might recognize our need for Christ as savior from our own inability to stand under the law (see below, Kittel). For Luther, the Sermon expresses life-in-faith, and he approaches it christologically. This approach is followed, in the 20th Century, by the preaching of Karl Barth and the Matthew commentary of, among others, Adolf Schlatter.

Tolstoy provides a convenient place to begin with an overview of 20th century or modern interpretations, since he represents the radical end of the spectrum. For Tolstoy, the Sermon was the New Law of Jesus which superseded the old law of Moses and which was to be taken literally as the program for the kingdom of God: no oaths, no police, no defense, and so forth. Were we to carry it out, we would have the kingdom of God on earth.

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[19] Clarence Bauman, *The Sermon on the Mount: The Modern Quest for Its Meaning* (Macon GA: Mercer University Press, 1985), introduction.

[20] Bauman, 273.

At the other end of the spectrum is the view of Protestant scholar Friedrich Naumann, who held (1903) that the Sermon on the Mount was in no way workable in the twentieth century with its capitalistic structures, and was thus to be abandoned as a curiosity incapable of fulfillment. Naumann's view was powerful, well-known, and often accepted. He proposed an "either-or" with the text of the Sermon and concluded it to be an impossible ideal under capitalist conditions.

In *The Quest for the Historical Jesus* (1906) Albert Schweitzer showed that for him, eschatology was the key to the interpretation of the New Testament. From his perspective, the Sermon on the Mount represented what he called an *Interimsethik*, an ethic for the interim, an emergency ethic set up for use during the interval between the death of Jesus and his second coming, but not applicable for all time. Since the end of the world did not come in that first century of the Christian era, the Sermon probably has little relevance for us now. Nevertheless, Schweitzer came as close as anyone to living it out, despite his own exegetical insights.

A fourth option in interpretation is to see the Sermon as a *Gesinnungsethik*, an ethic of "intention." That is to say, the basic aim of the Sermon is to create and inspire an inward disposition in the disciples of Jesus. The Sermon is not to be carried out slavishly (since Jesus intended no new law) or literalistically (since it is filled with hyperbole and metaphor), but we may see it as an overview of what a disciple should be. The emphasis is on *being* rather than doing, though one is called to enact what one can. Such an approach, represented by Johannes Müller, for example, at least has the merit of trying to salvage the Sermon as something a Christian may use.

We may, fifth, take Gerhard Kittel as representative of the interpretation which holds that the Sermon's major aim is to bring us to repentance in face of the knowledge that we cannot uphold its tenets; the Sermon is thus a preparation for the gospel of the cross of Christ.

Lastly, T. W. Manson holds that the Sermon offers us a portrait of ideal life in the kingdom of God. The tone of the Sermon is not legalistic, but rather prophetic; in it Jesus holds out the hope of a perfected life in the coming kingdom of God, parts of which may be approximated now as we hew to the golden rule. If we love God and our neighbor with intensity, then these perspectives become the origin for all our action and we live ethically in this world, from the future promised kingdom. Manson suggests that, for him, this is what Paul means when he calls upon Christians to have the mind of Christ (Phil 2:5-11). So here are six interpretations from the twentieth century.

Basically there are three responses to the Sermon on the Mount which are worked out in a variety of interpretations:

1. The Sermon is a law which breaks us (some later Lutherans, but not Luther);

2. The Sermon is a code for radicals (Tolstoy and, in his own way, Naumann);

3. The Sermon is a set of precepts commanded by Jesus (as *Interimsethik*, Schweitzer and Weiss; as ethic of opposition to pharisees, Windisch).

This leaves a possible fourth response, the christological, which Bonhoeffer follows.

Bonhoeffer's Cost

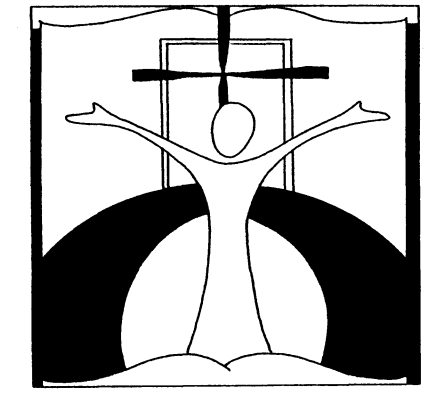
The theology of the Word produced one sustained interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount before Bonhoeffer's *Cost*. In 1936, Eduard Thurneysen, preacher at the Cathedral Church, Basel, since 1930, also

professor of practical theology at the university, and close lifelong friend of Karl Barth, published a small treatise on the Sermon. In this book he spoke of the christological interpretation. *The Cost of Discipleship* is aligned, but not necessarily to be identified, with the approach of Karl Barth and Emil Brunner.

As we examine the text of Bonhoeffer's *Cost*, we see that Bonhoeffer uses elements of a number of the above interpretations which function here. There is a *prophetic* element, in that the call to discipleship is radical and projects a certain kind of life in opposition to "the world"; there is an *eschatological* or even apocalyptic element, in that the vision of the End informs the interpretation; and there is a hint of the approach of the *ideal* which we find in Manson. Bonhoeffer's approach, however, while utilizing elements we may find in other interpreters, turns out to be unique, a close theological reading of the text of scripture in response to the mysterious call: "When Christ calls people, he bids them come and die." Bonhoeffer's interpretation is a sustained reflection of life in faith in response to the call of Jesus which bears a *promise*, and is therefore gospel.

The point of it all

The times have changed outwardly since the days of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, yet we continue to appropriate scripture within the church as the church's book, as authorization and ground for our authenticity as persons and as community of faith. These are not easy times for such appropriation. The contemporary scene is filled with the most minute social and literary criticism of the biblical text, the rapid deconstruction of the portrait of the dogmatic Christ in face of the manifold portraits of Jesus in the Gospels (including, at last count, the Gospel of Thomas in the reckoning), and the sophisticated negative response to such readings which may be found in the work of, say, a Brevard



Childs. And yet, Bonhoeffer is moving into another sphere of interpretation, one more characteristic of current moves in literature.

The French *philosophe* Jacques Derrida would most likely characterize Bonhoeffer's approach to scripture as 'logocentric,' meaning that there is a prioritization of speech over text, of immediacy over distance, of intimacy over abstraction, of self-presencing over ambiguity. Suffice it to say that, for Derrida, such a move is suspicious: 'logocentricity' is a peculiar kind of valorization, a move of critical apprehension made in advance of the textual data, in order to express one's sense of the identity between image and reality in the text (cf. the first chapter of Derrida's *Disseminations*).

Problematic though this approach may be to a Derrida, it sounds like the Reformation and particularly Luther to the rest of us. And it sounds like the Bonhoeffer we've been hearing in this rehearsal of his approach to scripture. We have to own up to this valorization, that what we actually be-

lieve is that, in a way which cannot be fully explained to oneself, let alone to others, with any kind of clear logic, the mystery of scripture is that through its words we hear The Word, in its declamation we experience the self-presencing of the Holy in the ordinary. It is this experience Bonhoeffer attempts, in his day, to retrieve in the face of nationalist readings of scripture and/or those readings which would not place any claim upon the hearer, i.e. which would not lead to discipleship.

The churches that claim the Reformation heritage need to claim this interpretive stance as well, namely that the proclamation of the text—primarily through dramatic reading and preaching—represents the inbreaking of that Presence which is present in the power of God's Spirit. This Presence (*Vergegenwärtigung* in German, a continuous or "ongoing presencing") is neither lost in history nor shrouded in the future, but available now by virtue of God's new act in the resurrection, which grounds the promise of all subsequent Presencing. The Christ who comes in address has been known across the centuries, regardless of what critical apparatus was working away at the texts that record that address. Bonhoeffer sought to describe this present Christ, who calls us into discipleship, to his age, and we are called to no less a task in our own.

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Independent Churches: A Southern African Experience of Mission & Modernity

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Washington, D.C.

"Earlier they had been pioneers of the white man's penetration," wrote Kenneth Scott Latourette of white missionaries in Africa. "They had fought the initial crude exploitation of the blacks by the less conscientious of the white men. By reducing languages to writing, inaugurating schools, introducing improved medical care and bringing a fresh and powerful spiritual and moral dynamic they had begun the preparation of the black folk for the momentous transition."[1]

In the early 1940s, it may have been difficult for Latourette to foresee that the history of the expansion of Christianity in Africa would not proceed from the mouths of heroic Western missionaries, advocates fighting for the spiritual freedom and social welfare of their black clients. Rather, the story of the Christian faith in Africa is being rewritten by Africans themselves as roughly one third of a million men, women, and children join African Independent Churches each year.

The growth of these spirited movements tends to be greatest where the white presence was most ubiquitous and, not by coincidence, where the western missionary endeavor was most energetic.[2] Especially in South Africa, where various British and Dutch factions rushed for control of its precious land, the contents of African cultures were buried beneath the dust of the white man's frenzy. But as anthropologists Jean and John Comaroff point out, the story

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[1] Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity: Advance Through Storm*, vol. 7, p. 217.

[2] See Inus Daneel, *Quest for Belonging* (Gweru, Zimbabwe: Mambo Press, 1987), 45. Observers have lost count of the precise number of these churches. Due to commonplace schisms, there are perhaps as many as 6 to 8,000 distinct independent churches in Africa today, 4,000 of them in South Africa alone. Roughly 20-25% of self-professed Christians in Africa belong to Independent churches. Yet, one must not overstate the exclusive importance of Independent Churches. In other countries such as Madagascar, charismatic Christianity is being absorbed by and from within the established church.

of southern Africa is not simply one of material domination and resistance. It is not simply a tale of might-makes-right in which indigenous economies are destroyed by superior firepower and then replaced by the rules of the reigning capitalists. The struggle was also—and still is—over consciousness, over symbols and meanings, over interpretation.

Whose side were the missionaries on, anyway? The answer is complex and contradictory. In the nineteenth century, missionaries effected change more through conversation than through spiritual conversion.[3] There was a finely nuanced power in the medium of the salvation message. For the missionary, envoy of Christ and liaison for western civilization, there were certain externals which were primary conditions for conversion: the monogamous union between man and woman, the nuclear family and its particular division of labor, new rules about dress and bodily appearance, and the need to accumulate things besides oxen and women. Reverend John Campbell greeted one powerful Tswana chief by placing a copper comb in his hair and a chain about his neck and then handing him a looking glass, "that he might gaze at his own reflection."[4] The chief reciprocated by giving the evangelist a "fine ox." The significance of this exchange was not simply that the Christian, by accepting the ox, had publicly but unwittingly confirmed his allegiance to the chief, but rather, that the white man's goods were important signs of a modern, materialistic mentality. The mirror, especially, was a quintessential tool in the development of western consciousness. The hand mirror had become a common possession among Europe's bourgeoisie, a great symbol of self-awareness and introspection. "It was just this kind of self—the self abstracted in the mirror, divorced from context—that the missions wished to liberate from the mesh of superstition and social dependence" in order to create an individual who could commit to a life of morality and reason.[5] Behind the quicksilvered glass was the free-floating face of the modern, autonomous self.

Both the body and the spirit were struck blows by the crashing waves of modernity, material and symbolic. As the late nineteenth century wore on into the mid-twentieth, African peoples began to turn to spiritual healing. With their emphasis on healing the body through the spirit, Zionist and Apostolic churches began to flourish in this context of dehumanizing political and economic conditions. Schismatic sects of faith-healers provided people of all ethnic groups, both rural and urban but always poor, with the possibility of recovering a genuinely human identity, an identity planted in the soils of kinship and community. Surely, Wesleyan and Congregational missionaries from England, for example, had brought their own plans for social equality. Their blueprints for a liberal, mixed-race utopia were to be based on the solid foundations of God, capitalism and, above all, civilization. But unlike the established Christianity out of which these separatists rose, they were intrinsically suspicious of Empire. In their imagined Africa, the kingdom of God and civilization could not collapse into same-

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[3] Jean Comaroff, "Missionaries and Mechanical Clocks," *Journal of Religion* (January 1991), 15.

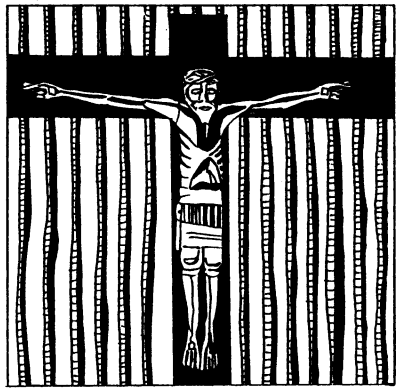
[4] Jean and John Comaroff, "Through the Looking Glass: Colonial Encounters of the First Kind," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 1, no. 1 (1988), 6. See also the Comaroffs' *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, vol. 1 (University of Chicago Press, 1991), 183.

[5] Jean Comaroff, "Missionaries and Mechanical Clocks," 10.

ness. However, southern Africa was not the malleable wasteland they anticipated. Not only were their sacred plans a nagging obstacle to the commercial ambitions of the colonial powers, but Africans did not perceive the light-skinned missionary as innocently as he may have viewed himself. While the missionary fought to halt the slave trade, his grand ideas of preparing the native for freedom with his schools and health clinics were not received like he dreamed. The Cape Colony was a virtual matrix of emerging, colliding interests.

Africans resisted and coped. Some learned to read and write in mission schools—and some of these became leaders in movements for independence in the twentieth century. But it was not the Enlightenment values of reason-through-literacy and health-through-dualistic medicine which made sense to the great majority of Africans. The blueprints for civilization were laden with reasons and values which Africans did not necessarily find useful. The white man thought Africans inferior when, in fact, many of the presuppositions behind modernity simply did not work in Africa, practically or intuitively. Perceiving themselves as the vanguard of black freedom, missionaries taught Africans to do away with their "primitive" customs. The sooner the better, they reasoned, as then God's savages could arm themselves with the armor of modern times: education, medicine, clock-time, morality and reason, autonomy and mobility, self-reflection.

Today, it has become increasingly difficult to distinguish ritual from the rational, as the Comaroffs consistently point out: what modern sociology often categorized as the distinct and inferior realm of ritual has never been truly separated from the political march of reason in southern Africa.[6] Case in point: when in 1818 directors of the London Missionary Society sent a



large clock to decorate the church at its first station among the Tswana peoples of the interior, disturbed Tswana leaders sensed that the conspicuous clock was a portentous object of ritual. Its design had exceeded "functional necessity." Not only were its hours "struck by strutting British soldiers carved of wood," but "in the face of the clock the Tswana had caught a glimpse of a future time, a time when they would be made to march in step with the rhythms of an Empire whose imprint they could already discern in the seemingly innocent signs" of the Christian mission.[7]

The story of the Christian faith in Africa is, today, being etched by peoples who were not willing to walk in rhythm with civilized religion. The irony of this story is that many of those who had learned to read and write in mission schools turned the tools of modernity into tools of transformation. The intriguing story of the Independent Churches enters here. Independent Churches such as the Zionists are as close to

[6] Jean Comaroff, "Missionaries and Mechanical Clocks," 17.

[7] Jean Comaroff, "Missionaries and Mechanical Clocks," 1. See also *Of Revelation and Revolution*, 192.

the practice of first-century confessors as one could imagine. Imbued with an overt sense of joy often expressed through "ecstatic" experiences, this is the antithesis of Victorian religion. This form of faith is like a tree which survives on a parched plain, its roots penetrating the rugged terrain. If the missionaries of North America had come to Africa to plant diffuse and towering maples —shade from the relentless sun of savagery and superstition—and if the English had come to cover its hills with heather—fields of forgiveness in which Africans could finally rest—they would have found that those forms of life do not grow in the dry, stony soil of southern Africa. To extend the metaphor, it was the separatist churches of the twentieth century which took root in such terrain, thorny trees indigenous to the social climate which not only withstood the elements, but thrived in them. As the word "independent" implies, however, African Zionists had to free themselves of their evangelical messengers, be they spiritual landlords or mutual companions.

Historians trace Zionism to John Alexander Dowie. Born in Scotland, and trained in Australia as a Congregational pastor, Dowie established in 1896 the Christian Catholic Apostolic Church in Zion (CCACZ) in Chicago. It is significant that three years later Dowie founded his own Jerusalem on the shores of Lake Michigan, a sacred city designated for the religiously pure, those who could faithfully abide by the divine law. Alcohol and tobacco were prohibited along with pork and medicines.[8] This was not primarily a fundamentalist movement of protest, but a millennial, apocalyptic reaction to the defiling forces of modernism. Only through the human restoration of the "primitive" church would the Second Coming take place. Dowie's successor even went so far as to predict the date of Christ's return. Zion, Illinois, would eventually fall to a devastating schism, but not before one of Dowie's followers, Daniel Bryant, journeyed to South Africa to preach. He found eager ears there. In his search for the church holy and primitive, he found, with some irony, those who had been pejoratively cast "primitive" for several centuries. Black Africans, on the other hand, found a message whose messenger also shunned some of the so-called benefits of modern life in the west.[9] Both groups had in common the intentions to resist the ills of modernity.

The Zionist tendency towards religious purity, baptism by triple immersion, and charismatic leaders with a healing touch soon spread through southern Africa.[10] In 1923 a Shona migrant laborer by the name of Samuel Mutendi was baptized into the Zion Apostolic Faith Mission while working in South Africa. Having been educated in a Dutch Reformed Church mission, Mutendi was eager to carry his fervor back to Rhodesia where he founded the Zionist Christian Church of Zimbabwe (ZCC).[11] Mutendi achieved an almost messianic reputation. He not only had a gift for faith-healing but was the descendent of the royal house of Rozvi, the peoples known for the Great Zimbabwe Ruins.

Mutendi was one of dozens of prophets throughout Africa since the 1870s who not

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[8] David Chidester, *Religions of South Africa*, 123; Inus Daneel, *Quest for Belonging*, 54; Jean Comaroff, *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance: The Culture and History of a South African People* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 177-86.

[9] See Jean Comaroff, *Body of Power*, 179.

[10] The instability of fission has been virtually institutionalized. See Jean Comaroff, *Body of Power*, 183-4.

[11] In an interview with Nehemiah Mutendi, the bishop narrated a story about his father's conversion which differs significantly from Daneel's in *Quest for Belonging*, 55.

As the gospel is actively told and retold, the story disrupts all human plans to tie it down.

only preached forgiveness and repentance, but through faith-healing was able to act out the history of salvation in people's lives. Faith in an incarnate God became participatory. Mutendi's rejection of modern medicine is crucial to understanding Zionism as an attempt to reject civilization without saying no to salvation. The white race is not rejected in this claim. Western civilization is not declared wrong; the sum of its parts are simply not for Africa. By resuscitating some elements of pre-colonial cultures, a whole host of Independent Churches have converged to affirm what Edward Schillebeeckx explicitly states, that while the gospel is universally true, permanent truths must find their historical identity "precisely in what is transitory."[12]

As Zimbabwe continues to struggle its way out the gate of national independence—with a new South Africa not far behind—these forms of faith are playing a key role in that reconstruction. What has often been labeled as "politically acquiescent religion" has the opportunity of providing some social stability in a revolutionary moment while, at the same time, resisting the temptations offered by a Eurocentric church. Among these indigenous elements which are being preserved, the spiritual need for an immanent God heads the list, a God whose power, love and immediacy are constantly affirmed in the patterns of daily life. The hierarchy of the tribal structure is also retained by the Zionists, as well as by most Independent Churches. In place of the nuclear family, they encourage and fortify the small kinship group. While polygamy is by no means a requirement for kinship groups or ZCC membership, it also is an ideal.[13] Nevertheless, the strength of the Zionists lies in their ability to bring people together, no small feat in a society whose communal structures have been severed and worn by a history of domination. People whose humanity has been reduced to wage labor are finding, as Inus Daneel concludes, a place of belonging.

The ethics of a community is only one area by which the Old Testament is held up as the supreme law of God, a guide to daily living. In the books of the Hebrew Bible, Zionists find a clan-structured, nomadic, disinherited people who rise to follow a courageous leader to the promised land, a specific plot of soil signifying safety, prosperity, and salvation. They also find a God who is concerned for the way in which whole peoples live, not simply individuals. At least in theory, Zionists retain many of the sacrificial and purification laws found in the Old Testament. Not only have these primarily oral cultures rejuvenated the Christian texts with great authority, but African elders have embraced the authority to interpret the Bible. "The question is one of self-reliance," said one Dr. C. J. Zvobgo (University of Zimbabwe), explaining how the

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[12] Edward Schillebeeckx, "The Role of History in What is Called the New Paradigm," *Paradigm Change in Theology*, ed. David Tracy and Hans Kung (Chicago, 1991), 311-32.

[13] Bishop S. Mutendi had some 16 wives while the current bishop, Mutendi's son, has three or four.

founders of schismatic churches had reasoned in the early twentieth century. "We are children of missionaries. But we have grown up. We must take the gospel to our own people."

What has happened to the Christian faith in Africa, is not, however, the smooth transaction of a product called the gospel. In many instances, Africans did not buy the white man's words. Because language had been used by missionaries as a tool to a greater end, the formidable task of interpretation was underestimated. Those Africans who acquired literacy discovered, however, that the words they themselves began to read were different from the ones they heard preached. Missiologist David Barrett shows that the empowering tool of literacy did, indeed, create an atmosphere of discontent. Unrestricted access to the Bible provided the African with an interpretation which "made sense." Religious ritual could not be severed from the reason which imbued the mundane, everyday world of pre-colonial and even post-colonial Africa. Southern Africans find great affinity with stories of demon or spirit possession, or struggles for land or struggles with the land, pieces of the Bible which we moderns easily leap over in order to get to the real meat, the "salvation message." The soil of Africa is saturated with ritual, and ritual is not easily distinguished from reason. So while many parts of the Old and New Testament sounded "reasonable" for the first time as people read them in their vernacular, "the discrepancy between missionary practice and biblical norms were not passing unnoticed."[14] In fact, a statistical analysis from 724 tribes led Barrett to conclude that in tribes where only parts of the Bible had been translated there was a 56% possibility of separatism; tribes with access to the New Testament had a 67% probability, and those with the whole Bible in their own language an 81% probability of schism.[15] Barrett criticizes the western missionary with the failure to study or understand African society "in any depth." But with the literacy and the translation of Bibles, he writes, the "catastrophic nature of this failure" soon dawned on many African leaders. Perhaps they had not experienced the missions' "fresh and powerful spiritual and moral dynamic," not as Latourette had supposed.[16] Perhaps the gospel must change in order to remain itself. The truth of the gospel must find its "historical identity," precisely, that is, "in what is transitory."[17] The news of Jesus of Nazareth comes to a people and, with great disruption, that people tells itself the stories of how the Messiah befuddled even his own people, how the world rejected him. Despite human attempts to limit the plurality of this story, the Spirit of the story soaks into the collective imagination of a people. As the gospel is actively told and retold, the story disrupts all human plans to tie it down.

The Zionist faith is not yet linked to confessional statements, but it is immersed in the daily practice of a people. Through the Zionists and other Independents, faith in Christ is taking root in southern Africa—amidst violent eruption. To the impressive numerical growth which these movements have recently seen we must add also this: that once-named savage peoples are being salvaged from historical ruin. Amidst the violent racket of southern Africa, the political march of reason drags on. Within that cauldron of race and culture, the words and rhythms of the gospel continue to simmer.

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[14] Daneel, *Quest for Belonging*, 74.

[15] Daneel, *Quest for Belonging*, 74-5.

[16] Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity*, 217.

[17] Schillebeeckx, "The Role of History," 311-32.

The Stewardship of the Family

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Someone has defined stewardship as what we do after we say, "I believe." The stewardship of the family certainly involves what we do after we say, "I do." The very God who created Eden's family and lived incarnate as one of Mary and Joseph's Nazareth family wants us to be stewards of the family. Parent Martin Luther saw its importance in ministry. It involves the congregation as marital community and the stewardship of life itself, the faith, the family unit, and the marriage vow of the covenant of fidelity.

In sin's neighborhood, the first arrivals on the Eden block, Adam, Eve, and sons Cain, Abel, and Seth, struggled to keep the family together. Matthew begins his story of the gospel by tracing the family lineage; Aunt Elizabeth and Uncle Zachariah play an important role. After finding out Mary was pregnant, Joseph considered divorcing her. God incarnate grew up in family and, while he was never understood, he was nevertheless loved and nurtured.

On the disciple team appear at least two sets of brothers, James and John, Peter and Andrew. Jesus tells the poignant story of a loving father whose family broke up when the youngest son went into the far country. He told another parable about two sons who disappointed their parents.

After going to his cousin John for baptism in the Jordan, and later in his own ministry, Jesus tells his listeners that his brothers and sisters are those who hear and do God's will. Uncle Barney seems to have an influence on John Mark. The Scripture is full of illustrations of the glory and struggle of family.

Stewarding the marriage covenant

At the conclusion of our marriage service, we pray, "Gracious God, you bless the family and renew your people. Enrich husbands and wives, parents and children more and more with your grace, that, strengthening and supporting each other, they may serve those in need and be a sign of the fulfillment of your perfect kingdom, where, with your son Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, you live and reign, one God through all ages of ages" (*Lutheran Book of Worship*, 204).

In the long overdue need to include contemporary single-parent and other kinds

of units in our concept of family, we may have neglected our enrichment of traditional marriage and our need to help spouses maintain their "covenant of fidelity." It is a ministry to be reclaimed.

We have a responsibility to be stewards of the marriage covenant. We live in a day when the covenant is attacked from every side, and the temptations are tremendous to weaken and dissolve it. Faithfulness and lifelong fidelity must be rewarded very much like we preserve, conserve, and treasure other priceless possessions and natural resources.

The number of people who are divorced tripled to 16.7 million in 1993 from 4.3 million in 1970, according to the Census Bureau of the U.S.

When we bless the bride and groom with these words: "The Lord God, who created our first parents and established them in marriage, establish and sustain you, that you may find delight in each other and grow in holy love until your life's end" (*LBW*, 203), we see we have a ministry to implement and empower that blessing to be a reality with the bride and groom. The words in the ceremony continue: "With high praise we recall your acts of unfailing love for the human family..." (p. 204).

We pray for the bride and groom: "As members with them of the body of Christ, *use us to support their life together*; and from your great store of strength give them power and patience..." (p. 204). This is a precious gift that is available and given to a couple who decide to marry. Brides and grooms must be coached to see it as a gift and then nurture, preserve, and care for it like we would other gifts that we steward in our lives.

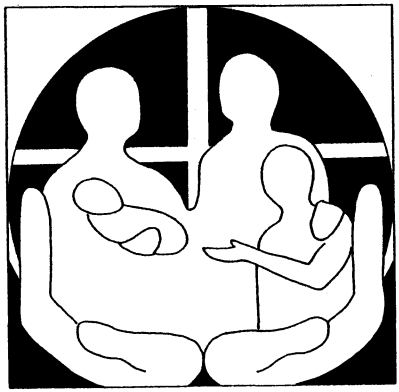
Martin Luther, in his "Table of Duties" in the Small Catechism, quotes 1 Peter under the husband's responsibilities. It's a beautiful concept of the giftedness of married couples: "...and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered" (1 Pet 3:7).

Stewarding the family unit

In addition to being good stewards of a covenant of fidelity, we must also be stewards of the family unit. I'm convinced that this is still the best way to care for each other in our culture and society. When Jesus tells the story of the Good Samaritan caring for the neighbor lying beaten in the ditch, it reminds me that we must also see each family member as that person in the ditch and in need of our loving care. We are probably the best ones to administer that care. It is a stewardship of family.

Social services delivery, education, welfare (if needed), good mental health, physical health, housing for the homeless, extra care needed in old age, socialization of children, and foster care for youth who need it, can be best administered through the family unit. It is an opportune place for ministry and opportunity for a broader stewardship practice.

The extended family serves as stewards of the culture, history, and wisdom to be passed down from one generation to the next. It is the repository of stories that interpret life's priorities, personalities, traditions, and relationships. It conserves and observes holidays, holy days, and life's accomplishments and anniversaries. It serves as teacher of generations of experience on how to parent the new born child, the elderly parent in need of special care again, and all ages in between. The family's stewardship includes dispensing of respect for the elders and patience with the immature. Manners, culture's taboos, customs, music, humor, and healing of broken relationships are all part of its stewarding re-



sponsibilities. Members of the family have a support system for grieving, loss, renewal, and mental and physical healing. It can be the primary care giver and steward of God's undeserved love and acceptance. The family, in whatever configuration, must steward a place to come home to and belong.

And we ought aggressively advocate for legislation which protects and preserves our wise cultural and religious heritage of living in family.

Commenting on recent Census Bureau statistics on the family, *US News and World Report* (August 1, 1994) claims: "Driving the trend, breakdown of family, are more births to teen moms and to older women who tire of waiting for a mate, as well as persistent high divorce rates. Consequences are troubling. Youngsters from single-parent homes are much more likely than dual-parent children to grow up poor, to fail in school and to become single parents themselves. And many more of them rely on welfare."

With the phenomenon of gift identification in our churches, discerning what gifts God has given to family members and empowering them to develop and use those gifts in their ministry in the world where they work, live, and play, is best done through the family unit. This means that the family becomes an instrument of the Holy Spirit that empowers each one to more fully realize his or her created potential. In a sermon on married life preached by Martin Luther in 1519, he proclaimed: "Every married person... consider the child nothing less than a precious, eternal treasure, entrusted to his [or her] protection by God so that the devil, the world, and the flesh may not steal or destroy it."[1] Luther adds, "Nor does Christendom suffer a greater harm from anything than it does from the neglect of children."

In 1529 Luther again explained the command in his large catechism. By this time Luther himself had become a father, and his interest in children was personal and immediate. "For if we want to have good and capable persons for both temporal and spiritual leadership, we must certainly spare no diligence, effort or cost in teaching and educating our children, that they may be able to serve God and the world."[2]

Stewarding the faith

There is also an important role of stewarding the faith and means of grace through our families. After the baptism of a child, we pray the following prayer: "O God, the giver of all life, look with kindness upon the fathers and mothers of these children. Let them ever rejoice in the gift you have given them. Make them teachers and examples of righteousness for their children. Strengthen them in their own Baptism so they may

[1] *What Luther Says*, ed. Ewald M. Plass (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), 141.

[2] *What Luther Says*, 140.

share eternally with their children the salvation you have given them, through Jesus Christ our Lord" (*LBW*, 124).

In Luke 2 we read about Joseph and Mary taking the 12-year old Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem. They were taking seriously their stewardship of that child, seeing to it that the next generation was taught about the faith. Martin Luther instituted the Small Catechism as a tool for parents to use in passing on the faith to their children.

There is also a stewarding of the faith that can take place by baptismal godparents that is yet to be realized in our churches. There is the possibility of a role of religious mentor and spiritual grandparent for those who share the responsibility of baptismal sponsor.

There is a medical strategy called "prophylactic medicine," which means that we anticipate the disease and weaknesses in our physical and emotional health that may attack us and take prophylactic measures to prevent them. Teenage pregnancy, drug and wealth addiction, sexual abuse, racism, selfishness and greed are examples of that which can be prevented by sound stewarding of the family. Certainly that element is a part of being a parent and grandparent, anticipating the attacks the power which works against God will bring upon our children as they mature in our culture.

It is within the family setting that we can best live out our Christian ethic and model a servant ministry and discipleship. In a sermon on married life in 1522 Luther spoke of being "God's agents in giving children not only temporal but eternal life. So you see how rich in good works the estate of marriage is. God lays souls into the lap of married people, souls begotten from their own body, on which they may practice all Christian works. For when they teach their children the Gospel, parents are certainly their apostles, bishops, and ministers."[3]

In the rite of affirming our baptism, we pray: "Continue to strengthen them with the Holy Spirit, and daily increase in them your gifts of grace: The spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord, the spirit of joy in your presence..." (*LBW*, 201). We then become stewards of these "gifts of grace" and only with God's help see that these gifts are available to all of the family members. It's being a living steward of the faith.

Being members of a family also means being stewards of life itself. We become the instrument through which creation's "breath of life," that holy breath that renewed Ezekiel's dry bones, and the wind of the Spirit at Pentecost, continues to blow across our family members. As a family steward and living in our present time, caring for our bodies is no longer a pious option. We are stewards of what St. Paul calls the temple of the Holy Spirit, our bodies. As stewards in a world that has difficulty distributing enough food produced for everyone, we must prayerfully consider when to conceive and how many children we can effectively steward. World population, now 5.7 billion, will rise to 8.5 billion by the year 2025. Family planning is no longer something we can ignore or fail to teach as stewards of the global family. We humans are becoming a menace to all other life and the non-human world. We are placing burdens on the environment that go beyond its carrying capacity. With the new discoveries being made in genetics, we must develop an ethic of gene stewardship. We also have big decisions to make about when human life ends.

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[3] *What Luther Says*, 907.

Our theology and lifestyle ought to show the preciousness and giftedness of life itself. Our faith reminds us that life does not end with death, and it is a pure gift while we live it out here.

In our families we can intentionally reaffirm the biblical doctrine of creation and learn to live within that ecological system. Our life styles can be moderated to ones which are sensitive to the needs of human beings worldwide and to the non-human world. We hand down to the next generation how to live responsibly in our global family.

Resource inheritance comes down upon us as we realize that our grandchildren and great-grandchildren will rely on our careful conservation and environmentally responsible living practices now. There is a stewarding of our money, how we get and spend it; the natural resources God has blessed us with in our generation; and those non-human neighbors in the creation that need to be gently preserved and cared for as well.

"We must move beyond our moral concern for human beings to all forms of life," James D. Heffernan claims, and he continues by noting the difference between "a human-centered environmental ethic and a bio-centered ethic" and names the difference between shallow ecology and deep ecology. "We must practice in our stewarding of life itself a deeper ecology."[4]

According to an Associated Press release, "In his or her lifetime, a child will:

Go through 12,000 paper grocery bags

Drive 700,000 miles, using more than 28,000 gallons of gasoline

Wear and discard 250 shirts and 115 pairs of shoes

Use and discard 27,500 newspapers, 3,900 weekly news magazines and 225 pounds of phone directories

Purchase a dozen automobiles

Make 110,250 pounds of trash

Go through 28,627 aluminum beverage cans, weighing 1,022 pounds, of which 17,700 will be recycled

Consume enough commercially produced electricity to burn 16,610 pounds of coal

Burn out 750 light bulbs

Account for the use of 69,250 pounds of steel and 47,000 pounds of cement

Eat 8,486 pounds of red meat

Eat 17,591 eggs (equal to the lifetime production of 35 chickens)"[5]

This rampant consumerism might best be modified within the family unit as we live out our responsibilities of being stewards of all creation.

Congregation as marital community

There is also a congregational stewarding of the marriage vows' "covenant of fidelity" and the family unit itself. It's interesting that the law courts now talk about "husband and wife and their *marital community*." So, the congregation becomes a steward of the marital family. Prayer at the close of the marriage ceremony says: "As members with them of the body of Christ, use us to support their life together..." (*LBW*, 204). To take this seriously as a congregational unit means we would engage in extensive premarital counseling, marriage enrichment, Christian education in parenting, youth ministry and advocacy for the family as a unit in our community and country. Some of this can be done in coalition with other congregations and by recruiting specialists in those areas.

In an annual report compiled by the

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[4] James D. Heffernan, *John Muir's Life and Work* (University of NM Press, 1993), 104.

[5] *The Oakland Tribune* (June 7, 1992).

Census Bureau titled "Marital Status and Living Arrangements," it is obvious that out-of-wedlock births are still on the rise. Such births soared by more than 70% from 1983 to 1993. According to the bureau, 6.3 million children, or 27% of all children under age 18, lived in 1993 with a single parent who had never married, up from 3.7 million in 1983.[6]

The *Springfield News-Sun* (November 16, 1994) carried an Associated Press article from Washington, D.C.: "Student survey shows parents' work not finished." The 25th annual survey of high achievers by *Who's Who Among American High School Students* found that one-quarter of the responding juniors and seniors said they had engaged in sexual intercourse. Nearly 35% of the sexually active teens said lack of a condom would not deter them, and 83% thought their risk of contracting AIDS was low or nonexistent. Nineteen percent of the responding students said they drink alcohol beverages at least monthly; 17% admitted to having stolen something from a store in the past five years; 78% said they had cheated in school.

Other surprising findings: "Teens were nearly five times more likely to smoke if they come from what they said were unhappy homes and twice as likely to drink enough to get drunk. Two percent of teens from what were characterized as happy homes had tried to commit suicide; the figure was 18% for those from unhappy homes."

These are startling differences between happy homes and unhappy homes.

"This year's survey offers ample evidence that parents' work is far from done, even when their kids' report cards are suitable for framing," said Paul Krouse, publisher of *Who's Who Among American High School Students*.[7]

We Christians in the church who are stewards of children and see the congregation as marital community aren't done either, even though our kids attend worship. As stewards of the family we certainly will want to be a good resource in sex education for all ages. We ought rethink our congregational program to involve much more intentional intergenerational events in order to avoid more fragmentation when opportunities for worship, Christian education, and discipleship are offered.

> In our families we can intentionally reaffirm the biblical doctrine of creation and learn to live within that ecological system.

When we see our congregation as a marital community we will want to look at ways we can lighten the load and reduce the stress on the individuals and family units as they try to carry out their role as Christian, church member, and family member in a very stressful, frantic and fragmented society. We stand as stewards of God's shalom in a hectic time.

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[6] *Marital Status and Living Arrangements* (March 1993), Arlene J. Saluter, U.S. Department of Commerce Bureau of the Census, 11.

[7] *Sex With a Stranger? If Price is Right*, Associated Press release in Springfield, Ohio, *News-Sun* (Wednesday, November 16, 1994), 12.

Stewards of the gospel

There is good news that we can proclaim from our pulpits that applies to the struggles and needs of our congregational families. Grace, forgiveness, and the opportunity to start over is the theological glue which enables us to hold together as family. Paul writes in Ephesians 4: "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace." We can be effective stewards of this admonition as applicable to the family individuals as they deal with each other. Paul continues: "speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work." This is a beautiful concept which can apply to our life as a marital community, to the various families, and to our responsibility to provide these grace gifts to each other.

There is a biblical gospel to be proclaimed that is hopeful and instructive for family. From the liturgical seasons and lessons we can proclaim:

Advent: A call for repentance in the way we treat each other and for neglect that results from a lack of good priorities.

Christmas: Mary and Joseph stayed together even though their engagement was in serious trouble. The holy family struggled against great odds and made it through. That's good news!

Epiphany: Jesus went to his cousin John at the Jordan River for baptism. The holy parents brought Jesus to the temple in order to pass on the faith to the next generation and take the stewardship of their offspring seriously.

Lent: There is example after example of how sin destroys and forgiveness heals. We find the message of renewal of relationship as we humble ourselves before the cross.

Easter: New life is possible out of chaos. We can start over. Joy can come from pain. We are the Easter people and thus enabled and empowered to live as family.

Our congregational stewarding of families can point the way for them to turn their baptismal water into wine.

Pentecost: The spirit which God wants to give to us can be the very equipment used to live our life now. Our faith is not to just get us saved for eternity, but is to use to live with each other in the present.

Those teachings of Jesus during the Pentecost season, such as radical, undeserved love and forgiveness; peacemaking; serving others; the blessedness of humility; the joy of seeking the lost; and the proper consideration of wealth and money, will all help our families live out the wisdom of Jesus. There is the story of Jesus turning water into wine at a family event in Cana. Our congregational stewarding of families can point the way for them to turn their baptismal water into wine when the wine runs out in their marriage (as Luther claimed it does).

Romans Revisited: Once More Amazed

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Krister Stendahl in an article entitled "Paul Among Jews & Gentiles"[1] insists that we need to stop taking Paul's letters (or portions of those letters) out of context. Stendahl suggests that we have often missed the original intention of Paul's letters by imposing on them our own preconceived notion of what Paul's purpose was supposed to be, e.g., to expound some doctrine such as justification by faith. Stendahl writes:

> We think that Paul spoke about justification by faith, using the Jewish-Gentile situation as an instance, as an example. But Paul was chiefly concerned about the relation between Jews and Gentiles—and in the development of this concern he used as one of his arguments the idea of justification by faith....
>
> Such a shift in [our] focus and perception blocks our access both to the original thought and original intention of Paul.[2]

If this insight is applied to Romans, Stendahl says,

> What is the Epistle to the Romans about? It is about God's plan for the world and how Paul's mission to the Gentiles fits into that plan.[3]

And again:

> The real center of gravity in Romans is found in chapters 9-11, in the section about the relation between the Jews and the Gentiles, the mystery of which has been revealed to Paul.[4]

Notice, according to Stendahl, Paul's primary concern was to write about the relation between Jews and Gentiles and how they fit into God's plan of salvation.

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[1] Krister Stendahl, "Paul Among Jews and Gentiles," in *Paul among Jews and Gentiles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976). For a summary of various approaches to the interpretation of Romans see *WORD & WORLD* (Theology For Christian Ministry), Fall 1976. James Nestigen's article, "Major Shifts in the Interpretation of Romans," gives an overview of medieval interpretation. Robert Jewett, "Following the Argument of Romans," offers a different perspective from Stendahl's and mine. See also Calvin Roetzel, "Sacrifice in Romans 12-15," for a helpful overview of some of the more recent interpretations of Romans as well as Roetzel's own insights.

[2] Stendahl, "Paul Among Jews and Gentiles," 3.

[3] Stendahl, 27.

[4] Stendahl, 28.

While one might disagree with some of the particulars of Stendahl's argument (e.g., I'm still not convinced that chapters 9-11 are "the center of gravity" for Romans), Stendahl is right-on regarding his thesis. Romans does indeed deal primarily with Jews and Gentiles, i.e., how they both fit into God's plan of salvation and how they therefore ought to live together in Christian community.

With this in mind, let us consider an overview of Romans—keeping in mind that it is not the purpose of this essay to offer a complete commentary on Romans but simply to offer an overview, with some parts being looked at more carefully than others. After summarizing how Paul's argument unfolds in relation to the Jewish-Gentile issue, I will then apply some of these insights to the current controversy regarding homosexuality and the church.

The text

After extending his greetings to the Romans and expressing his desire to visit, Paul declares: "I am not ashamed of the gospel: it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (1:16; notice how Paul immediately includes both Jews and Gentiles). It is significant that this statement immediately precedes Paul's further comment that "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness..." (1:18). Notice the real tension between the opening statement about the gospel and salvation (v. 16) and the second statement about God's wrath (v. 18). However, this tension is transcended in a third alternative, namely, that God's grace is triumphant even over God's wrath or judgment. We might speak of this in the Barthian sense of "the triumph of grace." Here the gospel is the power of salvation for all who believe, regardless of who they are or what they've done. Clearly, that is the meaning and emphasis of these opening paradoxical statements. Paul then lists some of the sins and characteristics that go along with the aforementioned "ungodliness." In the course of making this list, Paul refers to homosexuality (1:26ff.).[5] However—we need be clear—it would be a mistake to read more into this than is actually there. Paul is not singling out homosexuality, along with a few other "select sins," for particular condemnation. Neither is this a description of the universality of sin or "the universal human need for salvation: the plight of man"[6] which is more fully described in 1:18–3:20. Paul here is quite consciously describing some of the behavior that would have been rather common in the libertine atmosphere of the Gentile-pagan world. He points out that the Gentiles are guilty of "ungodliness" and thus subject to God's wrath as declared in 1:18. In other words, Paul has here indicted the Gentiles, half of

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[5] I want to make two points in this footnote.

a. There are those in the gay movement who would protest the inclusion of homosexuality in any list of "sins," just as there are others who would insist on it being on the list. However, because our purpose is simply an overview of Romans, let us put that debate aside until later in the essay and simply acknowledge Paul's statement for what it is and try to understand its meaning in its larger context.

b. Arland Hultgren of Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota, delivered a brief lecture (Feb. 23, 1994) which summarizes some of the different expressions of homosexual behavior Paul may have encountered in his travels and to which Paul may have been referring in Rom 1:26-27. A paper by Dr. Hultgren may be forthcoming on the topic.

[6] F. W. Beare, "Romans, Letter to," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 4 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962):115ff.

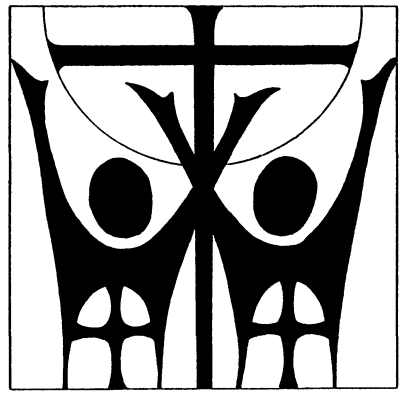
the "Jew and Gentile" equation. This leads us to the next chapter.

Lest there be any tendency on the part of some towards self-righteousness due to their following some written code (e.g., the Jews and Jewish law—2:17-24) while others do not, Paul quickly dispels any such presumption and, at the same time, warns against judgmentalism. He asks, "While you preach against stealing, do you steal?" (2:21b). It would appear that some had been keeping "the letter of the law" but breaking "the spirit of the law"—its intent—by taking what didn't rightly belong to them. Paul in effect asks: Do you do the very things you preach against, e.g., thievery? Do you preach against adultery but then live lustfully and/or visit prostitutes? (cf. 2:21ff.).

Having convicted the Jews of duplicity in this regard, Paul warns them against judgmentalism "because you, the judge, are doing the very same things" (2:1b), i.e., being ungodly (1:18, 5:6). If you are breaking the law, if you are not living up to God's standard of holiness, you are by definition "ungodly." You are, therefore, subject to God's judgment as well as God's wrath, and your circumcision will be of no value to you. In addition, if you are still going to try to rely on circumcision, you must also fully keep the whole law (2:25). That is what is necessary in order to be truly "godly" and save yourself, which is not only humanly impossible but is also the chief human temptation (Gen 3:5).

Therefore, Paul concludes that real circumcision is not so much about ritual and outward change (2:28, i.e., scarification) as it is about inward change and transformation. Real circumcision is a matter of the heart (2:29; cf. Deut 10:16), the seat of all conduct and volition.[7]

Paul's analysis leaves no one unscathed. "All, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin," Paul insists (3:9). This leads



him further to conclude that "since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are now justified by [God's] grace as a gift..." (3:23-24). While this certainly could in part be understood as a description of and response to a "universal need of salvation." The real point is that neither Jews nor Gentiles have anything to brag about (see 3:27 re. Jews, and 11:18ff. re. Gentiles). Both, being ungodly, are subject to God's wrath and thus both are in need of God's grace which is given, not because it is deserved or earned, but simply as a gift.

In the course of laying all this out, Paul enters into a discussion of the place of the Jews as the chosen keepers of the oracles and promises of God (ch. 3), as well as the place of Abraham, the "father" of the Jewish people (ch. 4). In both cases it is underscored that both Abraham and the Jewish people are chosen on the basis of God's grace. God by grace initiated the covenant with Abraham.

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[7] Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. III, article on "kardia," trans Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 605-13.

> 'Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.' Now to one who works, wages are not reckoned as a gift but as something due. But to one who without works trusts him who justifies the ungodly, such faith is reckoned as righteousness. (4:3b-5)

Therefore, just as Abraham was chosen by God's graceful initiative, so too are we all—Jews and Gentiles alike—chosen by grace. Indeed, even though God's wrath has been revealed against all ungodliness (1:18), our faith is in the One who "justifies the ungodly" (4:5), i.e., the One who "died for the ungodly" (5:6), Jew and Gentile alike. "God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.... For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life" (5:8, 10), even to the extent that "where sin increased, grace abounded all the more..." (5:20).

In short, it has to be clear from all this that if even sinners, the ungodly and enemies of God are reconciled to God via God's graceful initiative in Christ, then the emphasis is entirely on grace, even to the extent that "[nothing] will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." (8:38-39)

Understandably, some might raise a red flag here protesting that this sort of free-flowing grace might appear to give "carte blanche" to all sorts of licentiousness and promiscuity.[8] Others might conclude, "[Why not] continue in sin that grace may abound?" (6:1) "By no means!" Paul answers (6:2a). Such an attitude completely misses the point! It misses the meaning of grace and what it means to be in Christ. "Do you not know that... we have been buried with [Christ] by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life" (6:4)?

Notice that Paul does *not* say: as Christ was raised from the dead, we too will some day be raised from the dead. That is implied in 6:5, but here he says, "we too might walk in newness of life." There is a change or transformation that takes place in the believer, i.e., in his/her will, awareness, and life orientation. Thus, the believer not only wants to do what is right, good, and caring as such characteristics flow more readily from his/her heart, but also the believer cannot any longer be cavalier about the

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[8] Roetzel, "Sacrifice in Romans 12-15" (n. 1), suggests that a major reason Paul wrote Romans was to provide for himself an opening with the Roman Christians who perhaps had been biased by Jewish opposition to Paul's gospel of grace. "[It is likely that] Paul's version of the Gospel outside the law was perceived by the Jews as an attempt to woo Jews away from the ancestral traditions" (p. 413). In their opposition and their fear, they accused Paul of antinomianism. They accused him of undermining the law and morality. Roetzel continues, "At several points in Romans Paul shows he was stung by the charge that his gospel of grace undermined moral behavior. Enough evidence existed to give some substance to the charge. In Corinth and Philippi in particular, some understood salvation by grace outside the law to mean that all things were lawful (1 Cor 10:23). Certain libertines appeared to anticipate Herod's caricature of grace by W. H. Auden: 'I like committing crimes. God likes forgiving them. Really, the world is admirably arranged.' 'Is that where Paul's gospel leads?' the critic was bound to ask. Paul's sarcasm is unmistakable in Romans 3:8: 'And why not do evil that good may come?—as some people slanderously charge us with saying.' In 6:1–7:6 Paul again returns to this issue for a sustained rebuttal. Drawing on images familiar to his readers—baptism, slavery, and marriage—Paul answers the charge that his gospel encouraged immoral behavior."

To orient one's life around the creature rather than the Creator is not only idolatrous but also foolish self-deception.

depth and reality of sin. Sin is taken too seriously, as is the call to be transformed into the likeness of Christ (2 Cor 3:18).

Likewise, the believer cannot be apathetic about sinful behavior nor indifferent about the human tendency to enslave ourselves to promiscuity or other forms of addictive behaviors. To put it in the words of a wise parent, "You know better than that!" To orient one's life around sin is death (7:23-24). To orient one's life around the creature rather than the Creator is not only idolatrous but also foolish self-deception (1:25). "But the free gift of God *is* eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (6:23b). Thus, being cavalier about sin and simply giving in to licentiousness and promiscuity are an impossibility for the true believer because, if you have been redeemed from your slavery to sin, how could you possibly give yourself over again to another form of slavery, whether passion, legalism, flesh, or anything else? You are a new person! You are not your own, "you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body" (1 Cor 6:16-20)!

Paul then proceeds to discuss the place of the law which, according to his scheme of things, can be seen to have both a positive role as a teacher, custodian and guide (Rom 7:7, Gal 3:24ff.), but also a negative role in the sense of being an oppressive burden. This paradoxical experience of the law's duality leads even Paul to admit to his own experience of struggling under sin in spite of the guidance of the law.[9] He writes:

> I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.... Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! (7:15-20, 24-25)

Even though we are free in Christ (6:22, cf. Gal 5:1), and have the instruction of the law to guide us (7:7-12), we are not free from the reality of sin under which we continue to struggle and suffer. And not only that, we also fail. We fall short (3:23). It is like there is a great tug of war going on in us between

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[9] As an aside, it might be helpful to note that Paul in Romans, whether consciously or not, speaks of "law" in four different ways. The first is the law of God. The second is the law of sin/flesh. The third is law in the sense of religious law, namely Jewish law and tradition. Fourth, Paul speaks of the law of the spirit of life in Jesus Christ (see 7:25–8:8). These are not always entirely distinct from one another but it may be helpful for our purposes to distinguish between them.

The law of God is simply God's demand for righteousness (8:7). It is God's demand that we measure up to what God wants for us (cf. Amos 7:7ff.). The problem, of course, has been that there have been so many different understandings of what this means. Does God

our desire to follow the will of God, and the power that sin with its impulses has over us. Indeed, it is a war we not only often lose in spite of our best intentions, but we are also taken as prisoners of war. Paul confesses, "I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members." (7:23)

Notice that Paul has simply been describing our experience as Christians of the paradoxical nature of reality. In Christ we

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want us to be righteous vis à vis some written code of laws and traditions (as in some expressions of Judaism in Paul's day or Christian fundamentalism today), or does God want us to be righteous by being in a loving, trust-oriented relationship with Him? Paul clearly prefers the latter.

The law of sin (8:2b; which can be spoken of using a variety of metaphors, e.g., being tainted or defiled, missing the mark, or brokenness, etc.) begins with the separation that human beings feel from God. It is not only that we, with all of creation, experience longing for God (8:22ff.), but it is also that we therefore try to go it alone without God. Likewise, this can be called the law of the flesh (8:5). To be clear, it is not that flesh is evil in and of itself, but that flesh is the seat of all human impulses and passions. The flesh, especially when it is at the center of our being, when we worship the creature rather than the Creator (1:25), has its own set of laws or characteristics. The law of the flesh is to try to go it alone and to act on our own impulses, whether that be an impulse to pleasure (8:5a), or an impulse to try to justify oneself before God and humanity. This is why the impulse to justify oneself is like worshiping the creature rather than the Creator. It is to forget who we are as creatures in the face of the Holy One and to try to take the Creator's role upon ourselves thereby making ourselves enemies of God and God's plan (an enmity which only Christ can overcome—5:10; Eph 2:14ff. On this last point see Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. VII, article on "sarx," trans. Geoffrey Bromiley, p. 128: "As in the OT, however, the decisive antithesis is between God and man.... This is to be understood in light of the OT antithesis between the omnipotent Creator and the feeble creature.")

The law as religious law and tradition may be, as we have seen above, a custodian/teacher (Gal 3:24) for us amidst all the ambiguity of life. It may also be a guide or rule for us in fostering the growth of our relationship with God (law of God). However, it might also be a temptation for us to try to do what we cannot do, namely, to justify ourselves. In the later sense, it becomes an expression of the law of the flesh. It becomes a tool of that irrepressible human impulse to usurp for ourselves that which rightly belongs to God. It becomes an expression of the human tendency to worship the creature (self-effort) rather than the Creator.

Lastly, the law of the spirit of life in Jesus Christ (8:2a). When one has tried to do it all alone, and when one has been encountered either by the impossibility of fulfilling God's righteous demand (3:9-20), or by the holiness of God (11:33ff.), one becomes mindful of the poverty of every human effort towards self-justification. It is there, in the midst of the paradoxical struggle between the call to righteousness (God's law) and the awareness that one inevitably falls short (3:23ff.—the law of sin), that one either falls into despair (7:24) or comes to a new awareness that God has done for us what we, with or without the law, cannot do (8:3). All human arrogance and presumption are crushed and we are raised to a new life based on (pardon the contradiction in terms) the law of love. Just as life of the flesh has its own set of laws or characteristics that govern the individual, so too does life of the spirit (13:8; cf. 1 Corinthians 13). It is life characterized by patience, love, kindness, hopefulness, etc. (Gal 5:22ff.).

Life in the Spirit is life based on the confidence that the love of God will never fail (8:39). In spite of our groaning, and the groaning of all creation, the Spirit of God ever intercedes for us, longs for us (8:15ff.,.26ff.) just as we long for God. In spite of what is at times the appearance of our being like sheep to be slaughtered, nothing can separate us

are free (Gal 5:1), yet we are still in this world, in the flesh, and in the grip of sin. As Luther put it, we are *simul justus et peccator.*[10]

Sin can here be understood in two ways, both as the condition into which we are born, and the reality that we contribute to that condition by our actions, words, and attitudes. However, it is crucial to note that in spite of the fact that this experience of sin's inescapable and comprehensive nature might easily lead one to despair—"Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (7:24)—Paul doesn't stop there. He concludes with a doxology because God has done in Christ what we, in the grip of sin, could not do for ourselves, i.e., redeemed and justified us. "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (v. 25)

Having made clear that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (3:23), and also that, in spite of our wretchedness, nothing can separate us from the love of God (8:37-39), Paul then moves into chapters 9-11, which are possibly the most difficult to understand in all of Romans. Here Paul is not only addressing the question of God's plan for the Jews in light of their disbelief (i.e., How can Jews be saved when they have rejected Christ?), but he raises some other difficult issues including the sovereignty of God and predestination (cf. 8:28ff.).

Paul expresses his heartfelt desire that the people of Israel might come to a righteousness that is based on faith rather than law.

Paul expresses his heartfelt desire that the people of Israel might come to a righteousness that is based on faith rather than law. He addresses the issue of how the Jews (half of Stendahl's original equation) fit into God's plan of salvation. How is it that they are God's chosen people, God's covenant people, and yet they do not believe? Does this mean God's word has failed? (9:6) Has God revoked His call? (11:29) Were the Jews called only to be rejected? Are some persons or groups created only to be condemned? Is God whimsical or un-

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from the love of God in Christ Jesus. We can therefore live with hope (8:24ff.) as those who are "more than conquerors through Him who loved us" (8:37), as persons who are free to discover the ways of faith, love, grace and compassion.

The implication of all this for the Romans is that both Jews and Gentiles ought to put aside the arrogance of their respective positions. They are to live no longer as slaves to the laws of sin, flesh, religious tradition or self-righteousness. Neither are they to be oppressed by God's demand for righteousness, which cannot be fulfilled by subscribing to some legalistic code, but can only be fulfilled by living in a covenant relationship with God. Instead, Jews and Gentiles are to live together in a way that reflects life in the Spirit, life "under the law of love" (the "new commandment"—Jn 13:34), Paul says. He then adds that to do so fulfills all the commandments. (See also Gal 5:22ff. and 1 Corinthians 13.)

[10] For a discussion of "simul justus et peccator" see Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 242, esp. n. 82.

Paul calls us to have a transformation of consciousness and have an honest assessment of ourselves.

just? (9:14ff.) "By no means!" (11:1) "The gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable," Paul insists (11:29).

While certainly it is true that God can do with creation whatever God wishes, just as a potter can do with the clay whatever s/he wants (9:15, 21); and while it is the case that the true children of Abraham are not necessarily children of the flesh but are children of the promise (9:8), i.e, those who have been grasped by the gospel; and while it is so that the Jews have heard God's promise and yet have not believed (10:14-21), Paul does not stop there. He reminds his readers that he himself is a descendent of Abraham. Indeed, one wonders if this is not an implied reminder that he, Paul, was not only a Jew, but also a Pharisee and a persecutor of the church (Phil 3:4-9; Gal 1:13). And yet, while he was doing so, God called him. Will God not also find a way through the most recalcitrant hearts in Israel? And furthermore, Paul says, if it were not for Israel's rejection, the gospel might not have come to the Gentiles (11:13ff., 28-32; the second half of Stendahl's equation). Thus, Paul uses an image similar to Jesus' "true vine" image (Jn 15:1) as he seems to say: Remember, O Gentiles, that you too were called in the midst of your disobedience and "grafted" on to the tree of faith by grace. Therefore, do not try to be wise in your conceit. Do not be haughty.

> If you [Gentiles] have been cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these natural branches be grafted back into their own olive tree. (11:24)
>
> And so *all* Israel will be saved.... Just as you [Gentiles] were once disobedient to God but have now received mercy because of their [Israel's] disobedience, so they have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you, they too may receive mercy. For God has consigned all to disobedience, that [God] may be have mercy on all. (11:26, 30-32)

Paul's emphasis is twofold. First, the Gentiles have no reason to be haughty or arrogant simply because of their election and inclusion. Secondly, God will find a way to redeem all who have been disobedient.

God found a way via Israel's disobedience to include the Gentiles in spite of their own disobedience. Therefore, will not God also find a way not only to include all of Israel (11:26), but also to have mercy on *all*? (11:32).

Response to God's mercy

After spending eleven chapters declaring and expounding the good news of God's unbounded grace, Paul makes a shift in emphasis to spend the last five chapters of Romans talking about how we should therefore live in response to this marvelous gift. As one commentator puts it, "Nowhere else is the transition from doctrine to exhortation so definite and... so abrupt as here."[11]

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[11] John Knox, ROMANS, *Interpreter's Bible*, ed. G. Buttrick (Nashville: Abingdon, 1952-57), vol. 9:578ff.

Paul begins his exhortation by challenging us to present our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. He calls us to have a transformation of consciousness and have an honest assessment of ourselves, not thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought (12:1-3).

But why would Paul raise these issues at this point? Remembering that Paul, according to Stendahl, is addressing the relation between Jews and Gentiles, and was particularly concerned that they had been treating one another with disdain, each trying to make the other conform to their own style, it is not surprising that Paul would confront some of these issues more directly now that he has reminded them of how they were both included in God's plan in the first place, namely, by grace! Therefore, how should they respond to and relate with one another? Paul says, "Let love be genuine!" (12:9) "Owe no one anything except to love one another... [for] love does no wrong to a neighbor" (13:8,10). Thus, we ought to relate to one another out of a respect that comes from having "put on the Lord Jesus Christ, [making] no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires." (13:14)

But what does it mean to "put on Christ" and to love one another? It means having attitudes that are the opposite of "making provision for the flesh to gratify its desires." Provision for the flesh means not only the pursuit of pleasure, but also the drive to justify oneself and have one's own way regardless of its impact on others. Thus, in addition to not engaging in licentiousness, reveling, debauchery, quarreling and jealousy (13:13), putting on Christ also means being patient and understanding, especially with those who are weaker in the faith (15:1). Love means you do not do what will cause the weaker person to stumble or fall (14:13b). You don't flaunt your freedom in the gospel, whether by eating certain foods or engaging in other behaviors (14:14ff., 21), in a way that those less mature in faith can't understand and can't handle. On the other hand, neither will you be judgmental (14:13a), but instead will "pursue what makes for peace and mutual upbuilding." (14:19)

Isn't it interesting that Paul would make such comments, especially in light of the tensions that existed between Jew and Gentile? Equally interesting is the fact that Paul charges both Jews and Gentiles to show hospitality to one another as Christ has shown hospitality to us all (15:7). But, how did Christ do this?

> ...Christ has become a servant of the circumcised on behalf of the truth of God in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. (15:8-9a—notice again, Jews and Gentiles are both addressed.)

In short, because both Jews and Gentiles have been justified by grace, so too ought they live together grace-fully.

Paul concludes the letter by reiterating his desire to visit (15:22ff.) and by sending greetings to a number of people. However, before concluding entirely, he adds one final warning that they

> take note of those who create dissensions and difficulties, in opposition to the doctrine which you have been taught; avoid them. For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites.... (16:17-18a)

So, what is the doctrine that the Romans were taught and how is it now being opposed? Is it not the doctrine of grace that is being opposed by those, whether Jews or Gentiles, who are arrogantly trying to force their ways upon the other group? Watch out, Paul seems to say, because by doing so you nullify the grace, love, and patience by

which you were called and with which you, both Jews and Gentiles alike, ought to live together in spite of your differences. Grace ought to characterize your style of living together and not the arrogant and haughty pushiness with which Paul has had to deal.

In addition, when Paul speaks of those who are serving their own appetites rather than Christ, isn't he referring precisely to the arrogant pushiness of those who are interested only in justifying themselves by forcing their ways on others? Isn't that a form of feeling validated or justified only when others are forced into being "just like us"? Do not we all have a hunger or appetite not only to justify ourselves but also to do so by controlling, coercing and manipulating others? Isn't that a form of living by the law of sin/flesh as opposed to the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus? (8:2) Therefore, Paul encourages Jews and Gentiles alike to put aside behaviors, attitudes, and appetites of the flesh that cause dissensions and difficulties and instead seek to embody more fully the grace they have been given.

Application

This rather lengthy excursion through the letter to the Romans brings us to the difficult task of applying what we have learned to the issue at hand, namely the ELCA's wrestling with homosexuality via its study of human sexuality, as well as to those on both sides of the debate. Beginning with Paul's reminder to both Jews and Gentiles that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," the first thing all sides of the sexuality controversy should keep in mind is an attitude of humility, remembering how they themselves became partakers of the gospel. While the particulars of our respective histories will differ from that of the Jews and Gentiles (as outlined in Romans 1 and 2), we dare not forget that our being in the church and partaking in the gospel is, nevertheless, entirely by grace! "You did not choose me; I chose you and appointed you," says the Lord of the church (Jn 15:16). And because "None is righteous, no, not one," we are reminded that we were not incorporated into the body of Christ on the basis of some "righteous" opinion we hold on this or that issue. Our pasts, just as those of the Jews and Gentiles, have been questionable and therefore we have no cause for arrogance nor judgmentalism. All of us, guilty of untold ungodliness, are deserving of wrath (1:18) and therefore can only hang our hats on the grace of the One who "justifies the ungodly" (5:6).

While on the one hand we all have been raised to new life through faith and hope in Christ (6:1-4), on the other hand we all continue to suffer and struggle under the reality of sin. Who, therefore, has the right to be haughty?

We ought to have humility and patience in our dealings with one another. This humility is based on the knowledge that, just as God found a way to incorporate both the Jews and Gentiles, so too will God find a way to incorporate those with opposing views on this subject. "For God has consigned all to disobedience, that God may have mercy on *all*" (11:32). And our patience acknowledges both the complexity of the issue and the fact that not everyone can or should be at the same point. Let us embody the patience Paul advocates in Romans 14.

Therefore, let us present ourselves (gay or straight) as a "living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God," ...be transformed by the renewing of our minds... not thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought to think (12:1-3). Let us "owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law"

(13:8). Let us no more pass judgment on one another (those who differ with you are not necessarily stupid or bad) but decide never to put a stumbling block in the way of another (i.e., don't flaunt your freedom in irresponsible ways—14:13). Beware of those who stir up dissensions by opposing the gospel of grace you have been taught, i.e., by cramming their opinions or agendas down your throats in unloving, inhospitable ways. And for Christ's sake [sic], be a grace-full community!

Whether or not one agrees with this overview of Romans and the interpretation offered, one cannot dispute Paul's words of caution both to those who would render judgments and to those who would dare to flaunt their freedom in the gospel in irresponsible or hurtful ways. One cannot help but think here of those who on the so-called "conservative" side of the fence would condemn all homosexuals, even those who live in faithful "monogamous" relationships, unless they remain completely celibate. On the other side of the fence we find those in the homosexual community who flaunt their orientation without regard for how it might impact others.

Paul, I think, would challenge both sides to consider what it means to love the other as Christ has loved us (Eph 5:1-2). Is it loving to condemn some persons to a life of loneliness and celibacy just to make the rest of us feel more comfortable? I think not. Did Jesus reach out and include those who were considered "the untouchables" of his day and culture? Yes! On the other hand, is it loving for some in the gay community to take an "in your face" attitude, even in the church, towards those who are uncomfortable with homosexuality, especially public displays of it?[12] Public displays of sexual activity, whether hetero- or homosexual, can be offensive, and Paul's admonitions would apply across the board

The first thing all sides of the sexuality controversy should keep in mind is an attitude of humility.

to both orientations. In all cases, Paul would ask what it means to live together as a community of grace, patience, tolerance, and love.

However, in response to those who fear that Paul's position as presented here might give *carte blanche* to all sorts of licentiousness, debauchery, and promiscuity (see 3:8), I would refer them to the comments made above regarding Rom 6:1ff. And by the way, these comments would refer to all forms of debauchery and promiscuity, heterosexual as well as homosexual. Again, Paul would ask how a person who has died and been raised to new life with Christ could possibly enslave him/herself to anything other than Christ, whether to another form of slavery, passions of the flesh, or whatever. Such enslavement would be, for Paul, an irrational impossibility that would,

[12] A 1993 "Gay Pride" parade, televised in the spring of 1994 by cable channel C-Span, showed that there are those who will and do flaunt their sexuality in public and distasteful ways. Of course, the entertainer "Madonna" has shown that this kind of behavior is not limited to homosexuals but is also practiced by hetero- and bi-sexuals, and is likewise offensive.

of course, eliminate the fear of debauchery and promiscuity.

There is another factor involved here. If authentic love is what is to characterize Christian community, how can anyone, whether hetero- or homosexual, possibly justify using another person who belongs to Christ? (1 Cor 6:15ff.; 7:23) How could you possibly dehumanize another person, even if he or she is willing, knowing that that person is created in the image of God and is an object of God's redemptive activity? How could you not care about the personhood of someone (or yourself) for whom Christ died? How could you use others promiscuously, or debase them, when you are called to love them, not in any trivialized fashion, but as described in 1 Corinthians 13 and Romans 13? Do you not know that if anyone is in Christ Jesus, that person "is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come" (2 Cor 5:17). Therefore, how could you who are called to be new through your baptism into Christ still act in such old (-Adam; 1 Cor 15:45), irresponsible ways?

It is clear that any form of licentiousness, debauchery, promiscuity, or whatever, whether homosexual or heterosexual, is condemned and excluded!

"Go and sin no more"

One more question begs to be addressed, namely, the question of whether or not Paul (or anyone else) should consider homosexuality a "sin." And, if it is a sin, ought we to be saying to homosexual persons, "go and sin no more"? (Jn 8:11) Whatever we say here will be subject to misinterpretation and distortion. So let us proceed cautiously.

We need first to clarify what is meant by the word "sin." First, it can refer to (a) the universal human condition, and (b) specific actions or behaviors that contribute to this broken reality. Secondly, one might describe this condition using a variety of metaphors such as missing the mark, being tainted, being enslaved, being under the power of death, brokenness, etc. However, whatever metaphor one uses for "sin," it must be understood that sin is the condition in which we live. The doctrine of original sin, albeit held in much disregard in some circles (e.g., Matthew Fox's *Original Blessing*), means nothing if not a simple description of the inescapable human condition. To the question, "What is the human condition?" the doctrine of original sin answers, "sin." We are inescapably broken, tainted persons who have missed the mark and who are enslaved under the power of death. Thus, to the question, "Can we in this life escape this condition and its consequences?" the answer is an emphatic "No!" (see Luther's "*De Servo Arbitrio*," i.e., "On The Bondage of the Will").

It has been said that Paul probably would consider homosexuality a sin, first, because it is seen by him as a deviation from God's created order and purpose (1:19), and second, because Paul saw it as a symptom of idolatry, that is, of worshiping the creature and impulse rather than the creator (1:25). On the other hand, it would seem that Paul would also say, and I would concur, that if we are going to designate one person's "sin" as particularly sinful (e.g., homosexuality), then we had better be careful lest in passing judgment on the other we condemn ourselves (2:1). For the question, as Paul and classical Christian thinking would remind us, is not "Do you sin?" but "*How* do you sin?" Again, it is precisely as ungodly sinners that Christ comes to us and dies for us! (5:6) We all stand before God simply as beggars in need of grace.

What we are to do with the oft quoted statement of Jesus, "go and sin no more" (Jn

8:11)? Let us consider this statement more in context lest our reading it in isolation lead to some distortion.

In context, we discover that Jesus was speaking to a woman who had been caught by some scribes and Pharisees in the act of adultery. These religious leaders, living by the legal code of the times, seemed to have mixed motivations in bringing the woman to Jesus. They not only wanted to test the orthodoxy of Jesus but also seemed to want to justify their own self-righteous indignation at her adultery, which was deserving of death according to the legal code of the times. After all, she had transgressed the law of Moses! Jesus, however, does not play by the same rules (or assumptions) and thus turns the tables on the woman's accusers by simply saying, "Let those who are without sin cast the first stone." Shocked and dismayed at having been forced into such naked honesty, all her accusers turn and leave because no one—then or now—is without sin.

So, if none of us is without sin, and sin is the condition in which we live, is it possible for us to "go and sin no more"?

As we saw earlier, even Paul himself admits that he often feels powerless and ineffective when it comes to his own desire to resist sin (see Rom 7:15-25, and the comments on that passage above). What specifically Paul is referring to here, we don't know. All we know is that he feels wretched about it (7:24). He further concludes, "if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me" (7:20). Paul seems keenly aware of how entangled he is in the reality of sin and that he seems unable to "go and sin no more."

Regarding this feeling of entanglement, there are many things today which would seem to substantiate it. For example, many people are ensnared by alcoholism and other addictions. We know that some are born with a genetic predisposition towards alcoholism and, if circumstances are right, those persons will become alcoholic. We also know that many alcoholics, at least at some level, want to quit drinking but they don't or can't. Clearly, Paul considers drunken behavior to be a sin (13:13; Gal 5:21; cf. Lk 21:34). What then are we to make of the admonition to "go and sin no more" when in some cases many people are powerless to change? (I am aware that admitting one's powerlessness is the first step of many 12-step programs of recovery. My point here is simply that to "go and sin no more" is more than merely an act of will.)

> The question, as Paul and classical Christian thinking would remind us, is not "Do you sin?" but "*How* do you sin?"

In addition Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, declares, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks on a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Mt 5:27-28—I suspect the Lord would agree if we were to read that statement to include women lusting after men as well as any other variations that might come to mind). Jesus offers a radically new understanding of the sins of lust and adultery. They are more than merely physical acts; they are an expression

of the state of the heart and mind of an individual at any given moment. Given this new understanding, is there anyone who is not guilty of adultery or lust? Can anyone avoid fleeting thoughts that would be, by Jesus' definition, "sinful," as these thoughts come upon us not only involuntarily but also contrary to conscious will?

The point is that honest introspection dictates that if not one of us can avoid lusting in his/her heart, then all are guilty of committing adultery. That being the case, we are drawn to several conclusions. First, even though we want to discern the difference between behaviors that are healthy and unhealthy, helpful or not helpful (see 1 Cor 12:10, Phil 1:9), we dare not be arrogant nor judgmental with regard to our own moral purity nor with regard to our attitudes and behaviors towards others. Secondly, simply because we have identified a particular behavior as sinful does not mean we have the ability to "go and sin no more" (again, see Luther's "*De Servo Arbitrio*").

There is a dimension to the reality of sin that goes far deeper than what is commonly perceived in conventional wisdom. True, some have learned to distinguish between sins of omission and sins of commission, but most people today continue to believe that sin, or the lack thereof, is merely a matter of the will.[13] But if willpower is the key factor regarding sin, then from a theological and practical perspective, what need have we of Christ and grace? In addition, if willpower is all that is needed to avoid sin, then why, after years of "positive thinking" and "possibility thinking," are so many persons who have committed themselves to this line of thinking unable to get their lives together? To be clear, this should not be construed as a blanket dismissal of Robert Schuller nor the value of a positive attitude. Neither is it to dismiss the importance of discipline and true efforts at self-improvement. It is simply to recognize that there are forces in our lives bigger or more powerful than conscious will and attitude.

It seems that we must more commonly recognize aspects of sin that are voluntary as well as those that are involuntary. For example, I can choose whether or not to rob a bank, but I cannot choose whether or not to have an impulse to greed, avarice, lust, hate, or whatever. In fact, I inevitably *will* lust, hate, etc.—the very things which Christ has identified as sin. Thus, regarding these "involuntary" sins, none of us has the spiritual authority or insight of Christ to command ourselves (or others) to "go and sin no more," even if we truly desire to do so. The old sayings "where there is a will there is a way" or "practice makes perfect" simply do not apply here. Indeed, isn't that Paul's point when he says, "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Rom 7:24)

What about homosexuality? Is it a sin? And, if so, are homosexuals to be told, "go and sin no more"?

Many more issues need to be considered before a satisfactory answer to these questions can be offered. For example, recent findings suggest that some forms of homosexuality are due to genetics or brain

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[13] The reader will please recall the indignation expressed by the "religious right" during Jimmy Carter's 1976 run for presidency when in an interview with "Playboy" magazine he commented on Matthew 5:28ff. and admitted that he had inwardly lusted after other women. That may not have been a wise confession politically, but it was refreshingly candid. However, the moral outrage that was expressed in response was due at least in part to the naiveté that exists in some circles regarding what it means to be born anew in Christ and the notion that willpower is the key factor with regard to sin. Such naiveté is contrary to Jesus' meaning in this passage.

> Simply because we have identified a particular behavior as sinful does not mean we have the ability to "go and sin no more."

physiology. Such persons would come by their homosexuality rather naturally. And if a person comes by homosexuality naturally, is it a sin?

Again, we need to add a caveat or two. First, scientific findings or "facts" are often fleeting. For example, while many of us subscribe to some form of an evolutionary theory, Darwin's original hypothesis has undergone considerable transformation over the years. Thus the Darwinian view, which was in its day a "new finding" regarded by many as "fact," is no longer simply "fact." If we are going to develop church policy based on recently discovered facts in the field of genetics, we may be building our house on sand.

Secondly, as already alluded to, there are a number of human behaviors and characteristics genetically inherited that are still not considered acceptable. We referred above to the inherited genetic predisposition to alcoholism. In addition, recent findings have shown that there may be an inherited genetic tendency towards aggressive behavior.[14] The point is that simply because a tendency is genetically inherited does not necessarily make it okay to act out the behavior. More research and debate need to take place before we can make that determination.

Lastly, even assuming that the genetic link to homosexuality is fully substantiated in the future, we would still be naive to assume that *all* homosexuals are so because of genetics. We know that there can be psychological factors that give rise to some homosexual behavior. Many individuals developmentally go through a homosexual stage and may even engage in some pubescent homosexual experimentation. It has also been proposed that some expressions of homosexuality are due to the bonding or lack thereof between parent(s) and child. We need to be careful lest we naively lump all homosexual behavior under one cause.

Should Paul or any of us consider homosexuality a sin? I have avoided answering this question for many of the reasons I have just outlined and also because, like Paul, I don't believe there is much to be gained by doing so. My own view is that Paul's reference to homosexual behavior in Romans 1 is so passing, and so much part of his larger purpose of depicting Gentile involvement in the universal reality of sin, that to focus on it, as many have, is to blow it all out of proportion.

Paul's view of creation flowing out of his Jewish heritage would undoubtedly lead him to conclude homosexuality is a sin. By mere observation, it is clear the genitals were created for a specific purpose, namely, procreation. God created us male and fe-

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[14] If memory serves, there was an article (last fall in The Morning News Tribune of Tacoma, WA a day or two after the media got a hold of and reported on the ELCA's draft document on human sexuality), which stated that genetic findings indicate that there is an inherited predisposition towards aggressive behavior.

male and said, "be fruitful and multiply" (Gen 1:28). Therefore, for the Jew of Paul's day, other tendencies and uses, even if pleasurable to some and genetically inherited, would be deviations from that divinely established procreative purpose. In addition, Paul would have been aware that many forms of homosexual expression were highly exploitative. Pederasty and other forms of what we today would call predatory behaviors were well known in Paul's day (see footnote 5b). Insofar as these are unabashedly lustful and care nothing for the personhood of the individual being exploited, they are clearly and hideously sinful. We all have lustful impulses of one form or the other and thus are sinners, but we do not all act upon them in an unrestrained manner. These deserve to be called sin, and those who engage in such behavior with such attitudes should be told to "go and sin no more."

But what about the person who is born with the genetic predisposition toward homosexuality (assuming this will be fully and satisfactorily substantiated) and who is living in a sexual relationship that is monogamous and faithful? What would Paul say to and about such persons? Are they sinners? By the definitions of sin with which we have worked throughout this essay, of course they are sinners! We all are! But I suspect that Paul would not single them out as any more sinful than heterosexual persons. Instead, he would give the same advice to them as has been outlined throughout this paper. Do not be haughty or arrogant. He would encourage them not to think more highly of themselves than they ought (Rom 12:3). He would encourage them not to flaunt their freedom in Christ, especially with "in-your-face" antics. He would encourage them to resist those who create and cause dissensions in the body of Christ by opposing the doctrine of grace that he, Paul, has tried so hard to articulate (16:17).

I sit before Paul's letter to the Romans once more amazed at the clarity of Paul's insights and how relevant they continue to be in addressing the vital issues of Christian community. I pray those insights will continue to guide us in our life together lest the arrogance of some destroy the unity for which many have worked so long.

The Rhetoric of the Gospel

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For thirty years, off and on, I have taught preaching at a seminary. I begin the required course with the question: What is good preaching? By the end of the discussion, I will have made clear my own answer: "Good preaching happens when the gospel of God in Christ is used by the Spirit to create and nurture the Christian life of the hearer and community." Or, more succinctly, "Good preaching is gospel preaching."

Over the years no one has ever given me grief at this point in the course. Who could be against preaching the gospel? By the end of the course, however, some of those same students are visibly irritated, if not in open rebellion, by my effort to hold their feet to the fire of what I call the rhetoric of the gospel—the task of framing the sermon in such a way that the gospel really gets said. I have met the same kind of resistance from veteran clergy when I served as a leader in many preaching workshops over the years.

Part of the impatience that some students feel stems from a conviction that an articulation of the gospel is not necessary in every sermon. After all, those who come to church regularly know the gospel. The gospel is offered in the liturgy, notably in the Eucharist that follows the sermon. Some preachers are concerned that the gospel will become a cliche through repetition. Others feel that from time to time different issues need attention in a sermon, for example "Five Steps To a Happy Marriage" or "Was the Gulf War Just?" There are times when some are inclined in the tradition of Amos to unleash only the Word of God's judgment on a stiff necked people. In other cases there is a more subtle reason for avoiding the gospel. The gospel is scandalous. Who can look at the sun for very long?

I have critical responses to all the reasons for the intentional omission of the gospel in a sermon. What concerns us here, however, is the *unintentional* omission of the gospel. Often what a preacher believes is good news, when it is *not* gospel, is in fact anti-gospel. That is to say, the preacher thinks she is preaching the Good News but is actually delivering bad news. Every preacher can cite John 3:16 as the gospel in a nutshell. That does not mean, however, that the preacher knows how to avoid omitting the gospel in a sermon on, say, responsible sexual behavior. The gospel in such an instance tends to be omitted because the

preacher has an ethical or life goal that is not viewed from the perspective of a faith need that would cry out for the gospel.

What kind of analysis can the preacher make to test for the presence of the gospel in the sermon? There are many metaphors

Preaching the gospel is proclaiming God's answer to the hearer's prayer and not simply exhorting the hearer to pray.

that convey the full power of the gospel to different people in different circumstances. There is a broad and narrow use of the term "gospel" in the traditions of the church. Yet, in spite of these differences, I believe there are at least three basic rhetorical principles that can be used to test the explicit gospel content of the sermon.

1. God as subject

You have no gospel without God as the subject of the sentences you construct to articulate the gospel. There is no more eloquent expression of the power of God at work than Psalm 23: "The Lord is my shepherd.... The Lord leads me.... The Lord is with me.... The Lord anoints my head with oil." The power of the psalm lies in the fact that God is the subject, the agent, the actor blessing the person in distress and in celebration.

The primary speech of preaching announces God as the subject addressing and acting upon the hearer. At times the address accuses the hearer. At other times it graces the hearer. If God is not the subject gracing the hearer, then no response in the form of trust in God active in love is possible from the hearer.

This observation may seem too obvious. However, the great temptation of preaching is to focus entirely on the hearer as subject. Preachers are intent on changing people or getting them to behave in a certain way. We tend to fix on what the hearer should or should not be doing. Even the word "preach" has come to mean telling people what to do and what not to do.

The wedding address is a case in point. The temptation is to raise up the beauty of the unconditional promise the couple are making. The temptation is to give last-minute advice on what it will take to make their marriage work. All of this may have value, but what the couple really needs is not the preacher's advice but God's grace in Christ. The preacher needs to think in terms of being God's presence to bless the couple.

Preaching the gospel is not admonishing. "Pray without ceasing, and God will answer you." Preaching the gospel is proclaiming God's answer to the hearer's prayer and not simply exhorting the hearer to pray. Ultimately the hearer is praying for God's Presence in his or her life. God's presence in Christ that the preacher proclaims is the answer to that prayer.

A preacher who exposes the hearer's identity crisis only to tell him "remember your baptism" has not preached the gospel. God is *not* the subject of that sentence. Preaching is to be a means of grace for the hearer. When the preacher holds up what God did for the hearer in baptism, the gospel is proclaimed. Luther found great solace in remembering, "I have been baptized." The

source of his solace lay in the passive voice: He *was* baptized. He remembered what *God* did to and for him. The grace-filled action of God in Christ toward him was the unshakable ground of Luther's identity and activity.

There is no way to have an explicit gospel proclamation without God as the subject of the sentence that seeks to grace the hearer in Christ. If no such rhetoric is present, then the rest of the sermon leads the hearer either into delusion or despair.

2. *God's work in Christ*

Sometimes preachers believe that the gospel was preached because the word "gospel" was used. The word gospel is a theological abstraction that means different things to different people and often conveys no meaning at all. In order to proclaim the gospel, the preacher has to proclaim God as the subject at work in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ.

The Word of God is the incursion of God into human life by which the work of God gets done. The gospel word must point to God's coming in Christ and the work God accomplished in raising the crucified Christ from the dead. Proclaiming that Word of God is the Spirit's means of creating and sustaining the Christian life and community.

Once again, this may seem all too obvious. But the gospel story of God in Christ often is not told in sermons. Preachers habitually speak of God's grace with no mention of God's deed in Christ that is the ground, source, and embodiment of that grace to the hearer.

"Smile. God loves you." This is ersatz gospel if the preacher fails to tell the story of Jesus that grounds and verifies that truth. After all, there is nothing sentimental about the love of God, for God also says in earnest, "I hate your solemn assemblies." Indeed, God does hate that lovely worship in that lovely church when justice is not being done by those lovely people.

How does a preacher dare to address God's scalding word, which condemns the hearer, and still speak of God's unconditional grace? The answer for Christians is God's deed of justification in raising the crucified Christ from the dead.

The gospel is not necessarily present when Jesus tells the parable of the Good Samaritan or even when the story of Jesus blessing the children is told. In order to declare what that blessing is, you need to relate it to the cross and the empty tomb. If you had to tell the story of Jesus blessing the children to the children dying in Rwanda, you would need to give sufficient reason for them to trust its truth. The only truth we have that is full of grace in the face of cruelty, injustice, and meaningless suffering is "God raised the crucified son of God from the dead."

Consider the beautiful story of Jesus at the home of Simon the Pharisee forgiving the woman who loved extravagantly (Lk 7:36-50). If this story is isolated from the story of God's deed in raising the crucified Christ, it becomes a sentimental moralistic tale.

Luke's story raises a question that cannot be answered simply by telling *this* story. By what authority does Jesus presume to convey God's final verdict of forgiveness here and now? This was a scandal to our Lord's opponents. The basis for this authority calls for explaining why it was necessary for Jesus to suffer and die, and proclaiming what God was up to in raising Jesus from the dead. The authority and validity of proclaiming the promise, "In Christ's name, I forgive your sins" is grounded in truth by announcing what God did in the unique event of raising Jesus from the dead.

A danger in pure narrative preaching is to tell the story of Jesus forgiving a woman without telling it as a story of the risen Christ who is God's self sacrifice for the forgiveness of sin. When this connection is not made, Jesus is used as teacher, model, and motivator—but not as the One through whom God makes all things new by bringing God's eschatological verdict of forgiveness here and now.

Narrative preaching is important, but the question is which narrative? It is not enough to tell a story about Jesus from Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John apart from the story of the gospel, that is, what God was doing in that Jesus that the Gospels portray. The entire New Testament is a witness of faith in the risen Christ. Every story of Jesus received its faith meaning in the light of the climax of that story: God's raising of the crucified Christ from the dead. Every text from the four Gospels is an Easter text. Every Sunday is an Easter Sunday. Every sermon is implicitly an Easter sermon.

What God did in raising Christ from the dead is a many splendored work: God reconciled the world to God's self, justified the impious, liberated the captive, vanquished the demonic powers, adopted a new family, conquered death with life, made all things new. Telling this story is the Spirit's way of redeeming, forgiving, adopting, creating and giving new life to the hearers.

3. The benefits are bestowed

Gospel rhetoric is signaled by language in which: God is the subject of the sentence; God's saving work in the crucified Christ is proclaimed; and the preacher as the instrument of the Spirit offers the hearer the benefits of that saving work. The last point is crucial: You do not have gospel proclamation without giving the benefits of Christ to the hearer.

Perhaps the simplest and most eloquent gospel statement in the liturgy are the Words of Institution: "This cup is the New Covenant in my blood shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin."

It is not enough to say abstractly "God in Christ forgives the sins of the world." The preacher must dare to have God be the subject forgiving the sins of the hearer: "In the mercy of almighty God, Jesus Christ was given to die for you, and for his sake God forgives you all your sins." Or, as it appears in the Order for Individual Confession and Forgiveness in the *Lutheran Book of Worship*: "By the command of our Lord Jesus Christ, I, a called and ordained servant of the Word, forgive you your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

The benefits of God's action in Christ for our mortal race are many. Through preaching the hearer is assured that the benefits are for her personally and particularly, thereby sustaining and nurturing the Christian's faith life. Again, we preachers sometimes talk about Christ without offering the hearer the benefits of Christ: "As I have loved you, so love one another." Christ is used as a model of the godly life, and the criterion for what love really is is raised for the hearer. Nothing is said of the way we are loved by Christ in this moment. Unless the benefits of Christ—forgiveness, righteousness, freedom, peace, new identity, adoptive status, eternal life now, victory over evil, and the like—are conveyed to the hearer when a call to love and obedience is issued, the call becomes an overwhelming demand impossible to fulfill. There is no gospel without the Spirit's work bringing the benefits of Christ into the lives of the hearers.

"Christ bids you to take up the cross and follow him." Awesome! How is it possible? The call to die is an invitation to

live when the promise of Christ strikes the heart of the believers: "I am the resurrection and the Life. The Life that I am I give to you, and you shall never die."

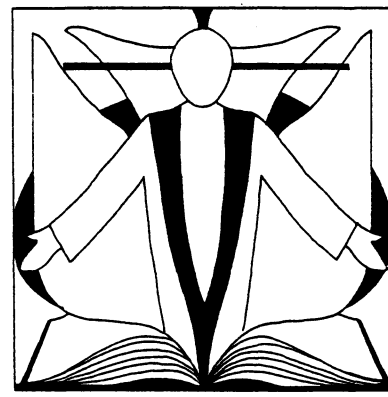
Sometimes the way the sermon is delivered turns the gospel into law. "Jesus died for your sins. You better believe it or else!" The gift is used as a cudgel. The gift is weighted with threat. The gift has strings attached that tie up the hearers into themselves.

"God was in Christ reconciling the world. Be reconciled." This is a herald's good news of great joy for all the people. This is grace-full invitation. This is a gift given that contains the power for the hearers to be what in God's eyes they are—the Body of Christ.

Beware of the rhetoric that makes the faith action of the hearer the condition for receiving the benefits of the gospel: If you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, you will be saved. If we confess our sins, God will forgive us. These statements have biblical warrant and are true. They are not, however, gospel rhetoric because God's action is made conditional on the hearer's action: If you do this, *then* God will do that. Gospel rhetoric reverses the order: Because God does this to you, therefore, you can do that.

It is, of course, true that the hearer can not experience forgiveness if she has not acknowledged something that needs forgiving in her life. But this truth by itself only accuses the hearer. It is more fundamentally true that the offer of forgiveness evokes the kind of trust that the hearer needs to have in order to be free to confess. Repentance is more than contrition defined as sorrow over failure. Repentance involves trust that the Presence of a gracious God offers unconditional grace.

Is repentance a *consequence* of being forgiven or a *condition* for being forgiven? Yes. This is a dynamic process at work in



the Christian life. The preacher must remember, however, that *faith* as the goal to which his efforts are directed is always the work of the Spirit by the gospel.

In a later article I will focus more directly on the integral connection between the Presence of God in the life of the believer and the believer's trust of God that is active in love. For now I offer three principles of gospel rhetoric. I believe they can be appropriated by all who preach for the church:

1. God is the subject.
2. God's saving work in raising the crucified Christ is proclaimed.
3. The benefits of that saving work are freely given to the hearer.

The Gospel of Luke and Liberation Theology: On Not Domesticating the Dangerous Memory of Jesus

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The most prominent text from Luke which provides orientation for the work of liberation theologians is Jesus' appearance at his home town synagogue in Nazareth to read from the Isaiah scroll. This text serves as a programmatic statement for the content of Jesus' ministry: to bring good news to the poor, release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, freedom for the oppressed, and the proclamation of the year of the Lord's favor (Lk 4:15-19). This final reference to "the year of the Lord's favor" is usually identified by liberation theologians with the Jubilee year, when debts would be cancelled and economic bondage overcome.[1] The entire agenda of Luke 4:18-19 is claimed as Jesus' own mission as he declares, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (4:21). Such a politico-theological program would prove itself radical not only within the context of the first century but just as much today. It's the sort of agenda that might get one crucified.

This essay pursues two related lines of argument. First, we will examine the contours of Jesus' teachings on poverty and riches according to Luke. Decisive for this task is an understanding of the socioeconomic circumstances of first century Palestine in order to place the teachings of Jesus in their proper historical frame of reference.

Second, we will argue that the radicality of Jesus' teachings begins to be softened already within the narrative of Luke's Gospel insofar as Luke's message becomes one

[1] See Sharon H. Ringe, *Jesus, Liberation, and the Biblical Jubilee* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985).

of exhorting wealthy Christians to be benevolent and generous to the poor, whereas the position of Jesus summons forth a response far more exacting. Such a domestication of the message of Jesus is the constant temptation, not only of Luke but of all approaches based solely on literary criticism insofar as the presuppositions of the present situation become the filter through which the teachings of Jesus are strained. This means that a legitimate literary approach to the Bible requires a grounding in the conclusions of historical-critical interpretation, lest the particularity and radicality of the incarnation of God in Jesus of Nazareth in first-century Galilee be compromised. To put the matter provocatively: the story of Jesus told apart from the social, economic, political, and religious context of first century Galilee becomes docetic.[2]

Village economy and the patronage system

It is necessary to preface the following discussion with the assertion of Halvor Moxnes that "in antiquity the political and the economic systems were inseparable."[3] Furthermore we would add that religion was fully embedded in the fabric of the single political-economic nexus. This means there functioned neither a doctrine of the two kingdoms nor a separation of church and state. What Jesus said religiously about poverty and wealth had very direct political and economic implications.

The basic political question in first century Palestine was one of economic power: who controls the land and thus is in a position to profit from its productivity? For all practical purposes, there existed only two classes of people, a relatively small number (ca. 10%) of wealthy landowners and a large number (ca. 90%) of peasants who depend on the owners for their sustenance. The moral expectation placed upon the privileged minority was to deal generously with the peasant poor.[4] To this end, there evolved a patronage system between "patrons" and "clients" based on reciprocity: peasants devote themselves to work and loyalty to a patron in return for sustenance and generosity toward the peasants.

On a large scale, the Roman empire was established as the highest center of authority which claimed the right to exact wealth from its provinces by means of taxes. On a smaller scale, local elites used their positions of power to administer the law, collect taxes, maintain civil order, distribute goods, and maintain their link to Roman rule.[5] The analogies between the economic structure of first century Palestine and the traditional economies of Latin America are striking.

Protest against the prevailing patronage system typically took place in one of two forms: (1) banditry, in which a strong leader banded together followers who lived as "parasites" from the intact patronage system; (2) a charismatic leader organized followers into an alternative community. Both forms of protest had minimal effect in changing the society as a whole.

The setting of Jesus' ministry in Luke's Gospel is primarily that of Galilean villages with only its culmination in the city of

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[2] For example, Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Conflict in Luke: Jesus, Authorities, Disciples* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), disregards the centrality of wealth-poverty as a conflicted issue in Luke.

[3] Halvor Moxnes, *The Economy of the Kingdom: Social Conflict and Economic Relations in Luke's Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 27.

[4] Moxnes, 36-42.

[5] Moxnes, 44.

Jerusalem. Villages in first-century Palestine were marked by smallness of size, homogeneity of population, and total self-sufficiency. Villagers knew only the reality of their own village and the proximate area around it. Moxnes characterizes the people of a village in Luke's Gospel according to three categories: (1) those on the periphery (the sick, the outcast, and the poor); (2) Jesus and his followers; and (3) the local leaders (elders, rulers, and sometimes Pharisees).[6] Wealth in villages derived from the land.[7] The rich derived their wealth from farms, orchards, vineyards, and livestock. Peasants occupied a smaller parcel of land from which they attained their subsistence. Tenants were those with a yet greater dependency on landowners, to whom they were debtors for their use of the land. Day laborers, servants, and slaves were virtually landless and precariously dependent upon the employ of the landowners. At the very margins of society were the widows, beggars, maimed, lame, blind, and the bands of the poor. Local village leaders included judges, priests, Levites, and Pharisees.

The entire village must be itself viewed in dependency upon regional political rulers and absentee landlords as well as the local landowners. The entire system was one of patronage between the powerfully wealthy and their clients. Luke refers frequently to debts and loans which indicate the pervasiveness of the patronage system.

For the peasant, life was lived under the constant of scarcity. Life never afforded the accumulation of wealth but remained a matter of subsistence. Such economic realities lead to a fundamental conservatism, lest one's deviation from established patterns lead to loss of one's subsistence. Peasants look to wealthy patrons to provide for basic needs of housing, food, and clothing. In the case of food, one notices in Luke's Gospel an awareness of the disparity between the full and the hungry (1:53; 6:21, 25; 16:19-21; 15:17). Basic diet consisted of bread and fish. Those with surplus food stood under a moral obligation to provide for hungry clients through patron-sponsored meals (cf. 15:3-10, 23). Those failing to employ their abundance to satisfy the needs of the hungry are held in contempt (12:16-21, 16:19-21). Food was to be properly "used for common consumption, for the benefit of everybody in the village, especially the needy."[8] Luke's Gospel protests the neglect of the hungry by the rich within the context of the patronage system of the Galilean village. Religious leaders like the Pharisees are sharply criticized for their severity in matters of purity while neglecting the obligation to provide for the poor, e.g., through almsgiving or redistributive table fellowship.

Jesus' radical gospel to the poor

Virtually every chapter of Luke contains references to how Jesus carried out the programmatic agenda of 4:18-19 to "bring good news to the poor." By claiming the text of Isaiah 61 as his own, Luke places Jesus in continuity both with the prophets of old who witnessed to God's requirement of justice for the poor and with Israel's messianic hopes for a Savior who would usher in the kingdom of ultimate justice.

One of the most difficult tasks of New Testament research is to sort out those traditions whose origins are most probably characteristic of the historical Jesus from those most probably accruing to Jesus at later stages of the tradition's development.

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[6] Moxnes, 52-55.
[7] Moxnes, 57-60.
[8] Moxnes, 90.

The proposal here defended follows the lead of historians such as John Dominic Crossan and especially Marcus Borg in reconstructing the core teachings and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth.[9] One of the major criteria of authenticity here followed is that of radicality, i.e., the more radical the teaching about wealth and poverty, the more likely it stems from Jesus without later domestication by the church.

The most radical sayings of all regarding riches and poverty anticipate an absolute reversal of status between rich and poor in the kingdom. "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.... But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry" (6:20-25). Likewise in the Magnificat, Mary sings of the God who "has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty" (1:53). The story of Lazarus and the rich man also demonstrates poignantly the theme of eschatological reversal (16:19-26). Moreover, the apothegm of 13:30 states the matter most provocatively: "Indeed, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last." Each of these passages by virtue of their very radicality deserve consideration for belonging to the most original layer of Jesus' material.[10] Moreover, when one employs these texts at the origin of what might be called a "liberation trajectory," other categories of texts are illuminated as well.

According to a broad consensus of New Testament scholarship, the central concern of Jesus in his teachings and ministry was the kingdom of God. What distinguishes the teaching of Jesus about the kingdom from the message of other eschatological prophets was the manner in which Jesus summons his hearers and disciples to live already in the present according to the standards of the kingdom.[11]

Two central emphases regarding the kingdom, consistent with the eschatological reversal sayings, are (1) the message of good news to the poor and (2) criticism of the rich. When the disciples of John inquire of Jesus if he is "the one who is to come," Jesus replies, "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard... the poor have good news brought to them" (7:20-22). In Luke 14:13, Jesus reminds the banquet givers of the responsibility to welcome the poor and marginal to their dinners, making those meals into occasions not of honoring those of one's own status but occasions of genuine redistribution. Similarly, in the parable of the Great Banquet (14:16-24), the owner of the house, exasperated by the excuses of

What Jesus said religiously about poverty and wealth had very direct political and economic implications.

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[9] Marcus J. Borg, *Jesus—A New Vision: Spirit, Culture, and the Life of Discipleship* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987) and John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1994).

[10] The following are identified as the "oldest traditions of the Gospels" by Walter E. Pilgrim, *Good News to the Poor: Wealth and Poverty in Luke-Acts* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1981), 57-63.

[11] Cf. Pilgrim, 62-63.

Those who followed Jesus as disciples were summoned to enter the eschatological reality already in the present.

the propertied who refused the invitation, finally does the right thing of inviting those who cannot repay, the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame. The theme of reversal appears here again with a fresh twist. There is, in addition, a growing consensus of scholarly opinion that the actual table fellowship as practiced by Jesus was marked by "open commensality," that is, by a radical openness to sup with those normally excluded from decent society—outcasts, public sinners, and tax collectors.[12]

The corollary of Jesus' message of good news to the poor is his calling the rich to repentance. In the parable of the rich fool, the rich man never recognizes the folly of his ways and so, at the hour of reckoning, finds himself unprepared to meet the eschatological reversal (12:16-21). Jesus summons the rich ruler to "sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor," a form of repentance he was unwilling to undergo (18:18-25). "How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God" (18:24-25). Zacchaeus shows, however, that with God all things are possible, even restitution of possessions to the poor by a rich man (19:1-10). Notice Jesus' words in response to Zacchaeus' act of justice to the poor: "Today salvation has come to this house" (19:9).

Those who followed Jesus as disciples were summoned to enter the eschatological reality already in the present. The cost of discipleship upon entry into the Jesus movement was leaving all security behind.[13] Simon, James, and John "left everything" to follow Jesus (5:11). Similarly, Levi the tax collector "left everything, and followed him" (5:28). Jesus instructs his disciples, "Sell your possessions, and give alms.... For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (12:33-34). Again Jesus says to would-be followers: "None of you can become my disciple if you do not give up your possessions" (14:33). Jesus and his disciples are characterized by their poverty (9:3, 58; 10:4). The willingness to become poor is the only thing the rich ruler lacked which prevented him from becoming Jesus' disciple (18:22-23).

There are strong reasons to conclude that Jesus' position on riches and poverty contributed decisively to his eventual arrest and crucifixion. If Moxnes is correct, Jesus' polemic against the Pharisees was aimed primarily at their hypocrisy in demanding ritual purity while neglecting the weightier matters of justice. They imposed strict (and often costly) ritual obligations upon those who could little afford them while themselves neglecting the giving of alms (11:37-41, 14:7-14). For this reason the Pharisees are identified in 16:14 as "lovers of money." It is likely Jesus' criticism of the Pharisees for their portion with the rich led some of them to actively seek his death.

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[12] Crossan, 66-70.

[13] Gerd Theissen, *Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 33ff.

Two other references suggest that Jesus' radical critique of riches contributed to his eventual arrest and crucifixion. First, the saying of Jesus regarding the payment of taxes, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's" (20:25), far from being a statement of submissiveness to Roman authority, appears to move in exactly the opposite direction: Give your ultimate loyalty not to the emperor but to God alone! Even if Jesus did not advocate the nonpayment of taxes, nonetheless the ultimate authority of King Caesar is undercut and subordinated to the rule of God. Secondly, Jesus' prophet-like action in "cleansing" the temple is recalled as the act of driving out "those who were selling things there" and is interpreted according to the words of Isaiah 56:7: "My house shall be a house of prayer." Jesus adds the pointed accusation, however: "But you have made it a den of robbers" (19:45-46). Jesus' critique of those who oppress the poor is thus traceable to the very conclusion of his ministry. If this prophetic action were also accompanied by predictions of the temple's destruction (21:5-7)—perhaps not so much in apocalyptic terms but rather in the prophetic sense that God brings judgment upon those who oppress the poor — then the stage is set for Golgotha.

If the preceding argument bears merit, then Jesus' radical teachings about poverty and wealth form a trajectory running from his appearance at his home town synagogue to the very end of his life. They are not peripheral to understanding that for which Jesus stood. Instead they belong to the very core of his message and praxis. Jesus taught an unconventional wisdom which turns upside down the wisdom of the world that identifies riches with God's blessing.[14] Jesus, the Messiah and Savior, is the one who bears good news to the poor and sets economic captives free. The echoes from Third Isaiah (cf. 4:18-19 and 19:46) establish Jesus as the inaugurator of the eschatological community whose ways are justice and salvation.

Jesus as benefactor in Luke's Gospel

Frederick W. Danker describes Luke's understanding of Jesus with the term "benefactor."[15] In analogy to the contemporary Hellenistic notion of public officials as benefactors of the public and consistent with what has been presented about the Galilean village patronage system, Jesus is depicted in Luke as the "benefactor of all benefactors."[16]

While Luke preserves many of the radical teachings of Jesus regarding the danger of riches and the message of good news to the poor with reference to eschatological reversal, these teachings are at the same time reinterpreted for the new situation faced by Luke's own community. The patronage system remains intact with its accompanying disparity between the rich few who control the land and the poor majority who are dependent upon wealthy patrons for sustenance. However, one thing has changed. Growing numbers of the wealthy also now embrace Christianity. In this new situation, "Luke does not make total abandonment a once-for-all mark of Christian discipleship. It belongs uniquely to the time of Jesus and to those called by him to discipleship."[17] For example, in 22:35-38

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[14] Borg, 97-124.

[15] Frederick W. Danker, *Jesus and the New Age: A Commentary on St. Luke's Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988).

[16] Frederick W. Danker, *Luke* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 6-17.

[17] Pilgrim, 101.

Lost in Luke's interpretation of Jesus as Benefactor is a sense of the inherent danger of wealth as a rival to God...

we have evidence of a changed situation where purse, bag, and sword have now become legitimate trademarks of the Christian missionary.

Luke's concern is to inspire all Christians and especially the wealthy to deeds of charity and benevolence patterned after the model and teachings of Jesus, the universal Benefactor. Note, however, the shift in emphasis. Although the radical texts of eschatological reversal between poor and rich are preserved, they function quite differently within the context of Luke's community. The demand to "leave everything" and follow Jesus is relativized in favor of an appeal to generosity on the part of the rich. The Pharisees are exhorted to give alms (11:41). Other texts similarly highlight the virtue of almsgiving (12:33, 18:22). This emphasis is further extended in the book of Acts (3:1-11; 9:36-43; 10:2, 4, 31; 24:17).

The Lukan application of Jesus' teachings on wealth and poverty is further elaborated as the obligation to do good with one's wealth. One should lend without expectation of repayment (6:27-36). Those who give will have a blessing returned to them (6:37-38). To forgive debts incurs loyalty from one's clients (7:40-43). In offering banquets, one has an obligation to feed the poor and not just those who can repay the honor (14:7-24). The ultimate example of benefaction is that of the Good Samaritan who risks his security and gives his possessions to help a stranger (10:29-37). While the story of Zacchaeus highlights the radicalness of Jesus' fellowship in welcoming tax collectors, the outcome—while itself impressive—is that Zacchaeus gives only half of his possessions to the poor, not all of them (19:8). Such stories as the Good Samaritan and Zacchaeus function to inspire generosity and benevolence among the Christian community without the radical demand that disciples must themselves become poor.

In the Acts of the Apostles, Luke further demonstrates his ideal of Christian community. The earliest church in Jerusalem is remembered as a community where "they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need" (Acts 2:45). This model is held up as an example for later generations: "Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common" (4:32). Ananias and Sapphira who hold back from the common treasury meet a disastrous end (5:1-11). Imagine how such a story functions to commend generosity! Over the course of the book of Acts, however, the theme of wealth and poverty fades into the background.[18] The dangers of wealth as an obstacle to participation in the community is set aside in favor of the challenge of including Gentiles. Consistent between Luke and Acts is the question of

[18] James A. Bergquist, "'Good News to the Poor'—Why Does this Lucan Motif Appear to Run Dry in the Book of Acts?" *Trinity Seminary Review* 9 (Spring 87):18-27.

who are insiders and who are outsiders in God's community. Jesus' radical teaching about the abandonment of wealth, gives way to Luke's emphasis on the need for the rich to be generous, which gives way in turn to the question in Acts of including Gentiles in the church.

Liberation theology and the dangerous memory of Jesus

The Lukan emphasis on the need for wealthy Christians to respond to the poor with benevolence, generosity, and charity is as necessary today as it was at the end of the first century. Particularly among the churches of the First World, we need to recognize how many are the poor neighbors who lie beaten on the side of the road to whom we are called to minister. Of the four Gospels, Luke raises most pointedly the problem of our wealth and the obligation to respond to our Benefactor Jesus with beneficence to those who are poor.

The limitation of the Lukan rendering of Jesus' teachings on poverty and wealth is that in the process of reinterpreting them for a new context, the radicality of Jesus' call to discipleship is tamed. The unconventional wisdom of Jesus, that one cannot serve both God and riches (16:13), becomes transformed into the conventional wisdom that it is virtuous to give alms. Perhaps it is only to be expected that a church cannot be built upon such a radical foundation. Were poverty to have remained a constitutive mark of the church (were we to confess in the words of the Nicene Creed that "we believe in one holy catholic apostolic and poor church"), the number of disciples, then as now, would be few. For the sake of the gospel, reaching the multitudes—rich and poor, Gentiles and Jews—Luke's account of Jesus' ministry has been extremely valuable.

At the same time, however, lost in Luke's interpretation of Jesus as Benefactor is a sense of the inherent danger of wealth as a rival to God, a sense of the radicalness of Jesus' call to discipleship, and a sense of the urgency of the eschatological now. Liberation theology, arising in context of massive poverty, hears the Lukan texts with an ear for the radicality of Jesus' first proclamation of the kingdom of God. Liberation theologians summon us to attend to the theme of eschatological reversal between rich and poor that occupies such a central place in the earliest Jesus' material. Lest we succumb to a domestication of Jesus' teachings which pacifies us in complacency with our own generosity, liberation theology hearkens back to the "dangerous" and "subversive" memory of the Jesus who took up the cause of the poor.[19]

The theology of liberation will not let us remain smug in our efforts to be charitable. Armed with texts that recall the subversiveness of Jesus' teachings about blessings to the poor and woe to the rich, advocates of liberation theology challenge us with the proposal of "God's preferential option for the poor."[20] They insist that, given the reality of massive starvation and unimaginable disparity between the rich and poor, mere charity is not enough. Our alms perhaps serve only to appease our own tender consciences. Instead radical structural adjustments are required in international banking policies and global economic

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[19] Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology*, trans. David Smith (New York: Seabury, 1980), 90f.

[20] Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, trans. and ed. Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1988), xxv-xxviii.

systems. Such changes, leading to a redistribution of the world's wealth, would mean a lower standard of living for those profiting from the economic status quo. As interpreted by liberation theologians, the dangerous memory of the Jesus who was crucified threatens to once again turn the world upside down.

Supported by the texts preserved by Luke regarding wealth and poverty, liberation theology challenges us to incorporate within our understanding of salvation the dimension of justice for the oppressed. The Lukan Jesus stands in continuity with the Exodus and the prophets in challenging oppressors with the demand that they surrender their privileges so the hungry may be fed. Even as we defend forgiveness of sins and eternal life as essential elements in the meaning of Christian salvation, so liberation theologians make frequent reference to Luke in constructing a vision of God's salvation—shalom—which includes justice for the poor.

Literary criticism as a basis for narrative theology, which has recently done much to re-enliven our imaginations by filling us with stories both biblical and contemporary, encounters the same temptation as any other attempt to translate the gospel into contemporary cultural forms. Luke faced this challenge as he told the story of Jesus for a new generation just as much as we do today. The temptation is this: to interpret Jesus so as to accommodate his dangerous memory to our own conventional standards and values. When that happens, however, we succumb to the perennial temptation of creating a docetic Christ that has little to do with Jesus of Nazareth. The scandal of the incarnation is that God has become incarnate in our world in the flesh and blood of this particular human being, the Jesus who gave everything away, even life itself, to save the world.

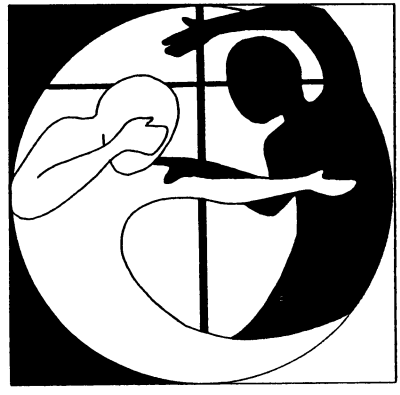
As we ponder aghast the implications of Jesus' radical challenge to "sell all that you own," "distribute the money to the poor," and "follow me" (18:22), we join the ranks of would-be disciples of every age, asking Jesus, "Then who can be saved?" (18:26). The poet Stephen Mitchell points us toward an answer in his poem "Through the Eye of the Needle" (*Theology Today* 48 [April 1991]:73).

The camel catches his breath, wipes the sweat from his brow. It was a tight squeeze, but he made it.
Lying back on the unbelievably lush grass, he remembers: all those years (how excruciating they were!) of fasting and one-pointed concentration, until finally he was thin enough: thaumaturgically thin, thread-thin, almost unrecognizable in his camelness: until the moment in front of the unblinking eye, when he put his front hooves together.
Took one long last breath. Aimed. Dived.
The exception may prove the rule, but what proves the exception?
"It is not that such things are possible," the camel thinks, smiling. "But such things are possible for me."

Rejoicing and Weeping

Marc Kolden
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> Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Rom 12:14-16



One Sunday morning after I had preached as a guest preacher in a congregation, a man waited after church to talk to me. He asked, "Do you know what I heard you saying in your sermon?" "No, what?" I said. "I heard you saying, 'Laugh and the world laughs with you; cry and you cry alone.'"

His words stunned me for a moment. "That's not what I said; that's not the

gospel. The gospel is more like the other way around." But he wasn't listening; he just reiterated, "That's really what the Christian message amounts to, I think: 'Laugh and the world laughs with you; cry and you cry alone.'" And he walked away.

In the days that followed, I kept wondering how the gospel had gotten reduced to that bit of secular wisdom. I hoped it wasn't my sermon. Perhaps it was the conclusion of his own painful experience.

Think how this contrasts with the apostle Paul's instructions about the Christian life in Romans. A very wise pastor once told me that Romans 12:15 was his guiding principle for the Christian care of others: "Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep." So simple, yet so amazing. These words are just enough like the old saying, "Laugh and the world laughs with you, cry and you cry alone," to be interesting; and they are just different enough to be instructive.

Rejoicing with those who rejoice; weeping with those who weep. Neither one is natural. We often recoil from others' misfortune. We don't know what to say. We stay away. Except for certain very close friends or family members, it is not automatic that we will weep with those who weep. We dare not trust our instincts here. If we do what comes naturally we may well *withdraw* from those who weep. "Cry and you cry alone." We may even rejoice that someone else's misfortune didn't happen to us. We need this divine word to guide and encourage us: "weep with those who weep."

But rejoicing with those who rejoice—isn't the worldly wisdom correct here? Isn't it simply natural that when we laugh the world laughs with us? That we will rejoice with those who rejoice? I wonder. Perhaps it is more natural to *resent* another's good fortune. To wish that it had happened to us. Again, with a certain few exceptions for very close friends and loved ones—and not always for them!—do we not more often envy those who rejoice? We resent the good that has come to them, in which they rejoice. We actually want it for ourselves. The ancient church writers actually considered envy to be the epitome of original sin.[1] Envy is displeasure in the presence of God, from whom come all good gifts. Envy is to reject God's doing good to someone else and wanting it for ourselves. Envy—not rejoicing with those who rejoice—is not trusting what God is doing; it is enmity against God.

What is natural, what is instinctive, is that we will *not* usually rejoice with those who rejoice, nor will we weep with those who weep. And that's why the apostle's words here are much more radical than they first appear. These words follow—and they depend on—his words at the beginning of chapter 12: "Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God.... Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed...."

Then he talks about our being part of Christ's body, which is to say that we are to be *conformed* to Christ. The list of teachings in verses 14-16, including the command to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep, is the result of the form of Christ taking shape in our lives. He is the one who rejoices over one miserable sinner who repents and delights in receiving forgiveness. He is the one who rejoices in the joy of the blind receiving sight, the deaf hearing, the lepers being made well, the lame walking, and the captives being set free. Christ is the one who rejoices and does not envy the divine generosity.

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[1] See the discussion in Gustaf Wingren, *Credo* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1981), 26-28.

And he is the one who weeps with Mary and Martha at the death of Lazarus and who weeps over the city of Jerusalem at its impending doom.

But it is not merely a matter of his giving us an example: that Jesus rejoiced and so should we; that he wept and so should we. *It is a matter of the very inner life of God and of our connection to that life.* It is God's joy to send the only Son for the joy of sinful creatures. Christ goes even to death on a cross in oneness with the Father's will, so that our sorrow may be turned into joy.

And this same Son is the one who cries out to the Father, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"—the one who weeps in being abandoned by the Father—even as the Father weeps in undergoing the loss of the Son, giving him up to a death he did not deserve. The grief of the Father is just as important as the death of the Son in terms *now* of who God is and what difference the cross makes to God. Because there is such great love between the Father and the Son, there can also be suffering.[2]

The sign of the cross is not first of all something made on us or by us; it is a scar in the very center of God. Even the risen Christ is always the crucified one.

"Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep." This is not merely good advice. It has to do with the fact that we have a God who rejoices and who weeps, so that in our joy and in our weeping we are in God and God is in us. Faith has to do with this sort of participation and transformation, becoming part of Christ's body. And there is more: does this not mean that as we rejoice with those who rejoice, God can be there? And as we weep with those who weep, in and through us God can be there? And does it not mean, finally, that we are *commanded* to do this because if we don't do it, God cannot be there?

The sign of the cross is not first of all something made on us or by us; it is a scar in the very center of God.

God is about the business of transforming us—against our instincts—conforming us to Christ by leading us to rejoice and to weep—at the same time sanctifying us and serving our neighbors. So, be transformed: rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep, and you will prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

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[2] A contemporary treatment of this classical notion of the relation of the father and the Son is in Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), ch. 6, esp. 200-219, 227-249. Moltmann makes clear his debt to Luther's theology of the cross.

The Dead Sea Scrolls Revealed[1]—A CD-ROM Worth Discussing

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Just as music CDs give us better sound and, with tapes, have made records nearly obsolete, CD-ROMs for the computer pack an amazing amount of data into one small disk and allow the user to see still and moving pictures and hear music or narration in addition to reading text as in a book. Books will not become obsolete anytime soon, but computer CDs may be almost as big a cultural innovation as the scroll, the codex, and the invention of movable type were in the past, and they are becoming an important resource for pastors and other church leaders.[2] CDs like *The Dead Sea Scrolls Revealed* (hereafter DSS Revealed) are interactive, that is, you point at something with your mouse, click once, and you are transferred to a new topic or a deeper level of the outline.

At the opening screen DSS Revealed offers six choices: Location, Scroll Work (modern analyses and ancient scripts and writing), the Scrolls, the Debates, the Discovery, and History. Click on "the Scrolls" and the screen unfolds to Biblical Scrolls, Sectarian Scrolls, Scrolls Gallery (pictures of scrolls, pottery, coins, etc.), Apocryphal Writings. Click again on the last two words and you learn about Ben Sira (Ecclesiasticus) and the Genesis Apocryphon at Qumran. At each level as one proceeds through the interactive layers, a video window opens and still or moving pictures are accompanied by well-informed narration or sound bites from leading scholars. Also at each level the user can invoke the "Links Wall" which offers videos, pictures, time lines, or

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[1] Available in Macintosh and Windows versions for $59.95 and published by Logos Research Systems. It will be available in local Christian bookstores, computer and software stores nationwide.

[2] Many readers no doubt have used computer CDs for games or for viewing an encyclopedia, such as Grolliers. Even the Britannica is now on CD. The American Theological Library Association has recently published a CD-ROM that indexes all journal articles in biblical studies from 1949-1993. In a future issue I will review CDs containing the complete Hebrew and Greek Bibles—and many English translations—that will greatly facilitate concordance work. Even the six volume Anchor Bible Dictionary, normal weight 28 pounds, will soon be available on a CD.

printed text on the given topic. There are many hundreds of these videos, pictures, time lines, and text. Don't expect to finish this CD-ROM in one day!

The experts appearing on the CD include the likes of Philip Davies, Lawrence Schiffman (his name is misspelled on the CD), Geza Vermes, Robert Eisenman, Michael Wise, Norman Golb, John Strugnell, and Jerome Murphy-O'Connor. Those familiar with current scrolls research will recognize that all sides are represented. I winced a bit when Davies said the New Testament was written by Greek writers who were not Jewish and accused Jesus of plagiarizing. But he's said those kinds of things in print too. Eisenman believes that the sect's writings appear in the teachings of James in the New Testament. Most of the scholars cited are centrists.

DSS Revealed makes learning fun, which is not easy to do on such an arcane topic. Videos take the user through a 3-D representation of the Qumran community and there are even occasional paintings or etchings of biblical figures. There is adventure in the story of Ada Yardeni's discovery of the word Jonathan (=Alexander Jannaeus) on a scroll that had been missed by the original editor. The CD also tells the story of Wilhelm Shapira (1830-1884), who claimed he had discovered biblical documents from near the Dead Sea, but committed suicide when his finds were labeled a forgery. The world will never know whether he had authentic writings since they were sold for a few pounds after his death and disappeared.

This is a very fine, though not perfect, resource. Allow me to offer two constructive critiques on the technology and the content.

Technology. The CD was easy to install although I had to call tech support to find out that I needed to refer to E:\ instead of the directions printed in the manual. Occasionally I had to nudge the buttons on the video windows to get the sound started. While the opening screen offers a kind of table of contents, and there is a marker palette that lets you mark things for future reference and a glossary that explains concepts and identifies people, I think it would really be an improvement to have an index feature on the CD that would let you find items in the "Links Wall" no matter at which level of the outline they appear. I wound up typing more than twenty pages of data to help me find my way around in the future. A bibliography to back up this presentation or for future study is also needed. Or am I still too book oriented?

Content. There are also a few errors, omissions, and contradictions worth noting. There are some typos (Hatore for Hatorah, Saducees for Sadducees, Pesherim for Pesharim, Cave 33 for Cave 3, and several more) that can be easily fixed in a later edition. The CD shows scribes working at the "scribe's tables" that have been reconstructed by archaeologists though Murphy-O'Connor states elsewhere on the CD that these were used only for preparing skins and not for writing on the scrolls themselves. Biblical scrolls discussed included the Tefillin (little leather boxes containing biblical quotations), Isaiah, Psalms, and Leviticus, but I found no mention of the sensational copies of Jeremiah and Samuel from Cave 4 which were often quite different from the Masoretic Text and in agreement with the Septuagint. In general, the importance of the Scrolls for textual criticism is understated.

Logos Research Systems is to be congratulated for this powerful CD-ROM and for a number of other publications on the Bible (for a catalog call 1-800-87Logos).

A tiny vial of Dead Sea sand is even included in the package!

Book Reviews

The Crying for a Vision. By Walter Wangerin, Jr. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994. 288 pages. $15.00.

Listen to what the novelist says about his own work: "I pray that you pay attention to this novel. It's the tale of a Lakota Indian boy whose learning of the ways of the world, both spiritual and natural, becomes the salvation of his people. I devoted ten years to its development, spending time in several summers at the Sun Dance on the Rosebud Reservation, involving legends of the Indians, and lavishing the best of my craft on the book."

Behind those lines is the pain of a writer who gave this book the best of his talent only to discover that his publisher had been swallowed up in a corporate takeover and that the new powers-that-be decided not to promote his prized book-child, to let it be born in silence, without promotion, without advertising. Seemingly DOA.

But let me tell you about this wonderful story of Moves Walking, a Native American orphan, befriended by two old members of the community who nurture him in harmony with nature and the Indian ethos. Lakota words are sprinkled throughout the story, but they do not impede. Rather, they lend authenticity and credibility to an often moving and gripping tale. In tune with nature he hesitates to kill on the hunt and lies down with porcupines to keep them warm.

There is an evil presence, however, in a warrior named Fire Thunder who cuts off Moves Walking's ear and perpetrates violence on other Indian tribes (seeking vengeance for a lost eye), on nature, and finally on Moves Walking himself. Throughout the book there are symbolic births and deaths, animals who rally around Moves Walking, a cosmos dying under the weight of a terrible sin.

The story takes place before whites invaded Indian space and time—in fact, one cannot guess when this story took place—which allows the Lakota to represent all of us. Interlaced with this wonderful story, in all the fibers of its Native American spirituality, is a highly symbolic retelling of the central Christian story. Moves Walking dies for the sake of others, and his grandmother urges him: "If you choose a willing sacrifice, if one person should die in the place of the people—well, then they all might have the benefit. The people might live." Moves Walking gives Fire Thunder permission to kill him and calls out in dying, "I love you Lakota." His people and nature recover.

On every page one finds the rich, sensuous language that we have come to expect in Wangerin's novels and poems and columns in the *Lutheran*. There are at least three reasons to put this book on your "must read" list: a ripping good story; a deep draft of Native American culture; an innovative rendition of the Greatest Story Ever Told, without ever mentioning The name.

Thanks to encouragement from numerous admirers of Wangerin's work, Simon & Schuster has significantly stepped up promotional activities in recent months.

Ralph W. Klein
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The Bible on Computer, Version 1.03, ABS Reference Bible on CD-ROM. New York: American Bible Society, $195.

There's an awful lot on this one tiny CD-ROM—6 English translations, Hebrew Old Testament, Greek New Testament, Septuagint (in Greek and English), Latin, German, and Spanish translations, parsing of the Old and New Testaments, Lightfoot's version of the apostolic fathers, the works of Josephus, Greek and English harmonies of the Gospels, Hebrew and English harmonies of Samuel-Kings-Chronicles, a modest Bible dictionary, plus small Greek and Hebrew lexicons. In normal cloth binding these books would

cost several times the price of the CD.

I called for Gen 3:15, for example, and there came to my screen RSV, NRSV, KJV, NASB, KKJV, Strong's numbers, the Hebrew of the passage, parsing of the Hebrew passage, the English and Greek of the LXX (including parsing), the Vulgate, Spanish and German translations, and the entry "enmity" from the Bible dictionary. This will greatly facilitate comparison of modern translations. Or one can find in a twinkling all the references in Josephus to Vespasian (163) and Titus (215), the Roman emperors at his time.

But, sad to say, there is also a serious deficiency here, especially in the Hebrew and Greek texts. The editors have used the standard transliteration that has been used in all the standard electronic Bibles but without "translating" this into Hebrew or Greek characters. The scholars who entered the original Bible onto the computer used only symbols from a standard typewriter keyboard. The first two Hebrew words in Gen 3:15 appear as W:)"YBFH)F$IYT while the place name Bethsaida appears as *BHQSA+DA/. Only the most diligent Bible students will be able to fight their way through these obscure transliterations.

And the concordance searches of Greek and Hebrew are primitive indeed compared to what one gets—for an extra $100—from a dedicated original language concordance like Bible Works for Windows (see my review in *Currents* 21:1 [February 1994]: 60-61). The "harmonies" of the Gospels and the historical books will not replace English and original language synopses either. In fact, I found them nearly useless unless one merely wants to *find* parallel passages.

This mixed verdict should not discourage those who might profit from what I outlined in the first two paragraphs. But the third and fourth paragraphs should warn all potential users not to expect too much. I suspect that later versions will address my criticisms, especially dealing with transliterations. After all, computers can be taught fairly easily to translate these obscurities into beautiful Hebrew and Greek scripts. A more sophisticated search engine is also a high desideratum.

Ralph W. Klein

Poverty and Charity in Roman Palestine, First Three Centuries C.E. By Gildas Hamel. University of California Publications: Near Eastern Studies Volume 23. Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford: University of California Press, 1989. xiii and 290 pages. Paper. $35.00.

Hamel describes the social condition of the poor in Roman Palestine and the wealthier who practiced charity on them. Her seven chapters discuss the food of the poor, poverty in clothing, the causes of poverty in the physical environment and the labor system, the effect of taxes and rents, the Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek vocabulary for poverty, the charity practiced by Jews, Greeks and Christians, and the views on poverty and wealth in the Gentile church. (She dies not discuss housing patterns or geographic distribution inside Palestine.) She bases her argument on ancient texts, archaeological and art-historical date, historical geography, and the contributions of modern social historians. The documentation throughout is impressive.

The poor have little security because they have no access to the surplus sources of food or the ability to buy the clothing that distinguishes the upper classes, while the wealthier people had a good living—subject only to the vagaries of political unrest and catastrophe. Food both advertised and enforced the social hierarchy, since it was far more difficult for the poor to observe the purity rules. In similar fashion, only the rich could afford to wear other than dark clothing. The poor were locked into their social status through their tie to low-yield agriculture and the interrelated effects of severe taxation of the wealthy by the Roman government, which, as a result, exacted more in rents and kind from the poor. In any crisis of agriculture the poor lost economic ground.

Hamel's work is a valuable contribution to the social history of Palestine. She sets charity on the part of Jews and Christians into its proper context. Jews protected the poor by law, and Christians adopted their attitudes, if not their law.

Read this volume in association with Douglas Oakman, *Jesus and the Economic Questions of His Day* (Lewiston: Queenston: Edwin

Mellon Press, 1986, reviewed in *Currents*, December 1989 issue) and Sean Freyne's *Galilee Jesus and the Gospels: Literary Approaches in Historical Investigations* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), and you have a detailed introduction to the context of Jesus' ministry, a wonderful aid to interpreting and preaching the Gospels.

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The Gospels in Context: Social and Political History in the Synoptic Tradition. By Gerd Theissen. Translated by Linda M. Maloney. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991. 320 Pages. Cloth. $30.00.

Gerd Theissen, Professor of New Testament at the University of Heidelberg in Germany, defends a historical-critical analysis and its contribution to our understanding the prehistory of the Synoptic Gospels. In particular, he directs his attention to the dating and localization of texts.

His book has three major divisions. In Part 1, Theissen scrutinizes specific small units in the Synoptics (Mt. 11:17, specific sayings of Jesus, the story of the Syrophoenician Woman, the story of John the Baptist's death, miracle stories, and apothegms). By pursuing clues in the textual material about social context and then linking those with the broader political history, he arrives at conclusions about the earliest oral tradition behind these texts. For example, he concludes that it is defensible to posit a Palestinian context (and even a Galilean one) for a number of Jesus' sayings which certain scholars have argued arose in a Syrian setting (e.g., Lk 11:31-32, Mt 8:11-12/Lk 13:28-29, Mt 11:20-24/Lk 10:13-16, Mt 23:29-31, Mt 10:5, 23).

In Part 2 Theissen examines larger units in the same manner. He concludes that the apocalyptic discourse in Mark 13 took its initial shape in response to the Caligula Crisis in 40 C.E. (when the emperor proposed to set up his own statue in the Jerusalem temple) and then later was adapted by Mark to the historical crisis of the 70 C.E. Theissen also determines that the passion story, eventually incorporated by Mark, was probably composed in Jerusalem during the first generation after Jesus' death in the aftermath of the conflict surrounding the Caligula crisis (40-60 C.E.).

In Part 3 the focus is on the provenance, time, and purpose for the composition of Q and then the three Synoptic Gospels. Theissen argues that Q was composed in Palestine at the heart of the Caligula crisis, sometime between 40 and 55 C.E. Mark was written after the capture of the temple, sometime between 70 and 74 C.E., whereas both Matthew and Luke presume the less tumultuous period of 85-90 C.E.

If read carefully, Theissen's historical analysis is at points most fascinating and leads to fresh interpretive insights. For example, his conclusions about Mk. 7:24-30 turns normal interpretations on their head. He builds a case for viewing the Syrophoenician woman as a person belonging to the Hellenized upper social class which despised and exploited Galilean Jews. If this is the case, then different power relationships than normally assumed are at work between Jesus and the woman. "Behind Jesus' cynical words there lies a bitterness grounded in real relationships" (79).

Theissen's reconstructive efforts develop hypothetical conclusions that are necessary to accept in order to arrive at his final conclusions. Overall, he assigns excessive importance to the crisis precipitated by Caligula's attempt to place his statue in the Jewish temple. By viewing the 40 C.E. crisis as pivotal, contrary to most scholars' view, Theissen is able to argue for a much earlier date for the literary composition of Q, the eschatological discourse, and the passion story.

This book will hold most interest for biblical scholars teaching at the university and graduate levels. It provides a helpful remainder that all historical critical work should not be discarded in favor of literary and rhetorical analysis of texts. The book is rather technical and may have limited value for pastors and most lay people.

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Preaching Helps

The Day of Pentecost—Eighth Sunday after Pentecost, Series C

Simply Inspired!

"An absolutely inspired work of art!" "An inspired performance by the league's leading scorer!" "An inspired screen adaptation of a best-selling novel!"

We do toss the word around loosely, casually, about the way a younger generation seasons conversation with the adjective "awesome."

The same thing happens to words that just happened to the Mexican peso: over time both words and money suffer devaluation and loss of purchasing power.

Yesterday at PLTS' annual "Preaching Days" I was listening to a presentation by Thomas G. Long, Professor of Preaching and Worship at Princeton Theological Seminary. Along the way he rehearsed a bit of the recent history of homiletical theorizing. A few years ago, he said, homileticians were telling preachers that the problem facing them was boredom. People knew all the stories and knew all the words. What was needed was some way to get excitement and energy (inspiration, the breath of the Spirit?) back into the Sunday morning experience.

But times have changed. Congregations have changed. Today preachers cannot count on the folks in the pew knowing the stories. The big new word coming up over the horizon in homiletical thinking, he said, is the word "teaching." Preachers in most congregations will have to be deliberate and intentional about incorporating "teaching" into their sermonizing. Teach the stories. And teach people the fundamental words of our spiritual tradition. These are the basic tools people need in order to make Christian sense out of their lives (their journey, their pilgrimage, their time of sojourning).

I was pleased to see how **Everett Kalin**, in his reflections on the lectionary texts for this issue, without any prompting from Tom Long, has focused on significant words in the vocabulary of Saint Paul: Wisdom, Reconciliation, Forgiveness, Resurrection, Freedom, New Creation. Ev is my colleague at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary. We are both on the faculty, both teaching Greek and New Testament. We both came here (Berkeley) in the same year (1983) from the same place (St. Louis) as part of the deployment of the faculty of Christ Seminary-Seminex.

Ev has written the reflections on the texts in this first portion of the Pentecost season. For many reasons Ev was the logical, even the inevitable choice. In the first place, he has written on portions of the Pentecost season of Year C before. He reflected on the central section in the June 1989 issue of *Currents*, and on the final section in the August 1992 issue.* To me it seemed eminently sensible to have Ev complete his collection of reflections by having him write on the opening section of the season in this present issue. And he graciously agreed.

But other reasons for the choice may be cited. Ev wrote his doctoral dissertation on the use of that wonderful word "inspiration" in connection with early ruminations on the books of the Bible in the process of canonization.

Ev's dissertation (along with many other words from many of us) came under fire back in the "wars in Missouri," when all of us wrestled with questions of biblical inspiration, biblical authority, biblical interpretation, biblical theology, being a people grounded in Bible without being biblicistic, literalistic, or fundamentalistic.

How does the Spirit of God work? In the Smalcald Articles Martin Luther declares that God has many ways of bestowing divine grace upon us. (Is that the same as saying that God has many ways of pouring the

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* The folks in Chicago tell me these back issues are still available in limited quantities. Send your request with $5 for both issues (or $3 for one) to *Currents*, attn. Peggy Eldredge, 1100 East 55th St., Chicago, IL 60615. Ev's reflections will supplement those of our 1995 contributors and you will have rich resources for preaching during the Pentecost season!

Spirit into our lives? God has many "inspired" means to in-Spirit us?) Luther says, "God is surpassingly rich in his grace," and he then lists what we sometimes call "the means of grace": first, the spoken word of preaching; second, baptism; third, the sacrament of the altar; fourth, the power of the keys; finally, the mutual conversation and consolation of sisters and brothers in the faith. (SC III, IV).

Preaching is right up there as "first" in Luther's awesome (now they've got me using the word) recitation of God's inspired media for communicating inspired stuff like God's grace, God's forgiveness and reconciliation, God's embrace, God's own new life.

Sermons, words spoken from heart to heart, have the power to open people's ears so that they hear again the sound of the Spirit blowing, like wind, like the storm over the deep at creation, like the rushing of air on the first Pentecost. The Spirit bends to use our words to blow onto their lives and into their lives and lift their lives and ours.

Kathleen Norris in her remarkable collection of reflections called *Dakota: A Spiritual Geography* takes a phrase once used to describe poetry and says it applies to the country folk of the Dakotas and to monks as well as to poets, and perhaps it applies also to preachers. They are "useless but indispensable." Useless from the point of view of business and industry, but indispensable if people are to know who they are, where they come from, and where they are going. If they are not to be blown about by every faddish wind and terrible storm of life but are to be borne by the Divine Wind.

Thanks to Ev for reflecting powerfully on our texts, and thanks to preachers for their indispensable labors in the service of the Breath of God. Your good work is "simply inspired."

Yours,

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The Day of Pentecost
June 4, 1995

Psalm 104:25-34,
or *Veni, Creator Spiritus*
Genesis 11:1-9
Acts 2:1-21
John 15:26-27, 16:4b-11

My reflections on Pentecost and the eight Sundays that follow come to you, in part, courtesy of Harvey Cox and Joseph Fitzmyer. Just as I was beginning to shape these readings of texts starting with The Day of Pentecost, I read an extended excerpt from Harvey Cox's new book, *Fire From Heaven. The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality in the Twenty-first Century* (Addison-Wesley, 1995). His focuses and the insights of Fitzmyer (in his book *Paul and His Theology*) will shape the readings and those that follow.

Cox analyzes the dynamism of Pentecostalism, growing by leaps and bounds in many parts of the world, under three rubrics: primal language (ecstatic utterance or speaking in tongues), primal piety (trance, vision, healing, dreams, dance) and primal hope (the unshakable expectation of a better future).

These three signs of spiritual dynamism were certainly in evidence on the first Pentecost: primal language—"All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability"; primal piety—the event is interpreted as a fulfillment of Joel's word about a community gifted from heaven by prophesy, visions, dreams (and there was enough "up off the pew into the aisles-ness" that bystanders thought them drunk); and primal hope—Luke not only interprets the Pentecost events by quoting Joel's words about the future, he also turns up the eschatological volume, changing Joel's "Then afterward" (Joel 2:28) into "In the last days," thereby declaring that the *shaking* of the foundations that was going on that day confirmed and actualized Israel's "*unshakable* expectation of a better future." The Spirit promised for the last days was actually here! Nothing would ever be the same!

I must admit that I long in my life and worship for a deeper measure of the spiritual dynamism in evidence on that day, and, apparently, in modern Pentecostalism. I cannot recreate the first Pentecost and do not want to become a Pentecostal. But what Cox says of Pentecostalism speaks to my heart: "It has succeeded because it has spoken to the spiritual emptiness of our time by reaching below the levels of creed and ceremony into the core of human religiousness, into what might be called 'primal spirituality'...in which the unending struggle for a sense of meaning and significance goes on." May we for whom precisely *the levels of creed and ceremony* are vitally important (that's how, at its best, I understand a liturgically focused ministry of word and sacrament) be able in our service on The Day of Pentecost this year to tap the level of primal spiritually in so powerful a way that it will be evident to us and to all—the Spirit promised for the last days is actually here among us; nothing will ever be the same.

And what about the Sundays after Pentecost and the ordinary days that surround them, when many things *do* seem the same, around us and in us? Where can we find, ever and anew, the "primal spirituality" that revitalizes our lives and ministries? Here I propose as resource an idea from Joseph Fitzmyer's *Paul and His Theology* (Prentice Hall, 1987). He lists from Paul's writings ten "Effects of the Christ-Event" (that is, what God has done for us and the world through the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ)—things like justification, reconciliation, freedom, new creation, and the like. I propose focusing in the readings that follow on one or two of these "effects of the Christ-Event (some Fitzmyer used, some he didn't) that seem highlighted in the lessons for each post-Pentecost Sunday. Thus, even, or precisely, when things do seem the same, we can ponder again what God—through Jesus Christ and the Spirit poured upon us—has done to make us new.

Remember when some "joker" offers to show you they are the "fastest gun in the West" and then a second later, having done nothing whatsoever, asks, "Want to see it again?" When we and the people among whom we live and minister seem to have missed, or to have forgotten, the very real and not at all illusionary things God has done for us, each Sunday is a time to ask,

"Want to see it again?" And all the people responded, "Yes, indeed!" ERK

The Holy Trinity
First Sunday after Pentecost
June 11, 1995

Psalm 8
Proverbs 8:22-31
Romans 5:1-5
John 16:12-15

Through Jesus Christ and the outpoured Spirit God has given us *wisdom*. Want to see it again?

Much ink has been spilled in the church's history trying to describe God "correctly." Alas, much blood has been spilled in the same history to punish those who were perceived to have described God "incorrectly." I never did hear what happens when an irresistible force meets an immovable object, but it strikes me that for the *impossible task* of fully knowing God we have been given an *irrepressible resource*, the Spirit of truth, who will guide us into all the truth (John 16:13).

For its doctrine of God, as for all its teachings, the church is not being most faithful to Jesus simply by repeating only what he said ("I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now"). "We never said it that way before" is not sufficient evidence against a new and fresh assertion about God if the Spirit of truth really is continuing to lead into all the truth. The church's most learned theologians and all the faithful are invited to live out of that promise as we try ever anew to know God more fully. At the same time, the gospel for the day also supplies the criterion for evaluating the new that is said about God: it will glorify and point back to Jesus, to whom God's own self has been fully entrusted (John 16:14-15). "No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son... who has made God known" (John 1:18). And what Jesus has made known about God is that God irrepressibly loves us.

Wisdom is the speaker in the lesson from Proverbs 8. It is celebrated as the first of God's creative acts (v. 22) and God's companion in the whole creative process. That is why wisdom literature (Proverbs, Psalms, Sirach, Wisdom of Solomon and the like) is asserting that to follow its precepts is to live close to God and to the life God intends for us. Thus the verse that follows the lesson (v. 32) says, "And now, my children, listen to me: happy are those who keep my ways."

The things said about wisdom in this lesson are echoed and "trumped" in what is said about Jesus Christ in the hymn quoted in Col 1:15-20. And the link between wisdom and Jesus Christ is celebrated by Paul in 1 Cor 1:30, which says of him that he "has become for us wisdom from God—that is, righteousness, holiness and redemption" (NIV). Paul is saying here (the NRSV translation obscures this point) that the wisdom that Greeks seek is embodied in Jesus Christ, who is wisdom for us *in that* he is for us righteousness, holiness and redemption. This is precisely the context for understanding the Romans 5 lesson as a Trinity Sunday lesson. Our knowledge of and wisdom about God is grounded in that justifying action of Jesus Christ, appropriated by faith, that conveys to us righteousness, establishing between God and us peace. And the Spirit poured into our hearts by God's love is the Spirit of Truth *in that* it is the *Holy* Spirit, for to grow in knowledge about God is to grow in holiness of life (ponder the striking phrase in John 3:21 and 1 John 1:6: "*do* the truth").

Interesting that the psalm for Trinity Sunday, on which we speak about who God is, asks "What are human beings that you are mindful of them?" It is an apt question on this day, since *we* are created in *God's* image and especially since God has come among us in The Human One par excellence, Jesus Christ our Lord.

About God and about ourselves, through Christ and the Spirit, God has given us *wisdom*! ERK

Second Sunday after Pentecost
June 18, 1995

Psalm 117
1 Kings 8:(22-23, 27-30) 41-43
Galatians 1:1-10
Luke 7:1-10

Through Jesus Christ and the outpoured Spirit God has given us *reconciliation.* Want to see it again?

Gospel of Thomas 22 ascribes to Jesus these words: "When you make the two one, and when you make the inside like the outside and the outside like the inside... then will you enter the kingdom." Quite aside from the questions of (1) whether Jesus ever spoke these words and (2) what precisely these words were meant to mean in the Gospel of Thomas, they symbolize for me the intention of today's lessons and the intention of God for the church and the world.

We live in a world, and not infrequently in a church, in which where two or three are gathered, *ire* is there among them, and some people will be perceived as "inside" and thus, by definition, others will be perceived as "outside." Today's lessons are intended to decertify those categories and to invite us into a new reality, the reign of God.

The psalm, the shortest in the Bible, uses its two verses to (1) invite *all* nations, *all* peoples, to praise and extol the Lord and (2) to give as grounding for these international hallelujahs God's steadfast love toward *us* (presumably Israel). The categories are there, inside/outside, but they are being challenged.

The lesson from 1 Kings, in its optional verses, speaks of the building by Solomon of the temple in Jerusalem, very much an Israel, David, Solomon, covenant "thing," an *inside* thing. Yet, paradoxically, in these verses the "outsider" is *God,* because even this house built at God's command is not "worthy" to contain God. And, in the non-optional verses of the text, in this in-house, in-land, in-people event, Solomon turns his gaze outward and prays that, when foreigners come and pray toward this house, their prayer be heard. The scriptures often show that Israel recognized itself to be covenanted, chosen, not for its own sake but for the world's.

The second lesson is the opening words of Galatians, the letter that is Paul's impassioned defense of the assertion that Gentiles did not have to be circumcised in order to be fully part of God's community of salvation. For, although God did not then and has not since abandoned the covenant people Israel, the insider (Jew) and outsider (Gentile) now have equal access to God by faith in Jesus Christ. There is no other requirement than Jesus Christ. Christ plus *anything else* always adds up to less than Christ. Any gospel other than the one that has the foreigner, the outsider, come in on equal terms with the insider is "a different gospel," that is, not a gospel at all (Gal 1:6-7).

In the gospel the centurion whose slave is gravely ill does not presume to ask Jesus to come into his home, but sends word: "Lord... I am not worthy to have you come under my roof.... But only speak the word, and let my servant be healed." But Jesus shows that God's love and power leap over the walls that divide inside from outside. In a reappropriation of these words that powerfully catches their spirit, the eucharistic liturgy in the Roman Catholic Church has the communicants all say just before the reception of the elements, "Lord, I am not worthy that you should come under my roof, but speak the word and your servant will be healed." All talk of worthy/unworthy, inside/outside, has now become a plea for God's grace, universally needed, universally granted.

I write these words shortly after my home state, California, has voted in Proposition 187, severely restricting services to illegal aliens. I have little doubt that when these words are read, in or far from California, this will still be a very live issue. And the world and our home towns are beset by hostilities that often focus along racial or ethnic lines. In such a world the church is invited to proclaim and embody the words of Ephesians 2:14-15: Christ "is our peace... [who] has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us... that he might create in himself one new humanity...." To our shame we in the church will need to recognize and confess that we have often succumbed to the resistance that seems to

overwhelm "insiders" when God is perceived to be showing favor to "outsiders," something that Luke 4:16-30, the passage that sets the themes for Luke-Acts, shows all too clearly, as the home town folk react to Jesus' references to God's help through Elijah to an "outsider" widow and through Elisha to an "outsider" leper (cf. vv. 25-30). Lord, actualize among us the day in which the two will be one and there will no longer be a barrier between inside and outside. Lord, Thy kingdom come. ERK

Third Sunday after Pentecost
June 25, 1995

Psalm 30
1 Kings 17:17-24
Galatians 1:11-24
Luke 7:11-17

Through Jesus Christ and the outpoured Spirit God has given us *resurrection/new life*. Want to see it again?

The first lesson is about the raising of a widow's son through Elijah, spoken about by Jesus in Luke 4:25-26 and referred to at the end of the previous reflection. But today this lesson is not part of last week's theme of God's outreach to outsiders. Instead it is part of today's theme that in the face of death God gives life. This widow and her son had faced starvation and was prepared to eat her last bit of food with her son and then die. Her story will be all too familiar to millions of the "wretched of the earth" who are constantly pushed to the margins of existence by hunger and illness leading to premature death. Through Elijah God saw to it that her jar of meal did not become empty, that her jug of oil did not fail. But precisely in this time of being pulled back from the brink of death by starvation, the widow's "dancing was turned into mourning." Her child became ill and died. And yet even here, in the place beyond "in extremis" God provided rescue. God has power even over death. Even this mourning was turned into dancing. God is the God of life.

These words of the widow end the lesson: "Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is truth." And *these words of the widow* are the proper transition to today's gospel. True, today's gospel, like the Kings passage, is about a widow whose son has died; and, like that passage, it tells of the dead son being raised and thus of the power of God even over death. But the punch line of the story is that the one who said to the widow, "Do not weep" and to her son, "Rise," is "A great prophet [who] has risen among us" and *through him* "God has looked favorably upon God's people." That is clear from the verses that follow today's gospel, in which John the Baptist, through his disciples, asks Jesus, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" The answer refers to events that were expected when God's reign became manifest in the world: blind seeing, lame walking, lepers being cleansed, deaf hearing, *dead being raised*, the poor hearing good news. Thus John the Baptist, and the reader of Luke's Gospel, are meant to get the point that *through Jesus*, right this very minute, God is looking favorably upon God's people and coming among them; the God who is the God of life.

In the second lesson we have another striking example of how in the midst of death God through Jesus grants life. Paul was dishing out death to confessors of Jesus Christ, and thus he was himself trapped in a living death, an enemy of the Lord of life. But the risen Lord met him, transformed him, and gave him a mission, as apostle to the Gentiles, geared not to death but to life. He came to see that the One he accounted accursed by God was in fact vindicated by God and raised from the dead. And in that moment he himself was brought forth to life. This is the experience each person who is in Christ has had by being transferred from the land of death into the kingdom of God's Son. And in the face of the many deaths we have experienced and will experience in our lives, it is the good news that God has, and always wants to, "turn our mourning into dancing." ERK

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost
July 2, 1995

Psalm 32
2 Samuel 11:26-12:10, 13-15
Galatians 2:11-21
Luke 7:36-50

Through Jesus Christ and the outpoured Spirit God has given us *forgiveness of sins*. Want to see it again?

It's a funny thing about sin and forgiveness and Christians. In any true-false test administered to a Christian, I am a sinner, T F and I have been forgiven, T F, would quickly get two T responses. Those two questions are "no brainers," as they say. And yet, paradoxically, neither being brought to a "primal" conviction of our sin nor living out of the "primal," irrepressible, grinning-from-ear-to-ear glee of having been forgiven, come easy to us at all. Perhaps nothing can do the trick but stories.

So Luke tells a story, a story about forgiveness, today's gospel. It's the ending to Luke 7, which began, as we'll recall from two weeks ago, with a Gentile centurion saying he is not worthy to have Jesus come under his roof. In today's story Simon the Pharisee is clear that this woman anointing Jesus' feet is not worthy to be under his roof—she is a sinner; and he is not at all sure Jesus is worthy to be under his roof—"If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is...."

Precisely, Simon. He does know, and so *he* tells a story, a story about forgiveness and about the love it evokes. It is a story about someone being forgiven much and someone being forgiven little and about the consequences, the consequences being played out before Simon's and our very eyes. Here was a person who, having been forgiven much, loved much. Here was a woman who was "living out of the 'primal,' irrepressible, grinning-from-*tear-to-tear* glee of having been forgiven." What would it take for Simon to be moved to that place? What would it take for us to be moved to that place? Whatever it would take, when we get there, we are ready for the next story. It is a story about sin.

The first lesson is about David and Bathsheba, or rather about David and Uriah, whom David had killed so that he could take Uriah's wife for himself. So Nathan told a story, about a man who had everything stealing from his neighbor the next-to-nothing that was all he had. The man deserves to die; you are the man; I have sinned against the Lord.

What would it take for us, the people of the church, to say nothing of the people of the world, to come to an awareness of the enormity of our own sin? In what area of our lives? To use Nathan's story to raise just one issue (other stories could evoke from us reflection on other issues): what is our level of complicity in a world in which the few haves continue to live at the expense of the innumerable have-nots? May God raise up among us story tellers who can on this issue call *us* to account with Nathanian power and evoke from us primal repentance and primal change! One thing that is clear to me is that we shall be most free to acknowledge our sin, in this and other areas, when we at the depth of our souls live out of the forgiveness that is already ours through Jesus Christ.

The second lesson, from Galatians 2, is about a community of faith in which some members of the community will not come to the table with other members of the community lest their cleanness become uncleanness. Paul, who writes this letter to combat this perversion of Christian faith and Christian life, can use the kind of we and they language behind such behavior ("We ourselves are... by birth and not... sinners"—v. 15). But he uses it to stand it on its head and to declare that every one of us has equal access to God because of Jesus Christ, in whom we are justified. Christ lives in me, says Paul. Shouldn't that alone settle the kind of table fellowship and any other fellowship to which we are open?

Today's psalm opens with the words. "Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered." How happy are we that God has forgiven us? Want to see it again? ERK

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost
July 9, 1995

Psalm 63:1-8
Zechariah 12:7-10
Galatians 3:23-29
Luke 9:18-24

Through Jesus Christ and the outpoured Spirit God has given us *an identity marked with the sign of the cross*. Want to see it again?

Today's gospel is about identity. The Synoptic Gospels at something of a midpoint all have a question about *Jesus'* identity (with this Lukan passage cf. Mt 16:13ff.; Mk 8:27ff.). Only in Luke are we told that at this crucial moment Jesus is praying, a detail Luke (often alone) has at other crucial moments of Jesus' ministry (at his baptism/anointing, 3:21; as he chooses the twelve, 6:12; on the Mount of Transfiguration, 9:28; when he taught the disciples to pray, 11:1). Here in Luke the disciples are first asked what the crowds say of Jesus. Then they are asked, "And who do *you* [the word's position in the Greek sentence makes it emphatic] say that I am?" Peter answers, "The Christ of God" or "God's Messiah." Luke's version of this material is much more sparse than Matthew's and Mark's, and their versions can be compared with profit.

In each synoptic account Peter's confession is followed by a command for silence about the confession, which in turn is followed by the first passion prediction (the second and third passion predictions are found in Lk 9:44 and 10:31-33). In Luke the command for silence and the passion prediction are explicitly connected with one another. The disciples are to keep quiet about their understanding of who Jesus is and listen to *his* understanding. What awaits the Son of Man is suffering, rejection by the religious leaders of his people, death, and resurrection. *This* is who he is; this is where he is going. His life is marked with the sign of the cross.

And this immediately leads to a statement about the identity of those who would follow him. Those who want to follow him are to deny themselves and take up their cross *day after day* or *daily*. Only Luke has "daily" here; Mark's wording makes physical, literal martyrdom easier to envision—a person undergoes *that* only once, not day after day. Luke's Gospel here, as elsewhere, is "the gospel for the long haul." To follow Jesus is to be marked, your whole life long, with the sign of the cross that marks God's faithful, rejected One and all those who follow him. We follow in the confidence that as he was vindicated by God his followers shall be also ("those who lose their life for my sake will save it").

The lesson from Zechariah also speaks of vindication, in that case of Jerusalem and its inhabitants and of the house of David. The lesson's final verse, the precise meaning of which seems obscure, speaks of the vindicated ones looking with sorrow on "the one whom they have pierced." Whomever that is meant to refer to in Zechariah (the Hebrew says "on *me* [on God?!] whom they have pierced"), it is quoted in John 19:37 with reference to the crucifixion.

The lesson from Galatians is also about identity, the identity of those who by faith are God's children. Gaining this new identity happens via baptism, so, believe it or not, we are once again speaking of an identity marked by the sign of the cross. For, as Paul says in Rom 6:3-4, we are baptized into Christ's *death*. This new identity of ours is one that puts an end to the divisive characteristics of whatever other markers we use to identify ourselves (Jew/Greek; slave/free; male/female; [here add any that today tend to divide]). Be it also noted that stressing with joy and emphasis today that our new identity does put "an end to the divisive characteristics of whatever other markers we use to identify ourselves... [especially those] that today tend to divide" could easily lead to some daily cross-bearing. ERK

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost
July 16, 1995

Psalm 16
1 Kings 19:14-21
Galatians 5:1, 13-25
Luke 9:51-62

Through Jesus Christ and the outpoured Spirit God has given us *freedom.* Want to see it again?

The battle cry of Galatians, the letter through which the second lessons have been leading us, is freedom ("For freedom Christ has set us free"). That is because Paul is arguing against those who would impose on the Gentile Christians in Galatia regulations, like circumcision ("a yoke of slavery"), in addition to the faith in Jesus Christ that alone gives life. You are not justified by believing the gospel *and* observing the law. Does that mean Christians are not under the law? They are not, says Paul ("if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law," Gal 5:18).

Yet, of course, Christians seek and need guidance for the new life in Christ that we live. What are we to do? How are we to live? For we have been made new, but, as no one needs to tell you, we do not this side of the parousia automatically and fully do the will of God. Wolfgang Trilling (*Conversations with Paul*, Crossroad, 1987) says that Gal 5:25 powerfully sums up the already and not yet tension in which we live: "If we live by the Spirit [that is the indicative, the new reality out of which we live], let us also walk by the Spirit" [that is the imperative to which we need again and again to be called].

For the imperative the law can be a guide, and it can be summed up with devastatingly simple directness: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself"; "through love become slaves to one another," in other words. "The only thing that counts is faith working through love" (Gal 5:6), in other words. And all of that is not only expected but also possible, because it is the fruit of the Spirit.

To follow Jesus in freedom, says the gospel, is to "set your face" (make a firm resolve) to go where you know God wants you to go; it is to give up the old patterns of vengeance and retaliation; it is to expect at times to join those with no fixed address, it is to leave the old encumbrances and go forward, walking by the Spirit.

To follow God in freedom, says the first lesson, is to realize that for all your zeal you are quite mistaken to think that the whole divine operation rests on you. At a time of God's choosing a person of God's choosing will be ready to be anointed in your place and receive your mantle.

The psalm has a lot of ways of describing what it means to follow God in freedom: I have no good apart from you; I bless the Lord who gives me counsel; you show me the path of life, in your presence there is fullness of joy.

In an old Worship Supplement we used light years ago, The Holy Eucharist II (I believe it was a service from St. Mark's-in-the-Bowery) started: "We are here in the name of Jesus Christ," centered on the Word and the Meal, and ended "Go. Serve the Lord. You are free." That about says it all. ERK

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost
July 23, 1995

Psalm 66:1-11, 14-18
Isaiah 66:10-14
Galatians 6:1-10, 14-16
Luke 10:1-12, 16 (17-20)

Through Jesus Christ and the outpoured Spirit God has given us *a new creation.* Want to see it again?

The second lesson, the final one in this sequence from Galatians, once again provides our theme. Verse 15 is one of the three places where Paul says circumcision doesn't count, uncircumcision doesn't count, but what really matters is.... You can imagine everyone getting quiet, as in the E. F. Hutton ads, straining to hear what Paul thinks really counts. Here his answer is "a new creation is everything." God is not into fine tuning the old; what God brings is new. The old religious categories are not what really count. The world's categories, since the crucifixion, no longer count. Through the cross of Jesus Christ the world and I have been crucified with respect to one another. Those for whom the cross of Jesus Christ—the sign of God's judgment on all sin and of God's grace for all sinners—is the basis for judging and experiencing what is life and what is death, know and live from God's mercy and peace. The new creation is characterized by bearing one another's burdens, restoring those who err, supporting with your gifts the heralds and teachers of the new creation.

It is God's peace, which surely is a new creation, that the seventy sent on in advance of Jesus are to proclaim in the towns and places to which he intended to come. They are to travel light, for here as well the hearers are to support the proclaimers. It is a whole new world of mutual love and care, where people are fed, the sick are cured. It is none other than the new creation, that is, the reign of God, which brings life and shalom on those who receive it, judgment on those who reject it.

In one sense all this is not new but what was promised and experienced already in Isaiah: judgment on that which thwarted God's plans, so that God's plans—to show mercy and love—can make all things new. To describe the God who does *that* the prophet reaches for the most primal image of all: God is a mother offering her child milk at the breast, bouncing her child up and down on her knees, offering her child comfort. Such a God can and does make all things new. ERK

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost
July 30, 1995

Psalm 25:1-9
Deuteronomy 30:9-14
Colossians 1:1-14
Luke 10:25-37

Through Jesus Christ and the outpoured Spirit God has given us *a role in God's plan for the world.* Want to see it again?

The theme comes from the gospel, the story of the good Samaritan, and from the prayer of the day, which reads: "Lord God, use our lives to touch the world with your love. Stir us, by your Spirit, to be neighbor to those in need, serving them with willing hearts; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."

In *The Amnesty of Grace. Justification by Faith from a Latin American Perspective* (Abingdon, 1993), Elsa Tamez points out that the truth that our salvation rests on divine initiative alone often is twisted into an assertion of the insignificance of humanity and the idea that we have no role in making present God's reign. While the gospel quite rightly calls to account those bent on self-aggrandizement and wanting to be God, this message can be heard very differently in a context in which the world tells someone that they are nothing—as the poor and others on the margin are told every day. When God comes, not only are the mighty put down but the lowly are lifted up. They are lifted up to have a vital role in God's plan for the world.

The prayer of the day powerfully catches

that message. God uses *our* lives to touch the world with God's love, to be neighbor and to serve. Not only are we to trust God, says Tamez, but God trusts us, enabling us to trust ourselves, knowing that in our tasks on God's behalf we are sustained by God's Spirit (Stir us by your Spirit, says the prayer).

All this time, I believe, the prayer of the day and Tamez and I have been talking about today's gospel. The question about what had to be done to inherit eternal life and the answer it received stuck close to the questioner's religious understandings, the Torah summarized as wholehearted love to God and neighbor. The question about who the neighbor was turned upside down by a story. It changed everything.

If the first words on the questioner's lips were "What must I do to inherit eternal life," the last word he was heard to say was *mercy*. God's story among us is about mercy. God *gives* eternal life, by grace, by mercy. Thereby God empowers us to show mercy, inspirited to be neighbor instead of asking task-evading questions about who out there is my neighbor. God trusts us and sends us forth to be neighbor as full participants in the redemptive plan.

In fact, says Colossians, God has transferred us into the kingdom of the beloved Son, redeemed and forgiven us and thereby empowered us to lead lives worthy of the Lord, bearing fruit in every good work (use *our* lives to touch the world with *your* love).

Deuteronomy reminds us that the task to which God calls us, for which God empowers us, is neither too hard nor too remote: "No, the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe." Paul quotes this verse in Romans 10, dropping "for you to observe" and taking *the word* that is so near us to be the word of *faith*. But for those who know themselves to be justified by faith, mercied into a place from which we are sent forth to show mercy, "for you to observe," and its siblings "go and do likewise," and "use our lives to touch the world with your love" work just fine. That's the task with which God entrusts us, and for which, if you believe Tamez, God trusts us. How about that! ERK

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Easter Story

Kenneth R. Storck
Storm Lake, Iowa

Salome never liked her name. As a youngster she was known as Sal. In her professional life she went by her middle name, Mary. Salome clutched her handkerchief tightly as she clung to the steering wheel while driving through the pouring rain. She gazed at the handkerchief and briefly remembered in passing Grandma sending her off to Sunday School clutching the perfumed handkerchief with a dime neatly tied into the corner.

Salome experienced a lot in life, and success had brought with it coldness and an icy distance. She had learned to maintain professional control and composure, but alone in her car on the way to Grandma's funeral the dam broke and a flood of tears. She remembered: sharing lemonade in Grandma's parlor, tomboy days playing whiffle ball, how she and her cousins competed for hugs from Grandma. She remembered: apple butter and homemade fried chicken, lace tablecloths and eggnog, Easter egg hunts in the backyard, and fresh peaches on homemade ice cream. Then there was her girlfriend, Joanne, who adopted Grandma as her own Grandma.

It was 300 miles to the funeral and a journey to death. When was the last time she laughed? When was the last time she cried as hard as she cried now? She felt like a child weeping at the loss of a precious teddy bear.

Organization woman: In her professional way, Salome had worked with Grandma. Pre-arrangements had been made years before. It seemed cold—even calculating, but she was Grandma's favorite and Grandma accepted a professional woman's advice. A sharp pain went through Salome's forehead; was it a migraine? And then she remembered the dark room and curtains closed and the soft cool cloth on her forehead as she relaxed on Grandma's bed. "You study too hard—your brain is bursting! Now relax—let Grandma take care of you. It's spring break and you could be celebrating with your friends...." The warm touch, the smell of perfume in Grandma's bedroom as she remembered her sophomore year in college.

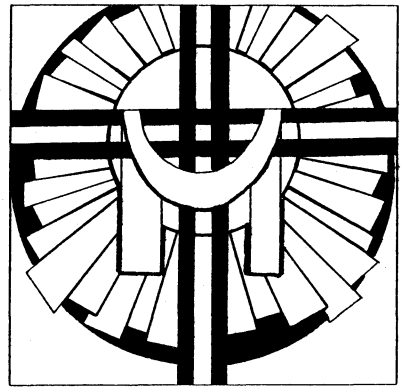
At the pace of 100 kilometers an hour, Salome was about an hour from her destination and driven by the rain, she did not stop. She took a deep breath and got her composure and practiced for an hour the professional greetings and the posture. No one would know her grief. She was poised for action, and her resolve was strong as adrenaline flowed swiftly through her veins.

Then she turned the corner to Grandma's house. She noticed the old swing. It was a porch swing. A sudden urge for love went through her, and she remembered the man she had given up for her career and how he caressed her there at Grandma's house.

The wind was lifting the swing, and it gently moved at a lover's pace.

This journey was a lot rougher than she thought it would be. She had set all the memories aside for years, and now an avalanche began; childhood losses smothered her at Grandma's doorstep. Salome was afraid, alone!

The funeral went exactly as planned. Salome was like a rock—a stone—solid, professional. People spoke of her strength—the rock of the family. She listened to the typical inane greetings: "Grandma looks like herself, doesn't she!" And the 'I'm sorry's' echoed in her ears. The funeral was finally over. Little did Salome know that the stone would be rolled away. The next afternoon her friend, companion at Grandma's dinner table, took her out for dinner. She was to return to business-as-usual the next day. Her friend brought her a gift and as they concluded dinner together said, "Grandma wants you to have this," as she took out a small package from her purse.



Salome opened it slowly; the wrappings seemed centuries old. And then that familiar smell of perfume. It was a handkerchief. And a dime was neatly tied into the corner. Salome wept like she had wept when she was ten years old, and the stone was rolled away!

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