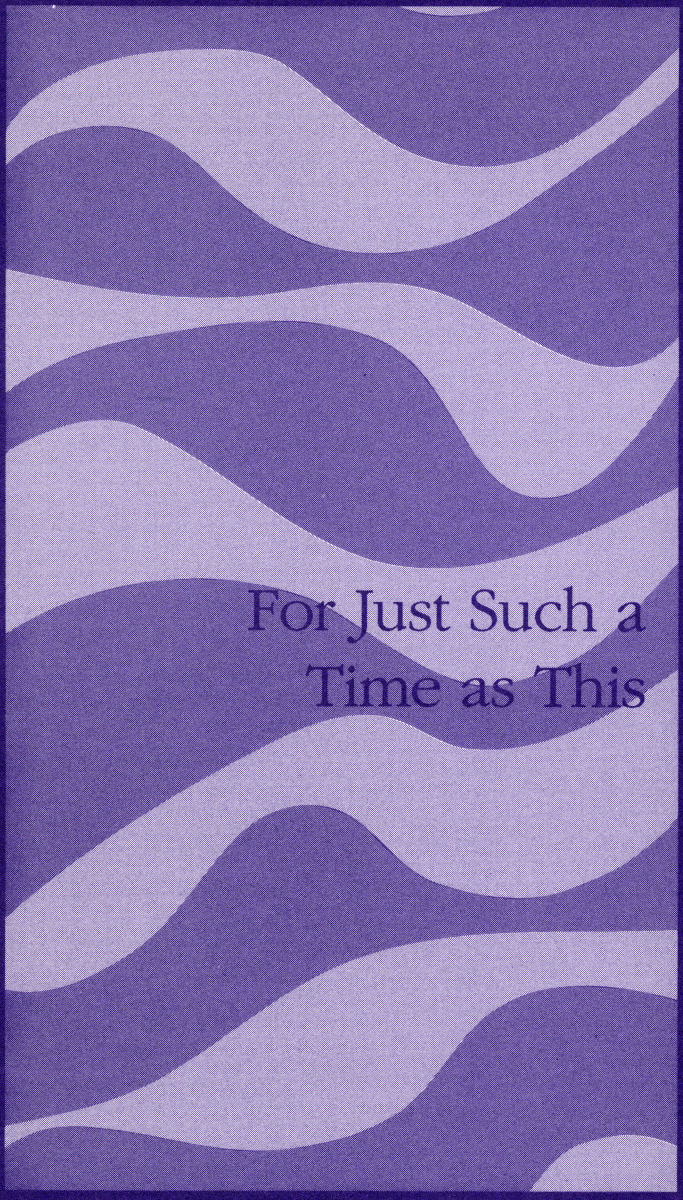
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For Just Such a Time as This

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Editor: **Ralph W. Klein**
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

Editor of Book Reviews: **Jay C. Rochelle**
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

Editor of Preaching Helps: **Robert H. Smith**
Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary

Associate Editor: **Norma Cook Everist**
Wartburg Theological Seminary

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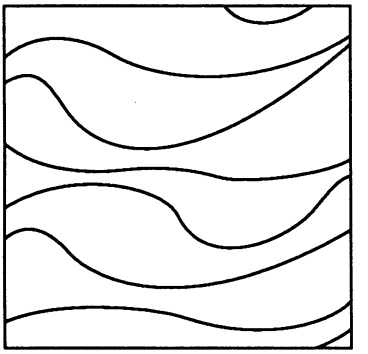
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For Just Such a Time as This

Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this. Esther 4:14

Mordecai's question to Esther addresses us all. We who have been appointed queens and kings in charge of God's estate (Gen 1:27-28) are prone to miss the opportunities for beneficent rule that God sets before us. Made only a little less than God, and crowned with glory and honor (Ps 8:5), we sometimes confuse blessed dominion with domination, responsibility with hierarchy, royal dignity with rank. At a time in the United States when politics has taken on a mean spirit, and when the church seems uncertain of both its future and its future direction, it's our turn to play the noble and effective role of Esther. The world and the church need light, more light.

Philip Hefner calls attention to the experience of loss that accompanies the environmental crisis. Although nature does not bestow grace and redemption, it is the necessary place where they begin. To lose our proper relationship to nature is to lose the primary object of God's creation work and the primary locus of God's grace. We have so defined our own survival that in our efforts to assure it we have hastened nature's demise. Our survival dare not be defined at the expense of the rest of nature. Our common life in the world of nature is the medium through which whatever we mean by Law and Gospel either happens or does not happen.

Andrew M. Weyermann begins a six part series on preaching by asking what makes good preaching good. Good preaching happens only when the good that God *is* is conveyed to the hearer. Preaching is God's

address to the hearer and not simply the preacher's talk about God. Too often we preachers tell the hearers to do on their own the very thing that cannot be done on their own—trust God! Good preaching happens when the preacher sets forth the magnitude of God's mercy toward fallible and fallen creatures so that the Holy Spirit might move the hearer to trust God above all things and be freed to love the neighbor.

Robert L. Brawley continues the focus of the last issue on the Gospel of Luke by showing that the Abrahamic covenant influences not only how Luke-Acts presents the extension of God's salvation, but also how Luke-Acts characterizes God and Jesus. The God of Luke-Acts does not act for the particular benefit of special people, but for the blessing of all the families of the earth. The healing of the crippled woman, the reversal of status for Lazarus and the rich man, the repentance of Zacchaeus, and the healing of the lame man are concrete cases of how God is blessing all the families of the earth. Jesus is the descendant of Sarah and Abraham in whom all the families of the earth will be blessed.

A. M. Okorie discusses the characterization of the tax collectors and Pharisees in Luke. While the tax collectors are depicted as crafty, unscrupulous, and unjust, Jesus opposed the Pharisees and accepted the sarcastic epithet that he is a friend of tax collectors and sinners. In Luke the tax collectors grow to be models of prayer, repentance, and belief. Readers are drawn to distance themselves from the Pharisees and to respond favorably to Jesus. By studying the contrasting characterization of tax collectors and Pharisees the reader-preacher gains new insights about the lavish graciousness of the gospel and about its power to transform people's lives.

Fred Strickert describes the Presentation of Jesus as a story about the inclusive gospel in an exclusive world. In the ethnically segregated temple Jesus appears as a light to lighten the Gentiles. While the elite priesthood is missing from the story, laity like Simeon and Anna are highlighted. Both Joseph and Mary are purified—not just the woman after childbirth. Simeon's eyes are opened and Anna's mouth is—two breakthroughs for the elderly.

Mark E. Chapman finds that eulogies often replace gospel-centered sermons at funerals. Since we are "called-forth" beings, only the word of the death and resurrection of Jesus, and the word of our incorporation by faith and baptism into that death and resurrection, can be the authentic language that calls forth life from death. What we see in the coffin is not what we will be, but only what once was. The true mirror of our future is the cross.

Ron Dwyer-Voss defines "confrontational ministry" as uprooting, pulling down, and destroying that which is bad, and planting and building that which is good. He joins the company of Jeremiah who learned that God's instructions to confront are never separable from God's reassurances. Confrontational ministry is a daily and weekly activity, that inherently goes hand in hand with planting and building.

To complete the package **Marc Kolden** reminds us in a sermon that God wouldn't call us to be steadfast, excelling in the work of the Lord, if he didn't have great things in store for us. **Gary Blobaum** shares a poem about self-identify, and **Reinhard Hütter** discusses two recent books by David H. Kelsey on theological education.

As I was writing this editorial, word came to me that **Ralph F. Smith,** professor of worship at Wartburg Theological Seminary and a frequent contributor to *Currents*, was killed in a head-on crash the day after Thanksgiving. The accident also took the life of his seven-week-old grandchild. Ralph was exactly the kind of person whose God-given grace and dignity seemed perfectly fitted to just such a time as this. We grieve his loss. May he rest in peace, and light, more light, shine on him.

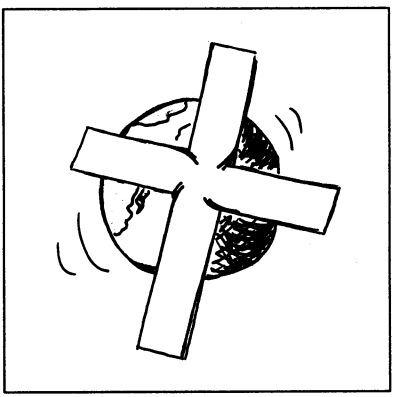
Ralph W. Klein
Editor

The Care of the Earth: The LSTC Legacy

Philip Hefner
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

The theme of the LSTC Professional Leadership Conference speaks of church leadership in the environmental crisis.

"Crisis" speaks to me of a situation that requires decision in the face of loss. I believe that such a situation can be called evil, and if we do call it evil, we have thereby also made a major advance in interpreting the crisis, an advance in bestowing meaning upon it.



Paul Ricoeur tells us that evil is itself "supremely the crucial experience of the sacred," that is, the crucial experience of God. It is such an experience of God, because evil threatens to cut us off from

what we are most deeply dependent upon and thereby opens up for us the meaning of our lives. I will weave my contribution to the theme on the loom of this insight from Ricoeur, in the hope that the theological reflection that emerges will be a resource to church leadership in this environmental crisis.

At the outset, I said that the environmental crisis involves loss. One of the principal ways in which evil confronts us in this crisis is with actual loss and the threat of greater loss. We face the loss of our own health and the loss of some natural resources, as well as the loss of some of the pleasures that the natural environment offers us. In some cases the crisis includes the loss of lives: polluted air kills, over the long haul, if not immediately; misuse of the land causes lethal floods, landslides, and famine. These are real and by no means to be minimized, and ultimately they point to the issue of survival or nonsurvival. Even more, however, the loss is that we are being cut off from a certain relationship with the natural world. Certainly the natural world can no longer be taken for granted; it can no longer be viewed as a friend in some superficially imagined partnership. For some, nature was never such a friend, but always a wild beast to be tamed and exploited—and for these people there is also loss: the beast is no longer waiting in the corral for the futile exercise of bucking a rider who will surely gain the final advantage, place the bit and adjust the halter. Although the rhetoric is anthropomorphic, we can say that nature, including the nature inside us, has in a sense revolted, it can no longer be viewed as a passive prize waiting to be conquered and exploited.

I want to focus upon the experience of loss that accompanies the environmental crisis, and that focus will be through the lenses provided by the theological thinking of Joseph Sittler and the poetry of two of his great spiritual companions, Gerard Manley Hopkins and Richard Wilbur. The loss that we face can be summarized under three images: *source*, *vulnerability*, and *revelation*.

Source

The environmental crisis brings to our awareness that nature is a fundamental source upon which we are dependent for life, and life includes the grace of God. From Gerard Manley Hopkins, I select as centerpiece his familiar sonnet, "God's Grandeur."

> The world is charged with the
> grandeur of God.
> It will flame out, like shining from
> shook foil;
> It gathers to a greatness, like the
> ooze of oil
> Crushed. Why do men then now not
> reck his rod?
> Generations have trod, have trod, have
> trod;
> And all is seared with trade;
> bleared, smeared with toil;
> And wears man's smudge and
> shares man's smell: the soil
> Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being
> shod.
>
> And for all this, nature is never spent;
> There lives the dearest freshness
> deep down things;
> And though the last lights off the
> black West went
> Oh, morning, at the brown brink
> eastward, springs—
> Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
> World broods with warm breast and
> with ah! bright wings.
>
> (*Poems and Prose*, 27)

The loss of nature, or the loss of a certain relationship with nature, brings with it an awareness that this grandeur of God

that will flame out from the world of nature, this dearest freshness deep down things, this particular brooding of God's Spirit over nature—these are not indifferent matters for us, they are the source of our lives, and we are dependent upon them as such.

From Joseph Sittler:

> If the occasions of grace, both in Israel's experience and in the testimony of the Christian community are incarnate—for Israel in her historical experience of liberation and God-heldness, for the Christian community in the "glory" of God beheld in "the face of Christ Jesus"—the place of grace must be the webbed connectedness of our creaturely life. That web does not indeed bestow grace; it is necessarily the theatre for it.
>
> (*Essays*, 94)

> Nature is an "occasioning" context, an interlaced web of origin and sustenance without which man is not.
>
> (*Essays*, 89)

> A doctrine of redemption is meaningful only when it swings within the larger orbit of a doctrine of creation. For God's creation of earth cannot be redeemed in any intelligible sense of the word apart from a doctrine of the cosmos which is our home, our definite place, the theater of our selfhood under God, in corporation with our neighbor, and in caring-relationship with nature, our sister.
>
> ("Called To Unity," 7)

We are dependent upon nature as the source of our breathing air, of our drinking and irrigating water, of our food in the fields. The threat of losing our relationship with nature reveals to us that this dependency must not be allowed to go sour. But we are also dependent upon nature as the source of our genes and our central nervous systems. No wonder Sittler can speak of nature as the theater of our selfhood! Sittler goes still deeper. He calls us to acknowledge that nature, the webbed connectedness of our creaturely life, is the place of grace, necessarily the pathway for our journey from despair to redemption. He knows that "men and women in their existence will be tempted to reduce human redemption to an 'angelic' escape from the cosmos of natural and historical fact," and he calls such a view "offensive to biblical theology."

The only place where grace is available to us is in the context of our actual creaturely lives...

There is no escape. The only place where grace is available to us is in the context of our actual creaturely lives, and this means that we are dependent upon the nature that surrounds us outwardly and forms us inwardly for our lives and for grace and for redemption. Not that nature bestows grace and redemption, but that it is the necessary place where they happen. Our doctrine of redemption is meaningful only when it swings within the larger orbit of a doctrine of creation. To lose nature, or our proper relationship to nature, is at the same time to lose the primary object of God's creation work and the primary locus of God's grace. The environmental crisis, consequently, is a crisis of these proportions, because it is precisely from this nature, the necessary place of grace, that we are so alienated that we face its loss. Only sheer romanticism can take Sittler's words

about redemption swinging within the orbit of creation or Hopkins' poetry of the Spirit brooding over the bent world as comforting without acknowledging that it is exactly the reality to which these images point that we are alienated from, that we are so close to losing. Sittler and Hopkins speak a truth to us that is genuinely poignant, in that it pricks our sensibilities, it cuts into us and disturbs us with its stinging veracity, because we feel how real the loss might be in this crisis.

Vulnerability

Gerard Manley Hopkins expressed a clear sense for the vulnerability of nature in his poem, "Ribblesdale":

> Earth, sweet Earth, sweet landscape, with leaves throng
> and louched low grass, heaven that dost appeal
> To, with no tongue to plead, no heart to feel;
> That canst but only be, but dost that long—
> Thou canst but be, but that thou well dost; strong
> Thy plea with him who dealt, nay does now deal,
> Thy lovely dale down thus and thus bids reel
> Thy river, and o'er gives all to rack or wrong.
>
> And what is Earth's eye, tongue, or heart else, where
> Else, but in dear and dogged man? Ah, the heir
> To his own selfbent so bound, so tied to his turn,
> To thriftless reave both our rich round world bare
> And none reck of world after, this bids wear
> Earth brows of such care, care and dear concern.
>
> (*Poems and Prose*, 51)

Threatened with the loss of nature, we perceive in a twinkling that this dear source of life and medium of grace is vulnerable. In our own crisis of loss, we see our utter dependency upon the natural world, past and present. But in the moment of recognition, we are aware that the vulnerability is reciprocal. The recognition of this reciprocity leads us deeper into the mystery of our relationship with the rest of nature. The threatened loss of nature or the loss of confidence we have had in nature's reliability reveals to us that in our own reciprocal vulnerability we have taken advantage of nature's vulnerability to shore up ourselves. We have so defined our own survival that in our efforts to assure it, we have hastened nature's demise, only to discover that in nature's decline, our own demise becomes more sure. In Hopkins' images, we might see that Earth's brow is furled in concern, not only for itself, but also for us, because when our eyes, tongues, and hearts fail to function for Earth, they also fail us.

Carlos Fuentes, the Mexican novelist and man of letters, has shown how the Spanish bullfight is a ritual of interaction between vulnerable nature and vulnerable humans.

> The matador is a tragic representation of man's relation to nature, the actor in a ceremony of remembrance of our violent survival at the expense of nature. We cannot refuse the exploitation of nature, because it is the condition of our survival. The men and women who painted the animals in the [prehistoric] cave at Altamira [in Spain] already knew this. Spain rips off the mask of our puritanical hypocrisy in relation to nature and transforms the memory of our origins and our survival at the expense of the natural into a ritual of bravery and artistry, perhaps even of redemption.
>
> (Fuentes, 23-4).

The matador does not vanquish the bull, the

We have so defined our own survival that in our efforts to assure it, we have hastened nature's demise.

symbol of nature, but rather acknowledges ritually that humans are always killing nature in order to live, and that they do so, not as confident winners, but as vulnerable creatures themselves whose lives are also often defined in being maimed and killed as the ritual plays itself out. Fuentes' is a prophetic voice that warns us against what he calls "the puritanical hypocrisy" that would suppose that being kind to nature is enough, or that it is even possible to be kind in any simple or pure manner. Nature bears our smudge and shares our smell, and we bear the smudges of nature's blood, blood that nature has shed from the moment that we emerged from her womb and throughout our mutilating climb out of the caves into high tech civilization. In the face of the loss of nature, we gain a sense of the vulnerability of both ourselves and nature, and we see that we have been and continue to be accessories to the demise of both. We have not only been exploiters and wounders of nature, but we have been necessary exploiters, because our survival and well-being is at stake. We have literally scratched our living out of the flesh of our sibling, the Earth.

The power and the awful beauty of Fuentes' description of the bullfight carries the strong scent of tragedy. Humans are destined to mutilate nature as a condition of their survival. Joseph Sittler would not deny the depth of Fuentes' insight, and he frequently acknowledges its truth, but he transmutes it in the light of Christian faith. Fuentes' description of the ritual dance between nature bull and human matador, with an intentional nuance of the erotic, speaks of the matador alluring while deceiving the bull into an engagement in which the bull is summoned by the man to "an astonishing instant of a statuesque coupling, bull and fighter enlaced, entwined, giving each other the qualities of force, beauty, and risk. The mythic moment is restored: man and bull are once more, as in the labyrinth of Minos, the same" (Fuentes, 23). From this beauty comes death, certainly for the bull and potentially also for the matador.

Sittler, in speaking of "Christian theology and the environment" (*Essays*, chapter 6) employs images that are not so far from Fuentes. Concerning the ethical task with respect to the environment, he asks,

> That faith should forever have to risk the act of investiture of the whole in the power of the experienced redemptive occasion—is this not of the profoundest character of genuine faith?... Faith, that is to say, when it becomes maturely conscious of the risk-character of its demand, is always an act of investiture of total reality with that vision, value, and meaning which has been granted to us in our encounters with the deepest, highest, and holiest. When that deepest, highest, and holiest is the presence and power of grace, and when the occasions of its life-sustaining gift are granted us within our residency within the nonhuman world-theatre of our existence, the place and scope for the ethical is given along with the realm of the gracious.
>
> (*Essays*, 118)

The point is a forceful one. Fuentes talked about the statuesque ritual coupling in which humans and nature are one, giving

to each other force, beauty, and risk, a coupling in which life and death, healing and mutilation are intensely reciprocal. Sittler is talking about understanding nature to be governed by grace and as a result of that understanding engaging in ethical action that follows the trail of God's grace, a trail leads everywhere and fills all the spaces available, in both the human and the nonhuman worlds. Mature faith will risk such an investiture, allowing grace to define the meaning of nature, because it is impelled to obey the call of grace. Further, the church wants to do more than simply add its "numerically modest voice" to the urging of the environmental cause. It sees that "a change in the spirit of our minds" is necessary, and that requires "something vastly more than a combination of frightening facts and moral concern" (*Essays*, 118). It requires faith that will not "translate down" "the power of events, presences, and visions, the total and holy understanding of man and God, man and neighbor, man and God's creation from their fiercely elevated and dynamic, steadily revolutionary reality" (*Essays*, 119).

This is the Christian vision of God's grace that Sittler is referring to, it is the Word of God that is a fiercely elevated and dynamic, steadily revolutionary reality, and as such it will not settle for the tragedy of the bullfight. Rather, its confidence lies in the will and grace of God that intend to break the vicious coupling in which humans kill nature as the chief strategy to forestall their own being killed. The Christian gospel is fundamentally a gospel of transformation, a change that is possible, real, and already underway through God's grace. If we claim that the gospel is relevant to the environmental crisis, we are at the same time claiming that the millennia-long ritual depicted in the Spanish bullfight can be transformed, that the spirit of our minds can be so transformed that our survival will not be defined at the expense of the rest of nature. This is a dramatic claim, one that not many people will accept. The claim is not worth making if it stops short of facing the challenge posed by the myth and ritual of the Spanish bullfight. Sittler summarizes in terms that are a direct response to the tragic vision that Fuentes has depicted:

> This symbiotic coexistence and interaction of the risk of faith, the consequent investiture of the creation with a gracious possibility in virtue of the Incarnation, and an ethicizing of our regard for and our transactions with nature as *still*, despite man's rapacity and despoliation, a field of grace—this is proposed as a Christian theological pattern of a magnitude that matches the misery of our environmental debacle.
>
> (*Essays*, 118)

Sittler brought this all together in his concept, "care of the earth." Care is directed toward the Earth who is our sibling. Care of the earth is an alternative vision of what can happen in the ritual of courage and risk that is acted out every moment in the coupling of vulnerable earth and vulnerable human being. Care of the earth is not band-aids, it is not a kind of "hello, I want to say I love you." It is rather an investiture of the natural world in grace and of ourselves in the implications that flow from that investiture.

Revelation

One of the most important dimensions of our experience of God in the situation of evil is insight into who we are, the meaning of our lives. That moment when evil inflicts great loss upon us is also a revelatory moment. Our common speech recognizes this fact when we say that in the face of death one's entire life flashes before a person's eyes. In his poem, "Advice to a Prophet,"

Richard Wilbur makes the point that since nature is essential to our self-understanding, the loss of nature would be a serious deprivation in our ability to know who we are. In the poem he asks,

> ...What should we be without
> The dolphin's arc, the dove's return,
>
> These things in which we have seen
> ourselves and spoken?
> Ask us, prophet, how shall we call
> Our natures forth when that live
> tongue is all
> Dispelled, that glass obscured or
> broken
>
> In which we have said the rose of our
> love and the clean
> Horse of our courage, in which beheld
> The singing locust of the soul
> unshelled,
> And all we mean or wish to mean.
>
> Ask us, ask us whether with the
> worldless rose
> Our hearts shall fail us;
> (Wilbur, 182-3)

Nature is a mirror in which we have seen ourselves and spoken. Joseph Sittler took that to be an important truth. Nature has served as a source of revelation about who we are and what we ought to be about. When nature is beheld in the light of God's will and purpose, the revelation is intensified. Nature, when studied apart from God, tells us a good deal—that it is our sibling, that we are deeply intertwined in its workings, that it is an amazing and wonderful reality on its own. When nature is perceived as God's realm, God's creation, and when it is understood that God intends the creation to be governed by grace, then a whole new cosmos opens up for us. Environmental ethics, Sittler said, includes more than a way of acting, it also includes a way of understanding all things from the center that is God.

Nature is a mirror in which we have seen ourselves and spoken.

When we look at nature from this center, then we learn that "the grace of the Creator is a principle of the creation" (*Essays*, 121), and this changes our total outlook, both on the world of nature and on ourselves. We are to assess the world and use it in ways that are consistent with the revelation that it is of God and a place of divine grace. When we do this, then we have had the truth revealed to us, and we know how to act in obedience to the truth. Sittler writes:

> If, for instance, Lake Michigan is assessed according to its given ecological structure as a place for multiple forms of life, by nature self-sustaining and clean, available for right use and delight, then in a blunt and verifiable way, we are "justified" by grace even in our relation to the things of nature. The opposite of justification is condemnation.... If a lake becomes a disposal-resource, or a dump, or a source for water to cool ingots with, or a bath to flush out oil-bunkers, then a repudiated grace that "justifies" becomes the silent agent of condemnation. (*Essays*, 121-2)

Instinctively, a Lutheran recognizes that Sittler is touching upon the rhetoric of law and gospel. "The law always accuses": In Lake Michigan as garbage dump, we encounter the hidden God, whose wrath is known in the accusation leveled by the silent agent of condemnation. Sittler be-

We are called to test out in our lives the claim that the Triune God of creation is a transforming God whose promises are utterly reliable.

lieved that such an understanding constitutes a major instance of revelation, especially for the heirs of the Reformation, who are inclined to restrict both law and gospel to the privacy of individual sin and its forgiveness. Nature is not the source of justification, nor of gospel, but our transactions with Lake Michigan are the place in which the gospel's justification is either present or not present. If it is not present there, then it is really absent; if it is present, it is really present.

The revelation is not complete, however, until we understand our life in the natural world to be fully incorporated within the central Christian vision of the Trinity. Sittler's celebrated New Delhi address to the Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1961 is noted for its christological perspective on nature. This is certainly vintage Sittler, but most often in his writings he speaks of the fullness of the trinitarian vision, a vision that he learned to appropriate in his ecumenical involvement with theologians from the Eastern churches and the ancient sources upon which they drew. The upshot is that in our common life in the world-as-nature and also in the world-as-human we must say that we stand in the place where grace is present, and that it is the grace of the Triune God.

> ...the reality of grace is the fundamental reality of God the Creator in God's creation, God the redeemer in God's redemption, and God the Sanctifier and Illuminator in all occasions of the common life where sanctifying grace is beheld, bestowed, and lived by.
>
> (*Essays*, 88)

> ...when grace as a redemptive reality, originating in the determinate will of the Father, is beheld as the meaning of the Son, the Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are, indeed, children of God; and the reality of grace known *there* names the Son as the life-principle and mystery of meaning in all that is.
>
> ("The Presence and Acts," 132-3)

What is the revelation that emerges in the face of the loss of nature and our relationship to it? It is vast and it is this: that our common life in the world of nature is the medium through which whatever we mean by law and gospel and whatever we mean by union with the Triune God either happens or does not happen. And wherever this grace happens, under whatever forms, it is the grace we associate with Christ, the "life-principle and mystery of meaning in all that is." This revelation, given to us in the terms of the present environmental crisis, provides the ultimate foundation on which we build our environmental ethics and exercise our leadership.

Our Legacy in the Environmental Crisis

If we are to do more than add our "numerically modest" voice to the others that are working in this environmental crisis, we will have to be about our theological busi-

ness. Such is the justification for the very heavy load of reflection that I have brought to our theme. To be about our theological business is the peculiar legacy of the church, and it is our legacy at LSTC. Reflection on nature and grace, particularly in the work of Joseph Sittler, but also in the work of his colleagues, is one the most prominent elements in our seminary's tradition. We have too often left this tradition on the shelf, as if it were a museum piece. I am grateful to David Rhoads on our faculty that he has insisted that it be taken out of the archives and set loose in the common life of our school.

To be about our theological business means that we are first of all out to change the "spirit of our minds," because the environmental crisis calls for nothing less. We might not recognize that this fundamental transformation of spirit is central, were we not in a crisis, and were we not faced with a loss so great that it is beyond recompense. Perhaps we should be more willing to go beyond the terms "crisis" and "loss," and name our situation evil. In the face of this "evil," we must be faithful to an environmental ethics, because both our ethical action and our ethical understanding are part of our calling, to follow the lead of God's grace into all the places where the Triune God has chosen to be present for the uneviling of evil and for the fulfilling of God's intention.

We are called to test out in our lives the claim that the Triune God of creation is a transforming God whose promises are utterly reliable. In that calling, we can place these words of Joe Sittler's foremost in our minds:

> If the realm of nature is regarded and used under the rubric of grace, and responds as if one had discovered her true name, and along with God's human creation "delights" to have a name and to have been given freedom to be, then the ancient image of the "morning stars sang together, and all the sons and daughters of God shouted for joy" becomes more than poetry, it becomes a viable hope that can direct our lives.
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> (*Essays*, 121)

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What Makes Good Preaching Good?

Andrew M. Weyermann
Wilmette Lutheran Church
Wilmette, Illinois

A man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone." Mark 10:17-18

Some time ago I was with a group of seminary professors of preaching, working on a curriculum for a Doctor of Ministry in Preaching degree. Toward the end of the session one colleague observed, "We ought to hold an open conversation in front of the students on what we mean by 'good' preaching!" He wasn't joking. Our discussion had exposed the simple truth that we professors of preaching were not agreed on the most fundamental question about preaching, namely, What makes good preaching good? But the way the question is answered reveals what preaching is, what it is for, and why it is necessary.

Of course we agree on many elements that make for a good sermon: life connectedness, drama, lively delivery, solid exposition of the text, clarity of thought, good progression. But the question is not what is good about this sermon in terms of rhetoric. Rather, the question is what is the good that makes the sermon good proclamation of the Word of God.

Our Lord told the rich young ruler in the text cited above, "Only God is good." The rejoinder implies more than moral perfection. It points to our Lord's conviction that God is the Good that all human life needs. Good preaching happens only when the Good that God *is* is conveyed to the hearer. Good preaching is offering God's goodness, God's self in Christ, to those who gather under it.

Often when we are told by our parishioners, "That was a good sermon, Pastor," it happens ironically that there was in fact no Good in the sermon. Perhaps we had retold the parable of the Good Samaritan with imagination and skill. Exposing the Levite in the hearers, we urged one and all to be Good Samaritans. But we still had not conveyed the Good that God is to the hearers. Only the Spirit of the gracious God can produce a Good Samaritan. We had failed to preach the Presence.

That may be hard for us to hear, but the possibility must be faced. In order for preachers to be the instrument of God's gracious promise, they need to engage in what I term the *art of centering in the gospel*. Sermon preparation for good preaching involves centering meditation. We let our minds move from the life situation

suggested by the text to center on God's grace in Christ and from that center out to life again.

This whole series on preaching is about that centering process.

Good preaching is preaching centered in the gospel. There are some basic assumptions hidden in this assertion. I want to expose them for consideration.

Assumption 1: What preaching is. Sermons usually include a certain amount of textual exposition, explanation of the church's faith, references to the contemporary scene, stories of people in need or doing good, and sometimes pithy sayings or attention-getting illustrations. None of these necessarily guarantees that the sermon is genuine preaching.

Theologically, preaching is God's Word at work on the hearers today. It is the application of the Word, the Word that comes to us out of Holy Scripture. If you interpret some passage of the Bible in such a way that it yields no application for today, you are not preaching. If you tell a story about a woman who freed herself from the shackles of an abusive spouse, no matter how gripping, without connection with the Word of God, it is not preaching. But when the Word of God intersects that story, then you are preaching. Preaching is God's address to the hearer and not simply the preacher's talk *about* God.

I have found helpful Gerhard Ebeling's dynamic summary of what preaching is meant to be. Ebeling says that the Word of God is the coming of God to those who hear. And proclamation, that is, preaching, is the coming into words of that Word of God.

When the Bible speaks of the Word of God, it is not referring to a book or some theological discourse. For the Bible, the Word of God is the way God comes and does God's work in the world (Gen 1:2; Isa 55:7-13; Ps 33:6; Heb 4:12). When God enlists the preacher to say, "Thus says the Lord," the Lord assures the preacher that what God promises in those texts, God will do.

Good preaching brings into words the work of God's salvation in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ by which the Spirit heals, liberates, and empowers the people of God today (Heb 11:1-3; Rom 1:6; Jn 8:4; 1 Cor 15:1-11). Preaching for the church is essentially God's means of gracing the people of God.

Now, it is audacious to speak about offering the Good that God is by means of a sermon. Hence, the task must be approached with fear and trembling. *We preachers do not simply speak about God; we speak for God.* Preaching is God's address and not merely "God talk." Put another way, when the Word is really preached, preaching is performative, not simply descriptive. Naturally, we do not speak for God in everything we say. That is why we need to distinguish prayerfully and carefully, like Saint Paul, between what is the Word of the Lord and what seems good to us.

Assumption 2: What the goal of preaching is. What is preaching supposed to do to the hearers? What do we hope the hearers will be and do in response to our preaching?

I affirm Ebeling's simple and singular statement of the goal: "Faith is the coming of the Word of God to its goal," or, less literally, "Faith is the goal toward which the Word of God directs itself." The work God works on the hearers through the preached Word of the gospel is faith. Without that Word the hearers will not and cannot have faith (Rom 10:14-15).

Faith essentially is trust in God with one's whole being. Faith is the point on which one stands over against the whole

world. To have faith is the wager of one's self-worth, one's reason for living, and the basis for one's valuation of himself or herself on God's promise in Christ.

The single goal of preaching is to create, nurture, and sustain true faith. By proclaiming the gospel, the preacher answers the prayer of the hearers: "We now implore God the Holy Ghost/ For the true faith we need the most."

Is faith too narrow a goal? What about love, hope, and other gifts of the Spirit? There are, of course, manifold expressions of faith, but "the fear, love, and trust" of God, in the words of Luther's explanation of the First Commandment, is the spring from which all other gifts flow. That goal can be effected only when preaching of the gospel realizes God's presence in the here and now.

Assumption 3: Why preaching is necessary. The primary reason we do not practice good preaching in which the Good that God is is conveyed to the hearer is simply that we are unclear in answer to the question of why people need to hear this sermon. What problems do my parishioners have that necessitates my preaching today?

To be sure, our hearers have many problems, many needs. There is an appalling ignorance of the biblical faith, the creeds of the church, the significance of the liturgy, and the relevance of the message we preach. What is worse, the hearers are products of a social context that is bent by racism, sexism, nationalism, consumerism, and more. They fear criticism, are anxious about job security, suffer low self-esteem, and are plagued by insecurity and confusion in the area of sexuality. While all of these conditions must be considered by the preacher, they do not constitute preaching's bottom line. They are not the crucial reason why the hearers need to hear this sermon.

Too often we tell the hearers to do on their own the very thing that cannot be done on their own.

In his explanation of the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed in the Small Catechism Luther exposes the ultimate reason for the sermon: "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe...." The need of the hearer is not simply "I don't know what the text means." The need is not that "I am not willing to give of my possessions to help the poor." The need is not that "I do not trust that God's will is being done at this moment in my life." The need is that "I cannot trust God by my own reason or strength."

At this point many preachers part company. We all believe the hearers need to be informed about the will of God. We all believe the hearers need to repent. We all believe the hearers need to be encouraged to grow in faith and works of love.

But we do not all believe that the hearers' ultimate need is that they cannot by their own reason or strength trust God. If we did, we would not so consistently solve the hearers' problem by saying, "Have faith... Love a little more." Too often we tell the hearers to do on their own the very thing that cannot be done on their own. The assumption is that baptized believers are beyond the problem of not being able to trust God by their own reason or strength

and go forward in Christian life.

The ultimate diagnostic question that really divides preachers is: "Why can't we trust God?" When that question is put, the usual answer is that the malady is the person, and the behavior is a symptom. True enough, but the matter lies deeper.

Why can't the hearers trust God by their own reason or strength? This is the crucial question in diagnosis. The answer will be considered more fully in a subsequent article. For now I offer the answer which is necessitated by the scandal and foolishness of the gospel of God in Christ. The necessary and inevitable judgment of God and the hidden mystery of God in human history seals the hearers in unfaith.

If the hearers feared, loved, and trusted God above all things, they would be perfectly free to live God's life. The hearers do not and cannot fear, love, and trust God above all things because the hearers experience both the judgment and absence of God in everyday life. The actual experience of God in the real world is overwhelmingly rooted in divine retribution and/or the dominance of destructive powers.

The hearers go to great lengths to deny this ultimate diagnosis and to live with illusions that make life more palatable. Religion and morality in general are often desperate human efforts to control or make sense out of the judgment and hiddenness of God in human history. Two faith questions persist even in our age: "Will Hindus be saved?" "Why do bad things happen to good people?" One relates to evaluation or judgment and the other to providence or meaning. Neither can be answered satisfactorily with theo-logic.

The gospel that God raised the crucified Christ from the dead is God's answer to the problem the hearer has with God. God in raising the crucified Christ becomes the Just One who justifies the impious. God in raising the crucified Christ becomes the Almighty One who in suffering has overcome the powers of evil and death in our world.

When the preacher proclaims the deed of God's love in raising the crucified Christ, the Spirit incorporates the hearers in that deed and gives the hearers the benefits of God in Christ. The Spirit frees the hearers from the truth that binds them in unfaith by overwhelming them with the Truth that is full of grace. The Spirit breaks the chains of oppression by convincing the hearers that God's power of suffering love in Christ is stronger than every evil and death itself.

What is the Good that makes preaching good? It is the marvelous, miraculous, saving presence of the good and gracious God in the sermon to the joy and edifying of God's holy people.

Good preaching happens when the preacher sets forth the magnitude of God's mercy toward fallible and fallen creatures in Jesus' death and resurrection so that the Holy Spirit might move the hearer to trust God above all things and be freed to love the neighbor.

Good preaching heralds the benefits of Christ's death and resurrection so that the Risen Christ might enable the hearers to die and rise to newness of life.

Good preaching connects the gospel of God in Christ with the life of the hearers.

For Blessing All Families of the Earth: Covenant Traditions in Luke-Acts

Robert L. Brawley
McCormick Theological Seminary
Chicago, Illinois

Exploration of the significance of God's covenant with Abraham in Luke-Acts got off to a slow start compared with the study of eschatology and redemptive history. To be sure, interpreters could count the number of times Abraham appears and deduce from the more numerous references that Abraham plays a role in Luke-Acts that is more prominent than his role in Mark or Matthew. Yet in the schema of redemptive history Abraham was a rather dispensable detail. According to this schema, Luke-Acts supposedly grounds the messianic movement in Judaism (continuity) but breaks the Gentile church off from Judaism definitively. Or interpreters could conceive of redemptive history as a sequence of promise and fulfillment, with Abraham as one particular case of prophecy to be proved. As a missing cog in the continuity, an inconsequential Abraham might make the gears of redemptive history slip a little, but not much. Luke-Acts could still trace continuity with Judaism whether Abraham played much of a role or not.

But two somewhat novel tactics make it possible to detect how indispensably God's covenant with Abraham qualifies the literary world of Luke-Acts. One is the recognition that texts mean more than they say. The other is an intertextual approach to allusions to scripture.

(1) Texts mean more than they say because all texts presuppose an enormous cultural repertoire upon which they draw. The written text is but the tip of the iceberg with respect to the unformulated text. The previous sentence illustrates the point in that it is understandable on its own by presupposing that readers possess a proverbial knowledge that only a fraction of an iceberg is visible and four-fifths lies under water. Similarly, the significance of the covenant with Abraham is far greater than the 22 explicit references in Luke-Acts.

(2) An intertextual approach to allu-

sions to scripture makes a difference because it is synchronic rather than diachronic. Traditional approaches to allusions to scripture in the New Testament have made comparisons across time between the text that is cited and the text that cites it, that is, between the precursor in its own historical context and the successor in its subsequent historical context. This approach conventionally makes judgments about whether the successor text faithfully represents the literary and historical context of the precursor or misrepresents it. But an intertextual approach views the two texts in a contemporaneous relationship with each other. The successor and precursor texts play with and off each other. Modifications of the precursor in the successor are not to be dismissed as inaccuracies but are part and parcel of an interplay between the two.

For example, when Gary Powers' U-2 aircraft was shot down over Russia, President Eisenhower first denied that the United States was spying on the Soviet Union but then admitted it. In response an editorial cartoonist produced a caption: "Our country, right or wrong, but at least let's get our stories straight"—a studied variation on naval hero Stephen Decatur's alleged remark, "Our country, right or wrong, but always our country." Similarly, with allusions to scripture the precursor opens up a new way of viewing the successor, and the successor opens up a new way of viewing the precursor. Together they make meaning beyond the sense of the independent parts. Thus, like Prometheus transforming the function of fire when he domesticated it, Luke-Acts transforms the function of God's covenant with Abraham by alluding to it. But also like fire transforming human existence when the hearth became part of the home, God's covenant with Abraham transforms a literary world by invading Luke-Acts. Moreover, together Luke-Acts and the tradition of the Abrahamic covenant resonate with and off each other in such a way that the interplay is itself a figuration. That is, the interplay itself stretches readers to give them an altered vision of how God is related to human beings.

These two approaches in particular enable interpreters to discern that God's covenant with Abraham exerts power for the entire literary work of Luke-Acts. The Abrahamic covenant influences not only how Luke-Acts presents the extension of God's salvation but also how Luke-Acts characterizes God and Jesus. In fact, this covenant confers a tonality on the literary whole of Luke-Acts and provides a theological criterion for understanding God and Jesus. Though his profile ostensibly remains low, Abraham is more than a mere thread in the narrative. He is a decisive actor in the larger story of Luke-Acts.

Strange, then, all these claims notwithstanding, that at Luke's first hint of fulfillment of messianic hope, God's covenant with David is the presupposed unformulated text. When Gabriel promises Mary that God will give her son Jesus the throne of his ancestor David, readers who have even a passing acquaintance with scripture would have to close their eyes and stop up their ears not to catch an allusion to God's promise to establish a descendant of David on his throne forever (Luke 1:32; see 2 Sam 7:16). But moderately aware readers will also catch that this allusion provides a revisionary perception of the Davidic covenant. 2 Samuel 7 implies that David's offspring as a *dynasty* will reign forever. But the word for offspring is singular in the Septuagint, and Luke-Acts implies that the offspring of David who will rule forever is one singular descendant of David, namely, Jesus. "And of his kingdom there shall be no end" (Luke 1:33).

Following the conventional diachronic



approach, one might be tempted to say that Gabriel's prediction misinterprets 2 Sam 7:16. But according to the synchronic approach, Gabriel's prediction, like the editorial cartoonist's revision of Stephen Decatur's remark, is a studied variation on 2 Sam 7:16. Such an allusion does not bury the precursor under the new text but presupposes it, induces readers to recall it, and prompts them to arrive at a revised understanding as the two texts stand in the tension of both consonance and conflict with each other.

The promise from Gabriel casts its foreshadow on the remainder of Luke-Acts. For readers who enjoy suspense, Gabriel's promise ruins the story by giving away the ending ahead of time. But when narratives disclose the outcome ahead of time, readers expect to be teased by how the ending comes about. And in this regard, narratives advance not only by fulfilling anticipations but by revising them. Readers of Luke-Acts who expect an uncomplicated fulfillment of Gabriel's promise will likely soon begin to think that they have misconstrued the foreshadowing. Thus, while Gabriel's promise is still fresh in memory, Mary recites the Magnificat to Elizabeth. Her song magnifies the Lord for what God *has done* (past tense). Through Gabriel, God has promised a messiah who will reign over the house of Jacob forever. But surprisingly, Mary claims that God's help in this revised renewal of the Davidic covenant has come in fidelity to the divine promises to *Abraham* and to his descendants forever (Luke 1:55).

Along similar lines, Zechariah provokes an even more explicit revision of readers' anticipations. At the birth of his son John, he exults that God has raised up a horn of salvation in the house of David—an obvious allusion to the Davidic covenant (Luke 1:69). But then he immediately qualifies his exultation by claiming the divine action as fulfillment of God's promise to the ancestors in remembrance of the covenant with *Abraham* (1:72-73). So Mary and Zechariah collapse the Davidic and Abrahamic covenants together into one. The Davidic covenant becomes a specific way the Abrahamic covenant comes to fulfillment. And in the progressive discovery of the unfolding narrative, readers catch that Gabriel's promise about Jesus on the throne of David is grounded in God's promise to Abraham.

Jeffrey Siker has underlined a saying of John the Baptist as disparaging physical descent from Abraham. When John says, "Do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham" (Luke 3:8), he sharply limits the significance of descent from Abraham. Rather than physical descent, the measure of whether one aligns with Abraham or not is the fruits of repentance.[1] Does

[1] See Jeffrey S. Siker, *Disinheriting the Jews: Abraham in Early Christian Controversy* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1991), 108-110.

Jesus align with Abraham by bearing fruits of repentance? Obviously so, because he himself is baptized (3:21-22).[2] But if readers are tempted to exclude Jesus on the basis of his lineage, Luke's genealogy legitimates him as a descendant of both David and Abraham (3:23-38).

The implications of Mary and Zechariah that Jesus is a central part of the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham combine with Jesus' own alignment with Abraham to cast even more of a foreshadow on the story. And in the shade of that foreshadow, the devil tempts Jesus by showing him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world (Luke 4:5). Seemingly, Abraham is nowhere in sight in this second Lucan temptation. But the unformulated text sneaks him in. A part of sneaking him in is a link back to Gabriel's prediction in Luke 1:33. Readers with hardy curiosity will still be puzzling over Gabriel's prediction of a kingdom for Jesus. Because the devil offers Jesus a kingdom that ostensibly fits Gabriel's prediction, the temptation is a recall of the Davidic covenant. But already Mary and Zechariah have implicated the Davidic covenant as the particular way God's promise to Abraham comes to fulfillment.

Beyond the amalgamation of the two covenants an additional aspect of the unformulated text comes into play in the second temptation. In New Testament times God's covenant to give Abraham and his descendants the "land" was understood as a promise that he and his descendants would inherit the whole world. It so happens that the term for "land" in both Hebrew and Greek can also mean "earth," including what we would understand as the inhabited globe—the whole world. A substantial line of Jewish tradition did not take the conquest of Canaan as the complete fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham. Rather, the promise was projected to the future and expanded to include the whole world (e.g., see Rom 4:13). With this tradition floating about in the cultural repertoire, the devil's temptation to give Jesus all the kingdoms of the world parades as the fulfillment of God's promise to give Abraham and his descendants the whole world. Thus, the devil proposes a quick resolution of Gabriel's promise by way of what also appears to be the Lucan revision of the Davidic covenant.

Many interpreters take the devil's claim to have the power to grant earthly rule as an accurate reflection of an ancient belief that the devil was mediator of earthly power. But is the devil a reliable character? Readers grounded in ancient Mediterranean culture would expect the devil to be exceedingly devious. So the devil is an unreliable character who tempts Jesus not with the truth but with deception. Deception is a particular way that narratives take readers on a detour on the way to the outcome. The foreshadowing in Luke-Acts anticipates a king who will rule over a kingdom without an end. The devil's proposal lures readers, as well as Jesus as a character in the story, to contemplate it as a potential way Gabriel's prediction will come to fulfillment. But the lure craftily snares readers because it coaxes them to buy temporarily into the devil's construct of the world. That is, it seduces readers to commit themselves to a deception that must be revised.

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[2] Hans Conzelmann noted that the narrative reports John's imprisonment before Jesus' baptism and argued that Luke separates Jesus from John (*The Theology of St. Luke* [New York: Harper & Row, 1961], 21, 26). But the continuity between Jesus and John speaks against Conzelmann. The normal supposition of readers is that John baptizes Jesus. See R. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*, vol. 1, *The Gospel According to Luke* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 47-53.

Deception is a particular way that narratives take readers on a detour on the way to the outcome.

But there are still other ways the temptation, though posing as fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant, is deficient. On the one hand, the renewal of the Davidic covenant could anticipate a political, nationalistic movement. And if readers anticipate a Jewish state to dominate the world, the devil seems to make an offer that Jesus could hardly refuse. But when Jesus nevertheless does refuse, readers follow a progressive discovery of what is true in the narrative world that revises expectations of a nationalistic state.

Further, in Acts 3:25 Peter identifies God's covenant with Abraham as the promise to bless all the families of the earth: "And in your seed (*spermati*, singular) all the families of the earth will be blessed." The devil's temptations in Luke are all set up as tests of whether God will bless Jesus for his own benefit or not. That is, the devil's christology (yes, the devil has a christology) embraces an expectation that God will act for Jesus' particular interest. But God's promise to Abraham is to bless all the families of the earth—not Jesus for his own sake, even as a beloved son, but all the families of the earth.

In this way the Abrahamic covenant becomes a criterion for the characterization of God and Jesus. The God of Luke-Acts does not act for the particular benefit of special people. Granted, God does act with power for specific people, including raising Jesus from the dead. Nevertheless, in these special events God is acting for the blessing of all the families of the earth. Therefore, the story of Jesus in Luke is not an end in itself. Though Luke-Acts invests enormous energy in verifying Jesus, who was crucified, as God's messiah, the story does not have as its end merely to glorify Jesus as messiah. Rather, the story of Jesus as messiah is for the blessing of all the families of the earth.

Jeffrey Siker has developed a thesis that Luke-Acts associates Abraham with two patterns of the extension of God's salvation—(1) to pious poor people who are marginalized and (2) to people who repent as John the Baptist demands in Luke 3:8. According to Siker, these patterns play out in Mary and Zechariah and in four other particular characters in Luke-Acts whom the story relates to Abraham. (1) Jesus heals a woman who is crippled and calls her a daughter of Abraham (Luke 13:10-17). (2) In a parable Jesus paints a picture of an afterlife in which poor Lazarus rests in the arms of Abraham whereas his rich counterpart suffers torment in Hades (Luke 16:19-31). (3) Zacchaeus repents, and Jesus calls him a son of Abraham according to the demand of John the Baptist to bear fruits of repentance in order to align with Abraham (Luke 19:1-10). (4) Peter and John heal a lame man at a gate of the temple, and later Peter associates this event with God's promise to Abraham (Acts 3:1-10, 25).[3]

As positive as Siker's thesis is, it demands scrutiny and extension. Even if the Magnificat sprang from circles of margin-

[3] Siker, *Disinheriting the Jews*, 104-121.

alized pious poor folk, as Siker thinks, Luke-Acts balances Mary's low estate with her kinship to Elizabeth and a venerable heritage from Aaron (Luke 1:5). In addition, the reversal in the second half of the Magnificat is more communal than personal. The strength of God's arm has come to the aid of Israel as a populace and not merely the pious poor on the margins (1:54-55). Even further, the Lucan genealogy associates Jesus with an honorable lineage and prevents readers from locking him out on the margins (3:23-38).

In fact, Mary and Zechariah give readers a key to unlock the significance of the healing of the crippled woman in a synagogue, the reversal of status for Lazarus and the rich man, the repentance of Zacchaeus in Jericho, and the healing of the lame man in the environs of the temple. Mary and Zechariah anticipate that what Jesus will accomplish will be the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham. When these two prominent characters in the birth narrative allude to the Abrahamic covenant they do not make mention of its content. Rather, the narrative leaves it up to readers to recall the content of the covenant out of the cultural repertoire. But not entirely. If readers fail to pick up the covenant early on in Luke from the cultural repertoire, Peter's sermon in Acts 3 gives it to them later explicitly: "And in your descendants all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Acts 3:25).

Is the key to the place of Abraham in Luke-Acts *human* behavior, that is, piety and repentance as Siker claims? Or does the place of Abraham depend on *divine* promise? The narrative world of Luke-Acts is a world centered on God. Readers who buy into the theocentric Lucan narrative world focus on the divine promise as the key to Abraham rather than on human behavior.

With the key from Mary and Zechariah, who collapse the Davidic and Abrahamic covenants into one, welded to the key of the primacy of divine promise, Jesus' mission becomes the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham. The healing of the crippled woman in the synagogue, the reversal of status for Lazarus and the rich man, the repentance of Zacchaeus, and the healing of the lame man at the temple are concrete cases of how in Jesus, God is blessing all the families of the earth. In moving toward the resolution of Gabriel's promise in Luke 1:32-33, Jesus breaks the bondage of Satan and calls the woman whom he heals a daughter of Abraham because he is fulfilling the Abrahamic covenant (Luke 13:10-17). Her healing is a particular incident that manifests how in Jesus the blessing of God is extending to all the families of the earth.

Significantly, Luke presents the healing of the woman as release from the bondage of Satan (Luke 13:16). In a persuasive analysis, Gerd Theissen has shown how healing stories locate their characters in three fields: (1) demonic, (2) human, and (3) divine. The human predicament is that the demonic has invaded the human field, a violation of boundaries that only divine power can remedy.[4] So in the case of the woman in the synagogue, Satan has violated the boundary between the demonic and the human. In the power of God, Jesus breaks through a sociocultural barrier (observance of the sabbath) in order in a correlated way to expel Satan from the human field and reinstall the barrier between the demonic and the human. Jesus' initiative rather than the woman's piety motivates the violation of sociocultural barriers entailed in reestablishing the boundary between the

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[4] G. Theissen, *The Miracle Stories of the Early Christian Tradition* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 43-45, 74-80, 134-37.

demonic and the human. Informed by the foreshadowings of Abrahamic traditions and buoyed up by the unformulated text, readers of Luke-Acts can envision the healing of the woman as a part of God's promise to bless all the families of the earth. So Jesus calls her a daughter of Abraham.

To backtrack momentarily, this incident also constrains a revisionary reflection on the temptations of Jesus. In the second temptation the devil offers Jesus a regency over all the kingdoms of the earth if in exchange Jesus worships the devil. But for Jesus to rule over the house of Jacob forever in fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant, Satan must also be subjected. The fulfillment of God's promises in covenant traditions means reconstructing the proper boundary between the demonic and the human.

Although the reversal of status of Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16:19-31) does not occur in a miracle story, nevertheless, the same boundaries separating the demonic, the human, and the divine come into play. With the Lucan context in mind, readers are able to understand the poor man's misfortunes as an invasion of the satanic into the human field. There is no violation of sociocultural boundaries as there is in the healing of the crippled woman. But there is revision of a sociocultural norm, namely, the norm that wealth is blessing. Given the Lucan context, the rich man experiences no relocation from one field to another. Rather, the story shows that wealth notwithstanding, the rich man remains in the field of the demonic. For this there is implicit motivation. The rich man failed to heed Moses and the prophets. Thus, Siker correctly portrays him as unrepentant, one of the trees in John the Baptist's warning that does not bear good fruit and is cut down and thrown into the fire (Luke 3:9). On the other hand, in spite of immense energies from many interpreters to discover the motivation for the transfer of Lazarus into the divine field, the story offers none. But cognizant of the foreshadowing of Abrahamic traditions and familiar with the unformulated text, readers can comprehend Lazarus's fortune as a specific fulfillment of God's promise to bless all the families of the earth. And so Abraham caresses Lazarus in his bosom.

Furthermore, though the story of Zacchaeus in Luke 19:1-10 is not a healing story, it involves violations of sociocultural barriers in order to restore the proper relationship between the divine and human fields. Zacchaeus is marginalized as a sinner, that is, one who lives outside a sufficient observance of Torah with whom table-fellowship is taboo. As in the case of the healing of the woman, Jesus' initiative motivates the breach of sociocultural barriers rather than Zacchaeus' repentance. This time the violation of sociocultural barriers corresponds to restoring the proper relationship between the human and divine fields. The reason Jesus gives for the restoration of this proper relationship is that Zacchaeus, even as socially marginalized, is an heir of the Abrahamic covenant. Thus, Zacchaeus repents as a fruit of the restored relationship between the divine and human fields. Readers who remember John the Baptist's distinction between physical descent from Abraham and fruits of repentance (Luke 3:8), who recall Mary's and Zechariah's foreshadowing of the Abrahamic covenant traditions, and who draw on the unformulated text, will be able to conceive of the reintegration of Zacchaeus into the social order as a part of God's promise to Abraham to bless all the families of the earth. So Jesus calls him a son of Abraham.

Commentators have generally recognized that Acts uses the healing of the lame man at the temple gate in order to augment

Jesus' legitimacy as the messiah of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But almost as if camouflaged, the relationship of the healing of the lame man to the Abrahamic covenant has gone unnoticed. It is as if Peter is an opportunist who snubs the former lame man and takes advantage of the healing as an occasion to preach to the curious crowd. If the story moves in such a way, when God's covenant emerges at the end of the speech, it has to do with the crowd and not with the lame man.

As in the healing of the crippled woman and the restoration of Zacchaeus, initiative comes from beyond the one whose field has been invaded by the demonic. Peter offers a blessing beyond the lame man's request for alms. This incident also involves a breach of propriety on the way to reestablishing the proper relationship among Theissen's three fields. Notably, upon being healed, the lame man begins to praise God. Implicitly, the power of God has enabled the expulsion of the demonic from the human field. The impropriety arises when Peter and John take over the temple as a forum for teaching and proclaiming the resurrection—intruding on the home turf of the priests and Sadducees (Acts 4:1-2).

Peter's speech then attempts to replicate the proper alignment of the three fields, manifested in the healing of the lame man, among his hearers. The demonic field has invaded the human in the crucifixion of Jesus. But the power of God has acted to overthrow the demonic in the raising of Jesus from the dead, and Peter is offering his listeners the same power of God to expel the demonic from the field that they occupy and to reestablish a proper relationship between the divine and human fields. "Repent therefore, and turn to God that your sins may be wiped out" (Acts 3:19). This restoration is explicitly grounded in God's covenant with Abraham, "And in your descendants all the families of the earth will be blessed" (Acts 3:25).

A significant part of understanding the Abrahamic covenant in Luke-Acts derives from the Septuagint form of Gen 22:18 that does not reflect an ambiguity that exists in the Hebrew. On the one hand, readers could understand the Hebrew of Gen 22:18 much like the Greek to mean that God establishes Abraham's descendants as a channel for blessing to all the families of the earth (so the NASB). On the other, readers can take the promise as a prediction of blessing so extraordinary that everyone will pray to be blessed as Abraham is blessed (so the NEB). But the Septuagint translation in the future passive obviates the ambiguity. The promise is clear and simple: "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen 22:18 LXX, author's trans.).

> The healing of the lame man is a concrete case of God's blessing of all the families of the earth.

What commentators have not noticed in the use of this text in Acts 3:25, however, is that the healing of the lame man is a concrete case of God's blessing of all the families of the earth. Peter does not abandon the lame man. In fact, he is still talking about him the next day. Acts 4:9 expresses the healing in terms that are equivalent to salvation (*sesōtai*). In Jesus there is salva-

tion (*sōtēria*) by which human beings are saved (*dei sōthenai*, Acts 4:12) according to the criteria of God's covenant with Abraham (Acts 3:25). Thus, readers who stand in the shade of the foreshadowings from Mary and Zechariah, who remember John the Baptist's demand to bear fruits worthy of repentance, and who catch the drift of the unformulated text will be able to discern that the healing of one lame man presages the blessing of all the families of the earth, a blessing that is potentially available to Peter's audience. So Peter calls them children of Abraham (Acts 3:25).

Though infrequent enough to neighbor on unimportance, references to Abraham and allusions to the covenant are actually of the essence of Luke-Acts, part of what makes Luke-Acts Luke-Acts. Like Prometheus transforming the function of fire when he domesticated it, Luke-Acts transforms the function of God's covenant with Abraham by alluding to it. But also like fire transforming human existence when the hearth became part of the home, God's covenant with Abraham transforms the literary world by invading Luke-Acts. Thus, Luke-Acts moves readers to a new vision of God's promise to Abraham. Jesus is the descendant in whom all the families of the earth will be blessed. But when this covenant invades Luke-Acts, it also moves readers to a new vision of Jesus and God. Jesus does not exist in Luke-Acts for his own sake but for the blessing of all the families of the earth. Further, the covenant with Abraham is particularly operative in the characterization of God. The God of Luke-Acts does not have a character to be equated with arbitrary notions of divinity. Rather, this is the God who promises to bless all the families of the earth. Thus, God's covenant with Abraham indispensably qualifies the theocentric literary world of Luke-Acts and is pivotal for interpreting the two volumes from start to finish.

The Characterization of the Tax Collectors in the Gospel of Luke

A. M. Okorie
Department of Religions, University of Florin
Florin, Nigeria

Characterization in ancient literature, such as the New Testament, takes place in different ways than it does in modern plays or novels. Yet, as this study will show, analysis of characterization can clarify what the biblical writer was up to, and what he wanted us to understand about the chief protagonist in his story, Jesus.

Characterization in the Bible is often inferred rather than directly stated. Sometimes we visualize the characters, but at other times we feel sympathy with them or distance ourselves from them. Characters are portrayed in arenas of decision, and how they act or are treated reflects God's own actions and the response he hopes to evoke.

Though characterization can be revealed through what a character says or does—or in the reactions of others in the story—it is also shown through techniques of repetition or redundancy. Robert Alter points out that no act or gesture is incidental and the sequence of events is never fortuitous.[1] Characterization often dwells on contrasting traits represented by two or more people, resulting in binary opposition. Such contrasts are seen in the Pharisee and the sinful woman (Luke 7:36-50), the rich man and Lazarus (16:19-31), and the Pharisee and the tax collector (18:9-14).

The following study of the characterization of the tax collectors and the Pharisees in the Third Gospel should help all who preach in this year of Luke.

The word *telones* (tax collector) is derived from *telos*, "tax," and *oneomai*, "I buy."[2] The Vulgate renders it as *publicanus*, treasury. *Telones* designates a person "who purchases from the state the rights to official taxes and dues, and who collects these from the people who owe them." *Telones* may be translated, according to John Donahue, as "toll collector."[3]

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[1] Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1981), 88-113.

[2] Michel, "Telones," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich and trans. G.W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), VIII: 89.

[3] John R. Donahue, "Tax Collectors and Sinners," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 33 (1971): 54.



The word *telones* occurs ten times in the Gospel of Luke (3:12; 5:27, 29, 30; 7:29, 34; 15:1; 18:10, 11, 13).[4] Another form of the word occurs only in 19:2 as *architelones* (chief tax collector).

The Lukan characterization begins with the tax collectors coming with others to John the Baptist to be baptized (3:7). They ask a "catechism-like" question with reference to their own lives, "Teacher, what shall we do?" (3:12) There is incidental characterization of them when John the Baptist commands, "Collect no more than is appointed you" (3:13).

The imperative *prasete* (collect) comes from *prasso*, to transact money matters, and it is used in the present imperative tense which forbids the continuation of an act. The tax collectors were crafty, unscrupulous, and unjust in their official duties. That they were coming to a prophetic character like John, whose emphasis was on repentance, shows nevertheless that they were seeking for a change in their moral lives.

The tax collectors and the other people were waiting in expectation and questioning within themselves whether John the Baptist was the Christ (3:15). While humbling himself, John exalted the protagonist (Jesus) who was yet to appear. The tax collectors waited in suspense, characterized by anxiety.

The protagonist, Jesus, finally arises on the stage, and a succinct inaugural event takes place in Nazareth (4:16-30). This Nazareth episode gives the direction of Jesus' life. Jesus is going to break societal customs and traditions and will refuse to be pigeonholed. The Lukan narrative is "the Gospel to the Outcasts." Hope comes to the tax collectors!

Soon the protagonist Jesus encounters the first tax collector named Levi (5:27). In the previous verse "amazement" has seized the multitude in seeing Jesus heal a leper (a despised societal outcast). Now Levi, too, is surprised. Jesus comes to him and says, "Follow me." The verb *akoloutheo* (to follow) implies following in obedience. Levi "left everything, and rose and followed him." Compare the action of Peter, James and John: "They left everything and followed him" (5:11).

Levi must have been so overwhelmed by the invitation to follow Jesus that he made a "great feast" for Jesus in his house (5:29). The deficient character of the tax collector found transformation in the tender call of Jesus.

Thus development occurs in the characterization of Levi, from an unscrupulous tax collector to a happy follower of the protagonist. Again, development occurs through the change of his name. Called as a disciple and chosen as an apostle, Levi becomes Matthew (6:15).

Vivid expressions give dramatic aspects to a character. Levi with a large

[4] *Telones* appears only the Synoptics, eight times in Matthew, three times in Mark, and ten times in Luke. It does not appear in the Septuagint or any other Greek Old Testament version including the Apocrypha.

company of tax collectors and others had table fellowship with Jesus (5:29). What a feeling of gratitude the tax collectors would experience in having this protagonist in their midst! Then comes the commentary: "The Pharisees and their scribes murmured against his disciples" and asked: "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" (5:30), obviously a sharp criticism against Jesus. The Pharisees' question reveals that they are the opponents of the protagonist, hence the villains of the Lukan narrative.

The Pharisees' question also introduces a phraseological characterization: tax collectors and sinners. As Hoffman posited, "Every time you give a definite trait to a character you add a potential, dynamic, dramatic force to help build your plot."[5] The epithet "tax collectors and sinners" appears together also in 7:34 and 15:1, while separately in 18:11,13 and 19:2,10.

Israel Abrahams inferred that sinners were "not those who neglected the rules of ritual piety, but were persons of proven dishonesty and followers of suspected or degrading occupations."[6] C. G. Montefiore pointed out that sinners were those "who knowingly violate... some precept of law, whether ceremonial or moral."[7] G. Rengstorf noted that to the Pharisees sinners were outside the law, while to the ordinary citizens sinners were those who lived an immoral life.[8]

The characterization of tax collectors as sinners connotes that the tax collectors were involved in actions that were contrary to righteousness, hence they needed repentance. From the Pharisaic perspective, the tax collectors were to be despised and rejected. Therefore, they murmured against the protagonist and his disciples for associating with tax collectors and sinners (5:30).

Jesus opposed the Pharisees on the issue of table fellowship with the large company of tax collectors. The joy of the tax collectors in Jesus is threatened by the challenge of the Pharisees. The dialogue in the scene reveals Jesus' sympathy for the despised tax collectors for he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have come not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (5:31-32).

The foregoing words of Jesus involve binary opposition: well/sick; righteous/sinners; not come/come. Using Raymond Collins' analysis of French narratology, one may schematize the actantial model as follows:[9]

Not Come		*Come*
	Physician	
Well		*Sick*
Righteous		*Sinners*
	Jesus	
Pharisees		*Tax Collectors*

The narrator through the binary characterization creates a distance from the Pharisees (who are on the left of the actantial model). On the other hand, the narrator moves the reader to be in sympathetic identification with the tax collectors (who are on the right of the actantial model). Jesus is the

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[5] A. S. Hoffman, *The Writing of Fiction* (Boston: The Writer, Inc., 1934), 130.

[6] Israel Abrahams, *Studies in Pharisaism and the Gospels: First Series* (Cambridge: University Press, 1917), 55.

[7] C. G. Montefiore, *The Synoptic Gospels* (London: MacMillan & Co., Ltd., 1927) I:54.

[8] G. Rengstorf, "Hamartolos," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* I:321-2.

[9] Raymond F. Collins, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1983), 268.

protagonist, to whom all actants must relate.

The action of Jesus toward the tax collectors and sinners was a most offensive act to the Pharisees, but a most meaningful experience to the downtrodden tax collectors, who have the character trait of "openness to Jesus."

The scene changes. Luke ushers in another conflict situation as he characterizes the tax collectors. After listening to Jesus' speech about John the Baptist (7:24-29), all the people and the tax collectors acknowledged the justice of God (7:29), but the Pharisees and the lawyers "rejected the purpose of God." The tax collectors accepted John's baptism of repentance; the Pharisees did not. The characterization demonstrates a complete reversal. The ostracized and despised persons find favor with God, but the self-righteous legalists are rejected.

Luke previously has informed the reader, through the birth narratives, what Jesus was going to be like, what he was going to do, and those who would benefit most from him (persons of "low estate," "low degree" — 1:48, 52). In his inaugural speech and in his reply to the disciples of John, Jesus emphasized his messianic role of effecting reversals: the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news, and "blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me" (7:22-23). Now Jesus accepts the sarcastic epithet that he is "a friend of tax collectors and sinners!" (7:34)

"The evangelist leads the reader toward his own ideological point of view."[10] As one can observe in the Lukan narrative, Jesus is the friend of tax collectors and sinners. The reader is invited into the narrative world and is made to seek this compassionate friend of tax collectors and sinners, while rejecting the exclusive prejudices of the Pharisees, who have illusions of their goodness.

As Jesus, the protagonist, moves from Galilee towards Jerusalem (9:51), the narrative becomes more and more episodic as events pass in momentous succession. "Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him" (15:1). Again, the Pharisees and the scribes murmured. Their complaint against the protagonist involved the familiar charge: "This man receives sinners and eats with them" (15:2). Spiteful indignity and hostility can be detected in the Pharisaic "shocked expostulation."[11]

The tax collectors and sinners, on the other hand, find sympathetic resonance in the voice of Jesus as he proceeds to tell the three parables about the lost sheep (15:3-7), the lost coin (15:8-10), and the lost son (15:11-32). The tax collectors were seeking such forgiveness of sins.

One needs to remember that the audience listening to Jesus included the tax collectors and sinners, on the one hand, and the Pharisees and scribes, on the other. As for the ostracized tax collectors and sinners, Jesus not only *called* one of them as an apostle, made friends with them and *met* with them at their level, but he also *saved* them. The Pharisees and scribes, on the other hand, "majored on the minor;" they were constantly murmuring against Jesus and lacked any salvific rejoicing which the tax collectors experienced.

In 18:9-10, Luke utilizes a parabolic narrative in which the actantial drama is staged by a tax collector and a Pharisee, the two extreme characters whose responses to God are closely portrayed. With a bitter

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[10] R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 148.

[11] H. G. G. Herklots, *Publicans and Sinners* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1956), 35.

irony, Luke gives the explicit commentary that the parable (18:10-14) was about "some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others" (18:9). The verb "despise" appears for the first time in the Lukan narrative. It is used in the present active participle which indicates a contemporaneous action of despising others while holding oneself righteous. The only other time the word is employed is when describing hostility toward Jesus himself in 23:11, where Herod and his soldiers treated Jesus with contempt.

The protagonist becomes the narrator as he portrays the attitudes of the Pharisee, the self-righteous opponent, and the tax collector, the despised sinner, who came to the temple to pray.

A sharp binary characterization is drawn. The Pharisee stood, prayed and thanked God while at the same time despising the extortioner, the unjust, the adulterer represented in a person "like this tax collector." The character trait of the tax collectors as dishonest persons had earlier been deduced from the pericope on John the Baptist's prohibition (3:13). The Pharisee predicated his own honesty on the fulfillment of outward acts or "holy externalism" of fasting twice weekly and tithing the minutest personal property (18:12).

Then comes the negating conjunction, "but" (18:13a). The despised tax collector, "standing far off" and unable even to assume a pious posture by lifting his eyes to heaven, beats his chest while brokenheartedly saying, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" (18:13) A magnificent trait of repentant humility is seen in the tax collector's character.

The result is revealing. The Pharisee is rejected while the tax collector is justified. Jesus gives his commentary in paradoxical reversals: self-exaltation leads to one's downfall, self-abasement results in exaltation (18:14).

Jesus gives his commentary in paradoxical reversals: self-exaltation leads to one's downfall, self-abasement results in exaltation (18:14).

The tax collector's vindication re-echoes 14:11: "For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

The characterization of the tax collectors comes to a close in the Lukan Gospel in the story of Zacchaeus (19:1-10). Luke characterizes Zacchaeus as not only being a chief tax collector but also rich. Thus two groups of tax collectors are represented: the earlier Levi, a lower level tax collector "sitting at the tax office" (5:27), and Zacchaeus, a superintendent of tax collectors. The actions of Zacchaeus are dramatic.

Zacchaeus was of small stature, yet there was momentous eagerness and vitality in his search for Jesus. He "sought," "ran," and "climbed" (19:4). There is a picturesque gradation of movement as the protagonist "came," "looked," and "said": "Zacchaeus, make haste and come down; for I must stay at your house today" (19:5). Zacchaeus is characterized as a joyful recipient of an unmerited gesture from Jesus.

The Pharisees are referred to in third-person narrative, "They all murmured." Their characteristic contemptuous remonstration appears once more: "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner"

Radical change of life, joy, and humility are unvarying traits in the tax collector's encounter with Jesus.

(19:7). In spite of Zacchaeus' riches, and his being a tax superintendent, he is disdained as a sinner. No tax collector was exempted by the Pharisees. All were stereotyped as unredeemable outcasts.

Nonetheless, having encountered the protagonist, Jesus, Zacchaeus experienced a development in his character. The hitherto scheming and greedy extortioner is transformed to a man with a contrite heart as he promised to make restitution.

Radical change of life, joy, and humility are unvarying traits in the tax collector's encounter with Jesus. In this climatic episode, Jesus lovingly said, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost" (19:9-10). These thematic words close the vivid characterization of the tax collectors.

The tax collectors show the effect of development in characterization. They grow to be models of prayer, repentance, conversion and belief in Jesus, and they have become committed followers of Jesus. The outcasts and societal rejects find compassion and forgiveness. To these despised persons who have no hope, hope has come. The salvific event has begun.

Again, the tax collectors are contrasted with the Pharisees in their respective relations to Jesus. The reader is skillfully drawn to distance himself/herself from the villains, the Pharisees and scribes, while being prompted to respond favorably to the protagonist, Jesus. Thus, the characterization of the tax collectors in the Gospel of Luke graphically invades the reader's disposition and worldview.

By studying the contrasting characterization of tax collectors and Pharisees in Luke, the reader-preacher gains new insights about the lavish graciousness of the gospel and about its power to transform people's lives.

The Presentation of Jesus: The Gospel of Inclusion. Luke 2:22-40

Fred Strickert
Wartburg College

Luke's account of "The Presentation of Jesus" in the temple (Lk 2:22-40) is one that normally does not attract a lot of interest. Coming 40 days after Christmas, it no longer fits into the season for celebration. The historicity of the account is questionable, especially since it does not work well with Matthew's "Flight into Egypt." Besides, it includes a lot of the Old Testament law material and references to an outdated cultic scene. If we do look at the text, we might prefer to focus on "The Song of Simeon," where our liturgical interests lie.

However, a closer examination of the text brings to light a stark contrast between the old reality of the world into which Jesus was born and the new reality of his life and ministry. This is a story about the inclusive gospel in an exclusive world. The critical concerns of our modern world are all treated: race, class, gender, and age. The old distinctions are broken down by the new reality present in a 40 day-old baby named Jesus.

Ethnicity. The temple in Jerusalem, more than any other place in the world, represented an ethnocentric culture. This was the center for Jewish worship—only Jews allowed. The introduction of Hellenistic culture into Jerusalem had threatened the temple's purity. First it was the issue of a gymnasium, where athletes exercised in the nude, within eyesight of the temple platform (2 Macc 4:11-15). Then it was the Antonia Fortress built up against the temple precinct's northwest corner, where Roman soldiers could look down upon the cultic activities and spy on the priests.

To ensure a limit on this encroachment of temple life, outsiders were restricted to a special section called the Court of the Gentiles. The death penalty was established for any Gentile who trespassed beyond this area. The priests constructed a stone barricade where thirteen notices were prominently displayed (Josephus, Ant. XV, 11, 5). A translation of the inscription makes clear the intent:

> No foreigner is to enter within the balustrade and embankment around the sanctuary. Whoever is caught will have himself to blame for his subsequent death.

This barricade later played a prominent role in the beating and arrest of Paul when

he was accused of bringing Gentiles into the temple (Acts 21:28).

It is against this backdrop of segregation that "The Presentation" takes place. There are, of course, no Gentile characters. However, the words of Simeon—the most familiar part of this episode—pick up the irony:

> My eyes have seen your salvation,
> which you have prepared in the presence of *all peoples*,
> a light for revelation to the *Gentiles*
> and for glory to your people Israel
> (vv. 30-32)

Through the pen of Luke, Gentile readers penetrate that barrier and witness these earth-shattering events.

Class. The temple not only represented segregation by ethnicity, but also by class. In addition to the Court of the Gentiles, the temple precincts were further subdivided into the Court of Women, the Court of Israel, and the Court of Priests. The priests, as to be expected, were at the center—they were the only ones allowed into the temple proper—and others took their place in the areas beyond. There was no question that the elite priesthood was in control of the religious enterprise and others stood as passive observers from a distance.

Although many later artists were unaware of this distinction, Luke quite correctly uses two separate Greek terms, one for the temple proper and another for the temple precincts. While *naos* was used in Lk 1:9, 21-22 for the actual temple sanctuary visited by the priest Zechariah, in this episode he uses *hieron* (vv. 27 and 37) to refer to the outer courts.

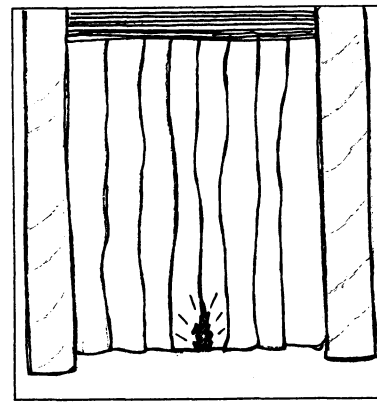
The striking thing about Luke's account for "The Presentation" is that there is no mention of priests. Their presence is certainly assumed to carry out the prescribed rituals. However, the telling of the story can be done using only the laity as characters. While matters of salvation had once centered on the roles of a restricted few, it is now proclaimed without them. How does Simeon fit into the story? It is precisely at this point of the ritual that one would expect the priest to come forth and offer a blessing (Lk 1:21). Rather there is now a role for the layman Simeon who takes the child into his arms and pronounces the peace of God.

Luke also calls attention to others who are dispossessed. The reference to the offering of "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons" (v. 24) is a provision in the law for the poor who cannot afford the regular offering of a lamb (Lev 12:8). Likewise the designation of Anna in v. 37 as "a widow" calls attention to the common Old Testament triplet of "the poor, the orphaned, and the widowed" (Isa 10:2; Ex 22:21). While the elite priesthood is missing from the story, the poor laity are highlighted.

Gender. It is significant that Luke has chosen to write the account of the Presentation focusing on the actions of two couples who surround the infant Jesus: Mary and Joseph, and Simeon and Anna. It is true that the church has chosen to focus its liturgy on the words of Simeon while Anna for all practical purposes drops out of the picture. It is also true that Joseph seems less significant here perhaps because of the doctrine of the virgin birth and also because of the motif of purification. Yet Luke's style is to focus on pairs: Elizabeth and Zechariah (Lk 1:46-79); the shepherd with 100 sheep and the woman with 10 coins (15:3-10); the man planting mustard seed and the woman leavening dough (13:18-21). This is a story about two couples.

The listing of the laws in vv. 22-24 is a reminder that it was a male-centered world into which Jesus was born. There are actu-

ally two different laws which have been combined by Luke here. Both underscore the preference for male babies. The first pertains to the consecration of the firstborn to God (Exod 13:1). The context is the Passover remembrance when the firstborn were spared. Thus both animals and human babies—*only the males*—were dedicated to God (Exod 13:11-13). The story of young Samuel (1 Samuel 1) is perhaps the best known example. Later when the hereditary priesthood was established, parents were allowed to "redeem" the firstborn with an offering of five shekels (Num 8:15-16; Exod 13:13). Thus the birth of Jesus is made complete by his redemption.



The second law pertains to the purification of the mother. As background one has to understand that all bodily discharges were seen to render individuals unclean. Leviticus 15 contains the regulations for purification for males upon the emission of semen from the body (vv. 1-18) and for females upon menstruation (vv. 19-30). However, Leviticus 12 singles out women for their role in childbirth. They are rendered unclean and not allowed to visit the temple or have any contact with anything sacred until purification takes place.

There are three interesting aspects of this law. First, the time of purification differs depending on the gender of the child. The birth of a boy rendered the mother unclean for 40 days and a girl for 80 days. No explanation is offered. Second, the law requires the offering of two animals; the first is considered a burnt offering and the second a sin offering. Thus there is an implied connection between what is inherently female and human sin. Third, there is absolutely no reference to the father of the child in Leviticus 12. The woman alone is expected to present herself at the temple. In New Testament times this took place at the Nicanor Gate in the Court of Women, the entrance farthest from the temple itself. Through the intervention of the male priest, the offering is made for her and she is made clean (Lev 12:6-8).

Both of these laws clearly show a different regard for males and females. If Mary's firstborn had been a girl, her purification would not have taken place for 80 days, and there would have been no consecration of the child before God. It would seem that boy babies provided a double reason for rejoicing—at least that's the implication.

Luke, however, has managed to write a report of this episode without calling attention to these differences. First, it is significant that v. 22 simply refers to "the time of their purification." Since he noted in the previous verse that the circumcision of Jesus occurred on the eighth day, one would expect explicit reference here to the fortieth day. Unless the Gentile reader looks up the Levitical law, it will go unnoticed.

Second, in vv. 22-24 Luke weaves together the two distinct legal traditions—the presentation of the firstborn and the purification of the mother—as if they were a single offering. As it reads, the offering of two doves is connected with the presenta-

tion, not the purification. Many commentators suggest that Luke is confused by the complicated Jewish legal tradition. On the other hand, it may be that Luke understands the law all too well but sees in the presentation of Jesus an end to the law's double standard.

Third, Luke manages to involve Joseph in the story in a way not specified in the law. According to the law, one would expect in v. 22 a reference to "*Mary's* purification" or "*her* purification." Rather Luke writes "*their* purification" (του καθαρισμου αυτων), referring to Mary and Joseph last mentioned explicitly in v. 16. As would be expected, later manuscripts show some uneasiness over this reading. Yet according to the principle of following the older, more difficult reading, there is really no question about the original reading.

One can only conclude that Luke saw a role for Joseph in the purification. The new reality, brought about by the presence of the child Jesus, required a totally new approach to the law. If the mother Mary needed purifying according to the law, then so did Joseph. According to the old reality, one would have expected Joseph to drop Mary off at the temple to do "her thing" while he went to have a cup of tea with the guys. To go one step further, Matthew's Joseph—a just man—would be playing the gentleman, waiting patiently at the gate for Mary. Yet in Luke's Gospel Joseph is pictured standing alongside Mary (in the court of women!) taking this new reality stuff seriously, being restored to purity and consecrated for parenthood.

The focus remains on both Joseph and Mary throughout the episode. The reference to "their purification" (v. 22a) is underscored when Luke uses the plural pronoun "they" (22b), "his parents" (27), and "his father and mother" (33). At the end, Luke reminds us that "they" do not return home until "*they* had completed everything according to the Law of the Lord" (39). They do not return to Joseph's home in Bethlehem but stake their future in Nazareth, the town of Mary. Joseph is not an extra in this story but is totally involved. If one is unclean, they both are. If one is hallowed, they both are.

Age. Luke paints an idyllic scene with the holy family in the temple, but he does not end here. He balances the canvas with a little realism. The picture of the holy couple is not complete until Luke tells the story of another holy pair: Simeon and Anna. The former are young, full of vitality, and ready to begin a life together; the latter are old and alone with vitality nearly drained out of them. The artists have often pictured Simeon as white-haired and nearly blind. He appears as a man alone in the world with no one to live for. He is waiting only for the messiah and for death.

Luke actually goes into more detail in his description of the less familiar Anna. What Luke implied about Simeon is made explicit about Anna: she was very old. She was from the tribe of Asher, always the last mentioned in Old Testament lists. She had lived in her father Phanuel's home until 12 or so, been married until 19, and then she was widowed until 84—living 65 years without depending upon a man's support. While Mary represents the vocation of motherhood, Anna symbolizes another vocation: a prophet who was always at the temple, just like the priests.

This holy pair offers a perfect balance for the young Mary and Joseph. For Luke they are a necessary part of the story and are given a place of dignity and worth. Unlike many biblical characters, they are given names. In the presence of the child Jesus they move from the periphery to the center.

Simeon's eyes are opened to see the light, the salvation for all peoples. Anna's mouth is opened by the spirit—just as the prophet Joel had spoken—to preach the good news to all Jerusalem.

The new reality: Jesus presented and present

Luke offers a story of contrast between two realities: one old and under the law, the other new and led by the spirit. In the presentation of Jesus, Joseph and Mary are described as following the requirements of the law. One cannot help but notice references to the law no less than five times in this section. Jesus is presented into a world stratified and divided by legal prescriptions.

Yet the role of Jesus is not merely that of the presented one. His presence actively offers a new reality. He is not merely, as a child, one who made Mary ritually unclean, but rather the restorer of life. He is not merely the firstborn to be redeemed from the service of the Lord, but the one who would bring about the "redemption of Jerusalem." His destiny is "the falling and rising of many." His piercing sword was to transcend legal understandings even as he fulfilled the law and made way for the free-blowing spirit made manifest at Pentecost.

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The Authentic Word in the Face of Death: Reflections on Preaching at Funerals

Mark E. Chapman
Chambersburg, Pennsylvania

From time to time, as I am called upon to sit down and write a funeral sermon, my macabre sense of humor often leads me to quip, "Well, if I can't come up with a sermon for a funeral, I guess I've just missed the whole point of this Christian thing!" And, you would think that would be true: the death of Christ and the death of a Christian; the resurrection of Christ as the promise of resurrection for a Christian; the grave that could not hold Christ cannot hold those baptized into him—the symmetry, the logic, the unvarnished *gospel* of it, would just seem to jump right out at you.

And yet, how many times I have attended funerals as a mourner for a family member or colleague, at which the preacher *did* miss the point of this Christian thing. A eulogy replaces the sermon, and what I come away hearing is that if you live a good life, are kind to your family, are ordained into the ministry and serve it well and faithfully, have lots of friends and people who admire you, and when you die make many people sad at your passing—then you go to heaven! It might be pointed out that Jesus Christ fails every one of those tests. And yet, this is the One who God raised in triumph from the dead! That ought to say something about what is preached at funerals.

Patrick Keifert, in his book, *Welcoming the Stranger*,[1] argues a convincing case that we are all captive to what he calls "the ideology of intimacy." Nothing is authentic, we believe, unless it finds its way past the invisible bubble of autonomy and isolation that surrounds each of us out of self-defense, and reaches the intimate depths of our hearts and relationships. This captivity to "the ideology of intimacy" seems to me to be what lies behind the hesitancy to

[1] Patrick R. Keifert, *Welcoming the Stranger: A Public Theology of Worship and Evangelism* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), see esp. 24ff.

preach the gospel of Jesus Christ at a funeral. Funerals are grief-laden times, no doubt. Feelings and emotions run high; the level of intimacy is high among family and close friends of the deceased. The "ideology of intimacy" bursts forth into a full-blown "community of intimacy" at a funeral. So that the great temptation for the preacher is to desire to be part of that community, to speak a word of intimacy that will be a consoling and comforting word, but that above all will show the preacher's solidarity with and fellowship in that "community of intimacy" surrounding the family and friends of the deceased. The preacher, as pastor, believes she or he cannot stand outside the bubble, will not be understood or appreciated from outside the bubble, but must find a way to speak a word that gains entre into the "community of intimacy" inside that protective bubble. And the best way to do that is to preach about the deceased in intimate, emotional, personal ways, demonstrating that the preacher, too, belongs in the "community of intimacy" that huddles in the protective bubble of private feeling and experience as it grieves over the death of a loved one. Hence, the eulogy is mistaken for the gospel, as the good news is no longer that "Christ is risen, Alleluia!" but that the pastor is as intimate a mourner of the deceased as everybody else in the bubble. Salvation is no longer then by faith in Christ, but by faith in the "ideology of intimacy."

The criticism of this surrender to the "ideology of intimacy" is not merely an *a priori* assertion about the Word of God and its objectivity. More to the point is a criticism based on what words in fact do as language, and language as communication.[2] The bubble of autonomy and the ideology of intimacy cease to be true analogies of existence when we consider what it is to speak language to one another.

Precisely because we take it so for granted, it is easy to ignore the power language has over us. It is no exaggeration to say that language makes us who and what we are, by "calling forth" our self from our existence. Our dual capacity for self-reflection ("Who am I?") and for self-transcendence ("Why am I?") are not innate to us; they are capacities called forth from us by the encounter with Another that addresses us in language in such a way that the language calls forth into being a self-reflective, self-transcendent person. This is the linguistic version of "It takes two to tango." In the autonomy of my own "bubble" (to hang on to the analogy just a bit longer), I have no way of knowing or experiencing myself. That I can think myself (*cogito, ergo sum*, "I think, therefore I am") may be entirely an illusion, and in any case tells me nothing of what or why "I am." It is only when my autonomous bubble is burst by the speaking to me of a word outside of me, that I am called forth by that external word to be and to become what the ensuing dialogue will make of me.

Language, then, makes us what we are, by calling forth who we are in its address to us. I experience my own being and embark on my own becoming in the linguistic dialogue of mutual calling-forth between two

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[2] A beginning bibliography in the very broad field of linguistic hermeneutics might include: *The Hermeneutics Reader*, ed. Kurt Müller-Vollmer (New York: Continuum, 1990); Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980); *A Ricoeur Reader*, ed. Mario J. Valdes (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991); David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination* (New York: Crossroad, 1987); Gerhard Ebeling, *Introduction to a Theological Theory of Language* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973). All of these have had influence on the argument I present, but none is precisely that argument.

Authentic Christian language has something else to say, other than and beyond the kind word of remembrance, sympathy, and compassion.

speakers. We are, then, not "autonomous beings" but "called-forth beings." Language is what transforms us from "that humanoid thing" into "this human person." We are not "the thinking animal" but rather "the called-forth person" (and so precisely not either "the speaking animal" or "the naked ape"; language calls forth a human person from "that humanoid animal-thing" in all instances of authentic language).

Parenthetically above, I have just made a distinction between authentic language and (by implication) "inauthentic" language. Both are real possibilities, and both have power to call forth my being. The difference between these two kinds of calling forth, however, is the root of the disintegration of so much of human community. Inauthentic language is that external word that calls forth precisely "the thinking animal," a language that keeps me bound up as "that humanoid thing" and so captive to the one who speaks the word that calls my being forth. Inauthentic language is "closed" speech: it does not invite (or call forth) an open response but provides and imposes only one answer to its question or command; it is the language of all ideology, and to be able to distinguish it is to be able to distinguish between ideology and truth. Authentic language, in that it is open speech that calls forth or invites an open response, speaks the truth and discerns the truth in the dialogue, in the creative calling-forth of genuine personhood, true self-reflection ("Who am I truly?") and true self-transcendence ("Why am I truly?").

The faith of Christianity is that authentic language that calls forth *Jesus Christ* as the authentic self, the authentic personhood, of the one addressed, and does so openly, so that Christ is called forth not only as the self of the person addressed but in the dialogue that calls forth authentic community of conversation, language, communication. The external word of the Christian faith is the language that calls my being and becoming forth as existence in Christ and a becoming like Christ. This authentic Christian word calls me forth as one who speaks the word of Christ in return, calling forth Christ from my addressee, and in that dialogue that calls forth from one another, from "I and Thou," the word of Christ, thereby calling forth from that word the Spirit of Christ that unites us as the community of language and existence of Christ.

When the calling-forth of authentic language is the calling-forth of Christ, then also authentic self-reflection and self-transcendence are called forth in the Image of Christ. "Who am I truly?" becomes the self-reflective question, "Who am I, that I might be the Image of Christ?" "Why am I truly?" becomes the self-transcendent question, "Why am I, if I am most truly the Image of Christ?" Authentic Christian language then becomes the reflective and transcendental dialogue in which ever-deeper and ever-changing answers to these questions are advanced as the continuing calling-forth of my being-in-Christ.

Authentic Christian language is based on two crucial phenomena about the Christian church in the world: (1) it is a religion of repentance, conversion, and new birth; (2) it is a religion of reconciliation and salvation. These two themes form the necessary and authentic poles of tension between which all authentic Christian language is spoken. And this is what bring us back to preaching, and particularly to funeral sermons. For it is death that causes us to recognize these two poles or foci: the claim of death against which Christian faith calls all humanity to repentance, to turn to the way of Jesus Christ, and to be united to his death so that his triumph over death becomes the Christian hope; and the inescapable finality of death against which Christian faith holds out the hope of Jesus' resurrection as the power that reconciles to the God of Life even those cursed by death and so delivers even those struck down by death to the salvation of new life with that God. To speak so as to call forth Christ, is then to speak so as to call forth Christ *against death.*

And that is what we should both hear and say in funeral sermons! Death may be the cause that gathers people together at a funeral, and the innate human need for consolation and sympathy in times of grief may be strongly present. Neither of those can be denied. But we cannot let the cultural captivity to the "ideology of intimacy" turn death and grief into the last word. For that is what happens when all we have to say at a funeral is a word of solidarity in sympathy, of "intimate" sharing in grief, of a consolation that is just another empathic hug. For Christians, this is inauthentic language, for it calls forth nothing but what is already there, it calls forth a dead-end of mutual intimacies in the face of life's tragedy; in its own way, it can only speak of "that humanoid thing," the corpse of the dead, and has no way to call forth the one who we grieve as again "this human person."

Only the word of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and of our incorporation by faith and baptism into that death and resurrection, can be the authentic language that calls forth life from death, by whose very words "that humanoid thing" in the coffin is called forth nonetheless by the power of God as "this human person resurrected." This means that authentic Christian language has something else to say, other than and beyond the kind word of remembrance, sympathy, and compassion. Those words can be made authentic language in Christian speech only when they are taken up and transcended by the word of triumphant life in Jesus Christ for all who have died in the faith. Then "remembrance" of the deceased is called upon to call forth remembrance of Christ, "sympathy" for the grieving is pushed further to call forth hope in Christ, "compassion" for those who feel pain and loss becomes the passionate calling forth of faith in the impossible truth that the lost are found, the dead are raised, the grave cannot hold its contents against the force of new life in Jesus Christ that raises up the dead.

Authentic Christian language in the face of death should not concede the claim of death, but challenge it. Authentic Christian language in the face of death should not blend in with the language of grief and mourning, but speak a word of triumphant hope above it. Authentic Christian language in the face of death should not leave those who face death where they are, but should be language powerful enough and alien enough to call forth the grieving into hope, to call forth Christ in the midst of pain and sorrow as the one whose cross is victory, to call forth a future beyond death that is so filled with the triumph of resurrection

life as to make the present moment of grief a tolerable and passing moment.

Which means that authentic Christian language at a funeral is that which says that God the Father has raised from the dead his crucified Son, Jesus Christ, and in that has given his Holy Spirit that we might receive his Spirit of life and so share in the triumph of life over death that Jesus Christ has won. Yes, funerals are for the living, as the preacher's adage goes. But that does not mean funerals must agree with or reinforce the feelings of the living, or do no more than make common cause with the grief of the living. Funerals are for the living, so that Christ might be called forth in their lives to give them faith and hope and peace, to "see in death the gates to eternal life" (as the funeral service has it),[3] and so call forth an end to their grieving by the power of the word of Christ.

In authentic Christian language, what we will say in our funeral sermons about the deceased is not a pious variant of "If you're good you'll go to heaven" cloaked in the sympathetic solidarity of the "ideology of intimacy." Rather, what we will say in our funeral sermons is the proper version of "as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Cor 15:22)—proper in that it calls forth this Christ and this life in this moment, this place and time, for this deceased person and these grieving people, such that they are called forth from an existence captive to the fact that "in Adam we all die," and *called forward* into the new realization of the existence given in the Spirit and Word of Christ, that reality is not what it appears to be, that "in Christ" the hopeless have hope and the empty are filled full, and even the dead "shall all be made alive."

This is not "the theology of glory" precisely because it does not intend to make people feel good, but rather to make people feel the cross—and then the resurrection. It is, in fact, the very essence of the "theology of the cross": the right word at the right time of how God in Jesus Christ grasps in himself, deep in his own human flesh, and just so deep in his own divinity, the pain and sorrow and broken dreams of life scared and scarred by death; how God in Christ, taking that grim reality of ours into himself, by that very act has turned the grim reality and the "grim reaper" into the stony yet holy path by which Christ ascends with us in his nail-pierced hands to the Father and the life of God. Nowhere must this be spoken more authentically than in the very face of death.

No humans who experience in themselves their own humanity can face death without dread fear. To look into the open casket is to look into the mirror of the future for all of us. Which is why I think I listen for more than just reminiscences and condolences at a funeral; I listen for an authentic word that assures me that what I see in that mirror of the future is not what will be, but only what once was; that the true mirror of my future is the cross, and the paradox of eternal life lifted up on it. I need to hear the authentic word, that none of us will end up as a mere memory, but that "I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever" (Ps 23:6). Which is why the funeral sermon must be an authentic Christian word that calls forth Christ for me, for all of us—*pro me, pro nobis*—"for us and for our salvation"—and not just the powerless words of sympathy language captive to the ideology of intimacy.

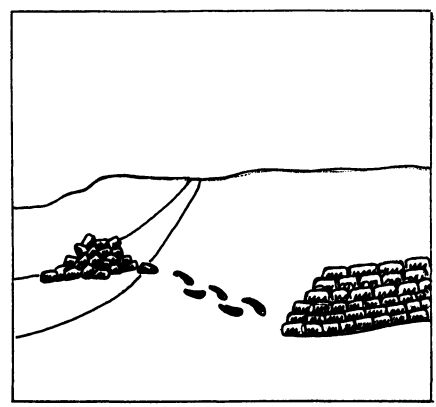
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[3] "Burial of the Dead," *Occasional Services* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1982), 114.

Called to Tear Down: Confrontational Ministry

Ron Dwyer-Voss
Chicago, Illinois

The shots echoed down the fear-struck street as bullets from an automatic rifle sprayed Pedro's new home. He and his family of five were on the second floor. The previous night, Pedro had attended a crime committee meeting at his church that discussed building a stronger community in the neighborhood around the church. Pedro suggested starting with some kind of neighborhood watch system. People would get to know their neighbors, and it would be practical as well.



"This is our neighborhood, we own it, don't mess with it," yelled a member of the local street gang as the car from which the bullets flew peeled away into the dark.

The next night a few gang members came back with baseball bats. Beating the door they screamed gang slogans and "If we get in, we will kill you...." Fortunately, on this night the police showed up (the previous night the 911 operator dismissed Pedro's call as a prank). Nobody was hurt.

Everyone on the crime committee had a story to tell. Pedro's was added to the neighborhood's repertoire of tales of police indifference, gang violence, and general insecurity. The stories intermingled with debate over what action to take.

"Let's get a group and march right up to the hoodlums and tell them to go home."

"How about if we get signs and the media to harass and embarrass all the people from the suburbs that buy their drugs from these guys? If no one is buying, the gangs will go away."

"I think if we paint out all the gang graffiti every Sunday after mass, they will get the message. I've been here 20 years and I can outlast these punks."

"Graffiti is not the problem. The police are the problem. They didn't even come to Pedro's the first night, and the second night they didn't take a statement from him."

Every solution was met with opposition and another solution. Every suggestion had its flaws. The crime committee was afraid of the gangs, distrustful of the police, and frustrated with the situation. They grew weary over the months of researching, meeting, and debating solutions. Fear, distrust, and frustration had immobilized the community, its otherwise influential churches, and its politicians.

A few months later the second largest Latino street gang in Chicago was broken up and destroyed in an early morning, neighborhood-wide raid. The success was the result of an experimental policing team that had been working closely with residents through the auspices of the same crime committee. In fact, the committee had pressured the mayor and police superintendent into creating the experimental team.

Fear? Frustration? Distrust? Where did they go? Nowhere. They remained, but they were confronted. Individuals grew as they confronted their own lack of confidence and replaced it with leadership qualities. Frustration and distrust were uprooted, pulled down, destroyed and overthrown so that seeds of hope could be planted and foundations for community could be laid. This happened in meetings with public officials and among the committee itself. Confrontational ministry is uprooting, pulling down and destroying that which is bad and planting and building that which is good.

Jeremiah, facing a society that would be hostile or indifferent to the message of one of God's prophets, was also called by God to confrontational ministry (Jer 1:4-10). God dismisses Jeremiah's excuses and fear ("I am only a boy") and reminds him, "Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you...." With these things said, God wastes no time in outlining what Jeremiah is to do. Pluck up and pull down. Destroy and overthrow. Build and plant.

There are two subtle but critical points in the passage. First, the author makes clear that God's intentions are not for some kind of spiritual self-help program. God makes the scope and stakes of this confrontational ministry perfectly clear: nations and kingdoms! Second, the instructions to confront, like Jesus' ultimate commandment, are inseparable from God's reassurances. God did not tell Jeremiah to go and plant seeds and build good things while ignoring or even condoning the bad things. God told Jeremiah to tear down the bad things as well as build the good things. God's integrity dictates that both be done.

This is not a very comfortable proposition to most church-folk. We would rather

discuss, talk things out, issue statements and manifestos, or "study the issue a little longer." The crime committee, to be sure, discussed and studied (for a full year) before coming up with their proposal and action plan. But they recognized that to implement their plan, to build, they would first have to do some plucking, pulling, destroying, and overthrowing.

Our resistance to confrontational ministry is not something on which to waste guilt. Jeremiah gives us good company. God's assurance of presence (v. 8) gives us good reason to plunge forward into the realm of the uncomfortable. As Walter Brueggemann points out, the message of Jeremiah is that astonishing beginnings only come out of painful or uncomfortable endings.[1] Indeed, this is consistent with Jesus' paradox of gaining 'life as it should be' through losing 'life as it is.'

Reflecting on the messages of Jeremiah and Isaiah, Brueggemann says,

> How do we move from "there is no peace" to "publish good tidings of peace"? The answer is that peace, which is impossible and not available, becomes possible and available when, and only when, the holy city is dismantled and God is driven back to square one to create a new people and to rebuild a new city.[2]

For us in 1995, dismantling or confrontational ministry is a daily and weekly activity, not just an apocalyptic or historical scenario. It inherently goes hand in hand with planting and building.

Confrontational ministry goes hand in hand with planting and building.

Dismantle. Uproot. Pull down. Destroy. Confrontational ministry. As leaders, we need to embrace rather than run from this biblical tradition. We need to learn the skills that will enable us to engage in such a ministry and lead others to do the same. Finally, we must do so remembering two things at all times:

1. God's promise that "I am with you" (v. 8)... grace.

2. There's nothing that separates that promise and the beginning of Jeremiah's confrontational ministry. It starts immediately (v. 9).

Go in peace, confront the world, build and plant, serving the Lord.

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[1] Walter Brueggemann, untitled lecture, 1982.

[2] Brueggemann, "A World Available for Peace," *Sojourners*, January 1988.

Standing on the Promises

Mark Kolden
Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota

> Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality.... Then the saying that is written will be fulfilled: "Death is swallowed up in victory." "Where, O Death, is your victory? Where, O Death, is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.
>
> —1 Cor 15:51-57

The Bible is full of pictures of hope for the future, and the apostle Paul's words in this passage are surely among the most vivid. The trumpet will sound; the dead will be raised; and we shall all be changed. We will be made immortal; the reign of death will be ended; the power of sin will be vanquished. And God will give us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus is our living hope, as it says in the first letter of Peter. Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, according to the book of Hebrews. Indeed, in Romans God is called the "God of hope" (15:13). In Christ God wins the final victory over all that sin, death, and the world can do, and this is the source of our hope.

When we are in the prime of life we may not often think about this future hope. It may occur to us at funerals or when someone close to us is very ill or in a bad accident or when we have a close call, but it may not really seem to be part and parcel of our Christian life. This is a serious lack, and so we need to trust those more sober moments when we do remember that this hope for victory after death is our only true hope, after all.

Yet just as we agree to this, we find a big surprise in the passage from 1 Corinthians 15. Since we have such a marvelous hope for the future, the apostle says, therefore, *therefore* now "be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain." The wonder here is that a sure and certain hope for the future leads us to work harder in the present. Precisely because God will act in the future, what we do now matters.

But if the future is secure, what difference does it make if we do anything now? Emphasizing future hope has sometimes caused Christians not to care about this life. Karl Marx thought that Christianity's emphasis on the future functioned like a drug to keep Christians in a stupor now. Yet the Bible has it just the other way around: the emphasis on the future hope is claimed to make what we do now all the more important. Because it is not just hope in general but a hope tied to Jesus Christ.

Christ is raised; he is our living hope. It is he, out there ahead of us, an objective hope, who stirs up within us a subjective hope which leads us to live now in accord with the promised future. The hope we have that "we shall all be changed" in the future is tied up with St. Paul's other words (2 Cor 3:18) that we "are being changed" now.

The content of our future hope in Christ affects the content of our life now. Faith always includes this future hope, and this hope "ricochets" back to impact our life now. There is a cartoon of two teenage girls sitting in front of a TV set, and one says to the other, "You know, the trouble with real life is that there is no plot." In Christ that is no longer true: there is a plot because there is a promised future.

Now all this is as familiar to anyone who knows the New Testament as it is foreign to our secular culture. For all of us who are believers it should be almost a truism that our "eschatological" hope transforms the way we live in the present. But the intriguing twist for me is that it also works the other way around: when life in the present becomes real it opens up the future to us. Paul could have put the last verse of our passage first, I think, and then ended up with the final resurrection, because God is not only the God of hope but the giver of life, as well. Indeed, without a sense of being called to tasks now, the certainty of our future hope may evaporate.

Here is a true story. A few years ago a teacher employed to teach patients in a large city hospital received a routine call requesting that she visit a particular child. She was told by his regular teacher on the phone that "We're studying nouns and adverbs in his class now. I'd be grateful if you could help him with his homework so that he doesn't fall behind the others."

It wasn't until the hospital teacher got outside the boy's room the next day that she realized he was in the burn unit. No one had prepared her to find a young boy horribly burned and in great pain. She felt that she couldn't just turn around and leave the room, however, so she awkwardly stammered, "I'm the hospital teacher, and your teacher sent me to help you with nouns and adverbs." The boy was in such pain that he barely responded. The teacher stumbled through the English lesson, ashamed at putting him through such a senseless exercise, and then she left.

The next morning a nurse from the burn unit saw the hospital teacher and asked her, "What did you do to that boy yesterday?" The poor teacher began to apologize and explain that she hadn't known that he was so badly burned, when the nurse interrupted her: "You don't understand. We've been very worried about him. But ever since you were there yesterday his whole attitude has changed. He's fighting back, responding to treatment. It's as though he has decided to live." The boy later explained that he had completely given up hope until he saw that teacher. It all changed when he came to a simple realization: "They wouldn't send a teacher to work on nouns and adverbs with a dying boy, would they?"*

God wouldn't call us to be steadfast, immovable, excelling in the work of the Lord, if he didn't have things in store for us, would he? Or give us tasks and relationships if death were just the end of things? When God calls us in Christ we receive promises and tasks, and they go hand in hand. The promises are the basis for the tasks: we shall all be changed, therefore be steadfast in the work of the Lord. And in the tasks we discover the truth and purpose of the promises, for in the Lord our labor is not in vain.

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*This story was printed in *Sojourners* magazine in the spring of 1986.

The Waiting Chalice

I'm nothing but the wonder: "Who am I?"
My soul is cupped—stark hollow by design—
And waiting is the way I live to die.

The folds of word and gesture guard a sigh:
Until my heart is anyone's but mine
I'm nothing but the wonder: "Who am I?"

You question me, I question you—or try—
But silence slowly takes us as we dine
And waiting is the way I live to die.

When all my world is quiet but the cry,
I lay me down with all I can define:
I'm nothing but the wonder: "Who am I?"

My iris twins the blue, unsounded sky
As hope and fear consent to fall supine,
And waiting is the way I live to die.

But for the burnished light, I'm empty, shy—
A chalice at the pouring of the wine.
I'm nothing but the wonder: "Who am I?"
And waiting is the way I live to die.

Gary Blobaum
Pastor, Faith Lutheran Church
Marion, Iowa

Worth Discussing: Two Books by David Kelsey

Reinhard Hütter
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

Between Athens and Berlin: The Theological Education Debate. By David H. Kelsey. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993. viii and 235 pages. Paper. $18.99.

To Understand God Truly: What's Theological about a Theological School. By David H. Kelsey. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992. 271 pages. Paper. $16.99.

One of the minor truisms about our day and age is that theological education in the United States is in a state of crisis. Thus, unsurprisingly, one of the many debates and conversations of the last decade has been on theological education—largely supported by the Lilly Foundation and in close relationship with the *Association of Theological Schools*. A remarkable amount of literature has been the result of this extensive and urgent conversation. The two books by David Kelsey, professor of theology at Yale Divinity School, are in many ways the last word, the summary and the peak of this discussion. What was obviously originally one manuscript had—under the conditions of current (bad) habits of marketing books for relatively quick consumption—to be published in two separate and to some degree different volumes by two publishing houses.

If one wants to read a first rate summary and analysis of the 1980s theological education debate and its prehistory, one has to turn to *Between Athens and Berlin*. If one wants to learn about Kelsey's own constructive proposal in light of the debate (including a very short, but clear summary of it) one should pick *To Understand God Truly*.

In *Between Athens and Berlin* Kelsey shows that American theological education has inherited two irreconcilable basic models of theological training. On the one hand, there is the "Athens" model with "paideia" at its center. The point of this kind of education is a process of "culturing" the soul, of schooling as "character formation." Current discussions around "spirituality" would fit into this broad tradition. On the other hand, there is the "Berlin" model, which combines orderly, critical, and disciplined research with professional education for ministry. Of course, a kind of formation takes place in both models, and a kind of teaching, learning, and scholarship are to be found in both. Yet they are decisively

different in their organization and ordering, because the guiding *telos* is a different one for each model.

This irresolvable tension between "Athens" and "Berlin" allows Kelsey to order the 1980s theological education debate from its predecessors like John Henry Newman in the 19th century over W. R. Harper, Robert L. Kelly, Williams Adam Brown in the 1930s, H. Richard Niebuhr, Daniel D. Williams, and James Gustafson in the 1950s to Edward Farley, the Mud Flower Collective, John B. Cobb/Joseph C. Hough, Max Stackhouse, and Charles Wood of the 1980s. The analysis and critique of all the authors are lucid, fair, and penetrating and the overall framework of "Athens" versus "Berlin" organizes the debate in a convincing way. Just for getting a handle on this extensive and complex conversation *Between Athens and Berlin* is a very helpful tool.

In *To Understand God Truly* Kelsey puts forward his own concrete proposal for theological schooling. Its decisive mark is that it is a kind of "positive" inquiry into Christian congregations as "particular sets of practices whose governing center is the enactment of a more broadly practiced public worship of God" (229). Yet Christian congregations are only the penultimate point of study. The ultimate point of a theological school is, as the title says, to understand God truly. Yet since God is not accessible as a direct object of study, "a Christian theological school is a community of persons trying to understand God truly by focusing study of various subject matters through the lens of questions about the place and role of those subject matters in diverse Christian worshipping communities or congregations" (110). Thus Kelsey is able to negotiate "unity" and "diversity" in one particular way. The unity of a theological school and its course of study is maintained by all its inquiries being focused on understanding God truly. The plurality is addressed by doing that *via* focusing on whatever sets of practices Christian congregations maintain.

Kelsey's focus on congregations and their practices represents a particular kind of modernizing key aspects of Schleiermacher's work (especially his *Sittenlehre*). Yet while Kelsey's idea of taking congregations as a *lens* and *horizon* is interesting, the very way he attempts to construe "congregation" without assumptions that might be particular or exclusive—in other words, without substantive theological assumptions—is highly questionable. It is only convincing if one has a particular structural and non-substantive ecclesiology in place which constitutes the horizon of this particular inquiry into congregational practices. And since this ecclesiology remains tacit, it does not need to be justified on theological grounds. In addition, it is far from clear what one is going to learn about God in this kind of school besides the fact that God can be, and as a matter of fact is, construed in endless ways by endless congregations. What can unquestionably be achieved is "conceptual growth," a deepening of understanding of the complexities of life and the manifold ways of understanding God. Yet it is far from clear whom this deepened understanding is to help—besides, of course, that kind of culture the product of which are nondenominational university divinity schools. In other words, what Kelsey has achieved is a very convincing proposal for how a theological school like Yale Divinity School can make sense and successfully negotiate "unity" and "diversity." The decisive yet tacit presupposition of this "theological school" is that it is, by definition, non-denominational, i.e. neither ecclesially nor ecclesiologically committed! This is what is tacitly normative about this kind of theological school and what

faculties and administrations of other theological schools need to look at very critically if they want to consider this proposal for their own schools.

Both books are outstanding examples of Kelsey's great gift for analytic precision and clarity of expression—which makes both books ideal reading material for seminary students and discussion topics for theological faculties. In my opinion, especially *Between Athens and Berlin* should be essential reading for all who are involved in theological education: students, faculty, administrators, parish ministers, board of directors, and trustees. The reason for this is the book's great heuristic acuity, i.e. its helpfulness in getting a handle on the complex issues involved in the present crisis of theological education in mainline denominations.

Both books are deeply disconcerting and—ironically—in all their acuity and clarity nothing less than a parable of the very crisis of mainline Protestant theological education.

Yet both books are also deeply disconcerting and—ironically—in all their acuity and clarity nothing less than a parable and mirror of the very crisis of mainline Protestant theological education. The problem is to be felt indirectly in *Between Athens and Berlin*. If one looks at who the participants of the debate are, how it is conducted, and how Kelsey organizes and frames it, it becomes very clear that it is nothing less than the conceptual preoccupation of theological liberalism with its own difficulty of negotiating unity versus diversity/plurality. It is liberal Protestantism that determines both the agenda and the form of the debate. The results are predictable: they underwrite culturally binding assumptions which are implicit in the horizon of how the debate is set up and at the same time undercut all normative theological assumptions.

The problem becomes even starker in Kelsey's own constructive suggestion *To Understand God Truly*. This construal only makes sense in one kind of setting and serves one kind of institution, namely the nondenominational university divinity school. There is, as such, nothing bad about this, since after all such a divinity school can be a very interesting place at which to teach and to study. What is deeply problematic is that by avoiding any substantive theological normativity the unavoidable normative implications of Kelsey's account remain tacit. They constitute the very horizon in which he develops his construal—which makes them more powerful than if they had been explicitly stated since then he would have had to defend them—theologically! What are some of these tacit assumptions?

First, despite all the "political awareness" demonstrated in both books, namely that ideological distortions and functionalizations are a constant danger in every construal of theological education that is less than highly self-critical, one completely misses the serious and extensive discussion of one major force by which congregations, seminaries, and denominations seem to be driven these days: the dynamics of the

"market," both religious and financial. Kelsey's discussion separates "politics" from "economics," or more concretely, issues around seminary-governance ("Power" issues) from issues around development, self-presentation, and recruitment. This very separation is in and of itself one of the unquestioned tacit, but normative assumptions of both the theological education debate and Kelsey's books, namely that "politics" and "economics" are two separate realities to be treated independently from each other—an essential axiom of liberalism, both political and theological.

A second tacit assumption is that it is possible to point to something as broadly as the "Christian thing"—a key term in Kelsey's description and proposal—and to assume that this "placebo" would give enough coherence to all the possible construals subsumed under it. Waco, the Christian Nazi Church in Idaho, and Jim Jones can teach us about God as much as Taizé, Unitarian Universalism, or the Greek Orthodox congregation in Durham, North Carolina. All of this only makes sense if one assumes a particular kind of purely descriptive congregationalism as the normative horizon for the kind of "theological understanding" entertained. This amounts to a serious ecclesiological deficit, namely assuming both the facticity and the normativity of denominationalism—which is theologically unwarranted.

Thus precisely in their generality, inclusivity, evenhandedness, and sensitivity to difference and plurality, Kelsey's two books tell a very *particular* story, namely of those who are invested in mainline Protestantism framed by its unquestioned constitutive—yet tacit—cultural and political horizon called "America." While Kelsey's non-essentialist account seems to include everyone, it ironically excludes from his proposal of a theological school all those who hold normative and binding convictions, be it in regard to the Bible, to church, to tradition, to hierarchy, or to the Spirit's concrete activity. Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Lutherans, Anabaptists, and for that matter also charismatics and fundamentalists should for very different yet very concrete and normative reasons be unable to accept Kelsey's proposal as workable for them. Only by "transcending" and increasingly disowning their normative and binding convictions, in other words, by becoming mainline Protestants, would they be able to accept Kelsey's proposal as genuinely helpful. (And, of course, it is precisely the case that many Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Episcopalians, and Anabaptists are increasingly being inculturated, i.e. are becoming mainline Protestants by increasingly separating their theological convictions from their lives, in other words, by treating their theological convictions increasingly as idiosyncratic opinions.)

Put differently, Kelsey's own constructive account is disquietingly vulnerable to the kind of ideology critique he is calling for as a central element in any kind of theological schooling, namely that his account is completely determined by the kind of university divinity school at which he is teaching, its theological and academic assumptions, the socio-religious culture that produces a school like that, and that kind of school's particular interest in continuing its educational enterprise.

Yet if one can live with these serious limitations or if one rather regards them actually as decisive advantages, one can focus on the two books' unquestionable strength, namely their heuristic function of helping us to clarify what the difficulties in current theological education are, where we agree and disagree and why so, and what our potential options might be. This on its own already is a remarkable achievement.

Book Reviews

Conflicting Agendas. By D. Don Welch. Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1994. 195 pages. Cloth. $19.95.

Out of the web of relationships that constitute our lives spring a variety of moral agendas. Sometimes these duties are complementary; other times they are not harmonious. The various agendas that claim our allegiance can and often do compete. But the expectations that arise because we belong to a family, church, civic club, business, professional association, academic community, political party, recreational facility, and/or labor union may require more than careful balancing. In these differing institutional settings, we incur obligations that conflict irreconcilably. Anyone who seeks to respond with honor and authenticity to these moral tensions will find this book to be a great resource.

It is divided into three parts. The first section describes the experience of conflicting moral agendas. This analysis illumines well the ways we encounter contradictory obligations and the ways in which our personal integrity is often challenged in institutional settings.

Six possible responses to these conflicts are considered in the second part. Among the alternative models explored are those typified by a hermit, an institutionalized person, a split personality, a reformer, an accommodator, and a convert. By providing us with this typology, Welch expands our sense of the options before us as we face these dilemmas. He also demonstrates that no one mode of response is suitable for every circumstance. Given the ever-changing nature of the conflicts we encounter, consistency demands that we not be inflexible in our approach. Authenticity requires the ability to adopt any of these types as appropriate in particular situations.

The process whereby we discern which approach to adopt is the focus of the final section. Here Welch alerts us to a number of factors relevant to such decision-making. If you seek to foster lively discussions about these matters, then order this text for your Sunday school adult forum class, local book club, or the next meeting of your ministerial association. Welch writes with a clarity and wisdom rarely combined. He communicates without jargon and illustrates his arguments with vivid historical and biographical vignettes.

Patricia Beattie Jung
Wartburg Theological Seminary

The Hilarity of Community. Romans 12 and How to Be the Church. By Marva J. Dawn. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992. 303 pages. Paper. $16.95.

Marva Dawn has written a moving, wise, substantive, and very readable book about the theology and reality of Christian community. Part of the richness of the book is undoubtedly due to the fact that here a person is writing who is both a trained theologian, yet also deeply immersed in the life of congregations. Her familiarity with the work of Jacques Ellul gives her a keen and disillusioned eye for the social ills of our times without letting herself be paralyzed by them and without playing her knowledge out in an abstract and irrelevant way.

She intersects biblical interpretation and current congregational reality in a highly imaginative way that does not get stuck with belaboring the obvious, namely the very lack of community in our congregations, personal lives, and social reality, but by unearthing and pointing to the constant possibility—and reality—of community as implied in the gospel itself.

The hilarity of community is, first of all, the hilarity of the gospel, that inexhaustible gift that is the very root of Christian community and hilarity. In this sense her book is Christian instruction in the best sense displaying the inherent interrelatedness of theology and ethics, Christian faith and community. Thus, she convinc-

ingly displays the richness of Romans 12 and, without making much ado about it, simply shows that Romans 12-15 is nothing else but St. Paul's "church ethics"!

The author does not only have college and seminary students in mind but people in the congregations. Each chapter ends with questions for further meditations. At the end of the book there are helpful resources on peacemaking, justice-building, and community. This is a book that I wish to see in the hands of all pastors and lay people, and to be read and pondered by all seminary students—especially during their internships.

Reinhard Hütter
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

Faith Before Faithfulness: Centering the Inclusive Church. By H. William Gregory. Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1992. x and 188 pages. Paper. $12.95.

Gregory has served during four decades as a pastor in the United Church of Christ; he calls his book a "report from the trenches." The thesis is that mainline denominations like the UCC, having now become "sidelined" (Wade Clark Roof's term) in American Christianity, can re-envision themselves as what Gregory calls *inclusive evangelicals.*

Such a revision would include several components. First, there would be an honest assessment of the failures of the past when such denominations were on the edge of social issues but seemed to lose their core of faith. Second, since these churches are now sidelined, they are free to raise a critique against the culture-Christianity now being espoused by the church growth folks. Touche. Third, the naming of the form of faith *inclusive* evangelical offers a clear alternative to exclusive evangelicals, i.e. fundamentalists. Lastly, the program for such a revision of the church would include both *conversion* and *catechesis* (though Gregory does not use this term).

This fourth component is intriguing. Gregory finds three doors into the inclusive evangelical church: the spiritual door, the justice door, and the door of caring community. The diversity of the churches is in large measure due to the existence of these three doors, each of which leads to the center, which is God-the-mystery. Gregory is concerned that, at this time in the history of Protestantism, inclusive evangelical churches explore the center from the perspective of covenant and conversion. This exploration will lead people into prayer, into contemplation, into the uses of the imagination in faith, into dreams: this is the stuff of his catechesis. Gregory believes that many in the inclusive evangelical church have had conversion experiences but have not been given the language or the permission to name them, and he sees this ministry of permission as a major part of the pastoral calling and the church's mission for this age. "Our goal should not be to become mainline or mainstream," says Gregory, "but to become clear in our Christian identity and faithful in our life and mission." The final chapter offers a program for study in the parish.

Pastor Gregory has written well, often poetically, to pose a dynamic balance whereby the church might respond to the world's needs and remain sensitive to discerning the will of God, whereby the church that is diverse and pluralistic may yet retain focus on the faith of the individual Christian. Lutherans will use this book with profit and delight.

Jay C. Rochelle

Venture Bible. NRSV: Electronic Edition. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1994. $69.95.

Augsburg Fortress is a late entry in the computer concordance field, and its *Venture Bible* (for Macintosh or Windows) must be labeled a disappointment. Even the Venture Bible will do things our grandparents could not have dreamed about, but it could have done much more in a more user friendly way.

Item: This is strictly an English concordance, good for finding any word or place in the Bible, but the user has no idea whether a given English word represents two or more words in the original, or whether one Hebrew or Greek word is represented by ten or twenty words in English. While scholars will want a Hebrew or

Greek computer concordance paired with the English text, even those who know neither of the original languages can correlate with the original in *Quick Verse for Windows* by Parsons Technology, since it allows the user to search for the Hebrew or Greek word by using the numbers from Strong's concordance.

Item: Augsburg Fortress has been *the* leading U.S. publisher of exegetical studies, but the brief introductions to the Bible as a whole and to its individual books in this concordance are often inane or even wrong. We are told that "The OT was originally written in Hebrew and Aramaic by Hebrew writers." (Note the double meaning of the word Hebrew in that sentence!) Again we are told that the Council of Jamnia rejected the seven books of the Apocrypha. In fact, there is universal agreement today that there was no Council of Jamnia, and surely all seven of these books were not in dispute in the late first century. A history of Bible translations stops with the American Standard Version of 1901 and the notice that many more versions were completed in the 20th century!

Item: The seven black and white maps in this program are undistinguished and do not compare with the more than 100 gorgeous, full-color maps in the *PC Bible Atlas for Windows* by Parsons Technology.

Item: The introductory manual does not introduce one directly to doing biblical concordance work, but has the user search for items on a restaurant menu called Auggie's Deli. Here one learns to search for either bacon or chicken, but not both together! It would have been far more helpful to give biblical examples, as all the competing programs do, since especially beginners may not understand the reason for making such a search in the Bible unless the example clarifies it for them.

Item: In addition, the manual and the four-page supplement designed to take you from Auggie's Deli into the Bible itself are riddled with mistakes. We are told there are 16 records that contain the word white—in fact there are 13. Or 18 records that refer to bacon—in fact there are 11. Or 123 records that refer to salvation—in fact there are 124. The reader is invited to search for the phrase "Jesus wept," but the Greek is rendered "Jesus began to weep" in the NRSV and so one finds nothing. Supposedly one can search for words used only in the Pentateuch or the Prophets, but this feature does not work, at least for me. When a word is found in context (here called Infobase) the user knows only the verse number and not the number of the chapter nor the name of the biblical book—without a lot of searching around. Finally, the Books of the Bible are called "headings" in this program. Why?

There are, to be sure, some nice innovations: the ability to underline passages in various colors, to affix "post-it" style notes, and the use of "links" to jump from one part of the database to another. But until version 2.0 of the Venture Bible appears, Augsburg Fortress is still behind the power curve in the electronic publishing field.

Ralph W. Klein

Daniel. By John J. Collins. Hermeneia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993. xxxiv and 499 pages. Cloth. $46.00.

The word "magisterial" comes immediately to mind as the reader pages through this commentary, but words like "exhaustive," "well-written," and "up-to-date" are not far behind. Seemingly everything is covered, from the canonical book itself, to the apocryphal additions (the Prayer of Azariah, the Song of the Three Children, Bel and the Serpent, and Susanna), to the influence of Daniel on the New Testament (the latter, extensive essay is written by Adela Yarbro Collins, the author's wife).

Collins believes that the Aramaic tales in Daniel 2-6 were composed in the Hellenistic period and outlined a lifestyle for the diaspora that recognized the legitimacy of Gentile rule. Chapter 1 served as their introduction and was written in Aramaic though it was later translated into Hebrew. Daniel 7 was added in late 167, before the desecration of the temple, and chapters 8-12 followed in 167-164. The chronological calculations in 12:11-12 are not tied to the restoration of the temple, but to some other "end," such as the promised resurrection (so p. 401; on p. 38 Collins suggests that these calcu-

lations were added before the rededication of the temple).

The first objective of the book was to persuade its readers of the supernatural dimension of their problems—the actions of Antiochus reflected the action of the great beast of the sea and an assault on the host of heaven. Even though the present situation was beyond human control, the book was reassuring since even this crisis was in the hands of God. The author did not support the Maccabees, but wanted to instruct the common people and impart an apocalyptic understanding of the situation. He gave persecuted Jews freedom to stand fast in confidence, even though their lives in this world might be forfeited.

Collins writes with a sure hand on textual matters and gives an exhaustive comparison of the Aramaic-Hebrew text with the two Greek versions. While chapter 7 was composed in Aramaic, the last five chapters were written in Hebrew because of the nationalistic enthusiasm of the Maccabean period. He also had first hand access to all the Qumran evidence. The Prayer of Nabonidus found there establishes the view that Daniel 4 is ultimately based on traditions about Nabonidus, not Nebuchadnezzar.

Collins shows that there was no ancient figure called Darius the Mede. The latter's appearance in 6:1 may result from the need to fit the sequence of future kingdoms outlined elsewhere in the book and because the author confused him with Darius I of Persia, who put down revolts in Babylon in the late 520s B.C.E. Collins continues to argue, as in previous publications, that the one like a human being (son of man) was the archangel Michael, and that the "holy ones" of chapter 7 are the angelic host.

For each section of commentary the author provides a fresh translation, text critical and philological notes, a discussion of structure and unity, detailed commentary, and a review of questions about genre, setting, and function.

This commentary is simply the best on the book of Daniel.

Ralph W. Klein

Women and Church: The Challenge of Ecumenical Solidarity in an Age of Alienation. Edited by Melanie A. May. New York: Commission of Faith and Order, NCCCUSA, 1991. 197 pages. Paper. $18.00.

Women and Church is a contribution to the continuing dialog of, for, and about women during the Ecumenical Decade for Women declared by the World Council of Churches. In this book the editor has assembled twenty-three essays by women of different cultures and denominational backgrounds.

Some highlights:

Lauree Hersch Meyer's essay, "And Then Turn South," emphasizes the diverse experience and unique insights that different cultural and ethnic communities have brought to theological thought and practice. Meyer raises the issue of academic standards vs. needs for mission which the seminaries of our country face in training Christian leaders for churches in their native countries. She also brings up the contrast between training leaders to be administrators and training leaders for service and mission to their communities. The title of her essay is also her advice to the church in need of renewal and reformation. "Turn south," she says, in order to discover and to receive the gifts of the peoples of Latin America, Africa, Asia, and Southeast Asia, as they bring their experience and interpretation of the gospel to all of us. These "new voices" in the dialog will include women as well as men, for the story of God is the story of women and men responding to and living in the joy of the gospel. What can the traditional churches learn from others? Most importantly, a different point of view from which to begin to tell the story.

As a Lutheran, I found Amalie Shannon's historical review of Lutherans' progress toward women's ordination to be of great interest. Shannon's account could be interpreted both positively, as a commentary on the progress that has been made, and negatively, as one sees the distance we have yet to travel before women's voices and experiences, as well as authority, are considered equal to that of men. Shannon's discussion of the need for quotas in representation in decision-making bodies of the ELCA

shows that the ideal is not always put into practice without some legalistic guidelines, which serve to ensure voice, not try to take away authority. Shannon looks toward the day when such steps will not be necessary but acknowledges that it is "not yet."

One of my favorite essays is Rena M. Yocom's "Presents and Presence." In four short pages she gives the metaphor of gifts and being "ungifted." She reminds the reader that the gifts of women have not been acknowledged or heeded in the past in the church to the same extent as those of men. Her story of the Methodist pastor's wife who became a pastor to serve her congregation is a treasure. I have already retold the story and its punch line, "Paul didn't call me. God did." The story points to the danger of taking culturally influenced words from the Bible out of context from the working of God through present-day humans. Yocom's other major point is the statement, "for the church not to recognize the gifts of women for ministry is for the church not to recognize the validity of its own baptism of women." That statement is an excellent commentary on Galatians and could have been made by a Lutheran. (Yocom is United Methodist.) I have not heard a more powerful argument for women's ordination.

The most eye-opening essay for me was "Toward a New Ecumenical Movement: A Malawian Perspective," by Annie Machisale-Musipole, where she discusses the Chewa people and their valuation of women in their culture. The view of God as female has never been so clearly articulated for me as in her descriptions of the "Mother-God" of the Chewa people. The differences with my own tradition were startling. I found it interesting to hear echoes of Phil Hefner in her statement that in her society "Woman are considered to be co-creators with God" (142). Women as the source of life for all people hold special status. Unlike in European culture, however, that special status does not translate into putting the women on a pedestal and keeping them out of the mainstream of decision-making and leadership, but authorizes their leadership of the community in worship and in other activities of life.

This book shows that societal and historical influences on Christian tradition are not static, but constantly occur. The world, as well as the Word, brings changes in viewpoints. The diversity of the Global Village mandates an acceptance and openness to discussion of all issues in light of the gospel of equality which Jesus brought to us.

Mary Lou Geer
San Antonio, Texas

Mystagogy. A Theology of Liturgy in the Patristic Age. By Enrico Mazza. Trans. Matthew J. O'Connell. New York: Pueblo Publishing Co., 1989. 228 pages. $14.50.

Mystagogy, Mazza asserts, is a kind of sacramental theology which explains the meaning of the sacraments using biblical typology. The genre of mystagogy had a kind of golden age in the late fourth century, when church fathers Ambrose, Theodore of Mopsuestia, John Chrysostom, and Cyril wrote mystagogical homilies for the newly baptized. Having completed mystagogy, the neophytes could participate meaningfully in the sacraments as saving events from scripture made visibly present.

Surveying these four authors, Mazza contends that while no general theory of mystagogy can be formulated due to the many nuances among them, we can gain insight about the interrelationship between preaching and liturgy from their different emphases. Eight different kinds of typological method can be found in Ambrose's *De mysteriis* and *De sacramentis*. For instance, a *species* refers to the external similarity between an Old Testament image or figure and a New Testament event or person, while Ambrose's use of *imago* signifies an ontological relationship between a biblical event and the sacrament which celebrates it.

In Theodore's mystagogical homilies, we find an eschatological approach in which the gift of immortality is prefigured in the sacraments which have been vivified by the *epiclesis*. The liturgical celebration, for Theodore, is an imitation of an archetype (the saving actions of Christ), while the sacrament itself imparts eschatological blessings, giving a foretaste of the future in the present. John Chrysostom's mystagogy focuses on morality, in which baptism is a call to self-control. However, Chrysostom is adamant

that salvation occurs without human merit. His homilies typologically interpret the baptismal liturgy in terms of dying, rising, and clothing in the righteousness of Christ.

Cyril (or is it John?) of Jerusalem stresses the mimetic, imitative character of the sacraments. Neophytes are assured that they have received the true sacraments because they are imitations of Christ's saving acts, vivified by the Holy Spirit. Mazza concludes with a brief discussion of the tectonic shift from typology to philosophical realism, the fault line along which these fathers stood.

This book is worth the time and effort of pastors who want to see typology's use in tying together biblical narrative and liturgical act. Moreover, the book is a must read for pastors and catechists interested in forming an adult catechumenate along lines suggested by patristic tradition. For students of historical theology it is one of the few books available in translation on this topic. However, one senses that something is lost in the translation from Italian. Some sentences are rather turgid and some grammatical mistakes mar the text. Barring these, this book breaks ground in a little studied but important field of pastoral theology.

William P. McDonald
Vanderbilt University

The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament. I. א - ת. By Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner. Subsequently revised by Walter Baumgartner and Johann Jakob Stamm. Translated and edited under the supervision of M. E. J. Richardson. Leiden: Brill, 1994. cv and 365 pages. Cloth. $129.75.

The Koehler-Baumgartner Hebrew lexicon first appeared in 1953 with meanings given in both German and English by Koehler himself. But Koehler's English was full of "howlers," and so Baumgartner, who had written the Aramaic portion of the lexicon and had edited a supplement in 1957 (called the second edition), a year after Koehler's death, decided that the third edition would forego English translations and appear only in German. Baumgartner followed a more rigorous method than Koehler, whose personality and imaginative and inventive mind shaped the first edition, and put more emphasis on comparative Semitic and on historical and religious developments.

Baumgartner had a passion for brevity in lexicography, but lived only to complete the first two volumes of what would become a five volume lexicon (1967-1994). Johann Jakob Stamm edited the last three, much longer volumes, but died before the final volume, devoted to the Aramaic parts of the Old Testament, saw the light of printer's day. Helping out along the way were two Israeli scholars, Ze'ev Ben-Hayyim and Eduard Yechezkel Kutscher.

The lexicon provides extensive etymologies for each word, identification of all forms, and of course, and most importantly, meanings. Arranged strictly alphabetically—unlike the Brown, Driver, Briggs lexicon!—HAL (Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon) is a joy to use. In addition to the raw materials for in-depth word studies, the lexicon also provides significant bibliography supporting and contradicting its proposals. Especially under Stamm's editorship, the lexicon allows the reader to follow the to's and fro's of scholarly debate. The English is excellent except for an anachronistic reference to the one woman who worked on the lexicon as "the first lady to be actively involved in the project."

The whole lexicon will cost considerably in excess of $600 since the first volume is one of the shortest, and inflation will wreak its inevitable havoc. But the publisher promises to deliver the whole set within three years, much to the rejoicing of professional scholars and very dedicated pastors. Others will surely use it only in libraries.

Patient readers of *Currents* need to remember that the ten volume Hebrew lexicon of David J. A. Clines, which eschews comparative Semitic and bibliography and interprets the text synchronically, will also appear in the next decade or so (cf. my review in *Currents* 21 [1994] 221-222), as will the new, more conventional American lexicon now being written at Princeton Theological Seminary as a replacement for BDB, last updated in 1913.

Ralph W. Klein

The Birth of the New Testament: The Origin and Development of the First Christian Generation. By Raymond F. Collins. New York: Crossroad, 1993. x and 324 pages. Cloth. $29.95.

Paul's Letter Collection: Tracing the Origins. By David Trobisch. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994. xi and 107 pages. Paper. $10.00.

These two contributions to Pauline studies take seriously the ancient "facts of publication" of the Pauline materials. Collins interprets 1 Thessalonians from the perspective of the epistle as the earliest document of the canonical New Testament. Trobisch interprets the entire Pauline letter collection (the genuine epistles, deutero-Paulines, Pastorals, and Hebrews) as an ancient edited letter collection.

Collins begins his book with the manuscript tradition behind 1 Thessalonians. He devotes chapters to the social and cultural setting of first century Thessalonica, the nature of the gospel message Paul preached in Thessalonica, the nature of the church at Thessalonica, the epistolary format of 1 Thessalonians, and the message of the letter. The concluding chapter analyses the historical and literary consequences of 1 Thessalonians.

Throughout the book, Collins performs a detailed exegesis of 1 Thessalonians by closely reading the Greek text and by extensive reference to modern scholarship. Pauline scholars will quibble over the details of Collins' analysis. Other students of the epistle and Paul's thought will be greatly enriched by the detailed analysis and the extensive bibliography.

My greatest appreciation is for Collins' closing analysis of how 1 Thessalonians gave birth to the New Testament. Paul continued to write letters to make up for his absence from a particular local church. Later Christians were "inspired" (pun intended) to write other letters, the Gospels, an outline of the early church's development, and an apocalypse. Ultimately the church formed a canon which has become our New Testament. All of this because Paul wrote a letter addressing a specific pastoral situation.

I recommend this book as a must for classes on Pauline literature or 1 Thessalonians and as required reading for all dedicated students of Paul's thought.

Trobisch's short book is a non-technical English language summary of his dissertation, *Die Entstehung der Paulusbriefsammlung: Studien zu den Anfängen christlicher Publizistik*, published in Germany. Trobisch examines the manuscript tradition of Paul's letters, the compositional techniques Paul used in writing his letters, the Pauline letter collection in light of edited ancient letter collections, and Romans, Galatians, and the Corinthian correspondence as a group of letters edited by Paul.

Trobisch makes two broad sets of conclusions. His first is that one single manuscript exemplar underlies the organization of thirteen letters attributed to Paul at an early stage. At a later stage of development Hebrews is attributed to Paul and placed next to the other Pauline letters in the manuscript tradition.

Trobisch's second set of conclusions are radical. He believes Paul combined Romans 1-15 (his theological testament) and seven letters to the Corinthian church. Galatians is not a letter at all but is added to the Romans-Corinthian correspondence as a legal affidavit to be used by the readers of the letter collection to support Paul's cause. Romans 16 is appended as a cover letter. This entire collection of letters, edited by Paul himself, is sent to the church in Ephesus who will plead his cause with the Jerusalem authorities regarding the controversy over the collection.

Trobisch's conclusions present a partial outline of the development of a canonical Pauline corpus. His analysis of the manuscript tradition of the Pauline letters in light of the habits of early scribes and bookmakers is convincing. His conclusions about the collection of letters Paul himself edited are overly complex and weak in several respects. Trobisch insists that all of Paul's letters conform to the short succinct Hellenistic letter. Since Galatians contains no greetings or thanksgiving it therefore cannot be a letter. He makes no allowances for the uniqueness of the Pauline correspondence nor for the use of phrases such as περὶ δέ to introduce parenthetical material. For example, Trobisch believes 1 Corinthians 13 is a later addition made

by Paul to his own work.

Despite my strong disagreements, I recommend this book. Trobisch has forced us to examine how the process of editing and manuscript arrangement is related to the task of interpretation and proclamation.

Collins takes seriously the chronological priority of 1 Thessalonians in the New Testament canon. Trobisch takes seriously the editing of the Pauline letters. Both authors stimulate us to further reflection of the Pauline epistles, and consequently our faith, by analyzing such a seemingly mundane or trivial matter as "facts of publication." I highly recommend both books for this reason.

Lynn Allan Kauppi
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

The Word and the Way of the Cross: Christian Witness Among Muslim and Buddhist People. By Mark W. Thomsen. Chicago: Division for Global Mission, ELCA, 1993.

Mark W. Thomsen serves as Executive Director of the ELCA's Division for Global Mission. His book admirably charts a course for the church to follow in fulfilling Christ's commission to "make disciples of all nations" (Mt 28:19). Although the book refers explicitly to the mission imperatives of a particular denomination (the ELCA), the understanding of mission Thomsen articulates has relevance for a much broader audience, particularly those engaged in relationships with Muslims or Buddhists.

At the heart of Thomsen's effort is an image of Jesus as the "Cosmic Crucified." By means of the Christology represented by this image, he seeks to steer a course between a relativism which compromises the role of Jesus Christ in bringing salvation and an imperialism which fails to honor the context, culture, and religious commitments of others. Both the particular and the universal aspects of Christology are developed. The particularity of Jesus' cross provides overall orientation. Jesus lived and died a servant existence. Thomsen combines recent research on the pre-Easter Jesus with a profoundly Lutheran theology of the cross in establishing the identity of the one who norms both "the word and the way" of the Christian gospel. The particularity of this Jesus gains "cosmic," i.e., universal, significance by virtue of God's raising him from the dead. The resurrection thus plays a central role in validating Christian mission to all people.

On the basis of this Christology, Thomsen elaborates the mission of the church as discipleship in conformity with the Cosmic Crucified. Faithful discipleship entails passionate involvement wherever humans suffer. The church is called to raise a prophetic protest wherever the way of Jesus is contradicted, to include the marginalized within the circle of God's grace, and to serve God's restoration of the entire creation. Both speaking and living the gospel are integral to the church's mission. Thomsen provides a balanced approach which takes seriously the need for a compassionate and intelligent witness in awareness of the difference of others, and at the same time is bold to affirm involvement in changing oppressive social and political structures. Only so can the church not only proclaim the gospel word but also walk the way of the crucified.

Special reference is made throughout the book to the beliefs of Muslims and Buddhists. The author helps familiarize the reader with several neuralgic points in the Christian dialogue with these great traditions. For example, at issue with Muslims is the role Christians claim for Jesus in God's salvific plan. Whereas Muslims insist on both justice and mercy as attributes of Allah, conversation with Christians discloses a tipping of the scales toward justice whereas Christians, for the sake of the cross, lean toward mercy. Even more fundamentally, the issue which is at the heart of the Christian-Buddhist encounter is the very existence of God. Although there are striking parallels between Christian and Buddhist analyses of the human predicament, the nature and way of salvation are markedly different. Thomsen offers thoughtful reflection to guide Christian discussion with and mission among those rooted in these religions. He both values their commitments yet persistently indicates where the Christian gospel transcends them. The image of the Cosmic Crucified would ensure that this missionary approach re-

main humble while witnessing to the truth it believes will ultimately prevail.

This book is a unique contribution to the recovery of the church's missionary sense. The Christology articulated could serve the church not only in global mission but congregational mission on the domestic front as well. Muslim and Buddhist neighbors are no longer only in distant places but increasingly live next door. More and more one needs to grapple with the basic content of Islam, Buddhism, and, one might add, Hinduism, to effectively make a "defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you" (1 Pet 3:15). Thomsen's proposals deserve wide discussion both inside and outside the Christian church—and certainly within the ELCA at this juncture in its young life. This book demonstrates a commitment to mission that could aid in unifying diverging polarities.

Craig L. Nessan
Wartburg Theological Seminary

The Land and the Book: An Introduction to the World of the Bible. By Charles R. Page II and Carl A. Volz. Nashville: Abingdon, 1993. 285 Pages. Paper. $15.95.

For the serious student of Israelite history or biblical archaeology, this book is rather a disappointment. Despite the title, the book is neither a geography, a Bible atlas, an introduction to Israelite history, a guide to archaeological sites, nor a guide for the tourist seeking to visit biblical historical or archaeological sites. Unfortunately it attempts to be a little bit of all of these, and therein lies its undoing. The organizing principle gets lost in the overambitious scope of the enterprise.

The book is arranged in essentially two parts with a substantial appendix adding notes on the chapters, an index, and brief discussions of archaeological method and chronology. Part one consists of a geographical overview in 7 pages followed by 68 pages of historical overview. The history follows Josephus and the biblical historiography in its naming of time periods and handling of chronological markers through the first century. It continues the sweep of historical summary through the Byzantine, Islamic, Crusader, and Ottoman periods right up to the very recent past, i.e., the return of the Sinai to Egypt at the Camp David agreements during the administration of U.S. President Jimmy Carter. This historical summary is supplemented by a chart in the appendix which presents the chronology of Israelite history in terms of archaeological eras, but there has been no attempt to correlate the two systems.

Part two presents "Biblical Sites" grouped by country of location. 110 pages are devoted to Jerusalem and the rest of Israel, 10 pages to Jordan, and 4 pages to "other sites." Although illustrated with 75 photos and site drawings from archaeological excavations, the sites were chosen for their general historical interest and say little about the archaeological work being done at them. No indication is given whether or not work continues at a site, and no dig directors are named. A few sites presently important to Syro-Palestinian archaeologists are not named at all, such as Tell Miqne and Tell Dor (both included in the geographical overview as Ekron and Dor), and Babh ed-Dhra (the five cities of the plain in the Lisan), but the standard major sites are mostly present. If a historical site is mentioned in the Bible (not all are), some pertinent biblical references are given.

The authors are purposefully and highly selective in their choice of details to illuminate each of the sites. It appears that the book is intended to be a layman's guide to historical sites in Israel and Jordan. Its best use would be to help enlighten the traveler a little to what has just been seen, or provide the basis for captioning slides purchased enroute and shown to the folks back home. In its present form the book would not be useful in planning a tour, since the sites are listed alphabetically and not according to geographical proximity. With respect to detail, although the scholar might be left hungering for more, the portions might be just right for those with only a casual interest in the subject.

Stephen A. Knapp
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

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Remembering the Poor: The History of Paul's Collection for Jerusalem. By Dieter Georgi. English translation. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992. 232 pages. Paper. $17.95.

This is a late translation of the 1965 German edition of Georgi's study, which was his thesis to qualify as a university teacher in Germany. Professor Georgi (who now teaches New Testament at the University of Frankfurt) has made his investigation of Paul's collection for the Jerusalem church available in English with a new preface that seeks to demonstrate the continuing relevance of this study for an understanding of Paul.

Georgi's work is amazingly comprehensive in its engagement with Paul's letters and theology. In the course of his tightly reasoned argument, Georgi includes careful treatment of a number of key Pauline texts in addition to Acts 15 (e.g., Gal 2:1-10, portions of 1 Corinthians including chapter 15 and 16:1-4, Phil 4:10-23, segments of 2 Corinthians including especially chapters 8 and 9, Romans 16, and Romans 1-15, especially 15:14-33). He convincingly demonstrates that Paul's collection for the Jerusalem church represents an activity integral to the apostle's mission and theology. In fact, according to Georgi, it embodies praxis that directly reflects the meaning of Paul's doctrine of justification.

After an introduction that traces the scholarly research—and neglect—of the topic, Georgi analyzes what can be known about the Convention at Jerusalem in C.E. 48 in chapter one. In light of scriptural expectations, the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem as the economically poor played a critical role as the "holy remnant" awaiting the parousia of Jesus and vicariously suffering for the entire church, especially the Gentile Christians in Pauline congregations who would be participants in the end-time ingathering. Thus, the remembering of the Jerusalem poor or "pious ones" involved far more than supplying their physical needs; it acknowledged the special dignity of this community because of the eschatological importance of its location and its difficult role in facing hostility from many Jews. In subsequent chapters Georgi discusses developments in Paul's mission and thinking after the Jerusalem Convention in C.E. 48 and how inextricably intertwined with that mission are the epistolary passages that relate to collection among the Gentile communities for the Jerusalem church.

To the English version of his book, Georgi has appended a twenty-five page "Afterword" that pursues the significance of his study for the church's discussion of financial realities in today's world. Here he makes up for the lack of chapter summaries by helpfully reviewing how Paul's thinking about the purpose and use of money compares and contrasts with the practice of ancient economy. The following quotation summarizes major emphases in Paul's theology of money which are rooted in his understanding of God's justifying grace:

> This justifying grace creates wise and reasonable, in a word good, praxis, in which personhood and the identity of persons is formed through relatedness and concern for others. This praxis is not to be confused with treadmill tug and drudgery or with money hunting either. It is giving instead of gaining, thanks instead of interest, confidence instead of credit, trust instead of security, community instead of market, spiritual worship instead of temple cult, charisma instead of property. This praxis avoids the power that grows out of fear and that leads to exploitation and violence. Instead, this praxis affirms the power of weakness and poverty because such power allows for authentic engagement, reliable yield, and true growth. A multiplication of thanksgivings follows from this and will engage people further in this expression of gratitude. This will create radiating strength. This praxis will instigate and invigorate truly humane, namely relational, ethical, and consciously political elements in the economy, and will make them transparent. (160)

This book merits close study by teaching scholars and pastors. It requires the reader to follow the author's exegetical discussion of numerous Pauline texts in order to make sense of the

overall argumentation. Most lay persons would probably find reading this volume too tedious.

James L. Bailey
Wartburg Theological Seminary

The Teaching Church: Moving Christian Education to Center Stage. By Eugene C. Roehlkepartain. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993. 223 Pages. Paper. $12.95.

The Teaching Church at Work: A Manual for the Board of Christian Education. Revised edition. Edited by Kenneth D. Blazier and Linda R. Isham. Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1993. 91 Pages. Paper. $6.95.

What is the difference between a church that teaches and a "teaching church?" The former survives, the latter thrives. The church that treats educational ministry as one department among many probably depends upon the pastor and one or two others to know and share the faith. It thinks of the laity as consumers and "volunteers" who come to be comforted, hear the right answers (albeit to someone else's questions) and keep the wheels going. Even the Sunday school teachers and administrators are simply managers of curriculum, which, if it is really good, teaches itself. A teaching church, on the other hand, considers everything that the congregation does as a process of learning-by-doing. All are teachers, and the ones on staff are particularly learned and well equipped to guide, coach, and encourage others in their lifelong integration of faith and life.

The 1990 report of Search Institute's five-year research project, "Effective Christian Education: A National Study of Protestant Congregations," demonstrated that churches that merely teach tend to produce members who are not well grounded in the gospel, do not live out their faith in lives of caring, serving, and social action, and are not very loyal to either their congregation or their denomination. Teaching-learning churches nurture Christians with mature, active faith and a high degree of loyalty to their faith communities.

Roehlkepartain is the Director of Publications for the Search Institute. His new volume is a "must read" for pastors, DCEs, and education committees. It provides a thorough and clear interpretation of the Search study, along with citations from a great deal of recent literature in religious and secular education to support the theses. There are plenty of helpful charts and worksheets that will help people do the vital evaluation and planning needed to foster a healthy learning environment. Ambitious readers will welcome the ample footnotes and lists of resources. Like the Search study itself, the material is not biased toward any denominational polity or theology. (It should be noted that congregations interested in planning for effective education may also directly contact the Search Institute in Minneapolis for congregational and self-study guides. Some denominations, including the ELCA, provide accompanying and interpretive materials at a reasonable cost.)

The Blazier and Isham volume does not focus on the Search Institute work, but it is in harmony with it in calling for integration of teaching and learning with all congregational life, and attention to informal and intergenerational learning. Like the Roehlkepartain book it can be used to guide a thorough program of evaluation, planning, and leadership development. While its list of resources is representative of the best in religious education, the book is weakened by a lack of footnotes. There is a Baptist bias in some of the material. (The editors are American Baptist. They and five other contributors supplied the thirteen chapters.)

My chief concern with both volumes is that they are wonderful tool boxes or large-scale maps for use in planning. They do not provide the vision. They, and the Search Institute material itself, help us converge on a truth, without stating that truth forcefully enough. That truth is that we need to radically change our working philosophy of religious education. We need to recognize that the most powerful learning goes on intergenerationally, informally, and spontaneously as a community worships and works in a reflective way. The Blazier/Isham work speaks of going beyond the schooling model of education but invests most of its ink on ideas appropri-

ate to classrooms. It bids us to concede that learning does happen in informal settings, when I believe the burden of proof lies with those who claim that learning is happening in our workbooks and our age-segregated classes.

The closest to the more radical and hopeful vision either volume comes is in Roehlkepartain's afterword where he writes, "The learning church educates itself as a whole... provide(s) a picture of the whole, of how the parts fit together. It is not about topics but rather interactions. It doesn't just talk about issues; it talks *through* issues. [While it respects diverse opinions it uses group reflection and] discovers shared interests and common ground.... It recognizes the gifts of all members for leadership..." (193-4).

We need fewer churches that teach, and more teaching *and learning* churches. These two volumes will help us move in that direction.

John R. Seraphine
Rogers Park Lutheran Church, Chicago

Briefly Noted

The Goddess Anat in Ugaritic Myth. By Neal H. Walls (Scholars Press, $19.95). The "maiden" Anat, one of the main goddesses in Ugaritic myth and usually considered a fertility figure, is never described as sexually active in the Ugaritic texts themselves. She rejected the normative feminine roles of wife and mother and thus threatened the patriarchal social ideology in which women were subordinate to authoritative males. Rather, she engaged in the masculine activities of hunting, warfare, and politics. Her violent temperament and lack of self-restraint manifested her own confused gender, sexual, and social identity. Anat posed a threat to the patriarchal social structure and to individual males. These are the results of an intriguing doctoral dissertation at Johns Hopkins University, in which Walls brought a pluralistic approach to the study of the religion of Israel's closest neighbors. *RWK*

Under Every Green Tree: Popular Religion in Sixth-Century Judah. By Susan Ackerman (Scholars Press, $35.95). A. argues that the Josianic reform and the purifying effects of exile were much less successful than are popularly thought, and that "popular religion" continued to thrive throughout the 6th and into the 5th century. Such practices as worship of the Queen of Heaven and worship of the sun were indigenous to Yahwistic religion, and those who participated in these rites considered themselves fully Yahwists. In fact, A. proposes that they constituted the majority and that sixth century Yahwism was characterized by a diversity which extends far beyond the parameters established by the biblical text. The author seeks to understand this popular religion without theological criticism, unlike the priestly, Deuteronomistic, and prophetic portions of the Bible. *RWK*

Kings and Cultus in Chronicles: Worship and the Reinterpretation of History. By William Riley (JSOT, $60). In this revised dissertation, R. dates Chronicles to the late Persian period and distinguishes it from Ezra and Nehemiah. Chronicles shows how Davidic rule could come to an end (Saul serves as a paradigm in 1 Chronicles 10), but it believes that the promise to David had enduring reality in the temple and cultic community of the post-exilic people. The Chronicler did not expect a restoration of the Davidic dynasty itself and saw the primary role of the monarchy in Israel as the institution of the cultus. *RWK*

Social Justice and Deuteronomy: The Case of Deuteronomy 15. By Jeffries M. Hamilton (Scholars Press, $31.95). H. studies the rhetorical character of Deuteronomy 15's laws about the release of loans and of slaves in order to show how they get the reader to assent and comply. Much of the rest of this revised dissertation studies Deuteronomy 15 in the context of similar ancient Near Eastern laws and the laws in the

biblical Covenant and Holiness Codes. After alluding to parallels to this attitude toward society in Luke-Acts, H. suggests that the church should be dedicated to granting to all of society's members the right to be human, to call upon the powerful to use that power to good effect, and to construe provision for the justness of society as a task of the most sacred sort. *RWK*

Second Temple Studies. 2. Temple Community in the Persian Period. Edited By Tamara C. Eskenazi and Kent H. Richards (JSOT, $42.50). The fifteen essays in this book were originally presented at several sessions of the Society of Biblical Literature and represent the lively interest in the Persian Period (from the return from the exile until the rise of Alexander the Great). Sara Japhet writes a brilliant analysis of the structure of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, showing that the arrangement of these books was intentional and artful and not the result of various dislocations or secondary additions. Daniel Smith-Christopher argues that the actions of Ezra and Nehemiah against mixed marriages become more understandable when investigated sociologically. "Hypergamy" is the attempt by one part of the population to "marry up" and thus take advantage of the higher status of the other part of the population. At Nehemiah's time the temple leaders tried to improve their social status by marrying into the local political leadership. Many more fine articles, some of them quite controversial. *RWK*

Gender, Power, & Promise. The Subject of the Bible's First Story. By Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn (Abingdon, $12.95). The authors read the Pentateuch and Joshua-Kings as literary critics with a commitment to see a radical reformation in gender relations in our society. "Subject" in the subtitle refers to the point of view the text expresses, which is almost invariably patriarchal. The God of the text comes under intense scrutiny, and the authors are unsure they want their children to read the biblical text. All notions of biblical authority seem to be beyond the ken of the authors, who teach at major Protestant seminaries, and their own reading prevents them from seeing the Bible's own transformative message. Items: The God who shows arbitrary favoritism (Gen 21:12) cannot be trusted. Yahweh's demand that Israel remain faithful to him shows he is a jealous husband. Abram's faith is deconstructed: He can firmly assent to God's plan (Gen 15:6) because God's plan and his desires are one and the same. In deciding to eat the fruit Eve does not sin, but chooses reality over her naive, paradisiacal existence. Was Hannah faithful or foolish in entrusting Samuel to Eli? Freedom (Deut 30:19) is only the freedom to submit to divine control or bear the consequences. The authors cite with approval scholars who think Lot's wife made the better choice. Occasionally they join wild speculation to their unremitting critique of patriarchy—Benaiah slipped into Abishag's chamber one night and slit her throat. I'll confess that I don't find this response to the admitted patriarchy of the Bible helpful. In fact, I hope the authors' children read *the* Book instead of this one. *RWK*

Struggles for Solidarity: Liberation Theologies in Tension. Edited by Lorine M. Getz and Ruy O. Costa (Fortress, $10.95). This book, published in 1992, contains two parts. Part one, "Struggle and Solidarity," illustrates the dilemma of discovering solidarity among the various liberation theologies: Latin American (Jose Miguez Bonino), North American Black (James Cone), feminist (Rosemary Radford Reuther), Hispanic (Orlando Costas), and post-Holocaust/Jewish theology (Marc Ellis). Part two, "Disciplines in Dialogue," takes up issues and disciplines important to liberation theologies. Included are essays by Richard Shaull, Harvey G. Cox, Pablo Richard, Otto Maduro, Peter J. Paris, Lorine M. Getz, and Rubem A. Alves. The book effectively introduces the reader to "liberation theologies' struggle for solidarity." *James L. Bailey, WTS*

After the decrees of all the councils from Nicea I to Vatican II have been made available in a remarkable critical edition by G. Alberigo and others (*Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta*) a second equally important step has been achieved with the monumental enterprise **Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils** (2 vols., Georgetown University Press, 1342 pages, $195), was re-

cently edited by the Oxford church historian Norman P. Tanner, S.J. In a highly significant collaborative effort a group of twenty-nine British Jesuit scholars have written a very readable, up-to-date translation of Alberigo's critical edition. It is the first rendering into English of all these decrees. The translations face the original texts of the decrees, and there is a concise introduction to all of the texts of each council. In addition to an index of proper names and subjects this edition also offers an index of the Bible, a chronological index listing all the canons and constitutions, and indexes of the Roman magisterium, of the Fathers and the Early Church, of liturgical books, and of canon law. All in all this represents not only the definitive edition of the decrees of all councils until the next one, but beyond that an indispensable and in many ways groundbreaking resource for all who are interested in church history, ecumenical studies, and the dialogue with Roman Catholicism. *Reinhard Hütter, LSTC*

There has been a rebirth of interest in the historical Jesus in recent years. Professor John Dominic Crossan of DePaul University has been one of the leaders in a series of books culminating in **The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant** (San Francisco: Harper, 1991). In **Jesus and Faith: A Conversation on the Work of John Dominic Crossan** (Orbis Books, $18.95) four DePaul colleagues and five other scholars engage in critical dialogue with Crossan's reconstruction of the real Jesus as an egalitarian, Cynic-style preacher and magician. The issues of meaning for faith come to clear expression. This is a useful collection of essays that differ with one another and with Crossan. Any persons interested in Crossan's work (and the results of the Historical Jesus Seminar) owe themselves an interactive reading of this symposium, which will clarify issues, raise new and significant questions, and suggest directions of thought and answers. *Edgar Krentz, LSTC*

A New Handbook of Christian Theology, edited by Donald W. Musser and Joseph L. Price (Abingdon, $19.95), is an affordable and helpful tool for college majors in religion, seminarians, and pastors. It provides helpful introductions to recent developments in theology (liberation theology, black theology, feminist and womanist theology, narrative theology, process theology, political theology) to the "classical theological" topics (atonement, Christology, creation, law and gospel, ecclesiology, trinity, justification, etc.), to ecclesial phenomena and movements (pentecostalism, fundamentalism, base communities, etc.), to topics of Christian ethics (peace/peacemaking, virtue, sexuality, society, ecology, justice, love, etc.), to methodological issues in theology and philosophical movements of present relevance (deconstructionism, phenomenology, metaphor, language, myth, paradox, etc.). The pluralism of perspectives and authors represented in the volume represents well the present diffuse situation of US American theology in its multidenominational and multicultural setting. Authors and entries are most of the time matched quite well; often they represent major authorities in their respective fields. Suggested routes for reading, cross references, and a short and non-intimidating list of further readings make it an excellent tool for beginning seminary students. *Reinhard Hütter*

The eight essays by Joseph Fitzmyer, S.J., Professor Emeritus of biblical studies at the Catholic University of America, in **According to Paul: Studies in the Theology of the Apostle** (Paulist Press, $12.95), deal with important issues or passages in Paul's letters: Paul's spiritual journey, with its consequences for his understanding of his Jewishness and his attitude to the Torah; the value of Acts for Pauline biography; the term *abba* as resource for Jesus' relationship to God; the interpretation of 2 Cor 3:7–4:6, 1 Cor 11:3 [meaning of *kephale*], Phil 2:6-11; and what Paul has to teach preachers today. Fitzmyer wrote one of the best summary accounts of Paul's life and theology for the *New Jerome Biblical Commentary* and is a recognized expert on Qumran and early Judaism. These essays demonstrate both competencies in pleasing, readable, and edifying form. I heartily recommend them. *Edgar Krentz*

Books reviewed in *Currents* can be ordered through the **LSTC Book Center**, 1100 East 55th St., Chicago, IL 60615, (312) 753-0753

Preaching Helps

The Resurrection of Our Lord—Seventh Sunday of Easter, Series C

What's New?

The best answer, momentarily delayed, is "All things."

In Year C and only in this year, the second lessons for all seven Sundays of Easter are readings from the Book of Revelation. So this Easter season offers a unique opportunity to preach the Apocalypse. If that seems too dangerous, we might try our hand (again?) at a short series for the study hour.

1995 is being celebrated on the island of Patmos (see Rev 1:9) as the 1900th anniversary of John's visionary and apocalyptic experiences, accepting the traditional date of 95 (under Domitian) as the time of John's exile. On Patmos, the monastery of St. John the Theologian (founded by the monk Christodoulos in the year 1088) will host an international conference on the Book of Revelation in September. In lectures and worship, participants will endeavor to open themselves to the power of the last book of the Bible.

Revelation is all about what's old and what's new. It's an Easter book from first to last, and it summons Christians to relax their hold on old and dying stuff and to seize with steady hand the new. The world with its injustice and greed, its idolatries and cynicism, is passing away. A new reality, present and triumphant already in the heavens, has locked horns with the old order and will in the end conquer it and be victorious also on earth.

We need visionaries, prophets and preachers, whose eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord, whose ears have heard the distant

triumph song and whose tongues can therefore offer an adequate answer to the heartfelt question, "What's new?"

Helping us to ponder the question and its Easter answer are several good people, friends both old and new. **Fred Behrmann**, recently retired from full time pastoring and now serving interims in Northern California, was for many years the pastor of United Lutheran Church (an ELCA-LCMS congregation) in Manteca, California. Fred has authored the First Readings for this issue.

The Pastoral Reflections are the work of a group of pastors in the Waterloo, Iowa, area. They meet weekly for pericope study and volunteered to work ahead and so produced materials for this issue. **T. Edwards Breed** is pastor of Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hudson, Iowa. **Wm. Thalacker** and **James Gardner** are pastors, respectively, of Trinity American Lutheran Church and of St. Ansgar Lutheran Church, both in Waterloo. **Edward R. Bastedo** is pastor of Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church in Dysart, and **Steve Solberg** is pastor of Fredville Lutheran Church in Cedar Rapids.

All these pastors, in various ways, bear witness to what is really new. The daily newspaper (even in the truncated version I am receiving each morning during these November days when most writers of the *San Francisco Chronicle* and *Examiner* are on strike) features bad news and keeps on reminding us of "what's old," invading our spiritual and psychic space with reports of fallenness, brokenness, and death. We need not just a little optimism or snippets of sentimentality but the strong word of God's "Yes" to Jesus and through Jesus to us and to all of God's creation.

God has done a new thing, a renewing thing, on the way to new creation.

Yours,

Robert H. Smith
Editor of Preaching Helps
Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary
2770 Marin Avenue
Berkeley, CA 94708

The Resurrection of Our Lord April 16, 1995

Psalm 118:1-2, 15-24
Exodus 15:1-11
or Psalm 118:14-24
1 Corinthians 15:1-11
Luke 24:1-11
or John 20:1-9 (10-18)

First Reading

The Easter psalm exults: "On this day the Lord has acted; we will rejoice and be glad in it!" (Ps 118:24) On this high festival day proclaim the new thing that God did in the resurrection of Jesus. Do not spend time saying that the empty tomb proved Jesus' resurrection; that is not the point. Let the proclamation of God's action do the convincing.

Exodus 15:1-11, one of the oldest hymns in scripture, celebrates God's deliverance of Israel at the Red Sea. Moses exclaims: "Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods... awesome in splendor, *doing wonders*!"

1 Corinthians introduces Paul's extended treatment of the resurrection and provides the basis for the whole chapter. It was the first gospel preached to them, he says, and it is that by which they came to believe. Both death and resurrection are part of God's own plan. It is from real death that God rescues.

Two key words strike me in Luke's terse resurrection Gospel: "remember" and "must." "The Son of Man *must* (δει) be handed over to sinners and be crucified, and on the third day rise again." (See also vv. 26 and 44.) That word "must" is powerful. KJV puts it: "It behooved Christ..." It means to be compelled by need or duty, by facts. Future need or purpose require such action. Just as Israel's rescue (first lesson) distinguished God from other gods, so here the resurrection *must* happen. God's own kind of urgency is behind it. It is so unbelievable, and yet that is what one would expect God to do. Only God can bring Life out of death, and from God comes the hope that does not disappoint. Again, such God-like action always surprises us and calls to faith: "Why look for the living among the dead?"

The second key word is "remember" (vv. 6 and 11). Luke submits no proof of Jesus' resurrection based on the emptiness of the tomb. Nor, at least initially in Luke's Easter account, do any appearances of the Risen Lord effect faith. But the Word does create faith! "'*Remember* how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified and on the third day rise again.' Then they *remembered his words*" (Lk 24:6-8). They responded in faith and hurried to share the Good News. Now they knew that the cross and the resurrection were both parts of the divine plan for the work of the Son of Man. The Son of Man (Dan 7:13-14) would be given an "everlasting dominion." If Jesus *was* the Son of Man, he must rise from the dead.

The Word creates faith. Paul writes: "I would *remind* you...." And our Easter Eucharist celebrates: "Do this for the *remembrance* of me.... With this bread and cup we *remember* the Life our Lord offered for us. And, believing the witness of his resurrection, we await his coming in power to share with us the great and promised feast." FB

Pastoral Reflections

I have been trying to imagine what it must have felt like for the women to have gone to the tomb of Jesus and found nothing there. I try to imagine just what it must have felt like for these women, when the other disciples called their report "an idle tale," and did not believe them. Peter checked out their story (Lk 24:12), and though he also found nothing, he didn't quite know what to make of it either. Do we?

In 1978, my mother was diagnosed with terminal cancer, and died five months later. In 1979, my first wife was diagnosed with cancer, and after surgery and two years of chemotherapy, she died. In 1980, my father was diagnosed with cancer, and he died seven years later. I was widowed at age 34 and orphaned at 39, and I did not want to let these loved ones go. But I didn't

return to their graves the next day or after three days, or several months later, and expect to find their tombs empty.

Imagine the scene: September 3, 1981, Bond County, Illinois, three days after the funeral. I walk into the Mt. Gilead Cumberland Presbyterian Cemetery, and there, next to Grandma Anna File's grave, is an empty hole in the ground. The beautiful wooden coffin is lying to the side, the lid open, the fine innerspring mattress empty. "Why do you seek the living among the dead?" I hear a voice say. "Remember how I said, 'Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me...." "Yes, Lord, I remember," I reply; but still I stare, incredulous, at the empty coffin, the empty grave.

Of course, it didn't happen that way, and yet it did happen. F. Wellford Hobbie has written, "Resurrection is not contemplation of an empty tomb but confrontation with a living Lord." Exactly. I do not expect to return to the graves of my family members or of the forty-some parishioners whose funerals I have conducted over the past eight years, and find empty coffins. But I certainly do expect my family and their families to move into the presence of our risen and living Lord, our Savior, who holds all lives in his hands. That is no idle tale!

My grandfather Breed's maiden cousin Emma Zug lived the whole of her long life in Pittsburgh. In the last decades of her life, she used to love to go visit Allegheny Cemetery, where her parents, her aunts and uncles, her sisters and brother, and her cousins, including my great-aunts Mary and Esther, were all buried. "It's my second home," she would tell us. But they are not there in Allegheny Cemetery, they are not at Mt. Gilead or Glenstead, Missouri, or Zion Lutheran Cemetery, Black Hawk County, Iowa. They are seated at the Lamb's high feast. They are already participants in the feast to come, of which we have only the foretaste. They are some of "those of your servants of every time and every place" with whom we join in ceaseless petitions, with whom we share the meal, and with whom we share the knowledge that "the Lord is risen; He is risen indeed! Alleluia!" TEB

Second Sunday of Easter
April 23, 1995

Psalm 149
Acts 5:12, 17-32
Revelation 1:4-18
John 20:19-31

First Reading

"The church is a mouth house," said Martin Luther. Words preached with clarity have power to unlock hearts and renew lives. Exhilarating but sometimes dangerous business.

In the early days after Easter the apostles were imprisoned for "telling" the whole message about the life of our Lord (Acts 5:17-20). The author of Revelation speaks to his readers who are experiencing persecution, poverty, and execution. And he speaks as one of them, and by God's grace he views his situation as one not of darkness only but of challenge and hope.

The Risen Lord comes to the locked up disciples and speaks: "Peace be with you!" Then he "breathed" on them (ἐμφυσάω). That is the same word used at Adam's creation (Gen 2:7). Through the gift of his Spirit Jesus breaks the hold of death and gives them Life in his name. It is the Risen Lord who greets them with the familiar "Shalom," but now there is, since the resurrection, a whole new context for that greeting.

Thomas asks not to see Jesus' halo but his wounds. He understood that the Christ of faith must be the Jesus who was crucified, for anything else would trivialize Jesus' struggle with evil and death, and would trivialize the resurrection also! Jesus reaches out and speaks healing to Thomas, Good News that evokes the response, "My Lord and my God." (See Luther's explanation of the Second Article: "...is my Lord who has redeemed me... so that I may be his own and *live* under him....")

In Acts, Luke reminds us that the jail could hold the apostles no more than the grave had been able to hold Jesus. God himself acts on behalf of God's covenant people, leads them out, and frees them for God's service, for continued bold *proclamation.*

Revelation offers powerful images as John turns to see whose "voice" "spoke" to him, one like the Son of Man with a "voice like the sound of many waters." This faithful witness (μάρτυς) is the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings of the earth, the one who has freed us from our sins by his blood. No wonder he can say: "Do not be afraid... I am alive!" (Rev 1:4-18) FB

Pastoral Reflections

A person who was deeply hurt upon finding out that their spouse was having an affair came to talk with me. We worked through the anger, the hurt at the betrayal of trust, the guilt with the thought of having caused the infidelity ("What have I done to cause this?"), the fear for the future of the relationship.

After a period of time and a number of counseling sessions, the person came to say, "I never thought I would be able to say this, but I've grown in this whole process. I really should thank the third party. I am in debt to them. They didn't mean anything good for me, but that's the way it's turned out. I would not have had the opportunity to grow if not for this experience."

We need to be clear here that people should not begin affairs for the purpose of getting marriage relationships unstuck, any more than they should have automobile accidents so they can grow from the experience of surgery and physical pain.

But there may be a certain sense of gratitude and indebtedness when we discover and see that we can work through and handle certain problems that were very difficult for us.

The Gospel for today is like that. Luther said once that the church owes St. Thomas a great debt of gratitude for asking all the hard questions about Christ's resurrection. We owe an Easter debt to the disciples, for their fear and faith; to Thomas, for his stubbornness and openness; to St. John, for keeping the record straight; to Jesus and his resurrection, for bringing us to resurrection life.

Over our heads in grief, sadness, tragedies, guilt, problems, uncertainties, and death, we are still raised up to new life by this Jesus, who appears to his disciples and to us with his blessed greeting, "Peace be with you." In Jesus Christ, the first born from the dead, we shall rise from all our doubts, all our debts, and all our deaths. WPT

Third Sunday of Easter
April 30, 1995

Psalm 30
Acts 9:1-20
Revelation 5:11-14
John 21:1-14

First Reading

Today's text from Revelation 5 indicates that *worship* is the central activity of the people of God. The word προσκυνέω means to fall down on one's face before someone who is worthy of worship. The worship scene is the throne room of God who holds a scroll with seven seals. The scroll could signify that all world history is subject to the will and power of God, but none is able to open the scroll except "the Lamb standing in the midst of the throne as if it had been slaughtered." The twenty-four elders, the four living creatures, and myriads of angels fall down in worship singing the new song: "Worthy (ἄξιος) is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing."

Our liturgies resonate to this image: "This is the feast...." "Worthy is Christ, the Lamb who was slain...." "Sing with all... and join in the hymn of all creation...." The "Agnus Dei" and other canticles, plus some 80 hymns in *LBW*, are derived from Revelation.

Today's Gospel (Jn 21:1-14, some consider this an "editorial epilog") relates the presence of the Risen Christ in the everyday life of his followers. But the "ordinary" turns wondrous as, at the Lord's direction, they catch 153 fish. Raymond Brown repeats Chrysostom's comment on "the helplessness of the disciples when left on their own," and adds that "it is notable that never in the gospels do they catch a fish without Jesus' help." Brown suggests that the number 153 is an anticipation of the church or a symbol of the universal-

ity of the Christian mission.

John 21 seems like a hodgepodge of events, but the chapter possesses unity in the way every part of it holds up to the reader familiar symbols of the church's existence: catching fish, providing bread, pasturing sheep, following the Lord, obeying his will, enduring death, bearing witness. All these bring to mind the church and its work bearing fruit only when people heed the word of the Lord.

The lesson from Acts suggests that God chooses to accomplish God's work often through unexpected channels. Even a man like the persecutor Saul is changed and becomes an instrument the Risen Lord chooses to bring his name before Gentiles, and kings, and the people of Israel. FB

Pastoral Reflections

It was a long time ago—over thirty years—but I remember it as if it were yesterday. My family was on vacation, staying at Coulter Bay campground in Grand Teton National Park. The last day before we moved on to Yellowstone, we all got up early, loaded the supplies we needed, and drove over to the picnic area on the shores of Jackson Lake. My brother and sister and I ran around for a while, playing tag, walking along the shoreline, and watching a fishing boat out on the lake.

Dad built a wood fire in one of those fire grates, and then cooked *a whole pound of bacon*! We couldn't believe it. At home it would have taken three or four days for us to eat a pound of bacon: we kids would have gotten one slice with our egg, and Mother and Dad might have two, but that day by the lake, it seemed we had all we wanted. When the bacon was done, Dad cooked eggs and grilled toast right over the coals. What a meal that was! In the cool mountain air, by the shores of a shining lake, eating breakfast cooked over a campfire. Unforgettable!

The last time I preached on these texts, I was in the midst of my "Soap Opera" series. My sermon titles ranged from "The Edge of Night" for Easter Day to "The Guiding Light" for the Day of Pentecost. And this Sunday, of course, was "Days of Our Lives." For it is in today's Gospel that the disciples go back to what they were doing before they encountered Jesus: they went fishing. What is this? Fishing? After the resurrection and the great missionary command? How can they act as if nothing had happened?

The disciples have gone back to their old lives, and they find that life does *not* go on. They are fishing without success; something is missing. As they are coming in to shore, someone calls out to them to put their nets on the other side. "Sure," they think. "We've been out here all night, and now we're supposed to try something new?" But they do, and the net is so full that they can barely haul it. Now they find what has been missing: "It is the Lord!" He is cooking breakfast on the beach, a breakfast of fish and bread (not bacon and eggs), but that must remind us of other meals, meals of fish and bread and of bread and wine.

What does Easter mean in our lives? Is it just a vacation from the everyday days of our lives, and then everything goes back the way it was before? Or is it really *the* event which has shaped us as the people of God? Paul (no longer breathing threats and murder) reminds us, "If we have been united with [Christ] in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his" (Rom 6:5). That is the answer. We are Easter people, claimed by the one who gives us his own body and blood to eat, united with him in death and resurrection. Indeed, "Worthy is Christ, the Lamb who was slain, whose blood set us free to be people of God." TEB

Fourth Sunday of Easter
May 7, 1995

Psalm 23
Acts 13:15-16a, 26-33
Revelation 7:9-17
John 10:22-30

First Reading

"Good Shepherd Sunday" lessons bring a new understanding of Shepherd and the Lamb. It is the Festival of the Dedication of the Temple (it had

been desecrated by Antiochus Epiphanes in 164 B.C.E.), and the Gospel reading follows Jesus' claim to be the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep. Jesus' critics immediately recalled God's promise in Ezekiel (34) to set over God's people one shepherd, "my servant David." As Jesus' words evoked messianic speculation, counting on God to send a deliverer, they challenge Jesus, "Tell us plainly if you are the Messiah."

Our Lord avoids giving them a direct answer but says, "The works that I do will confirm my claim." Feeding the sheep, healing, finding the straying, strengthening the weak are all works of the Good Shepherd. Note the irony here, because by the time this is written the temple is already in ruins. But Jesus' promise that "no one will snatch them out of my hand" is reliable because of the final sentence: "The Father and I are one." The sheep are safe in Jesus' hands because they are given him by God, and no one can snatch them out of God's hand.

Revelation 7 paints a picture of a great multitude from every nation "who have come out of the great ordeal," the testing for which John had been preparing them (3:10). "The One who is seated on the throne will shelter them." Σκηνόω is the word for "shelter," the same word for "dwell" and "tabernacle." God does not remain remote, unmoved by our needs, our hunger, our thirst. God has sent the Lamb at the center of the throne to be their Shepherd to "guide them to springs of the water of Life." (See John 4.) The great Good Shepherd turns out to be the Lamb. Because he is one with the Father, he is able to hold us securely in his hand. And because he is one with us, we can recognize his voice and follow him.

The Good Shepherd sent Paul and his company through Asia Minor to remind his Jewish listeners that they were descendants of Abraham and, therefore, heirs of God's promises to Abraham (Acts 13:26ff.). Jesus is the fulfillment of their scriptures, he who was put to death innocently, and actually died and was buried. Paul is no reluctant witness, and the Good News is that the work of God in Jesus reached its climax when God raised him from the dead. FB

Pastoral Reflections

Our culture tells us, "It's not who you are, it's who you know." We are impressed by famous names and people of stature. We expect that knowing the right person will gain us favors. From that perspective, the Jews question Jesus to discover if he is worth knowing. According to John, the Jews (=Judeans or Jewish authorities) are the group that never quite grasp Jesus' identity. They represent all who desire simple answers so that they can understand. The basic assumption is that people come to faith through their own reflections, meditations, and efforts.

Jesus' answer begins with a simple explanation. Jesus has told them and they did not believe. Jesus has shown them and they did not believe. Belief is not a result of information or proof. "I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ (*Small Catechism*). Not even the resurrection will prove to people that Jesus is the Christ. The words and works of Jesus are all the "information" and all the "proof" necessary to know that he is the Christ.

It is not a matter of who you know but who knows you. Jesus knows his sheep. Because Jesus knows them, they hear his voice and follow. The emphasis is on Jesus and his knowing his sheep, not on what we do or know. To make that point clear, Jesus speaks of his sheep as having been given to him by his Father. How does one come to believe in Jesus? It is a result of what the Father and Son have done. This is a matter of divine election. The text simply proclaims this matter rather than explains it.

This answer kills the sinner. The sin in us screams that there must be something we can do to save ourselves. We find it difficult to trust everything to God. Don't we have to follow? Doesn't the text say the sheep must follow Jesus?

But on this fourth Sunday of Easter, the emphasis falls on what God has done for us. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus he has given eternal life to his sheep. It does not depend on who we know. What matters is rather who knows us. ERB

Fifth Sunday of Easter
May 14, 1995

Psalm 145:1-13
Acts 13:44-52
Revelation 21:1-5
John 13:31-35

First Reading

The "new commandment" must be seen in its context. Jesus gives it at "his hour," "before the Feast of the Passover" (Jn 13:1), when "the Son of Man [is] glorified." John Marsh writes: "For John the real Passover, of which all the recurring Passovers are but symbols, occurred at the time when the true Lamb of God... was offered for the sins of the world upon his cross, at the very time when the now outmoded Passover lambs of Jerusalem were being offered... in the superseded Temple..." (Pelican Gospel Commentaries).

"Now... glorified." Here is John's unique contribution to Christian thinking about the death of Jesus: that death was not an event of unrelieved shame and ignominy from which Jesus was afterwards restored to honor and glorified. For John, the whole story, climaxing at the cross, was the glorification of the Son of Man.

See the new commandment moored in this context. What makes it "new" is not its originality, for in one sense it is not new (Lev 19:18). Jesus models its newness by serving and laying down his life. The commandment has to do with his very "glorification"—so opposite from the world's self-assertion. His is love to the end. The servant and towel add another dimension. This kind of love is to be the hallmark of life in the church. "Love *one another*" is to be the distinctive quality of love within the Christian fellowship. It is our greatest witness! In a sense it is easy to love Christ but difficult to display such love in the church, especially when the church has extended its borders to include persons quite different from ourselves (different in racial, cultural, or religious background. See today's Acts reading).

But note that this kind of love is a gift! Jesus says, "A new commandment I *give* you, that you love one another...." It comes as a response to our experience of his limitless love.

Once again Revelation gives a vision of hope. There is a "new heaven and a new earth." The renewal of the creation at the end of the ages is promised (see also Romans 8). And it takes place not in some remote oasis, but the "holy city" comes down from heaven to the world of humankind, for God is pleased to dwell among us. (The word for "home" in v. 3 is σκηνή, and "dwell" is σκηνόω, the same word used in John 1:14, lived, tabernacled.) Our hearts can be made glad by God's making God's home with us and healing human relationships.

I wonder about the dynamic of this "new" love especially when I consider the church's struggle with current issues of inclusivity, sexual orientation, and ethnicity. Is the "pain no more" only in some distant future? FB

Pastoral Reflections

In the Gospel lesson, Jesus speaks of his departure to a yet uncomprehending group of disciples. "Little children, I am with you only a little longer.... Where I am going, you cannot come." It brings to mind my eldest, who is yet a toddler. As I come home, I can see her face peering at me through the front window, wearing a delighted and delightful smile. When I must go away, the smile is replaced by a frown and an impatient beckoning of uplifted hands and dancing feet, "Daddy, up!"

Like little children, the disciples and we hunger for the security and joy of our Lord's presence and easily panic when he seems to be leaving or distant. In upper room and hospital room we have grown anxious. Little wonder that I have often noticed plaques of varying description hanging in private homes, speaking identical words:

"I said to the Lord, 'You promised me, Lord, that if I followed you, you would walk with me always. But I have noticed that during the most trying periods of my life there has been only one set of footprints in the sand. Why, when I have needed you most, have you not been there with me?' The Lord replied, 'During your times of trial and suffering, when you see only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you.'"

We are inwardly moved and comforted by such an intimate vision. It calms us to think of Jesus' continued presence and the final day before the throne of God when every tear will be wiped from our eyes.

Jesus' farewell does not speak of desertion. It does, however, speak of challenging work. The ascension is a change in the manner of Jesus' presence with the disciples. His Spirit would be there, pushing them beyond the comforting one-on-one relationship to face a world in need. Relationship with Jesus, the one glorified through selfless service on a cross, brings a new commandment of selfless service in and through the whole body of Christ. Jesus said, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another." And then he died for us, glorifying the Father and being glorified, giving clear demonstration of the love and service which he now plants and nurtures in our hearts and lives. As ones who know Jesus' presence, we will do more than consume comfort. We will love and serve, selflessly and sacrificially. Paul and Barnabas are just two that knew the joy of this.

"Footprints in the Sand" gives a wonderful vision, but maybe it needs a few more sets of footprints zigzagging every which way. Christ walking with us and carrying us. We walking with others and carrying others. Others walking with us and carrying us. Christ before us, Christ behind us, Christ bearing us up, Christ pressing us forward. SS

Sixth Sunday of Easter
May 21, 1995

Psalm 67
Acts 14:8-18
Revelation 21:10-14, 22-23
John 14:23-29

First Reading

Today's Prayer of the Day leads into the Gospel: "O God, from whom all good things come: Lead us by the inspiration of your Spirit to think those things which are right, and by your goodness help us to do them; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."

We need and we are promised the Spirit's impetus and aid to "love" our Savior/Lord and to "keep" his Word (Jn 14:23-30). The Father sends this Advocate (really "another" Counselor, v. 16; Jesus is the first) to teach and help us remember all that Jesus has said. "The Paraclete teaches and speaks nothing new but makes Jesus present.... Jesus is himself the Word, the unique exegete of the Father. His word is not just a teaching from yesterday to be memorized today and remembered tomorrow. His word is the voice of the Creator and the trumpet of the Judge daily calling forth from the dust and from the tomb into new life.... The believers live by fresh decisions, daily rendered, opening themselves to indwelling by the Word from above, not merely out of the past." (Robert H. Smith, *Easter Gospels* [Augsburg: Minneapolis, 1983], 191-2)

Therefore, the Father and the Son will make their "home" with us. Jesus promises not to leave us orphaned. "Home" = μονή. In John 1, the first disciples ask Jesus, "Where are you *staying* (=μένω), the same derivation. He replies, "Come and see." In Christ, God not only comes down to earth but also lives with us.

And surely this makes for "Peace," the gift the world cannot give, but a legacy our Lord leaves with us. The setting and the promise transform this ordinary greeting and infuse it with new meaning. It is the "Peace" *of* Jesus. That promise sustains us in our continuing journey.

Hope-strengthening images continue in this Sunday's reading from Revelation. While Jerusalem had always been considered God's dwelling place, now the city is "new," full and complete. But there is no longer any temple because God's very presence and the Lamb welcome and shelter all whose names are in the Lamb's book of life.

Easter has everything to do with death. It has everything to do with broken bodies and diseases as well. As Paul heals the crippled man of Lystra (Acts 14), this man also comes to know Christ's gift of peace. Paul and Barnabas strongly protest efforts to pay them divine honors, and Paul preaches his first sermon specifically to heathens. "Rather than a recital of God's acts in Old Testa-

ment themes, he witnesses to God's work in creation. Rather than testimony to God as Lord of history, there is emphasis on God as Lord of the Universe and the Giver of Life. Rather than testimony to Jesus as Christ, there is emphasis on the Jewish doctrine—shared by Christians—of the oneness of God. His word is anti-idolatrous, his only claim is that he brings good news. Instead of idols of wood and stone, he offers them fellowship with the true and living God, Creator of all that is." (Robert H. Smith, *Acts*, 1970) FB

Pastoral Reflections

In order to understand the context for the reading from John we should begin one verse earlier. Verse 22: "Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, 'Lord, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us, and not to the world?'" For us the questions might be stated differently. In a world where God is omnipresent, is God present differently for the Christian? In a world where God loves everybody, does God's relationship with Christians have any special meaning? Since God has forgiven all our sins, does obedience make any difference at all?

It is good to remember that these words were spoken to the twelve apostles. These are words spoken to the community of believers. More specifically, they are spoken on the occasion of Jesus' Last Supper. The hearers of these words are those who have gathered at table with Jesus to share the bread and wine. This text does not suggest how we become a part of that community; rather it tells us of the benefits of being a part of that community.

Even the community of believers asks about keeping God's commands. "Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound?" (Rom 6:1) We often reason that since good works cannot save us there is no reason for doing good works. We certainly wonder if obeying God makes any difference.

Jesus says that it does. First of all, it shows our love for Jesus. Those who truly love God cannot be complacent about their actions. A person in love could never reason that since the lover will forgive them it does not matter how they act! When in love, we seek to do what is pleasing in the sight of the one we love. Anything less would be betrayal of the one we love.

God will make a home with those who love him and keep his commandments. The image of being at home suggests being comfortable and secure. God may be present everywhere but not always "at home" everywhere. At times God is more of an uninvited guest. God's presence in the world is a troubling or accusing presence. Adam hid from God in the garden. Some people might prefer that God were not always present. Remember that God is the one who is "at home" in our lives.

A further benefit is the presence of the Holy Spirit. The presence of the Spirit will cause us to remember what Jesus has done for us. To remember is more than simply bringing an event into conscious memory. When we remember all that Jesus has done for us we are joined to the community that was created in Jesus' life, death and resurrection.

Lastly, Jesus gives us peace. This is not an end of conflict with the world. Nor is it the temporary peace that the world promises. This is peace with God: a peace that we have been set right with God through what Jesus has done, a peace that no earthly power can take from us. ERB

Seventh Sunday of Easter
May 28, 1995

Psalm 47
Acts 16:6-10
Revelation 22:12-17, 20
John 17:20-26

First Reading

As we move from Ascension to Pentecost, the invitation in Revelation (22:17) is striking: "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come.' And let everyone who hears say, 'Come.' And let everyone who is thirsty come. Let anyone who wishes take the water of Life as a gift." Here is a dynamic invitation to a living relationship with God in

Jesus Christ. At the same time the beleaguered believers to whom John writes call urgently to their Lord.

That same lesson assures that God is in control, and his Christ is moving history toward its goal. Our living Lord assumes the dynamic titles "Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end" and promises, "See, I am coming soon!" (12,13) It is the same living Lord of the church who prays *for us* ("I ask... on behalf of those who will believe in me...," Jn 17:20). He prays further that believers will know his gift of unity and that those who come to faith through the witness of Christians may likewise experience this unity.

"That they may be one...." What is this oneness? Efforts to give outward evidence to the shared faith in Jesus Christ ought not be discounted, but structural oneness is not the heart of the oneness. It is rather that unity which comes from identifying with the work of Christ. Just as the Father and Jesus are undivided in their intent to rescue the lost, to heal brokenness and alienation, to bring health out of illness, to effect genuine wholeness, so also believers are invited into the unity of the same work. The goal of this unity is "that the world may believe/know that you, Father, have sent me and have loved them" (vv. 21, 23).

The word "oneness" has to do with the church's integrity. Jesus prays that the church not be split or divided in heart or allegiance. Jesus prays that the church may continue the mission of her Lord, "to make known and effectual the love of the Father for the world" (John Marsh). Finally, Jesus prays that his church may see his glory and, secure in the Father's love, may be with him (17:24). Knowing that their Lord's return is certain, Christians plead: "Come, Lord Jesus!" (Rev 22:20).

The church is Christ's mission to the world. Today's lesson from Acts alerts us that we may be led in unexpected ways (vv. 6,7), but it is the "Spirit of Jesus" (the only use of this term in the New Testament) who directs. This odd phrase, "Spirit of Jesus," means that the mission is not Paul's, and not ours either. It belongs to the Holy Spirit (v. 6), to the Spirit of Jesus (v. 7), to God alone (v. 10).

I find myself asking what all this might mean as the church faces diverse cultures and folks with varied backgrounds. We pray to be led by "the Spirit of Jesus." FB

Pastoral Reflections

Most of us are good, honest, hardworking people. We believe in Jesus Christ. Yet we often let our differences, our arguments, past hurts and prejudices come between us. We build walls out of the things we do and the things we say—out of anger, impatience, unwillingness to forgive, stubbornness, self-centeredness.

Consequently those things stand in the way of our Christian fellowship and our witness to the world.

Jesus knows our pettiness and our jealousies and our fears. He knows what makes us uncomfortable and the people we can't stand to be around.

Yet he also knows that the salvation of the world is at stake, and so he prays for our "oneness" (Jn 7:20-21). Oneness means sharing in the fellowship he enjoys with the Father. He wants us to experience the same intimacy with him and with one another.

So he prays that we might live every day surrounded and strengthened by God's love. It is only the presence of the living God that can break down those dividing walls.

Notice that Jesus doesn't pray for us to agree with one another in every respect. He prays that we become united with God for a mission. It's not so important that everybody think alike or even act alike, but it is important that God's will and God's love be our central focus.

That means we need to receive that love and live with God. At our work, at school, on our tractors, in our shopping, in our families and free time—whatever we do and wherever we are, we need to be living with God. Our lives become a witness to God through our prayers, our worship, our service, and through our kindness and acceptance of others.

God's presence in our lives helps us to break down those things that separate us, so we can touch the lives of people who so desperately need to know the love and the healing of God. JG

Could the Year of Luke Make a Difference?

William E. Lesher
President, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

Ralph Klein set the stage for this article in his introduction to the last issue of *Currents* on "The Year of Luke" by saying, "The word and the church grew and expanded from Luke to Acts. How might they grow and expand as they move from the printed page to the living voice of the gospel?" R. Alan Culpepper wrote in the same issue about the Lukan parable of the Good Samaritan: "Jesus turns the issue from the boundaries of required neighborliness to the essential nature of neighborliness.... Mercy sees only need and responds with compassion." In a summary of the moral and ethical exhortation in the Gospel of Luke, Frederick Danker has written that "Jesus liberated his followers from preoccupation with their own public image, for he himself endured ambiguity through identification with the concerns of the weak and disenfranchised."

All these powerful observations about the social implications of Luke's Gospel, and many more that could be cited, raise the question: Could our study, reflection, and proclamation during this Year of Luke make a difference in the social crisis growing in our country today?

Four years ago, I spent three weeks in Southeast Asia with a group of seminary teachers, students, administrators, and board members. It was the summer of Tiananmen Square, when a student protest against government policy in China was put down with great force and much bloodshed. The symbol of this resistance was a female figure holding high a torch. She was called "the Goddess of Liberty" and bore an unmistakable similarity to the Statue of Liberty in New York Harbor. We did not visit China, but we saw the "Goddess" everywhere in the countries of the region, on billboards, in newspapers, and in the graffiti at construction sites and on bathroom walls. I admit to a twinge of patriotic pride at the sight of "our symbol" representing freedom and justice in another part of the world. But that only added to my sense of embarrassment and shame when local residents, especially young people, did not identify the goddess with the statue because, they said, they perceived that in the United States minorities are held down and the poor are hungry and often homeless. I argued with the scope of their perception, but I could not deny the reality.

Later that summer, I was in Germany. At a restaurant, a diner at the next table politely interrupted our conversation when he overheard that I was from Chicago. He told me that his local congregation had taken up a collection the previous Sunday

for the homeless in Chicago and asked with obvious concern what Christians in the United States were doing about these conditions.

I returned from these travels distressed and frustrated. As I reflected on these experiences, I re-read a study that had been on my shelf for several months, called *The Common Good: Social Welfare and the American Future, A Project of the Ford Foundation.* The document reads like an Old Testament text. It does not preach or threaten or moralize, so much as it states the inevitable consequences of our actions and inactions in this society. It simply describes how difficult life is in the United States today for an increasing number of people and what will happen if changes are not made. The study speaks of a "growing social deficit," which it maintains is just as troubling as the national budget deficit in terms of its potential threat to our society. It makes clear that social welfare is not for the poor alone, but that all of us at one time or another have to rely upon our system of welfare protections, beginning before birth and extending through our retirement years. The study goes beyond traditional welfare categories and political labels and argues persuasively for the interconnectedness of all the programs of social welfare and the common good for all of our people. It makes extensive recommendations for ways that both the public and private sectors must work together to re-knit a commitment to the common good in the U.S. today.

The study is sober about the magnitude of the task. It leaves no question that, unless we deal with the social deficit as one nation and one people, we will face an unprecedented social and economic crisis. The study is inspirational in its concluding belief that the American people will unite behind the challenge, not only because everyone will ultimately benefit from it, but

Could we hold up a biblical standard of neighborliness that is grounded in a mercy that sees need and responds with compassion?

because it is the right thing to do.

Much has happened in our public life since *The Common Good* study was released in 1989. During the intervening years I have been working with the National Council of Churches of Christ, the U.S. Catholic Conference, and the Synagogue Council of America to generate a single religious voice in America to proclaim publicly and persistently that the common good is the moral agenda for America in the remaining years of the 90s. The Ford Foundation study is simply an example, albeit a good example, of what could be done. Of greater importance is the role of the religious communities in the United States today.

Some things are beginning to happen. The three ecumenical groups mentioned above are developing plans to make the common good a special emphasis in their programs and publications. A booklet, entitled "A Call to the Common Ground for the Common Good," states that Jews and Christians share a common heritage in the Hebrew Scriptures, which proclaim that God's covenant of righteousness is devoted to the creation and preservation of community. It goes on to show the rich diversity of

social visions in the various faith communities. On the local and regional levels, a number of communities are developing ways to lift up concerns for the common good and to take actions to signal its priority. For example, the Illinois Council of Churches, in cooperation with the council of Religious Leaders of Metropolitan Chicago, has adopted educational reform as a focus for statewide common good study and action.

A national discussion on the social welfare system, anticipated by the Ford Foundation Study nearly five years ago, is almost certain to be a major theme in our public life during this Year of Luke. Thus, the question: Will our proclamation of the Lukan Gospel make a difference?

Could the churches of this land, through preaching and study of the Gospel According to Luke, contribute to the creation of a climate for a serious civil discourse on these critical matters, in which the common good would be the primary motivation? Can the word and the church grow and expand as they did in the Luke/Acts narrative, to include the common good of our society as it moves from printed page to the living voice of the gospel? Could we hold up a biblical standard of neighborliness that is grounded in a mercy that sees need and responds with compassion? Can congregations be liberated from their preoccupations by the proclamation of Luke's view of the Jesus who identifies with the concerns of the weak and the disenfranchised?

The national debate on social welfare will go forward, with or without us. The Year of Luke, however provides a unique occasion for the church to play its role as church in this discussion. The churches can make a profound difference indeed, by making clear that the common good is the moral priority for our nation at this time, by holding all in authority—in the public and the private and the ecclesiastical sectors—accountable for addressing the issues of the common good and, by using every opportunity the Lukan texts afford, to illustrate the essential nature of neighborliness and to call for its embodiment in a new concern for the common good as the text moves from printed page to living Word.

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