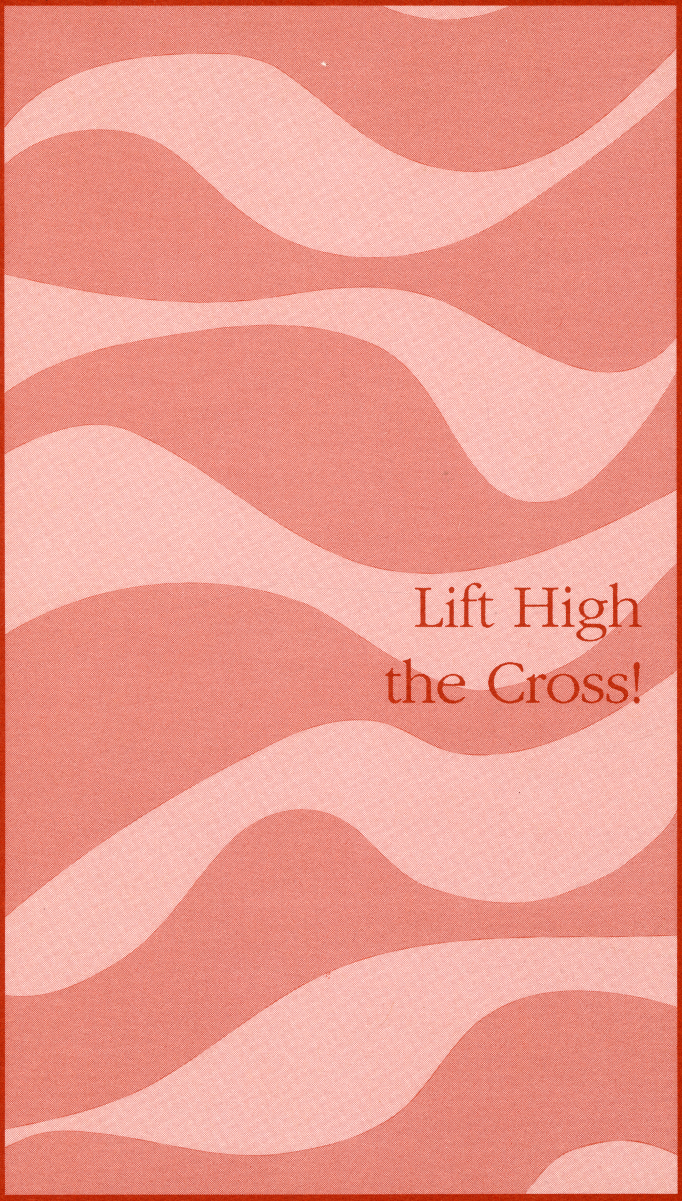
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Editor: **Ralph W. Klein**
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

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**
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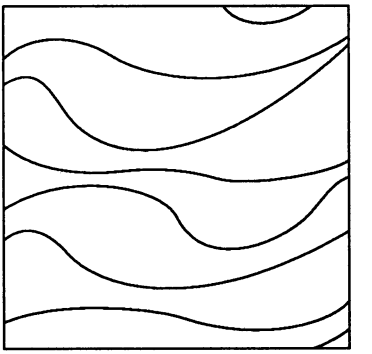
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Series B
Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost—Christ the King

Lift High the Cross!

Prologue

Since I have been free this spring and early summer from my usual round of adult forums, I've taken the opportunity to see and hear what's going on in the churches in the Chicago context of LSTC.

Most of these congregations have been small, economically fragile, largely African-American, and ELCA. The pastors have preached powerful sermons that reflected both deep study of the gospel and passionate engagement in the lives of their people. The music has been outstanding, the choirs versatile, the context raw. In one congregation a lay person rose to invite parishioners to a rally against violence to be held in honor of his 14 year old son who had been slain in a drive-by shooting. At another congregation a member told me that it was so good to be back in the big old church again in the spring; all through the winter they met in the school next door because it was too expensive to heat the big old church. Another Sunday all of us surrounded the nave in a prayer chain as people prayed for freedom from persistent sins.

How welcome I felt. Passing the peace was a major undertaking; I was the stranger, and they took me in—in the name of Christ.

Last Sunday I went to a mega church—4,000 people there, upper middle class, monocultural, non-participatory, multi million dollar annual budget, multimedia, antiseptic. The cross was not mentioned in the sermon, nor would one guess that many people find work boring, marriage intolerable, or life a series of bad happenings. The 4,000 got a pep talk on using all their talents and they left me and the other spectators in total anonymity. When we were dismissed (without a blessing),

we all raced for the parking lot—the church "show" was over. This particular church is trying to get "unchurched Harry" inside the door, and I must admit it works: fully half the worshipers were men that Sunday—compare that to any ELCA congregation! But I missed the pain, the intercessions, the cross, forgiveness, the misprints in the bulletin, the testimony of lay leaders, peeling paint, baptism, Eucharist, reality.

If the church is to be reborn in the city, I think I know where to find the manger.

Contents

George L. Murphy notes that in the dialogue of science and theology there is ambiguity and ambivalence, a desire for certainty and the realistic recognition of the incompleteness of our understanding. Our spiritual transcendence of nature stands in tension with the idea of fellowship with nature. Theology teaches that human beings are called to care for the earth, but it needs input from science to construct adequate environmental strategies. Christian theology and ethics can receive insights from interactions with science and technology in order to provide direction for Christian thought and action.

John R. Seraphine describes an ideal learning community in which people learn to live the faith by worshipping, serving, loving, and thinking with other people of faith. Before you compare this model with your St. John's by the gas station, remember that this is only a heuristic model! The emphasis in education is not on achievement, but on growth in trust and experience in living that is faithful to God and to community. The goal: to bring learning out of the classroom and into the muddy, bloody, and exciting world where faith meets life. We'd like some responses: those of you who have already implemented some creative educational programs that resemble the dreams of this article, please write them up in 2-4 pages and submit them to us for publication.

Robert A. D. Clancy points out a paradox: justification directs us away from ourselves and solely to the cross of Christ; yet, no situation is so anthropocentric as suffering. We cannot discuss the question of God

and human suffering until we have confronted the greatest mystery of God's revelation: God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. The cross of Christ gives us a double confidence: confidence that we have been saved from eternal affliction; confidence to face our present afflictions with the assurance that he will see us through. We need no longer face our afflictions as if they were God's judgment on our life; instead, we receive them as a means by which God accomplishes a greater purpose, in which his glory is revealed. Luther's "Nevertheless, I am baptized" must be a Christian's ultimate response to affliction.

Todd Murken, winner of the Piepkorn prize, asks: How does the exaltation of the human Christ make the Eucharist valid for the whole world? How does the doctrine about Christ vouch for Christ's promise of his bodily presence in the Eucharist? How can the latter be ecumenically compelling? The Formula of Concord showed that human flesh-and-blood is so exalted that in union with the eternal Word it enjoys magnificent power. The Lord's Supper is for all humanity because of the good news it carries and because God wills all people to become faithful communicants. This age is our home and the place for our bodies to do what they can to reflect our destiny, mightily aided in this endeavor by the body and blood of the risen Firstfruits.

Mark E. Chapman discusses early Christian mystagogy, the attempt to explain to the newly baptized the significance of the mysteries of Baptism and Eucharist. John Chrysostom proposed that the spiritual formation of neophyte Christians consisted in their moral formation. Knowing Christian doctrine is a necessary weapon for all soldiers of the cross in the war with Satan. The eyes of faith set before the baptized a picture of the invisible realm which is theirs by participation in Christ, and so encourages them to participate in it in the here and now. For Ambrose of Milan biblical history is the outward and visible sign of the inner and spiritual reality of God's saving will and work in Jesus Christ. What the neophyte is initiated into in Baptism is a new social order, a new culture, a new family, and so a new way of living within that new world. The typological method used by these bishops provided a conceptual unity in the church while allowing for significant differences; the historical critical method has produced fragmentation. For these

ancient bishops the life and experience of the church determined what the scriptures mean. We, like these bishops, cannot take for granted that our culture will be shaped by Christian morals, values, and virtues. Our reflections on their typological method may help us to live in this alien world.

Marc Kolden avers that we must be about the business of confession and absolution because it concerns our salvation. To confess our sins is to trust God's word that we are indeed guilty. As we hear the gracious words of absolution, let us not sit in judgment on them, but rather let us bask in their most gracious divine judgment on us: Pardoned on account of Christ.



Epilogue

Hope of the world, afoot on dusty highways,
Showing to wand'ring souls the path of light:
Walk thou beside us lest the tempting byways
Lure us away from thee to endless night.

Ralph W. Klein
Editor

The Science-Theology Dialogue and Theological Ambiguity

George L. Murphy
St. Mark Lutheran Church
Tallmadge, Ohio

Ambiguities in Christian theology

Santmire's important study of Christian attitudes toward the environment, *The Travail of Nature*, is subtitled "The Ambiguous Ecological Promise of Christian Theology."[1] We are interested here in the topic of that book, the place of nature in Christian theologies; but our concern goes beyond that to the more general question of ambiguities in theology and the possible role of the science-theology dialogue in our understanding of them.

Ambiguity is difficult to live with, especially when it affects fundamental questions about reality. Yet if we continue to learn about reality there will arise new questions which, at least for awhile, will not have satisfactory answers. A thoroughgoing skepticism which eschews definite answers to *all* questions is not in view here. But to deny the existence of any open questions at all is to require human understanding, both in theology and in the natural sciences, to remain completely static. This is true even when, as in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, it is believed that there is a divine revelation of truth to humanity. The conviction that scripture is true and authoritative, and therefore that questions which it *does* answer unambiguously are settled, does not mean that scripture provides answers to all questions which can be posed. This is the case for ethical issues as well as for purely scientific ones. The Bible does not, for example, tell us in physiological terms when human death occurs, and so there is some uncertainty for Christian ethics in deciding just when artificial life-support measures should be terminated.

Thus there exists tension between the certainty which we would like to have in matters of ultimate concern and the uncertainty to which the finite and still-developing state of our knowledge subjects us. There are beliefs which Christians hold with assurance, but at any given time before

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[1] H. P. Santmire, *The Travail of Nature* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985).

the parousia there will also be some open questions. We recognize that "we know in part" (1 Cor 13:9), even while we "contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints" (Jude 3). The tension between the desire for certainty and realistic recognition of the incompleteness of our understanding becomes especially painful when problems of current concern, which we are not able to avoid and for which we feel a need for definite answers, cannot be resolved in a clear fashion.

The development of the natural sciences in particular has often resulted in theology having to reexamine some traditional positions. The problem of the relationship of biological evolution to the doctrine of creation is a prominent example of such a reopening of theological questions because of science, a subject upon which we will comment later. But science may also help to give clearer definition when theological ambiguities have existed prior to scientific discoveries. It is that type of interaction upon which we want to focus here.

The environment in Christian thought

Santmire's book develops in some detail the thesis that the Christian tradition from its beginnings has been ambiguous with respect to ecological matters. The theme of spiritual transcendence of nature has been in tension with the idea of fellowship with nature. Santmire records at the beginning of his discussion some of the common criticisms, of which the best known is White's,[2] that the present worldwide ecological crisis is due in large part to the emphasis within the Judaeo-Christian tradition on human dominion over nature. But White recognized that Christian thought about nature has not been uniform, citing Francis of Assisi; and Santmire notes also some positive attitudes toward nature of other Christian thinkers, especially Luther and Calvin.[3] His study from the ideas of Irenaeus and Origen through those of Barth and Teilhard de Chardin reveals, however, a continual downplaying of positive evaluations of nature because of beliefs that the nonhuman world is inferior to humanity, is here only to serve human needs, and will ultimately be dispensed with in God's plan for creation.

Santmire argues that the two poles of Judaeo-Christian thought in this area can be developed from the single theme of "the overwhelming mountain,"[4] a theme common to many cultures and religions. The mountain can give a person two different views, depending on whether the mountain climber looks up or down. There can be the view of heaven, and the idea of passing beyond the created world. This gives rise to a spiritual motif in theology. But the climber may also look down and see the goodness and fecundity of the world. This gives rise to an ecological motif in theology.[5] Moses ascends Mount Sinai to be in God's presence, but he also climbs Mount Nebo to see the good land which God will give to Israel. Both views, and both theological motifs, are biblical.

Until recently, this ambiguity did not disturb Christians. The spiritual motif was generally dominant, and most believers considered it almost axiomatic that human

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[2] L. White, "The historical roots of our ecologic crisis," *Science* 155 (1967): 1203-7.

[3] Santmire, *The Travail of Nature*, ch.7.

[4] Santmire, ch. 2.

[5] Santmire also points out here that there is a third theme, that of "the promising journey," which is exemplified in the story of the Exodus, and which also contributes to the ecological motif.

fellowship with God beyond nature was the basic idea of Christian faith. Francis of Assisi was loved by many, but the attitude toward nature expressed in his "Canticle of the Sun"[6] was considered a bit eccentric. Disciples of Luther or Calvin were much more likely to emphasize the reformers' basic theme of human salvation than their positive views of the natural world. This is no longer the case. With all the theological ambiguity which may remain, Christian theologians are increasingly concerned about ecological issues and about the ability of their tradition to address them.

Impact of the science-theology dialogue on Christian ideas about the environment

Over the past quarter of a century, Christian thought has shifted significantly from emphasis on the spiritual motif toward the ecological motif, without abandoning the former. Why has this change taken place? In a sense the answer to that question is obvious, but careful investigation of the matter reveals some important, and perhaps not so obvious, points. The shift has taken place because of the impact which science-based technology has had on the environment, and because of scientific awareness of the interconnectedness of life and the finitude of all resources needed for life.

Until about three centuries ago, concerns about the welfare of the environment would have been largely theoretical, if they had been expressed at all.[7] Extinction of species was not thought possible by most Westerners,[8] and there seemed in general to be no reason to be concerned about the state of the natural world as a whole. That has all changed with the rise of modern science and the technology based upon it, the industrial revolution, and modern techniques of medicine and agriculture which have made possible a rapid growth in the global human population. In this century we have had extensive evidence for the negative influence which humanity can exert on its environment. Smog, oil spills, Chernobyl, extensive extinction of species, and ozone depletion are a few well-known problems which may be noted. It not necessary to go to the extremes of pessimism reached by a few environmentalists, but those who pay attention to the news and use their brains realize that the world is faced with some serious environmental problems.

In an even more profound way, science has helped us to realize that our actions *must* have an impact on the environment. In the first place, there are basic physical principles which govern all physical interactions, and which must be obeyed by our technological interactions with the environment. Prominent among these are the First and Second Laws of Thermodynamics, which express conditions which our use of any kind of energy must satisfy.

In the specifically biological realm, theories of evolution and the development of ecology as a science show the essential interrelationships between species. Evolu-

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[6] This hymn is most familiar to English-speaking Christians in W. H. Draper's rather free translation, "All creatures of our God and King." See, e.g., *Lutheran Book of Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1978), hymn #527. A more literal translation is that of Matthew Arnold in his essay "Pagan and mediaeval religious sentiment" in *Essays in Criticism*, First Series. See *The Works of Matthew Arnold* (New York: AMS Press, 1970), Vol. III, 232-33.

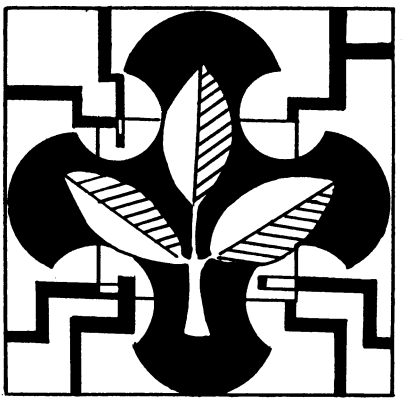
[7] See here R. H. Grove, "Origins of western environmentalism," *Scientific American* 267.1 (1992): 42-47.

[8] L. Eiseley, "How death became natural," in *The Firmament of Time* (London: The Science Book Club, 1960), 31-58.

tion means that we are organically related to nonhuman lifeforms.[9] Ecology tells us that what happens to one species in an ecosystem has some effect on all other species in that system. Different species, and even larger biological groupings, are related throughout time and throughout space.

Both our experience of the impact of science-based technology upon the environment and the scientific understanding of the character of the relationship between different parts of nature have been critical in forming the modern ecological consciousness. This new understanding, *in the context of the conversations among science, theology, ethics, and technology*, has moved Christian thought *in the direction of* the ecological motif. The phrases which I have emphasized in the previous sentence are qualifications which we now discuss in order to point toward an adequate view of the ways in which science may legitimately influence theology.

First, science by itself does not, and cannot, dictate the course which an adequate Christian theology takes. Science can and should influence theology by means of dialogue with it. Science by itself, as a means of understanding the physical world, can operate independently of theological presuppositions. It has theological significance, however, only in the context of belief about the physical world as God's creation. With its teaching that the world is God's good creation endowed with contingent rationality which makes it susceptible to scientific investigation, that God "did not create it a chaos, he formed it to be inhabited" (Isa 45:18 NRSV), Christian theology on its own terms is committed to the belief that observation and reason can give understanding of creation, and invites input from science about the ways in which the world works. Thus the statement of faith of the American Scientific Affiliation says, *inter alia*: "We believe that in creating and preserving the universe God has endowed it with contingent order and intelligibility, the basis of scientific investigation."[10] Theology teaches that human beings are called to care for the earth, but is unable by itself to tell them how to do this, and thus must invite input from science about adequate environmental strategies.



That theology must open itself to scientific understanding if science is to have any theological significance can perhaps best be seen if we consider not Christianity but an extreme world-denying gnostic religion. From the standpoint of such a belief system, natural science would be only a way of describing an inferior, and perhaps evil, level of reality. (And in a culture dominated by such a religion, natural sci-

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[9] For discussion of the theological significance of this see G. L. Murphy, "A theological argument for evolution," *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* 38 (1986): 19-26.

[10] *The American Scientific Affiliation and Canadian Scientific & Christian Affiliation 1990-1991 Directory* (Ipswich, MA: American Scientific Affiliation, 1990), 2.

ence would not even develop.) If science were to raise alarms about the state of the environment, gnostic theology would not be very interested because the environment would have no value for it anyway. It might respond, as classical gnosticism responded to the issue of sexuality, by counselling either flight from the world to avoid contamination or exploitation of the world because its illusory reality could not touch the gnostic's true self!

If Christian theology is to be true to itself, it must be open to dialogue with science.

In spite of all ambiguity, Christianity has always had to remember its own nature motif if it is to avoid outright heresy. It has to recognize that science deals with the reality of a good world (Gen 1:31), not illusions about an evil one, and that human beings have some responsibilities with regard to the world which science describes. Thus if Christian theology is to be true to itself, it must be open to dialogue with science.

This also brings out a second point. In allowing itself to be moved by dialogue with science away from an emphasis on the spiritual motif and toward the nature motif, theology is not submitting itself to an authority alien to itself. Though it has often been subdued and at times almost submerged, the nature pole has never been completely absent from Christian thought. It is not as if Christians had explicitly rejected care for the earth before the rise of science and the modern ecological crisis.

To some extent, science moves us toward greater concern for other creatures because of an enlightened self-interest: ecological damage will eventually affect human beings. Such self-interest is not contrary to the type of life called for in the Bible, which provides many examples of temporal goods to be gained by obeying God's law. (Lev 25:1-24 is germane to the present topic. Note especially vv. 18-19.) The commandment "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev 19:18. Cf. Mk 12:31 and parallels) assumes that there is an appropriate kind of love for self and concern about one's own welfare.

Thirdly, we must not emphasize the previous points in such a way as to belittle the significance of the influence which science can have upon theology, as if our task were simply to maintain the priority of theological considerations. The scientific endeavor to understand the physical world cannot reach beyond that world to issues of value and ultimate meaning, but within its proper realm it needs no theological validation. I have argued previously that, when seen within the context of theology based upon revelation, science can provide information about the world which leads to a legitimate natural theology.[11] Here it plays a stronger role. Still within the context of revelation, the science-theology dialogue can move theology itself from an emphasis on its spiritual motif to stress on its ecological motif. Such a move within theology

[11] G. L. Murphy, "Chiasmic cosmology: An approach to the science-theology dialogue," *Trinity Seminary Review* 13 (1991): 83-92. See also T. F. Torrance, *Reality and Scientific Theology* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1985).

itself, with no scientific input, would be quite arbitrary. Theology by itself does not understand the relationships between humanity and the world well enough, and needs the knowledge provided by science, just as science can tell us what will happen to nature if certain things are done, but cannot by itself tell us what is desirable for nature.

The fourth point to observe here is that I have avoided any statement that science (or anything else) has "resolved" the ambiguity between the spiritual and ecological poles of Christian theology. It has, as I put it, moved Christian thought in the direction of the ecological motif. The spiritual motif, divine transcendence, and the reminder that loving God is the greatest commandment and loving neighbors is second (Mk 12:28-34 and parallels) remain important aspects of the Christian view of reality. Science and technology, within the total context of Christian thought, demand that we place much greater emphasis on the ecological aspects of doctrine and practice than previous generations of Christians have done. If this demand is ignored, the spiritual theme simply provides an excuse to escape from responsibility. But that theme in itself must be retained as long as we hold that the divine reality is not limited to the world which science is able to explore.

Finally, we should note that involvement with science does not ensure that a theologian will give adequate emphasis to ecology. Barth was not a natural scientist and, while he was in no way opposed to scientific work in itself, did not think that he had to take it into account in his exposition of the doctrine of creation.[12] Teilhard de Chardin, on the other hand, was a working paleontologist, and concern for accord between science and Christianity permeates his thought. In many other ways as well the theological approaches of these two men were very different. But in spite of these great differences, Santmire concludes—in a chapter entitled significantly "The Triumph of Personalism"—that both of them failed to give sufficient consideration to the ecological motif in Christian theology.[13] (In fact, in one place it is Teilhard's awareness of the Second Law of Thermodynamics which leads him to conclude that there must be an eschatological transcendence of the physical world.[14]) Conversely, one need not be trained in science to be aware of the importance of an adequate theological treatment of nature.

A related example: evolution

The effect of the science-theology dialogue on Christian environmental thought is not the only instance of such influence. One of the major Christian concerns about creation has been whether God's activity in bringing the world and life into being is sudden or gradual—whether there was discontinuous creation of things more or less as we observe them today, or whether they evolved over some period of time. A common idea is that all Christians accepted the first view of creation until roughly the time of Darwin, but this is not the case. In the first millennium of Christianity, the tendency was to understand God's creative activity in Genesis as *mediated* creation.[15] The statements in Genesis 1 that God commanded the materials of the world to bring forth life

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[12] K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936-1962), Vol. III, ix-x.

[13] Santmire, *The Travail of Nature*, ch. 8.

[14] P. Teilhard de Chardin, *Activation of Energy* (London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970), 321-7 and especially n. 16.

[15] E. Messenger, *Evolution and Theology* (New York: Macmillan, 1932).

The reflection of the Christian community upon its faith does change in the course of history, as our understanding of the world grows.

(vv. 11, 20, 24) and those in Genesis 2 that life was created from the earth (vv. 7, 9, 19) made it possible to view the creative process as taking place through powers which God had made a part of the world. Gregory of Nyssa in the fourth century developed an anthropology which came very close to an evolutionary understanding of humanity.[16] Emphases upon God's special creative activity and upon mediated creation thus both have long histories within the Christian tradition.

The reason why many Christians in modern times have accepted some type of evolutionary process as God's mode of creation of the present variety of living things is, of course, the considerable weight of observation and reasoning which favors scientific theories of biological evolution. Intellectual integrity alone would demand that serious consideration be given to that possibility. But it is important to realize that science has not simply forced an alien conclusion upon Christian theology. The fact that the biblical accounts of creation are susceptible of an evolutionary understanding is shown by the patristic exegeses of those texts. What the scientific developments of recent centuries have done is to shift theological emphasis with regard to the creation of living things toward continuity.

Theological understanding of evolution as part of God's creative activity has, in turn, implications for other areas of Christian thought. As we have already noted, seeing humanity as organically related with other species must have some influence on our view of nature and our place in it.

Conclusion

Christian theology and Christian ethics must develop as we explore the world, gain new knowledge, and encounter new problems. The fundamentals of the faith have been recognized since the time of the apostles, and theology must first of all remain faithful to the authority of scripture. It is not infinitely malleable, and is called to maintain some positions in the face of cultural opposition. Yet the reflection of the Christian community upon its faith does change in the course of history, as our understanding of the world grows. Consideration of thought about the environment can help us to see how Christian theology and ethics, while keeping in continuity with their tradition, can receive insights from their interactions with science and technology in order to provide direction for Christian thought and action as new situations are encountered.

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[16] Messenger, *Evolution and Theology*, 121-44.

Reworking a Congregation into a Learning Community

John R. Seraphine
Oak Park, Illinois

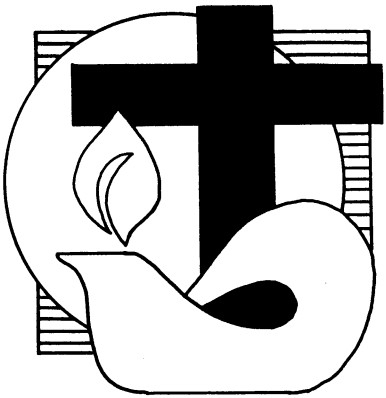
"Learning community" has become a buzz phrase among religious educators these days. It is a good phrase, informed by the conviction that people learn best to live the faith by worshipping, serving, loving and reflecting theologically with other people of faith. But many congregations have difficulty translating the vision into reality because religious education is still largely equated with formal programs of classroom instruction for age-segregated groups dependent on standardized curricular materials. Fulfilling the vision of learning community in religious congregations takes hard work. It calls on leaders not only to modify and enrich their current practices, but to break out of the box of formal schooling by rethinking the aims and redesigning the processes of religious education.

Fortunately religious educators are not the only ones who are hard at work redesigning education. Responding to perceived deficiencies in the primary and secondary school systems of our nation a growing number of scholars and practitioners are experimenting with new designs for learning in secular settings. I will suggest here several key themes that could guide thinking about learning community and examine some of the current school reform research that can inform these themes. In connection with each idea I will then describe how a model congregational learning community might apply those design ideas. Both in what I borrow from the literature on school reform and in ideas about reworking religious education in congregations I aim at being suggestive rather than exhaustive in the hope of contributing in a small way to a conversation among educators of the two fields of scholarship.

A clearer focus on community

It is important that we be clear about what we mean by learning community and about why it is valuable to nurture and maintain.

First, it is helpful to distinguish, as did the German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies (1887), between an associative organization and community. Tönnies called the former *Gesellschaft* and the latter *Gemein-*



schaft. These differ in the way we enter and leave them, the loyalty we feel to them, and the nature of the relationships we maintain within them. Whether it is a business, a political group, or a club, we join an organization because it does something for us or it gets us something we want. We have what might be called "ulterior motives" for belonging, and we hold our options open. If the job doesn't pay or we don't like the activities of the club, we switch to something else. It is relatively painless to move about because our connections with others in the organization are rather simple and tentative. We don't know their life stories and they don't know ours. We only know how well others function in the playing out of their roles in connection to the organization.

It is quite different with communities. We don't join communities; we are born into them, or we wake up one day and find ourselves neck deep in them. We don't notice because they are like the air we breathe. Our ties to them are deep and strong because we think, act, and speak in ways that are recognizable to others in the group. The community is our identity. It holds together our world view and is populated by people who share, to a great extent, the values we believe in. We know fellow members of our community not simply in terms of the jobs or roles they fulfill, but as whole people—warts and all.

Community does not mean conformity or even harmony. In our complex society it is not unusual for people to be lonely in the crowd. We are surrounded by people we don't understand and who do not care to understand us. Out of this loneliness we sometimes romanticize that being in true community is to be without pain—to be cared for and sheltered from woe. But residents of small villages the world over will testify that, while loyalty and relationships are deep and strong, there can also be a high level of stress in community. After all, we can easily quit a job or an organization. We are stuck with our community much the way we are stuck with our family.

If communities do not shelter us from pain, why stick around? Why promote community at all? What is the attraction? And what is their strength? What gives them their staying power? Reading Tönnies in the light of more recent narrative theology, I believe we can conclude that it is not rational rules, roles, and procedures that hold communities together, but shared story. Often without reflection or reflective awareness, members of a community know of themselves coming from the early part of the community's story and moving within that story to a common goal. They are moved forward through sometimes lengthy episodes of pain, trial, and separation from a sense of community, by an ineffable sense that they are to return a gift to the community out of their suffering.

Congregations may choose to act as *Gesellschaft* organizations (we hear consultants urge pastors to maintain professional "emotional distance" to increase "effectiveness," and they seem to promote the

model of the local church as a vendor of religious services). But is this a live option? If we are not community are we church? Is it not our heritage—our identity as people of faith—to be "stuck" with one another as we are chosen by one God, set aside by one baptism? Are we not made involuntary heirs to a peculiar world view, language of ritual, system of meaning and worth, and life of mission? If other people are called into faith in this world view, and if they are nurtured by this life of festival and symbol, are they not stuck with us? This is not a matter of choice or of lifestyle. It is not always very comfortable. And yet it certainly is our destiny.

It is this destiny, this involuntary nature of community, this tacit and powerful sense of common origin, journey, and goal, that gives birth to the power of expectation that gives learning community its life.

Community expectation rather than schooling aims

A learning community approach to religious education can only be appreciated as it is contrasted with the schooling model.

Formal schooling is best suited to producing standardized outcomes to meet standardized aims as measured by standardized tests. It thus serves well the purposes of affiliative organizations and their set purposes. A learning community on the other hand moves not toward a product but toward a common life. The inexperienced members of such a community are not working to adopt the competencies of experienced members. Most often they are not even aware of learning. Instead they are occupied with living a common story which translates into a way of being together. Inexperienced members piece together their own "character" by scripting and re-scripting for themselves the ways of other more experienced characters they admire. The experienced fully expect the inexperienced to arrive at competencies through a process of trial and error. Everyone is involved in learning and teaching, but quite effortlessly and quite unself-consciously. There will be divergence and diversity, but eventually all members of the community will emerge being able to communicate using the same language, to cooperate using a wide diversity of beneficial skills, to share those values most important to the group, and generally to live together without harming one another. Again, they do this because they share values that prize the community itself. (Smith 1988:2-16 relates shared expectation to the learning of language.)

Ivan Illich (1971:111) wrote:

> The planning of new educational institutions ought not to begin with administrative goals of a principal or president, or with the teaching goals of a professional educator, or with the learning goals of any hypothetical class of people. It must not start with the question, "What should someone learn?" but with the question, "What kind of things and people might learners want to be in contact with in order to learn?"

Illich's idea works only in an atmosphere of positive expectation native to learning community. In such a context education does not push its way forward laboriously toward goals but moves forward effortlessly, naturally, and continually through the power of expectation which arises from a mutual faithfulness to each other and to the greater value of the whole community. In a religious community this value of the whole community is rooted outside itself in God. And the expectation is that learners will develop a fluency in the "language" of faith that gives them the necessary structure within which they can

be free to think and live the shared faith of the community in a way that is true to their own experience and gifts.

The model congregation we propose here will work toward learning community by organizing its efforts and its program around expectations of ways learners will be involved with other people (of the past as well as of the present) and activities rather than around a rigid set of learning aims. This will be detailed below in the section describing the "Faith-Life Album."

Community learning is intergenerational and cooperative

Teachers who rely on a schooling model of education demand that learners "do their own work" and do not "cheat" by receiving help from others. Since they think of education primarily as a delivery system for a set body of information they assume that the most efficient system is a large group of learners, segregated by age, matched with a single teacher who manages the flow of "content" to fill a predetermined set of learner "needs." Learning community does not divide the world into teachers and learners or "complete" and "incomplete" people. Instead it assumes that all members of the group are learning, while the less experienced use the more experienced as resources and guides, while each person remains in control of her or his process. It was L. S. Vygotsky (1978) who pioneered the study of the social and collaborative basis of learning, noting that copying the behaviors of others, or receiving help when it is needed from any available source, is a key cognitive skill. It is indeed helpful for a child to be able to learn not only from a designated teacher, but from anyone with skill and experience.

This focus on collaboration contributes to the social as well as the cognitive development of the learner and to the general functioning of the community. Learners begin to trust more that knowledge and value formation is a lifelong process and to see themselves and others as partners in that formation. They grow in their appreciation that to any of the multitude of tasks they must perform together each individual must possess the confidence to offer a piece of the puzzle, be wise in recognizing the contributions of others, and be patient in working together to make the pieces fit.

School reformers offer several alternatives to the single grade-level classroom, and to the model of one teacher per large learning group. Many of the proposed models suggest that students of various ages and grade levels organize their learning day around a "home base" in which they and their team of learning guides form something like an "extended family" that stays together through a number of school years (Garet, Collins, et al. 1991, cf. also Ratzki 1988). Another way of breaking down the grading box is to allow students to move in and out of project- or subject-oriented clusters composed of learners of different ages and one or more experienced sponsors (Olds, Collins and Morrison 1992).

For the sake of a thought experiment we can imagine several ways a model congregation will foster intergenerational cooperative learning. First of all it will recognize that all of those portions of the congregation's program that have often been intergenerational, such as worship, retreats, choirs, picnics, and even the church governing council, present wonderful settings for learning. Our model church will work to provide ample opportunities for theological and mission-directed reflection in these settings. It will devote energy and financial resources to helping leaders be more con-

scious of the need for collaboration and learning. This church will also add a "community hour" to the Sunday morning schedule. During this forty-five minute period between the early worship hour and the more formal educational hour the membership will meet in two large halls: pupils and teachers of pre-kindergarten through grade six meet in one and those of grade seven through adult in another. Each Sunday, different cross-generational teams will rotate responsibility for providing refreshments and cleanup, organizing a celebrative moment highlighting the theme of the liturgical season, and giving informative and entertaining announcements concerning events of vital interest for the community.

The formal Sunday educational hour in our model congregation will be called "Faith and Life Hour." The focus of this period will be on growing in familiarity and experience with the Bible, doctrine, and worship. The mix of activities will favor Bible stories for the young and more doctrine- and issue-oriented learning for the older learners. Teacher-learner teams will organize the time so that most of the more experienced learners will be involved in teaching the less experienced and almost all activities will involve learners of more than one age group.

Another key to intergenerational learning in our model will be the Wednesday Multiversity. Students will begin arriving directly from their schools. From 3:30 to 5:30 p.m. they will be able to choose to play in supervised team sports or cooperation-building games or work at individual or cooperative learning projects. In these activities the youth in grades nine through twelve may be joined by mentors they themselves have chosen from the congregation or community. During their ninth-grade year each young person, in conversation with their parents and teaching team, will choose a mentor of their grandparent's age. Studies have shown our older generation exhibits greater mature faith and denominational loyalty (Benson and Eklin 1990:9-21) and youth often learn lessons of maturity more readily from people not of their parents' ages. The purpose of the mentor relationship is to simply spend time getting to know one another and to share conversation about each other's faith-life journey.[1] Mentors and their partners may also choose to be together during the Wednesday Multiversity meal and celebration that runs from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. During this time intergenerational groups will rotate the responsibility for the meal and cleanup, and for 15 minutes of celebration and announcements.

> Learning community does not divide the world into teachers and learners or "complete" and "incomplete" people.

As parents and other adults get off their jobs and other students leave after-school activities, they will join the Multiversity from 6:30 to 9:00 p.m. (young learners will be free to leave earlier) for a broad offering

[1] Ken Smith, catechetical resource specialist with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, has developed a handbook for development of a mentoring program. He may be reached in the ELCA's Division for Congregational Ministries at 1-800-638-3522.

of classes and project groups. Any member of the community, young or old, will be allowed to propose and/or organize a project offering provided they gain the approval of the Multiversity Council which itself will be intergenerational and which will rotate its membership on a two-year basis. Most classes and project groups will be intergenerational. Classes will offer some of the content-oriented fare familiar to schooling settings, yet also involve discussions, practice, hands-on work, and other ways of actively involving learners. They might include an experiential exploration of the book of Job for grade five through young adults or an introduction to liturgical dance for all comers or a discussion of the problems facing youth at the local high school offered to students and their parents. Projects will place emphasis on "products," an action/reflection style, and cooperative learning. They may indeed build on learnings from classes, but will always work toward doing something for others outside the group. Examples of projects might include an ongoing group devoted to exploring creation theology and environmental activism, and a group that discusses justice and theology and works with a national organization to provide affordable housing for the poor. Project groups may work to present classes, stage plays, dances, or multi-media presentations for others in the congregation or for the public.

Community learning as ongoing experiments with Truth

Mahatma Gandhi called his nonviolent social activism "experiments with truth." They were, of course, experiments in which he injected himself passionately into the field of observation as an all-important variable. That is the nature of Truth as opposed to truths. Discoveries concerning matters of ultimate importance are not made without commitment and risk.

In our model congregational learning community we will practice this sort of risky learning through an action/reflection model in which learning is seen as integrated with all the life and work of the congregation and its members.

Here again we can be in dialog with those who are concerned to redesign secular schooling. John Dewey, writing early in this century, warned against an education far removed from the tools and toil of everyday life—"an undesirable split between the experience gained in more direct associations and what is acquired in school" (Dewey 1963:9). Recent advocates of education reform have also argued that learning is more effective when fit to life-work experience. Michael Halliday (1973) has demonstrated that language is learned along with its uses, and what has been called the "whole language movement" has applied that notion with great success by involving learners in language education through such purposeful activities as publication of their own magazines and books. Jeane Lave (1988) has shown that people may be very adept at working out their own systems for doing math calculations and applying them in everyday settings at home and work, and yet these same people may fail at conventional schooling and standardized tests. She notes that conventional schooling, supported by a system of standardized testing and laboratory-based psychology, does not always lead to knowledge that can be transferred to diverse life-work situations.

In our model congregation a great emphasis will be placed on the Bible, church doctrine and history, and the liturgy, but people will not simply learn about these things through discussions or readings. They

It is important for congregations above all to exercise the power of trust and faithfulness that resides in a vital community.

will constantly experiment with them as truths, asking penetrating questions about the ways the faith tradition already shapes and the ways the people of the faith community can better respond. The learning ministry committee of the congregation will be in continual dialog with other leaders of the church about how to bring informed reflection on practice into the work of music, youth, social action, evangelistic outreach, and every other aspect of the congregation's life (cf. Groome 1980, 1991 for details of a "shared praxis" or action reflection model of religious education). Leadership development will be a high priority. And much of the more formal learning of young and old will be project oriented with intergenerational and diverse teams becoming experienced in faith by teaching others, leading worship, caring for those in need, and caring for the environment.

A great deal of attention in this model congregation will also be paid to faith active in personal life. The paid staff of the congregation will work together with interested members to spawn reflection and support groups for such things as parenting, recovery from alcoholism and addiction, and job and career related issues.

Community learning mediates between private and public life

According to Evelyn and James Whitehead (1982) a faith community is both a way to be together and a way to help people to be open to the wider world. It is important therefore for congregations to be communities of moral discourse, to model healthy acceptance of diversity and conflict, to foster a sense of identity that can be resilient and enduring through the changing seasons and conditions of life, and above all to exercise the power of trust and faithfulness that resides in a vital community. Parker Palmer (1986) suggests that religious congregations can *teach* public life by avoiding a tendency to favor neat solutions for problems and by using scripture and theological resources that deal with the pain and ambiguity of community life with realism and grace. They can *practice* public life through a spiritual discipline of discerning the fear-dispelling presence of God in the midst of all human relationships. They can also *build* the public life by offering an educational program to non-members throughout the wider community.

Our model congregation will work to be a mediating community by holding regular forums for frank and open discussion of controversial issues of public life. Pains will be taken to provide skilled monitoring of these discussions so that participants will develop skills in listening with respect and understanding to others, and learn how to make constructive use of conflict and deal with strong emotions with love and honesty. Learning alliances will be established between the congregation, other faith communities, and other educational, civic, business, and governmental institutions. A regular program of public forums will also be established, perhaps in partnership with

civic groups, both to provide helpful information and to help divergent interest groups find common ground.

The Faith-Life Album: A portfolio tool for religious learning community

Across the nation a number of schools are experimenting with the project-portfolio approach to organizing and assessing student work. Sally Loughlin and Walter Ziko (1991) note that in a school setting it is commonplace for students to rely upon teachers as experts in assessment. Students submit work they have completed and the teacher assigns a letter grade with little or no comment. But the teacher who employs this system of assessment does so without either modeling healthy application of judgment criteria or fostering self-assessment skills in learners. Loughlin and Ziko advocate a radically different approach whereby students take the major responsibility for planning, evaluation, and revision of their own work. They present their individual or group work to committees of peers and teachers for help in evaluation, receive detailed feedback using grading scales they have helped develop, and work to answer the central question to all learning: "How do I get better next time?" Students then use their portfolios to track the major questions they have asked and answered, the thinking or reflection they have done, the unique talents they bring to their work, ways they have revised their work, and ways they will continue to apply their knowledge and skills.

The benefit of the portfolio approach is that it gives a tangible working form to the community's expectation that all its members *will* learn. Students need not fear that they must get everything right before they present a project. They grow to appreciate that all of learning is a process of experiment and revision. As people in charge of their own learning projects they internalize the valuative process as an integral part of the subject matter.

This of course changes the way we look at the role of teachers. They are freer to move out of the "didactic" role of passing on a body of knowledge (filling deficits), to the "constructivist" role of being guides, coaches, facilitators, and resource providers, helping to direct and motivate students to meet challenges and construct their own meanings and knowledge (Collins 1991:29; Reigeluth 1987:7-8).

In our model congregational learning community we have considered the strong voices that are calling for getting "back to the basics" and for more attention to teaching the content of the faith tradition. Some believe that minimum standards for such knowledge should be enforced in congregations, if not for all learners, then at least for young people who go through our more structured indoctrination classes. However, rather than a set of such standards (Who would set them? How would we decide the level of sufficiency?), our model congregation has set only one "central expectation": that all members live loyal to the community of believers who are seeking together to interpret and obey God's will.

To do this the congregation uses the Faith-Life Album as a tool of organization and assessment of learning and growth. A catalog of suggested learning projects will be developed and maintained, with project designs and descriptions organized into three basic categories: "My Tradition," "My Journey Through Life," and "My Relationships." Projects in the tradition area stress experience with understanding and using the Bible, church doctrine, Christian ethics, church history, worship and liturgy, and information about denominational and congrega-

The portfolio approach gives a tangible form to the community's expectation that all its members *will* learn.

tional history and governance. The "journey" category encompasses learning projects that focus on life passages, sexuality, substance abuse issues, self-esteem, and peer pressure. The "relationships" category calls for people to learn by involvement and dialog with others in such subcategories as "Faith and Family," "Faith and School," "Faith and the Workplace," and "Faith and Community Service."

The congregation's learning ministry committee oversees the catalog in consultation with teaching teams which focus on different age groups. Anyone in the congregation can propose, design, or coordinate projects, with the approval and guidance of the teaching teams and learning ministry committee.

From cradle to grave each member of the congregation will have his or her own Faith Life Album to maintain. Each member is also assigned to a teaching-learning team composed of a lead teacher (this congregation employs four part-time lead teachers—one for each of four broad age groups), a volunteer teacher, and either a parent or guardian or a friend or spouse. They meet with this team at least one time a year during the summer months to review their Faith Life Album and to plan learning projects for the coming year.

In the album learners keep both product and reflection. They will assemble the things they have written and the art work they have produced for themselves and for sharing with others. They will include an account of involvement in individual and group projects, including questions and problems that arise, ways that their thoughts, faith, and life have changed shape, and ideas they will pursue in the future. We call this a faith-life "album" and not a "portfolio" because the emphasis is not on achievement and demonstration of the ability to put out products, but on growth in trust and experience in living faithful to God and to community. So the album will be a place where learners keep mementos of celebrations and times of joy and praise. They will keep letters and notes upon which their parents, friends, and mentors have written their hopes, dreams, affirmations and prayers for them. All together the album (which for the long-time member may grow to fill several volumes) will provide an artifact of one's journey of faith and life, rich in power to stimulate new reflections and learning.

The Faith-Life Album and the project concept should be useful tools for motivating learners for lifelong learning in the faith, emphasizing student control and responsibility for learning. Instead of setting learners on the task of meeting an arbitrary set of standards, it encourages them to grow in order to contribute their gifts for the good of the community. It further motivates them by providing a broad "audience" of others who understand them and support them on their journey through life.

Publications as learning tools

A vital learning community will encourage, empower, and enable lifelong learning. The faith-life album or portfolio concept ac-

complishes this by giving learners a framework for organizing their learning. Learning-process-publication accomplishes the same things by giving learners a purposeful activity through which to channel their efforts, audiences for their work, and a medium in which to practice their skills and

Our use of technology will be driven by our philosophy of education and not vice versa.

revise their thinking. A complex and vital learning community will employ a number of media for sharing or "publication" of work, including simple sharing in small groups, placement of art works or writing on bulletin boards, or performances on stage or in other public forums. But one backbone piece of any such system of sharing will be learning-focused publication.

Elliot Wigginton has been a pioneer in the area of publication for learning. Frustrated as a teacher of English in a Christian school in Georgia he recalled that the standout moments of learning that he had experienced as a youth were those in which he had an audience beyond the teacher and a purpose beyond making a grade. In October of 1966 he and his students elected to toss out the textbooks and learn language by interviewing their Appalachian neighbors and publishing a magazine of the folklore they gathered. They launched *Foxfire* magazine, an endeavor which subsequently expanded to include the publication of several nationwide best selling books and the establishment of a student-run radio station (Wigginton 1985). Language teachers across the nation are learning the power that publications have to motivate learners to work hard, to take more control of their learning, and to give them opportunity to hone their skills for revision (Riel 1989; Martin, D'Arcy, Newton and Parker 1976).

In our model congregation publications will provide a highly structured social milieu in which learners of all ages can develop a language for faith active in private and public life. Besides the normal Sunday bulletin and a monthly newsletter this congregation will publish two "faith development periodicals." The first will be called "Raw" and will be published monthly. Circulated for free only to members of the congregation, it will contain works-in-progress by learners of all ages. The second publication, "Traces," will publish more polished works, often, but not exclusively, the revised versions of items first appearing in "Raw." This latter periodical will be published three times a year and circulated both among congregation members and the wider public. The sense of learning community will be enhanced as authors and editors energetically seek feedback and publish interesting "letters to the editor" in the periodicals.

Both publications will include items about faith at work in the following categories: fiction and poetry (including songs and short drama), art and photography, opinion and public affairs (including political cartoons), critical reviews of literature and film, faith-life interviews, devotional works, and critical reflections on Bible, theology, and ministry. Articles may be submitted by individuals or by groups. Some may be submitted as products of formal learning projects of the congregation's learning ministry. All articles must pass the review of

the congregation's learning periodical editorial board which will be made up of adult "senior editors" who will be trained and highly skilled, and adult and high-school age apprentice editors. There will also be smaller editorial boards for each age group who will work with teachers to do preliminary editorial and selection work on items before they are sent to the periodical editorial board. Each editorial group, including those of the younger age groups, will contribute to the formation of their own rating scales (Loughlin and Ziko 1991). With the assistance of their teachers and more experienced editors they will then be able to build experience in improving the clarity and precision of their thinking and their use of the language of faith. Things editors will be encouraged to look for include an artist or author's ability to formulate ideas clearly, reflect faithfully on the theology of the denomination, develop a personal style and voice, and take "ownership" of the language of faith through imaginative and critical thinking.

Uses of technology to enhance learning ministry

One of the exciting growing edges in the field of education is the utilization of computers, video and telecommunications. Much experimentation and research has resulted in a body of work that can guide religious educators in uses of technology, but a note of caution should be made. Often in the past there have been those who have predicted that new technologies such as inexpensive book production, filmstrips, television and video recorders would revolutionize the way people teach, yet the basic social organization of the classroom has remained the same. Work is done either by an entire large classroom group or through individual seat work, and communication remains teacher dominated—the "didactic" rather than the "constructivist" model of teaching and learning. The cognitive model has remained untouched as well, with learning seen as mastery of small bits of information. Technology has thus *enabled* changes in the organization of learning, but has never independently changed it (Cohen 1988:231-41; Collins 1991:32). New computer technology is more flexible, affordable, and powerful than ever, when it is linked with telecommunications and digital video and audio applications, but those who seek to apply it must make clear decisions about the purposes of education and the social organization of teaching and learning before they invest in technology (Cuban 1986:101).

In our model congregation we have decided that technology should be used in ways that further efforts to organize as a learning community. Our use of technology will be driven by our philosophy of education and not vice versa.

Besides having several computers in the church office this congregation will have a desktop publishing office, computers for each of the four learning ministry departments, and a computer laboratory with a number of multi-media computer work stations. Each member of the congregation from grade seven through adult who wishes to use the computers will be given passwords, computer time privileges, and instructions in computer use. Individuals and project work groups will have their own directories of files forming a password protected computerized "workspace."

Computers will be used in our model parish to empower learners by giving them voices and audiences within a community of mutual respect. They can also be used as tools to enhance intergenerational and cooperative learning. By their use in congre-

gation publications and maintaining each learner's "Faith-Life Album" these technologies can serve the action-reflection model of learning. Computers can serve as learning centers open for a generous number of hours, and when learners can connect through local area networks and telecommunications (bulletin boards and electronic mail)[2] they can conceivably communicate with peers, teachers, and mentors at any distance at any time (Reigeluth 1987:5; Newman, Reese and Huggins 1992). Computer technology with multi-media capabilities and the computerized maintenance of learning plans enables teachers to provide individualized learning that matches with different learning styles (Hopkins 1991:29; Collins 1991:30; Loughlin & Ziko 1991:9-10). Computer software can even be used that will simulate different environments calling for the practice of collaboration skills, such as a church council meeting or a situation calling for conflict resolution (Newman 1990).

In conclusion—a little dreaming

One of the most pressing challenges of our age is to find ways local religious communities can strengthen their sense of identity and modes of mutual support while working to meet the challenge of service, ministry, and dialog in an ever more pluralistic cultural landscape.

The great goal of a learning community will be to bring learning out of the white-robed, antiseptic, and boring laboratory of the classroom and into the muddy, bloody, and exciting world where faith meets life. Excitement and motivation for learning will be a natural by-product when young and old of various backgrounds roll up their sleeves and work together to find out how God's-Word-of-old becomes God's Word for us today.

Imagine the fifth-graders and the teens of our model congregation, putting on a chancel drama and exchanging written and artistic reflections about what it means to pray "give us this day our daily bread" and "deliver us from evil." What if they use computer modems to share these reflections with an inner city youth group or with someone ministering in Mexico or West Palm Beach? How deep will be their learning if it is tested in action as they write letters to their government representatives or develop a phone-in hotline?

Learning community means breaking down some of the walls we have erected by mistaking schooling for education. Let people meet, mix it up, work, question, take control. Challenge them to put thoughts and faith to work. Do it and it will not be easy to predict what will be learned, but that learning will be deep, broad, and powerful is certain.

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[2] Networks are proliferating. Lutherlink is a computer network of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (call 1-800-638-3522), and InterNIC Information Services (1-800-444-4345) provides free information on how to link with a growing number of links to the huge Internet network *of* networks. A few areas of the nation have "freenets" with free dial-up of library services with electronic mail and "gateways" to Internet.

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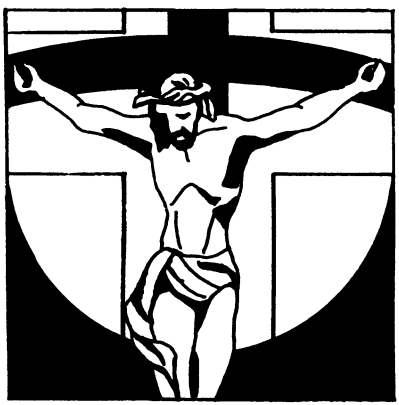
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Theology of the Cross

The Doctrine of Justification and the Problem of Human Suffering

Robert A. D. Clancy
West Paterson, New Jersey



Justification and suffering: the question

Justification, the declaration of a sinner's righteousness before God, is an act that occurs *extra nos*, outside of a person who contributes nothing to that event except sin to be forgiven. Saint Paul writes, "By grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God—not because of works lest anyone should boast" (Eph 2:8-9). It was by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that our justification was achieved (Rom 4:24 ff.). It is solely by the goodness of God that this sacrifice of his Son on the cross is reckoned to us for righteousness (2 Cor 5:21) as a free gift of God's grace (Rom 3:24). Even faith, by which we receive this gift, is a work of the third member of the Trinity (1 Cor 2:12). The doctrine of justification, then, directs us away from ourselves and solely to the cross of Christ. [Cf. Augsburg Confession IV and Apology IV.]

On the other hand, perhaps no situation is so anthropocentric, even egocentric, as that of suffering, for the experience of the sufferer tends to become normative for reality (Crenshaw 116). Luther notes that everyone needs to learn the Christian art "of looking to the Word and looking away from all the trouble and suffering that lies heavy upon us and weighs us down." Unfortunately, "the flesh is utterly incapable of this art; it sees no farther than the present suffering" (1530a: 203; cf. Ap IV 170). This fact causes problems even for believers. In times of affliction, "individuals cry out for God because they remember; that memory serves both to sustain faith and to throw it into question" (Crenshaw 118). "Why is God doing this to me?" casts doubt upon the nature of God and his relationship with the

believer. It seeks to probe the cause of suffering, and asks God to justify himself. Such a quest almost always brings the assurance of justification into question: How can the same God who afflicts me also be the one who saves me? If God is a loving Father who cares for me, where is he when I cry to him from the despair of my depression? The present experience of God's wrath—or, worse, of God's absence—obscures God's grace. How can these two experiences of God be reconciled?

The problem of theodicy

> Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind? (John 9:2)

Does God cause suffering? "No," said the middle-aged man, almost crippled with arthritis. He still felt the loss of his wife some years before, when she died of cancer. "God allows it to happen; but if I thought that he was the one who caused it, I don't know how I could handle it." For him, to assert that God causes suffering is to cast doubt upon the loving God who had saved him and supported him through his many afflictions.

Does God cause suffering? "Of course," said the pastor, a veteran of many years in the parish, of many hospital calls and funerals. "Everything comes from the hand of God. Only if it comes from the hand of a loving God can there be any comfort in suffering." For him, to deny God as the author of affliction is to cast doubt upon the divine omnipotence. But because he is a caring God, he will not bring into the life of his people anything that is not ultimately good.

The first response to this question (by the middle-aged man) locates the cause of suffering outside of God. It is human sinfulness (Gen 3:17; Deut 27-30) or the devil's malice (Job 1-2; Lk 13:16; cf. LC III, 65) that brings suffering into our lives. Luther, too, asserts this. "Even though God does not want to assault and torment us, the devil does" (1530a: 206). God gives permission for such affliction, but is not the cause. When pressed, this argument can lead to a kind of dualism which forgets that God is the one who "subjected [creation] to futility" (Rom 8:20; Gen 3:17 ff.), who destroyed the Egyptians in the Sea of Reeds (Ex 14-15), who stands ultimately in control of all creation—even Satan.

The second response (by the pastor) locates the cause of suffering in God and justifies it by asserting that "in the sight of God, many aspects of life which we consider repugnant, unfair and unwarranted... combine to form a beautiful harmony which is ultimately very good" (Willimon 43). This is "the Augustinian notion that evil is a part of the larger picture of overall good." Augustine places the *blame* for suffering on human sinfulness, but the *cause* in God's will. According to Augustine, "All human beings deserve everlasting punishment, but God's sovereign grace elects some for eternal felicity" (Schilling 129). But here we encounter the terror of predestination: "How do I know if God has chosen to bring about an end to my affliction?" Such questions raise doubt about God's goodness, and may only serve to intensify the problem (Schilling 145).

A third alternative is the way of Irenaeus, who probed not the cause of suffering but the reason for it. Suffering, to him, is a means by which God develops people for his purpose. (See below, pp. 271-72.) "Irenaeus believes that only by experiencing the opposition of good and evil can we learn to cherish the one and avoid the other" (Schilling 149). But still, the goodness of God is called into question. To teach that "the justification for whatever evil we en-

We dare not forget that we have a God, a Savior, who knows what it is to suffer.

dure is not in the quantity or quality of our trials and tribulations in the present, but the greatness of the good toward which these present tribulations lead in the future" (Willimon 54) produces a Machiavellian God, who permits suffering because "the end justifies the means." Both Augustine and Irenaeus end up calling what we experience as bad "good," and so each earns the title "theologian of glory" (Luther 1518, #21). Such "'theologians of glory'... expect God to be experienced as present throughout his creation, and thus find themselves seriously embarrassed by those parts of his creation in which he appears to be conspicuously absent" (McGrath 157). These absences must be explained away.

To some extent, any attempt to probe the causality of suffering ends up seeking "to justify the ways of God to men" (Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 1:26). The fact is, we do not have a clear answer to the question, "Does God cause suffering?" because *he has never given us one!* In Job, where this question is bandied about for some 37 chapters, the only answer God gives may be summarized as "I'm God. You're not. Shut up." In Christ, the answer we are ultimately given is that God, in the person of Jesus, gets up there on the cross and hangs there with the rest of us in pain and hurt and rejection (Capon *passim*).

Crenshaw concludes that "the single response to the problem of theodicy is *deus absconditus*, a hidden God" (114). When we seek to find the heart of the hidden God, we end up with attempts to justify ourselves on the one hand ("I don't deserve to suffer like this") and the fatalistic fear of an arbitrary God of predestination on the other. "Here there be dragons"; here, one finds no comfort in affliction, no assurance of salvation. This is why "Luther urges people to turn their eyes away from the *deus absconditus*, the hidden God who elects and damns, and focus them on the *deus revelatus*, the revealed God who has shown a merciful face in Jesus Christ" (Steinmetz 26).

We have been asking the wrong question.

The theology of the cross: the cross of Christ

> He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him? (Rom 8:32)

"The attempt to offer a theodicy threatens to become blasphemous unless it takes into account the divine pathos" (Crenshaw 115). We cannot discuss the question of God and human suffering until we have confronted the greatest mystery of God's revelation: that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself" (2 Cor 5:19), and that he did this through the scandal of the cross.

God never seemed so absent as on that first Good Friday: his Son given up to suffering and death, the cry of dereliction, the darkness. But he seemed absent only because humanity failed to look for him where he was to be found: hanging on the cross (McGrath 161). We dare not forget that we have a God, a Savior, who knows what it is to suffer; indeed, according to Capon, it is ultimately the only answer one

We must remember that, though sin may produce suffering, suffering is not an invariable indicator of sin.

gets from God on the question of theodicy (14). The suffering of Christ has not only saved us from our sins; it has also given us the comfort of knowing that God has an intimate understanding of our affliction. As McGrath writes:

> The darker and inevitable moments of life, culminating in pain, the knowledge of death and dying, are not areas of life from which God has been excluded, but areas in which he has deliberately included himself. God himself chose this way—the way of dereliction and death—to redeem us from these, our last enemies.... The powerful image of a God who knows what human suffering and pain are like, who understands at first hand what it is like to be weak, frail and mortal, is authorised by the cross of Jesus Christ. (158)

"We have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses" (Heb 4:15; cf. 2:14-18). The author of Hebrews rejoices in this "passionate" savior: "Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (4:16). "The biblical testimony to a God who suffers... is eloquent indeed" (Crenshaw 115).

The cross of Christ, then provides a double confidence: confidence that we have been saved from eternal affliction, as "the suffering of Christ has become so mighty and strong that it fills heaven and earth and breaks the power and might of the devil and hell, of death and sin" (Luther 1530a: 200); and confidence to face our present afflictions with the assurance that he will see us through, for he has overcome them all (Jn 16:33; Rom 8:31 ff.). Thus Luther concludes that "the touch of Christ sanctifies all the sufferings and sorrows of those who believe in him" (1530b:184).

The theology of the cross: suffering as law

> For the Lord disciplines those whom he loves, and chastises every child whom he receives. (Heb 12:6)

The question before us, then, is, "What is the purpose of suffering in the light of Christ's cross?"

There can be no doubt about how suffering is usually perceived: as the absence of a loving God. Suffering is seen as God's law (his "alien work"—Isa 28:21) made real and active. And affliction is a very effective means by which the law of God lays us low. Suffering reminds us all too well of who we are and what we by nature deserve. To the one who, in the face of affliction, arrogantly asks, "Why me?" God declares, "You are dust, and to dust you shall return; you were born in sin and conceived with iniquity, and the wages of sin is death" (Gen 3:19; Ps 51:5; Rom 6:23; Ezek 18:25).

But we must take care to steer a careful path between Scylla and Charybdis. First, we must remember that "the judgment that sin produces suffering cannot be logically converted" (Schilling 127); in other words,

though sin may produce suffering, suffering is not an invariable indicator of sin. We must avoid the mistake of the disciples, who saw blindness as a result of specific sin (Jn 9:2), or those who see AIDS as God's judgment on those who have a homosexual or promiscuous lifestyle (Hall 76). Affliction is indeed God's word of law, his judgment on sin (cf. Luther, "Whether One May Flee from a Deadly Plague," 127), God's means of putting to death again the old Adam in us; but we must remember that "the sins of the world" were laid on the Lamb of God and punished on the altar, the cross, on which he died, once and for all (Jn 1:29; Heb 9:26). God is not, by way of affliction, punishing a person's sins (even though a given affliction may come about through a given sinful behavior).

Second, we must avoid the impression that our suffering merits or earns salvation (Luther 1530a:198 ff.). This would be to deny the doctrine of justification by grace alone, and to rob Christ of his glory.

Just as the law not only convicts of sin but seeks to guide the redeemed into the sanctified life (FC VI, "The Third Function of the Law"), so also afflictions serve this purpose (Luther 1530a: 207). Thus, the sacred writers speak about affliction as providing discipline for the believer (Heb 12:6; 2 Cor 12:9; 1 Pet 1:6 ff.). It is to this purpose of suffering that we are to direct believers:

> When in the midst of troubles terrified consciences see only God's punishment and wrath, they should not feel that God has rejected them but they should be taught that troubles have other and more important purposes, that God is doing his alien work [law] in order to do his proper work [gospel].
>
> —Ap XII, 158

Suffering may indeed be law, but it prepares the way for the gospel.

The theology of the cross: suffering as gospel

> We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us. (Rom 5:3-5)

By his suffering, Christ has "not only saved us from the devil, death and sin," but has given us his suffering as "an example, which we are to follow in our suffering" (Luther 1530a:198). His suffering has not only redeemed *us*; it has redeemed our suffering as well.

> Favoured with the vantage point of the resurrection of the one who was crucified, the believer is enabled to contemplate failure, suffering and death without either accepting them fatalistically or being reduced to despair by their prospect. God has walked this way before us, exposing the pretensions of experiences to finality, and allowing us to see beyond experience to the reality lying behind it (McGrath 159).

This is the radical effect of the cross on the Christian life. Because Jesus Christ has suffered, died, and been raised from the dead, we have been restored to a right relationship with God. We need no longer face our afflictions as if they were God's judgment on our life; instead, we receive them as a means by which God accomplishes a greater purpose, in which his glory is revealed.

That purpose is expressed in the promises which God has attached to the suffering of believers. He promises that in our weakness, his strength is "made perfect" (2 Cor 12:9), and that he will not let our affliction be more than we can, with his help, bear (1 Cor 10:13). He has assured us that he will bring good out of our sufferings (Rom 8:28;

5:3 ff.), and that through faith in the time of trial we will "obtain the salvation of our souls" (1 Pet 1:9). Not that our suffering and affliction are, in themselves, good, but God promises to make them work for good in our lives. Luther extolled these promises: "Every Christian should submit himself to this suffering that he is sure that it will work for his good and that Christ, for his Word's sake, will not only help us to bear this suffering, but also turn and transform it to our advantage" (1530a: 200).

The gospel purpose of suffering is likewise revealed in the confession that "if we have died with [Christ], we shall also live with him; if we endure, we shall also reign with him" (2 Tim 2:11 ff.), and in the assurance that "we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we might also be glorified with him" (Rom 8:16 ff.). By our suffering, by our taking up our cross and following Christ (Mt 16:24), God "wants to make us conformed to the image of his dear Son, Christ, so that we may become like him here in suffering and there in that life to come in honor and glory" (Luther 1530a: 206). This gospel purpose made Paul bold to confess: "Henceforth, let no one trouble me . . . for I bear in my body the marks of Jesus" (Gal 6:14,17). May it inspire that same confidence in our day.

Practical implications

When confronted by affliction and suffering, a Christian may experience doubts about her relationship with God. At such times, the assurance that through baptism into Christ's atoning suffering and death on the cross she has been put right with God must be placed before her in all its clarity and power. Luther's great "Nevertheless, I am baptized" must be a Christian's ultimate response to affliction. To seek to justify God's actions by probing into the *cause* of suffering only yields doubts and fear as one stares into the dizzying depths of the *deus absconditus*. The theology of the cross must remain central. But that, too, must be properly presented, for

> the theology of the cross is calloused and perverted when it is applied to the suffering of others, when we say, in effect, 'suffer, suffer, this is what Christ wants for you. Rejoice, your suffering puts you close to Jesus.' The theology of the cross can lead to complacency and resignation when not wedded with compassion (Willimon 171).

The theology of the cross always teaches us to suffer *with* the Christ who suffered *for* us. Nor is it helpful simply to point to the cross of Christ, for without the grace of God which declares this suffering to be for us, it remains a proclamation of the wrath of God upon sin (FC Ep V, 9). But when the theology of the cross, which assures us of our justification before God for the sake of him who suffered on the tree, is truly proclaimed to one who is afflicted, then suffering may be turned from a burden into a gift from a loving God.

> A theologian of the cross (that is, someone who speaks of the crucified and hidden God) teaches that suffering, the cross and death are the most precious treasures of all, and the most sacred relics which the Lord of this theology has himself consecrated and blessed, not just by the touch of his most holy flesh, but also by the embrace of his most holy and divine will. And he has left these relics here to be kissed, sought after, and embraced. How fortunate and blessed is anyone who is considered by God to be worthy that these treasures of Christ should be given to him! (Luther, quoted in McGrath 164).

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The Exalted Humanity of the Ascended Christ: Food for the One World

Todd Murken
First English Lutheran Church
Oshkosh, Wisconsin

Winner of the 1993
Arthur Carl Piepkorn Competition

The Eucharist's good news for the world

In his article "One Eucharist for the One World," Arthur Carl Piepkorn reports some good news. In spite of prevalent malice and evil, and despite our justifiable fears, yet

> this is our Father's world, which He made through and for His Son. The same Word through whom He made the universe, sitting not only as God but also as a human being at the right hand of the divine power (to use the Biblical metaphor), is holding it together and is making ultimate sense of its terrifying absurdities.[1]

Piepkorn intends the heart of this happy message to be "also as a human being." That is the twist, the really novel aspect. That glorified Person, God's Prime Minister, is one of us, a member of the human family. Not was, but is! Christ Jesus' resurrection, ascension, and session were not the discarding of his humanity, received from the Virgin Mary, but its glorification. Of course, as the Trinity's second person he has had from eternity glory aplenty. But more recently, as the son of Mary, also his humanity is exalted to the right hand of power. And this bold theology insinuates that we can parlay our blood-relationship to the Prime Minister into advantage for ourselves. Actually, it is yet bolder, brazenly believing that he will be flattered when we thus put such faith in our connections to him.

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[1] Arthur Carl Piepkorn, "The One Eucharist for the One World," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 43 (February 1972): 101.

Three questions

And how is this good news related to Piepkorn's announced theme, "One Eucharist for the One World"? This is the first of three interrelated questions to be addressed.

That the exalted humanity of Christ has much to do with the Eucharist Piepkorn knew already from the Lutheran confessions. Article 7 of the Formula of Concord confesses the astonishing presence of the human body and blood of Christ in Eucharist. Then, in support of that confession, comes Article 8, which defends the Christology intrinsic to that high view of the Lord's Supper. Piepkorn knew this connection between Christ's exaltation and his Holy Supper found in the Formula of Concord, since his good news is like that in Article 8, which urges that Christians should

> rejoice constantly that our flesh and blood have in Christ been made to sit so high at the right hand of the majesty and almighty power of God. In this way they will be certain to find abiding comfort in all adversities and will be well protected against pernicious errors. (Solid Declaration 8:96)

Now, referring, via Piepkorn, back to the Formula of Concord opens a second (though logically prior) question: How can the doctrine about Christ's person (Article 8) vouch for Christ's promise to be bodily present in the Eucharist (Article 7)?

Actually, a third question has already engaged us, since it is basic to the other two. The Concordists confessed the bodily presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper only because it was in dispute. This dispute endures. Piepkorn recognized that this view of the Sacrament of the Altar, theirs and his, "is not everywhere in good repute.... Other formulations stress the presence of Christ (rather than of His body and blood)." The validity of such a formulation he gladly concedes "as long as it does not intend to evade or deny the fact of the presence of the incarnate Christ."[2]

It is worth noting that the state of affairs is more distressing than Piepkorn's gentlemanly reference to "formulations" sounds. For, while the Eucharist is a means of Christian unity (Piepkorn rightly says, "The Christ who gives us His body and His blood in the Holy Eucharist... makes us all one body with Him"[3]), it does not now make that unity. Why not? Because our different formulations are secondary reflections upon differing practices, strictly speaking, upon different suppers. Some Christians principally offer a sacrifice to God. Others have exclusively a material sign of a spiritual "eating." Others eat and drink Christ's body and blood to receive forgiveness. Three different suppers cannot unite us.

To return to the differing formulations of the sacrament, they are inseparable from their various Christologies. One example, perhaps the one Piepkorn meant, since it would ruin his good news, claims that since his ascension Christ is always with us in regards to his majesty but is no longer with us bodily.[4] This distressing situation (that Christ cannot unite his people by means of his Eucharist until the whole church does the same Eucharist, but this doing-the-same is hindered by christological differences) hatches the third question, at least for catholic theologians like Piepkorn and the Concordists: what is the true, apostolic and catholic doctrine of the person of Christ?

There are, then, three closely entwined questions. (1) Piepkorn's: How does the

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[2] Piepkorn, "The One Eucharist," 95.

[3] Piepkorn, "The One Eucharist," 99.

[4] Jean Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 580. Calvin thus interprets the conflict between Mt 28:20 and 26:11.



exaltation of the human Christ make the Eucharist "for the world"? (2) The background question to #1: How does the doctrine about Christ vouch for Christ's promise of his bodily presence in the Eucharist? And (3) the Concordists question: How can the case for #2 be made so ecumenically compelling as to create catholic agreement? We must begin with the last question, for it is not only foundational for the others, but defines their terms.

The Formula of Concord, claimed its writers, was not one idiosyncratic slant on the Christian faith, but the one faith that belongs to all Christians, present and past. (Piepkorn believed them: "All the Symbols stand in a continuous chain of Catholic witness."[5]) For this reason, the Concordists used primarily the early ecumenical councils[6] to defend their Christology (and thereby, their eucharistic teaching). One commentator observed, "This controversy over the real presence was responsible for the most detailed western church preoccupation with the intricacies of Christology since the early church."[7] Indeed, it is just this exacting theological work that gives the Concordists' testimony its compelling ecumenical credentials, which Piepkorn appreciated.

The Formula of Concord: real presence and orthodox Christology

Luther's dispute with Zwingli, Oecolampadius, and others over Christ's bodily presence in the Lord's Supper continued beyond the 1529 Marburg Colloquy. And after the principals' deaths the dispute entered the Lutheran camp itself (through the "Cryptocalvinists") and was therefore addressed in the Formula of Concord. Article 8 explains how this sacramentological dispute led to a controversy concerning the person of Christ:

> For when Doctor Luther maintained with solid arguments the true, essential presence of the body and blood of Jesus Christ in the Lord's Supper on the basis of the words of institution, the Zwinglians countered by saying that the body of Christ could not be a true and genuine human body if it were present at the same time in heaven and in the Holy Supper. (SD 8:2)

Thus the project of Article 8 is to demonstrate how Christ's human body can be simultaneously present in more than one place while remaining genuinely human.

Now, to be true and catholic, any christological question must be referred to the Council of Chalcedon, which defined

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[5] Arthur Carl Piepkorn, "Suggested Principles for a Hermeneutics of the Lutheran Symbols," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 29 (January 1958), 5.

[6] Nicea (325), Constantinople (381), Ephesus (431), Chalcedon (451).

[7] William Rusch, "Lutheran Teaching on Christology and Its Implications for Lutheran-Orthodox Relations," in *Christ in East and West*, ed. Paul Fries and Tiran Nersoyan (Macon, GA: Mercer, 1987), 137.

four ways in which the two natures of the one person Jesus Christ are known:

> without being commingled (1), without being changed (2), without being taken apart (3), without being segregated (4), the difference of the natures being in no wise abolished on account of the union, but the peculiarity of each nature being rather preserved.

In these terms the Lutherans were charged with violating the first and second items by teaching that Christ's human nature has been absorbed by the divine, since only God, and not a real human body, can be both in heaven and in the Supper. The defense in Article 8 has two stages.

The first stage (SD 8:14-30) uses the third and fourth terms from the Chalcedonian definition to show that since Christ's two natures must not be said to be divided or segregated, they must have a connection. (The second stage will describe this connection.) This means that his divinity and humanity are not like two boards glued together which have nothing in common. This was the error of Nestorius (SD 8:15), who said that only Christ's divinity raised the dead and calmed the storm, only his human nature was born of the Virgin, suffered, and died. The Council of Ephesus said this would make two persons, two Christs. Nestorius did not retract and the council deposed and excommunicated him.

These decrees of Ephesus support the Concordists' point that the two natures must have communion with each other. Not that the natures are unified (made one nature) but united; not blended into one essence (a demi-god) but into one person (SD 8:17). The Fathers, both before and after the Council of Chalcedon, used the term "mixture" in this good sense. The Formula of Concord uses the same illustrations used at Ephesus: the two natures are combined like soul and body, or like fire and iron (SD 8:18). In neither union is one part lost or absorbed or become indistinguishable, yet each union's two parts are combined in a genuine union, which is not a matter of words only. And so it is also in Christ.

The Formula of Concord cites three arguments used by the Ephesus council[8] (two of them based on that product of preceding councils, the Nicene Creed) to show why the genuine communion of the two natures must be confessed. First, the Nicene Creed says that the Son of God suffered and died. Humanity, but not divinity, can do this. Since we cannot say that the human nature died in isolation, then the divine Son suffered through the human nature. This requires some communion between the two natures (SD 8:20). Second, the Creed includes Christ's human nature in his resurrection, ascension, session, and return in glory. Of these the human nature is incapable by itself. Therefore, again, the two natures must be in communion (SD 8:23). Third, a soteriological point: when Christ died, he died in such a way that by his death he conquered sin, death, the devil, hell, and eternal damnation (SD 8:25). The human nature could not have accomplished this if it had not been personally united with the divine nature and had communion with it. So the cooperation of the divine and human is proved once again.

This first stage of FC 8's argument, now having shown the doctrine of the communion of the natures to be utterly true and ecumenical, continues by claiming that, because of the communion of natures, Christ's *humanity* has its apotheosis far

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[8] Council of Ephesus, *Canons in The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, ed. Henry R. Percival, vol. 14 of *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, second series, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 198, 204.

above all creatures, earthly and heavenly alike. This occurs after the resurrection, when he laid aside forever the form of the servant. (This is not laying aside the human nature, for his—and our—humanity he retains to all eternity.) Being exalted, he now has full possession and use of divine majesty *also according to his human nature.* He does not shed his humanity to become glorious; his divine majesty glorifies his humanity (the good news with which this article began). Actually, he had had that majesty even in his mother's womb, but "laid it aside" (Phil 2:7) or hid it except when he wanted to use it (Luther, SD 8:26). But now, ascended into heaven, to carry out his reign he is *everywhere* present not only as God but also as human (SD 8:27). Since that is so, then also "because of this communicated power he can be and is truly present with his body and blood in the Holy Supper according to the words of his covenant, to which he has directed us through his Word" (SD 8:29).

In answer to Zwingli's question, if Christ's humanity is capable of all this and his humanity is genuine, why cannot all humans do so? The Formula replies:

> No other human being can do this, since no human being is united in this manner with the divine nature and installed in the exercise of the divine, omnipotent majesty and power through and in the personal union of both natures in Christ, the way Jesus, the son of Mary, is. (SD 8:29)

The first stage of the Concordists' argument has established that the personal union includes communion of natures; now the second stage (SD 8:31-66) will describe this communion of natures itself by the famous doctrine *communicatio idiomatum* (SD 8:31). This refers to the sharing or communication between the two natures of the respective properties of each. An apt illustration of this communication comes from the fifth century debate (it is so pertinent to the case that it will be considered in detail below). A property or peculiarity (*idioma*) of the divine Word is to give life. Human flesh does not have this property. Yet the human flesh of Christ does have that property, gaining it from its communion with the divine nature. So Christ's flesh is, as John 6 says, vivifying. *But*—and this distinction is the key to the defense—this life-giving property always belongs only to the divine nature and never becomes the intrinsic property of the human nature, as if his flesh would be vivifying on its own, apart from its communion with the divine nature in the *unio personalis.*

This *communicatio idiomatum* is unfolded in detail in Article 8, a section written by Martin Chemnitz, who drew upon his own work *De duabus naturis in Christo.* There he elaborated three distinct ways in which this *communicatio idiomatum* is meant, that is, three genera (kinds) of communication of properties. Only the third *genus* is at issue in Article 8 and in this present essay, but for clarity's sake (SD 8:35) the other two shall first be sketched.

The first of the three *genera* of the *communicatio idiomatum* is called (unfortunately) *genus idiomaticum.* This sense is essentially a matter of predication, wherein the properties and experiences of either nature are both ascribed to the one person Jesus Christ (SD 8:38).[9] An example of Luther's used by the Formula of Concord will clarify.

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[9] On this point the Formula of Concord does not explicitly cite the decrees of the councils. But that they are in mind is clear in Martin Chemnitz, *The Two Natures in Christ,* trans. J. A. O. Preus (St. Louis: Concordia, 1971), 173-4.

He does not shed his humanity to become glorious; his divine majesty glorifies his humanity.

> Although, so to speak, the one part (namely, the deity) does not suffer, nevertheless the person who is true God suffers in the other part (namely, in the humanity). For the Son of God truly is crucified for us—that is, this person who is God, for that is what he is—this person, I say, is crucified according to the humanity. (SD 8:42)

But other things predicated to the person of Christ actually involve both of his natures. Most important of these are the works which Christ accomplishes as Savior, for which the cooperation of both natures was required. This is the second way the natures share their properties, called the *genus apotelesmaticum* (of effects or results).[10]

The third, *genus maiestaticum* (of majesty), is the one at issue in the doctrine of the Lord's Supper: "do the natures in the personal union have nothing else and nothing more than their own natural and essential properties?" (SD 8:48). The Formula answers, in a word, They do! When it was glorified and exalted the human nature of Christ received in addition to its own properties, because it is personally united with the divine nature, "special, high, great, supernatural, unsearchable, ineffable, heavenly prerogatives and privileges in majesty, glory, power and might" (SD 8:51). Such properties are inherently divine; they have belonged to the divine nature eternally. But now, because and only because of the personal union, these majestic properties have also been bestowed on Christ's human nature. The many biblical passages which say Christ received authority, power, and glory are interpreted (according to the "unanimous, accepted rule of the entire ancient orthodox church," SD 8:57) to mean he has received such as a human, since as God he already had them from eternity.

Here comes into play, as previously mentioned, the parade example of a conciliar confession supporting the Concordists' case. Nestorius had denied that the flesh of Christ could by its own nature give life because the Spirit gives life but the flesh profits nothing.[11] St. Cyril rebutted: but in the Eucharist we receive the body and blood of the Word which gives all things life; of course common flesh cannot give life, but this is the Word's very own flesh; therefore we understand it as life-giving; Nestorius rashly dissolves the power of this mystery,[12] that is, he denies the Word working with his flesh. An anathema, composed by Cyril and canonized (declared a rule of faith) at Chalcedon (and perhaps already at Ephe-

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[10] Again, Chemnitz in *De duabus naturis*, but not in the Formula's text, shows the catholic legitimacy of this genus by citing the councils, in this case Pope Leo's Tome, which was canonized (declared a rule of faith) at Chalcedon. Leo's Tome says, "In order to pay the debt of our condition, the inviolable nature was united to the passible, so that as the appropriate remedy for our ills, one and the same 'Mediator between God and man, the man Jesus Christ' might from one element be capable of dying and also from the other be incapable." Percival, 255.

[11] Percival, 217.

[12] Percival, 217.

sus[13]) reads, "whoever shall not confess... that that flesh giveth life because it is that of the Word who giveth life to all, let him be anathema."[14] This is frequently cited[15] by the Concordists for it declares not only the communion of natures, and specifically the controverted *genus maiestaticum*, but also the bodily presence of Christ in the Supper!

This is how the Concordists now summarize their point:

> There is and remains in Christ only a single divine omnipotence, power, majesty, and glory which is the property of the divine nature alone. But it shines forth and manifests itself fully, though always spontaneously, in, with, and through the assumed exalted human nature of Christ. Just as in glowing iron there are not two powers of illumination and combustion... but since the fire is united with the iron, it demonstrates and manifests its power... in such a way that on account and through this union the glowing iron has the power of illumination and combustion without any transformation of the natural properties of either the fire or the iron. (SD 8:66)

This demonstration allows them to defend Christ's promise to be bodily present in the Supper, without rendering his human nature ungenuine, because this ability does not belong essentially to his human nature, but his divine majesty operates through his human nature.

Christ's glorified humanity in the Eucharist

The Concordists showed that human flesh and blood is now so exalted that in union with the eternal Word it enjoys and exercises magnificent saving power. We can now turn to Piepkorn's question, How does this exalted humanity make the Eucharist for the world?

Piepkorn adopts the thought with which Article 8 closes when he says "also as a human being" the Word sits at the right hand of divine power.[16] We might say that, since the cosmos was made through the Word, and exists in and for him who is our elder human brother, then the cosmos is practically our family estate, currently managed by our senior Sibling on our Parent's behalf. And it is precisely his flesh and blood which is offered us in the Eucharist. Human flesh, but not dead flesh; not cannibalistically do we eat. Far from dead, this flesh, which is our sustenance, is not even mortal, but has already put on immortality and, further, enjoys divine glory and saving power. Piepkorn expresses the relation between us and the universe this way: "In Him and through Him and to Him who gives us His body and blood in the Eucharist this vast universe has its being and its meaning."[17]

Good news. Yet, "if the Eucharist is truly to be for the one world, this stress on His human, bodily presence in it is vital."[18] Why so? Three reasons make his for-us-ness inseparable from his bodiliness. From

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[13] Frances M. Young, *From Nicea to Chalcedon* (Southampton: SCM Press, 1983), 240, and Percival, 199.

[14] Percival, 217.

[15] Twice each in Article 8 (8:59,76) and in the unofficial appendix to the Formula of Concord, the "Catalog of Testimonies," *Concordia Triglotta*, 1129, 1137. The Catalog of Testimonies is an exhaustive catena of scriptural, conciliar, and patristic citations confirming the majesty of Christ's human nature.

[16] The point not to be missed is that a doctrine saying Christ cannot be in the Eucharist also means that the Lord Christ is present only as God, not also with his human nature.

[17] Piepkorn, "The One Eucharist," 100.

[18] Piepkorn, 96.

the virgin's womb to Joseph's tomb the saving story is a human biography with a body. Bodily he came for our sake: his flesh is for this world. Second, his flesh is now raised and glorified, victorious and potent. This continuing bodiliness is an "abiding comfort." Third, his flesh and blood are genuinely "vital," give us life, when they are given for our consumption in the Supper of the Lord. This triple bodiliness, incarnate, glorified, and distributed to us, which is present only in the Eucharist, is what Piepkorn believes makes it such good news.

Where we come in

Piepkorn describes another way in which the Eucharist is for the world, still using these same connections. The Eucharist is for the world also through us. Because Jesus Christ is the model of all people, nothing human is alien to him. And, "because we eat the body and drink the blood of this cosmic Christ, we are bound to Him in His concerns." So, not only by nature but also because of Christ "there is no achievement of the human spirit that is not our triumph, and there is no disaster that involves human beings that is not our grief."[19] For this reason Piepkorn exhorts all communicants, according to their vocation and resources, conscientiously to seek to redeem the areas of their influence for the Christ who manifested himself as the agent and protector of health, peace, justice, decency, integrity, and all that is good in Creation. We do so "because He whose body we eat and whose blood we drink and whose slaves we are has a proprietary interest in these things."[20] The Eucharist is for the world because it does not take us from the bodily world. For it is the Incarnate One's body and blood, in whom nothing less nor more than exactly our humanity is exalted and then physically given to our bodies not to repudiate them but to nourish them for eternity and for service.

The Formula of Concord demonstrates that the promise of Christ to give us his body and blood need not be doubted, since the conclusions of the ancient, ecumenical councils thoroughly support the teaching of his vivifying physical presence in the Sacrament of the Altar. Piepkorn shows how this ecumenically solid doctrine enables the church to affirm that our whole threatened universe hangs together in Christ[21] and how the power of this very bodily Eucharist works through us for the world.

Indications for practice today

This conscientiously established Christology from the Formula of Concord, as used by Arthur Carl Piepkorn, has several indications for pastoral practice today.

1. The Lord's Supper is a kind of evangelism. This is *not* in the sense that unbelievers should be given the Eucharist. Piepkorn explicitly and rightly excludes this because such is not the purpose that the Supper has been given by its Founder. But the Lord's Supper does announce the gospel. For it is the human body of Christ, which was conceived and borne, crucified, then exalted and glorified, that now, by the divine power with which it glows, is distributed to us.

Further, this history indicates how very high God means to lift us up. Undeniably, Jesus' career is uniquely his, not ours, and we will never be a person of God as he is. Yet because his human biography is for

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[19] Piepkorn, 101.
[20] Piepkorn, 102.
[21] Piepkorn, 100.

humanity, his glorification will not leave us behind. 1 John 3:2 and 1 Cor 15:42-49 testify to the embarrassingly grand plan God has in store for us. In this way, the Lord's Supper puts quite a shine on salvation; it is gospel with panache. (The outright glory we are to receive through Christ could be included into preaching or the Eucharistic Prayer. Could it also be done in the Supper, non-verbally? It could also be rendered in a visual medium.)

2. Understanding that the Lord's Supper includes so grand a future for the bodily humans who receive it will affect how we preach the Holy Trinity's work. That Christ's exaltation as a human indicates an "abiding comfort" for all his flesh-and-blood family (as the Formula and Piepkorn notice) is one more reason to stress that the Trinity's work is aimed at the retrieval of all creation. (This is *not* saying that all humans willy-nilly benefit from the Trinity's saving work, an inattentive universalism that overlooks the scriptures' view of faith as *sine qua non*. It only says that the Trinity aims to retrieve all.) For the Lord's Supper, although it benefits only faithful communicants and harms the faithless, is nonetheless for all humanity both in the good news it carries and in that God wills all people to become faithful communicants.

Therefore a Lord's Supper, like the Trinity's whole redemptive project, ought not be treated or described by pastors as a collection of basically individual sacramental events. Of course, the personal particularity "for you" (singular) is to be stressed for all its evangelical power. But the Supper is still "for you" (plural) first. In the end, individuation is necessary to the Trinity's work; our God aims at all, receiving one at a time.

3. The majesty that flesh-and-blood humanity has acquired in Jesus the Christ is a protection against two extreme anthropologies, which can infiltrate our teaching. The misanthropy that believes being human is at its base a bad existence is refuted by the apotheosis of the second Adam (who, though second, is still an Adam.)

Today, however, it is the other extreme which pesters us: we humans think humans are just terrific and blame all our contretemps on misunderstanding or bad luck. The exaltation of Christ's humanity can protect us also from this "pernicious error" since it indicates that humanity, while having a capacity for glory, is not yet glorious, cannot become glorious on its own, and will not be glorious in this age. Also a chastened optimism that admits, OK, we are not perfect, but given time we will develop into perfection, is corrected by the notice that the second Adam, though Adam, is utterly second.

4. By a confusion, this last truth sometimes encourages a peculiarly Christian, purportedly pious, disregard for our present age as entirely hopeless. But the Eucharist is for this age. Here and now the Lord's body, which has already felt the transformation that we await, is, as it were, sent back into our age to nourish it, strengthen it, make it holy. Until the next age, this age is our home and the place for our bodies to do what they can to reflect our destiny, mightily aided in this endeavor by the body and blood of the risen Firstfruits.

5. While the Fall means the permanent ruination of human ability to fear, love, or trust God (without drastic extra-human intervention, at least) it does not mean that everything human is worthless. Worthless as expiatory, yes, but not worthless on a less ambitious scale. Kindness, justice, and humility are still preferable to their opposites. Piepkorn's stress on Christ's human bodiliness in the Eucharist imbues it with Christ's "proprietary interest" in all things human, and so makes the Holy Supper a fit

occasion to enter his sorrow for human loss and his thanks for human success, for example in the Eucharistic or Post-Communion Prayers.

6. Piepkorn's good news should be said. The Holy Supper, by bringing to us the ascended Christ, reminds us that our frightened world is in a brother's hands. No matter that pure divinity intimidates us, it is not that, but Jesus, son of Mary, who reigns, in accord with his Father's merciful design. This "abiding comfort" is fitly recalled in preaching and the Eucharistic Prayer.

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Early Christian Mystagogy and the Formation of Modern Christians

Mark E. Chapman
Second Evangelical Lutheran Church
Chambersburg, Pennsylvania

"Mystagogy," the "teaching of the mysteries," that is, of the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist, was a phenomenon almost unique to Christianity in the late fourth century, when it flourished as a form and style of preaching in both East and West. Four great bishop-theologians of this era have left us the legacy of their mystagogical sermons largely intact (no small feat for writings set down over 1,600 years ago): Ambrose of Milan, Theodore of Mopsuestia, John of Antioch (called Chrysostom, "the golden mouthed"), and those ascribed to Cyril of Jerusalem but more probably the work of his successor, John.[1]

Basically, mystagogical homilies seek to explain to the newly baptized the significance of the "mysteries" they have just experienced in their initiation into Christianity at the great Vigil of Easter, the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist.[2] This was a preaching task, and involved applying the scriptures to the mystery that had been or was about to be celebrated, in a series of sermons spanning the week before and the week after the Vigil of Easter. Mystagogy is thus a question of exegesis and exegetical method, and the flowering of mystagogy in the fourth century is also the flowering of the favorite exegetical method of the whole patristic era, that of *typology*.[3]

The exegetical method called "typology" is based on the conviction that "the realities of the Old Testament are figures of those of the New."[4] There is a dynamic relationship between the Old and New Testaments by which each continually refers back to the other as anticipation and fulfill-

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[1] Enrico Mazza, *Mystagogy: A Theology of Liturgy in the Patristic Age*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (New York: Pueblo Publishing Co., 1989), x.

[2] Mazza, *Mystagogy*, x.

[3] Mazza, *Mystagogy*, 9.

[4] Jean Danielou, *The Bible and the Liturgy* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966 (1951), 4.

ment, superimposing each upon the other in order to arrive at the true picture of divine revelation. Israel's history and prophecy have their fulfillment in Christ; thus the New Testament is understood in terms of the images that anticipate it—its "types"—in the Old Testament, and conversely, the Old Testament is understood as signs and figures that anticipate what achieves its concrete expression in Jesus Christ. The New Testament does not have priority over the Old, but the two are in a mutual relationship of interpretation, a relationship wherein the revelation of the divine mysteries is to be found.[5]

The typological method is entirely, indeed rigorously, biblical. But typology makes a basic decision about how it will approach the Bible that forms its fundamental rule of interpretation: that there is an objective correspondence between the eras of salvation history recorded in scripture; that the events of scripture are not unrelated or related only in a single-direction, straight-line flow of time, but rather are eras and events that reflect upon and correspond to one another *objectively*, in the creating and redeeming purpose of the will of God.[6] That is to say: it is not just the Bible, but the Bible as history; and not just God, but God as the Lord of history, that determines the typological method of the Church Fathers. God stands above history and at its center, creating all history from the center outward in both directions in such a way that the two directions parallel and mirror one another as type and fulfillment.

We shall confine ourselves to examining briefly the mystagogical sermons of two of these Fathers here, one from the Eastern church, John Chrysostom, and then the lone Western representative of this form, Ambrose of Milan. We will present by no means a complete analysis of their writings.[7] What we wish to ask in this context is how their mystagogy, and particularly its typological exegesis, contributes to the formation of Christians, looking at that special group of Christians, the newly-baptized neophytes basking in the glow of the Easter Vigil.

First, then, Chrysostom. For John Chrysostom, the spiritual formation of neophyte Christians consisted in their *moral* formation, and his pastoral concern expresses itself in moral exhortation. His style of typology, then, is one of broad-stroke, impressionistic ties between Old Testament image, New Testament fulfillment, and sacramental reality, all focused on the moral dimension of Christian conduct.[8]

The image that Chrysostom wants to have dominant in the minds of his neophytes, with which he begins his sermon series and elaborates in great detail, is that of Baptism as marriage, and of the relationship of the baptized to Christ as that of bride and bridegroom. The point of this image is the radical, unmerited, unexpected graciousness of the love of the Bridegroom, his "boundless kindness" for a bride who "is deformed and ugly, thoroughly and shamefully sordid, and practically wallowing in the very mire of her sins."[9] Sin, grace, and repentance take on specific roles in this drama of salvation. Sin, for Chrysostom, is this mindlessly defiled state of the soul by which it has "abandoned its proper dignity, forgotten its noble birth from on high," and collapsed into all manner of idolatry, from

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[5] Mazza, *Mystagogy*, 10.

[6] Mazza, 10-11.

[7] Mazza has done this quite well, and provides extensive bibliography for further work.

[8] Mazza, 106.

[9] St. John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instructions*, trans./ann. Paul W. Harkins (New York: Newman Press, 1963), 23-24.

The spiritual warfare of the Christian is not a fair and open combat, for that is not how Satan fights.

which soon arise "the tinsel-trimmed parade of pleasures" that the demons lurking behind the idols inspire (Chrysostom, p. 24). Grace, then, is God's recognition of the true identity of this lost soul, and in Christ, God's communication of this true identity to this lost soul, the naming of it as bride and daughter and beloved, and the love for the soul that receives it without demanding an accounting for offenses or exacting judgment upon it (p. 25). And repentance is to "hear and accept [Christ's] exhortation and remonstrance," and so to "forget the past" (p. 25). There is only one thing Christ asks of us, says Chrysostom, and that is "to forget the past and to show good will for the future" (p. 28). The catechumenate is that beckoning; Baptism is that breaking with the past and stepping forth into the future; and the Christian life is the new life lived as the spotless bride in the love of the divine Bridegroom.

But to do that is to indeed break with the one who seeks to keep us captive to the past; Baptism is to break with Satan and his demons, and Satan does not give up without a bitter fight. Christian combat, then, goes hand in hand with the spiritual marriage of the soul to Christ, and the joys of marriage quickly become the rigors of war.[10]

The spiritual warfare of the Christian is not a fair and open combat, for that is not how Satan fights. Satan hardly ever launches a frontal assault against faith; his tactics, rather, are to undermine, subvert, demoralize, or lull us into false security: "This is the wicked demon's plan," warns Chrysostom, "to trip you up by little things" (Chrysostom, p. 39). Dogma is the first line of defense against this sort of assault, and Chrysostom holds up the Nicene Creed and the dogmatic decisions behind it as the norm by which all teaching is to be judged (p. 32); knowing Christian doctrine is not a form of intellectual entertainment for some, but a necessary weapon for all soldiers of the cross in the war with Satan. Familiar texts of scripture, and especially those psalms and canticles regularly sung at the liturgy, are also necessary weapons that work to purify the mind of worldly vices and so open up space in our conceptual world for acquiring the virtues that are the fruits of the Spirit: charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, modesty, continence, all those things that Satan cannot stand, and the dispositions by which we receive the grace of God and guard it (p. 36).

Moreover, we have been given the Eucharist, "a food which is more powerful than any armor, so that you may not weary in the fight, and that you may dine joyously and then win the advantage over the wicked one" (p. 60). Particularly the wine of the Eucharist, the very blood of Christ the Paschal Lamb, is a weapon so fearful to the devil that he will flee from its very presence (p. 60). The blood of Christ in the Eucharist is the Christian passover, fulfilling its Old Testament type (p. 61).

In order to see ourselves and the world in this way, Chrysostom teaches his neo-

[10] Mazza, 117-18.

phytes that part of the new birth of Baptism is that they must now see the world through the eyes of faith, or the eyes of the Spirit. They must learn to see behind the visible to the invisible truth and reality. "This is faith: to see the invisible as if it were visible" (p. 46).

This is especially true for understanding Baptism and the Eucharist. Here we get a glimpse of Chrysostom's eschatology. The sacraments are eschatological acts for Chrysostom, that is, they are the fulfillment of the final and ultimate promises of God, the event of the kingdom of God. But Chrysostom's eschatology is entirely *vertical* in its dimensions; the Last Things, the Final Fulfillment, is not a historically future consummation; it *has happened* in Jesus Christ; it *happens* in Baptism and the Eucharist. The kingdom of God is a present, heavenly reality here and now in a transcendent plain of divine activity existing parallel to our own and interpenetrating our own in the sacramental mysteries. Chrysostom would never say that the Eucharist is a "foretaste of the feast to come"—the Eucharist *is* the heavenly banquet feast, celebrated at two levels at once, here in our lives, where we have the figure or type of that heavenly banquet that is going on right along with us in the transcendent presence of the Trinity. Only the eyes of faith can discern this truth behind the figure of the sacraments; but when that discernment happens, what the eyes of faith see is God himself acting, and we who see it find ourselves set before the immediate activity of the Trinity.[11]

So, in Baptism, Chrysostom notes, the eyes of the Spirit will see something different from the eyes in your head. The water is not merely water, the bishop not merely a mortal man: "For it is not a man who does what is done, but it is the grace of the Spirit who sanctifies the nature of the water and touches your head together with the hand of the priest..." (Chrysostom, p. 47). Baptism really is death and resurrection, "For the old man is buried with his sin and the new man is resurrected"; the old garment, "made filthy with the abundance of our sins," is cast away and the new garment put on, which is to say, says Chrysostom, "We put on Christ Himself" (p. 47). The words and elements and rituals of the baptismal liturgy point beyond themselves, beyond the ministers, beyond the church, to the Trinity at work here in a way that is visible only to the eyes of faith (p. 53).

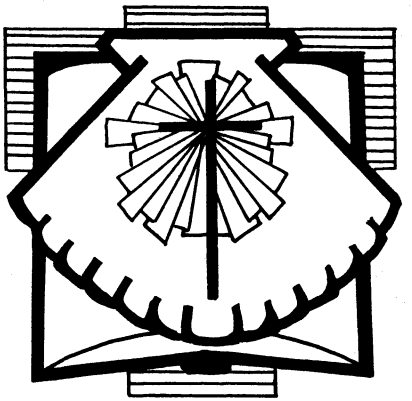
And it is through the eyes of faith that we see the radical change that has been worked in us, the transformation of the baptized into what Chrysostom will call "fruitful participation" in the life of Christ. The eyes of faith see beyond our physical, visible life to that spiritual, invisible life that is the truth and reality of our new existence in Christ. The eyes of faith set before the baptized a picture of the invisible realm which is theirs by participation in Christ, and so encourages them to participate in it in the here and now.[12]

The life of the Christian, then, is life lived in imitation of Christ. For Chrysostom, this imitation is linked directly to Baptism, for it is to imitate the profession of faith made in Baptism in the same way that God "imitates His own goodness" in his actions. For God's acts of mercy and kindness towards his creatures, says Chryso-

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[11] Mazza, 122, 142. Mazza is not so explicit about the sheerly vertical dimensions of Chrysostom's eschatology, and in fact seems to want to impose a more linear/historical model; but the vertical eschatology and its vision of two parallel worlds—heaven and church—existing simultaneously is crucial for the whole of Chrysostom's theology.

[12] Mazza, 143.



stom, are nothing other than the outward expression of the interior, essential goodness, love, and mercy of God; the essential graciousness of God, the fact that "God *is* love," is perfectly reproduced outside of God by God's actions towards his creation. The Christian's "imitation" of Christ must be of the same sort as God's "imitation" of his own interior graciousness. The faithful must express outwardly, by their deeds of love, mercy, and goodness, the indwelling of the Trinity which they have received in their Baptism; the good works done by Christians are an extension of their Baptism, the representation to the eyes of the world of that spiritual reality that only the eyes of faith can see.[13]

What John Chrysostom's mystagogical homilies do, then, is to create a specifically Christian world of meaning for his hearers. Their lives are cast within a self-understanding (bride of the bridegroom), a posture towards life (the combat with Satan), a measure for the interpretation of life (the eyes of faith), and a model for moral behavior (the imitation of Christ) that is meant to restructure their whole way of thinking and acting in such a way as to mold them into the Christian "way." Chrysostom's broad-stroke, impressionistic typologies are meant to provide vivid pictures, easily grasped and retained in the decision-making processes of the mind, into which the baptized are to fit themselves and by so fitting, determine the decisions that life forces upon them and that the faith calls forth from them. The formation of Christians, then, for Chrysostom, is this formation of a *moral* world of meaning that sets the *Christian* people demonstrably apart from all the other peoples of the world.

From this wild man of West Syrian asceticism[14] no greater contrast could be found than the refined, erudite, cultured Italian patrician turned bishop, Ambrose of Milan. Ambrose is characteristic of Latin theology in general in his abiding concern to understand the essential *unity* of the saving work of God.[15] As such, Ambrose focuses his interest in expounding the sacraments for the neophytes on the question of how God acts in human history. For Ambrose, history is a series of stages, but not stages of progress or improvement; indeed, for Ambrose, each successive stage in history is necessary because its precursor ended in failure to achieve union with God.[16]

God is active throughout this history, though, as the mystery hidden within it. As the hidden mystery underlying human history, guiding its events towards his own divine purpose, God can be known only by looking beyond the outward signs and fig-

[13] Mazza, 121-22.

[14] See Peter Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," and "Town, Village, and Holy Man: The Case of Syria," in *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982) for a vivid description of the world that shaped John Chrysostom as a Christian.

[15] Mazza, 15.

[16] Mazza, 14.

ures of history to the deeper meaning hidden in events. Holy Scripture serves the purpose of holding up to us those particular events in human history that have profound depths of meaning to them as the key events in history in which the divine mystery works out the plan of salvation for humanity.[17] Ambrose, then, like Chrysostom, calls upon his neophytes to see the world through the eyes of faith, in order that, when they observe the events of scripture and the events of their own lives, they see beyond the temporal to the eternal, "which is not apprehended by the eye, but is discerned by the mind and spirit."[18]

Biblical history, for Ambrose, is, as a whole and in every possible subdivided part, the outward and visible sign of the inner and spiritual reality of God's saving will and work in Jesus Christ. The history of salvation narrated in scripture *is salvation* because the historical events are the bearers of the saving event. And it is by the liturgical celebration of the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist that the church is given by God a window into this deeper reality.[19] The church's liturgy, and the sacraments celebrated in that liturgy, thus provide the interpretive key to understanding scripture, while scripture provides the fundamental context in history for understanding liturgy and sacraments.

This sense of reflection and reciprocity forms the basis for Ambrose's vision of the coherent unity of salvation history, including the church's role within it. While externally, history makes no progress or improvement from age to age, in the underlying mystery of God's plan of salvation, each stage of history moves from the lesser to the greater, from relative obscurity to relative clarity, in relation to the revelation of God and his salvation, so that the plan of salvation that begins as a faint sketch is increasingly filled in and given color and definition in each successive age until the final, full picture of salvation is finished at the eschaton. Each stage of history mirrors all the others, then, just in varying degrees of clarity and precision.[20] Mystagogy, then, is the explaining and revealing of this hidden, deeper meaning in the sacraments.[21] There is a connection between the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the church's life that gives to all three one and the same identity, each at a different level of perfection, but none is ever rendered outmoded or useless.[22]

So, for Ambrose, the Old Testament provides a wealth of types or figures that help illumine for the neophytes what the sacrament of Baptism has meant, and how it has such great effects upon them. Three of these Old Testament prefigurings of Baptism he holds together as a single point: the creation out of chaos, Noah and the flood, and the parting of the Red Sea (Ambrose, p. 318). At the beginning of creation in Genesis 1, we read how the Spirit of God moved over the waters; those waters are the waters of Baptism, in such a way that as the Holy Spirit moved upon and so worked a new creation upon those primeval waters, so now does the Holy Spirit move and work in these baptismal waters to work the new creation of regeneration. In the story of the flood, we read in Genesis 8 how Noah sent out two birds from the ark, a raven and a dove, to test the state of the flooded-out

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[17] Mazza, 15.

[18] Saint Ambrose, "On the Mysteries," in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church,* Second Series, Vol. X: *St. Ambrose: Select Works and Letters* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, reprint, 1979), 319.

[19] Mazza, 22-23.

[20] Mazza, 25-26.

[21] Mazza, 33.

[22] Mazza, 38.

world; the raven did not return, but the dove returned with an olive branch in its mouth, a sign that the flood had receded and life had begun again on earth. So it is also with Baptism (p. 318). Israel's exodus through the parted Red Sea completes the picture of Baptism by referring to the continual regenerating and renewing power of Baptism.

For Ambrose, the Song of Solomon illustrates the exchange that takes place between Christ and the baptized.

The Old Testament provides eloquent testimony to the christological center of Baptism and to the precise nature of Baptism as being united to the *cross* of Christ and the atonement worked on the cross. The story from Exodus 15, where the people of Israel in the wilderness come to Marah for water but find the water there bitter and undrinkable, the solution to which is God's command to Moses to throw a piece of wood in the water and so make it sweet, shows exactly the power of the cross in Baptism: just as Moses made the brackish water good to drink by casting in the wood, so in Baptism the priest makes common water "sweet for the purpose of grace" by proclaiming the Lord's cross over the font (p. 319).

But undoubtedly Ambrose's favorite Old Testament text for the exposition of the sacramental life of faith was the poetic book of the Song of Solomon. For Ambrose (who stands here in a long line of tradition), the Song of Solomon is the typology *par excellence* of the life of the Christian in communion with Christ, the loving relationship between bride and bridegroom, lover and beloved.

For Ambrose, the Song of Solomon illustrates the exchange that takes place in progressive steps between Christ and the baptized (pp. 321-22). The newly baptized are made beautiful and clean by the washing of Baptism. Christ, seeing this new beauty of his church, rejoices in it, and sends the dove of his Holy Spirit upon it, so that the eyes of the faithful become the eyes of the dove (Song 4:1), seeing now with the Spirit and not with the flesh. So endowed, the baptized now take on the virtues of life lived in the Spirit, and shed the vices of their sins; the baptized can now "offer to Christ the mystic faith and the grace of good living, which speak of the cross of the Lord Jesus." Receiving this sacrifice of faith and good works, Christ calls his bride, the baptized, to his side, "because, renouncing the world, she passed through things temporal and passed on to Christ." In return, the baptized in the church, "delighted with the gifts of grace," reach out to attain the fullness of the mysteries of the faith, "and to consecrate all her affections to Christ," so that by the devotion and faithfulness of her affection "her spouse [Christ] may be incited to ever richer love for her" (p. 322). And Christ indeed responds with this boundless, ever-deepening love, placing himself as the seal upon his bride's heart and so increasing infinitely in her the good works of faith and love that are the source of her beauty in his eyes. The Eucharist is the aphrodisiac of this love, the food that Christ gives his bride to strengthen her love and so continue her progress in grace (p. 325). The church guards this sacred food of love jeal-

ously, for it is the garden of her delights, grown fruitful and lush where its roots "have dipped... in the water of the sacred spring" of Baptism, so that it abounds "with the fruitfulness of the Gospel" (p. 325). Christ the Lord is delighted with the closed and devoutly cultivated garden of the church's Eucharist, and comes to dwell there with his beloved, the baptized, and enjoy with them the mutual pleasures of his holy love (p. 325).

What Ambrose has done in his mystagogical homilies is to produce another sort of world of meaning for his neophytes: not Chrysostom's moral world of meaning, but what might be called a "cultural" world of meaning. For Ambrose, Baptism and Eucharist create the church as the culture, the social and interpersonal world, of the Christian, shaped by its own particular structures of relationships, accountability, authority, and tradition.[23] What the neophyte is initiated into in Baptism is a new social order, a new culture, a new family, and so a new way of living within that new world.

We have spent considerable time exploring the mystagogical homilies of Chrysostom and Ambrose, and their typological method, because all of this is so alien to our religious world today. The Christian world in the West, from Reimarus in the mid-18th century to the present, has been steadily won over to an entirely different style of biblical exegesis, usually called "the historical-critical method," which has replaced the typological method of the Fathers and their heirs. Indeed, the historical-critical method has made a point of criticizing the typological method of the Fathers by emphasizing their lack of scientific rigor and analytical precision, their lack of any truly historical perspective, and their lack of critical distance from the text of scripture. In doing so, the historical-critical method has reduced the typological method of the Fathers to a curiosity of the past. The biblical exegesis of the Fathers is treated as a strictly *historical* source of information; that is, it can be useful for informing us of what a particular Father of the church might have thought, but it cannot be of use in our modern exegesis of the same text of scripture. The method of the Fathers illumines the thought of the Fathers; but the historical-critical method has so convinced us of its superiority as a way of uncovering the meaning of a biblical text, that any other method is ruled out as "uncritical" and so simply *passe* to the church.

We have examined the sermons of two of the great Fathers of the church, then, in order to question this assumption so taken for granted by so many professional biblical exegetes today. The historical-critical method enjoys the same nearly-universal application in the church today as did the typological method in the 4th century. But the difference in result is remarkable. While the typological method provided a sort of conceptual unity to the Patristic church even while allowing for significant differences, the historical-critical method has produced fragmentation. For the historical-critical method has succeeded in *distancing* the church from its scriptures precisely by rendering the scriptures unintelligible except to trained experts in the history, language, culture, and beliefs of the centuries and peoples spanned by the Bible, experts whose training is in the skills of disassembling and atomizing the text of scripture in order to discover the true meaning hidden in the issues of authenticity, authorial intent, philosophical and cultural influences, and the writer's own religious experience. The

[23] Mazza, 14.

untrained reader of the Bible is warned against the oversimplification of reading for the plain sense of the text, and then is left with bits and fragments of the text so scrutinized and analyzed that their original coherence is lost amid all the pieces of the puzzle.

And yet, as any professional interpreter of scripture can testify, the situation cannot end there. We must preach and teach the scriptures as a coherent whole, not as miscellaneous form-critical fragments. But the historical-critical method provides no guidance for reassembling the unity of scripture; indeed, the historical-critical method is opposed in principle to the idea of the unity of scripture. And so the preacher and teacher has had to invent or intuit his or her own way of finding the unity of scripture after historical criticism has laid the pieces at her or his feet. We should not be surprised, then, that the results have produced more of the personal and political agendas of the interpreters than the theme of grace and redemption of the Bible.

And yet, we cannot pretend as if the historical-critical method had never been developed; indeed, we would not want to do so. We have benefited inestimably in our knowledge and insight from the critical work done in textual, historical, linguistic, and cultural studies of scripture. Our understanding of the Bible and of the faith is richer and better for it.[24] The problem is not that the historical-critical method is in use; the problem arises when it displaces all other methods, and comes to be seen as an end in itself, the final step in the process of interpreting scripture. That it cannot be that is demonstrated by the fact that all preaching and teaching is compelled somehow, in some way, invented or intuited, to go beyond it, to return the coherence and wholeness to the text and to link the text to the lives of Christians. It is at that point that the exegesis of the Fathers becomes instructive for us today, not merely as a historical curiosity, but as relevant interpretation of scripture.

For, as we have seen in Chrysostom and Ambrose, the Fathers interpreted scripture by scripture, but also interpreted scripture by its application to the Christian life, and perhaps more importantly, interpreted the life of the Christian by its correspondence to scripture. In doing this, the Fathers sought a unity, not just in scripture, but between scripture and the Christian life, as a dynamic whole held together, not by abstract principles of exegesis, but by the church's own experience of her Lord's presence in Baptism and Eucharist. Baptism changes things, for the Fathers, and scripture provides the language and description and set of mental images that illuminate what that change looks like in the lives of believers. Receiving the Eucharist makes you different, and scripture gives the framework for how to live with that difference.

For the Fathers, the scriptures belong to the church, and the life and experience of the church determine what the scriptures mean. And at the heart of the life and experience of the church are the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist. These sacramental rites provide the context for interpreting scripture, while in turn scripture provides the language for speaking about these sacraments. And from that union of scripture and church—or dare one say, of scripture and tradition—the Fathers derived their images and metaphors and language for describing and encouraging the Christian life. The Fathers did not need to invent or intuit

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[24] One need only think of the doors opened in the Lutheran-Catholic dialogues in understanding eucharistic sacrifice or ministry or especially justification by the use of historical-critical study of scripture.

their own "method" or "system"; they found it given to them in the convergence of the liturgy and the Bible.

The convergence and union of liturgy and Bible, scripture and tradition, text and church, is what we must retrieve from the heritage of the Fathers. For this is the logical—and indeed, doxological—goal of the interpretation of scripture. Which is not to say we must abandon historical criticism. Rather, we must put the historical-critical work in its proper place: as the *middle* term, the *middle* step, in the process from first reading of the Bible to announcing the Good News in the Bible. The results of historical-critical research is not what we proclaim; but the results of historical-critical research are exciting new insights into what indeed the Bible first proclaimed, intended to proclaim, meant by its original proclamation, which provide perspectives on the Bible that the ancient Fathers of the church never had.

But the commentaries and homilies of the Fathers provide us with equally valuable insights and perspectives with regard to what to do with a text in the church, among Christians, as the Word of God addressed to us here and now. This legacy of the unity of scripture and the unity of the church with its scriptures is what we must rediscover in systematic and explicit ways if our preaching and teaching is to be faithful to both scripture and church, and if our preaching and teaching is to keep the church faithful to both scripture and tradition. Moreover, it is what we must recover if the idea of the formation of the Christian life is to make any sense and is to have any relevance to scripture and church as its formative principles, its world of meaning, its cultural system and structure of language that sets the Christian life apart from life in the world.[25] This may be an insight we are ready to appropriate only now, as it daily becomes more obvious that the world we live in is a post-Christian one, and that we cannot take for granted any longer that our culture will be shaped by Christian morals, values, and virtues. Such was also the world as the ancient Fathers would have described it, so perhaps it is time that we listen again to them for how to live in it.

> The Fathers sought a unity, not just in scripture, but between scripture and the Christian life.

[25] There are several movements in contemporary theology and philosophy in this direction. They include the cultural-linguistic theory of George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Post-liberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984); the canon-criticism approach of Brevard Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979); much of the narrative-theology movement, e.g., *Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1989); the hermeneutical philosophy of Paul Ricoeur, e.g., the essays collected in *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur: An Anthology of His Work*, ed. Charles E. Reagan and David Stewart (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), or his magnum opus, *Time and Narrative*, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984). The explicit turn to the Fathers was vigorously advocated by Jean Danielou (n. 4) and Henri de Lubac, *The Sources of Revelation* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), among many other Catholic theologians, and has long been the theme of Eastern Orthodox liturgy.

Pardoned, on Account of Christ

Marc Kolden
St. Paul, Minnesota

Then Jesus (looking down from the cross) said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." Luke 23:34a

(After the resurrection) Jesus breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." John 20:22-23

The service today is a service of confession and forgiveness. How did we know that this would be appropriate for you today? Not by asking you. Not by taking a poll. But by God's word (in 1 John 1:8, 10a): "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.... If we say we have not sinned, we make God a liar."

Yet even so, how did we know that such a service would be relevant? Perhaps you are not feeling guilty; perhaps you are not even aware of your sin. Again, in God's word, precisely the word from the cross, our Lord Jesus forgave those who didn't have a clue, who certainly felt anything but guilty. Today's service depends on Christ's word, which brings its own relevance.

We must be about this business of confession and forgiveness because it concerns our *salvation.* An Eastern Orthodox priest, Fr. Dudko, teaches us to think of pastors and priests as "confessors"—those who hear our confessions and announce the forgiveness of Christ. What does it mean that a pastor is chiefly a confessor? Fr. Dudko answers that "a confessor is someone who cares about your salvation."[1] We call pastors to care about our salvation: to call us to confession and to announce Christ's forgiveness.

Yet even as we know all this, we find ways to deny it, to oppose it, to put off Christ's word. Confessing our sins seems so negative; it doesn't express what we're feeling; it seems to lower our self-esteem. But confession is not our work or our words. To confess our sins is to trust *God's* word

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[1] See Richard John Neuhaus, *Freedom for Ministry* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), ch. 5, esp. p. 82.

that we are indeed guilty. It is to agree with God's judgment: to say with the psalmist, "Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgment." (Ps 51:4)

Confessing our sins means that God is already working in our lives. Confessing our sins is not our last human act preparing us to receive God's grace. Confession is already an act of faith: it is God acting in our lives, making believers out of us, leading us to acknowledge the divine judgment on each of us. It has nothing to do with lack of self-esteem; it has everything to do with esteem for God's word, for God's estimate of us.

If that is true, you would think that we would welcome the gracious words of forgiveness as the greatest good news there could be, but even here our sinful self may rise up during the absolution itself to reject the words by rejecting the speaker. We think, "Who is that person pretending to be, anyway, all dressed up in religious garb, saying, 'As a called and ordained minister of the church of Christ and by his authority I declare to you the forgiveness of all your sins'?" "Who do you think you are, anyway?" we say; "you're no better than we are." And in our childish anger we miss the words—"the entire forgiveness of all your sins."

But would we really like it better if someone ambled out in street clothes and said, "Hi! My name is Marc and I'll be your forgiver today"? The point is not the pastor's status—as if he or she had some special power to forgive sins. The point is that only one who is called and ordered to speak in Christ's name would dare to tell a group of proud sinners like us that God forgives us. Otherwise it would be blasphemous. Only God can forgive. Only he who is one with the Father in total obedience on the cross can speak the word of forgiveness in his own name. But he gives his people the Holy Spirit and commands us to forgive people's sins in his name. It is only by his authority that one of us may speak his word to the people and have it accomplish what it says.

Confession is already an act of faith: it is God acting in our lives, making believers out of us.

We need another to speak the word to us because the Christ in our own hearts is always weaker than the Christ in the word of another.[2] That's why we call and ordain someone to do that speaking. It is not a matter of status but of duty. Not a matter of power but of obedience. Not a matter of superiority but of servanthood: serving the word that pronounces us guilty even when guilt is the farthest thing from our minds and that pronounces us innocent and righteous against all the evidence, on account of Christ.

God grant that today we may put away all subterfuge, denial, and pride, and instead gladly confess our sins, trusting that God will keep his promise to forgive. And as we hear the gracious words of absolution, let us not sit in judgment on them but rather let us bask in their most gracious divine judgment on us: "Pardoned, on account of Christ." Amen.

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[2] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1954), 23.

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Book Reviews

Paul's Theology of Preaching. By Jack W. Beaudean. NABPR Dissertation Series, Number 6. Macon: Mercer University Press, 1988. xi and 216 Pages. Paper. $18.95.

Jack W. Beaudean (B.) investigates Paul's view of preaching by seeking answers to the questions, "Why preach? What is it about preaching that, for Paul, makes it indispensable to the gospel? What does preaching do?" (p. 27) He examines in chronological order of composition sections of five letters, selected because their authorship is not disputed: the significance of gospel in relation to word of God and community in 1 Thess 1:2–2:14; the relation of gospel to apostolic authority and freedom in Gal 1:6-17; cross, resurrection, and ministry in 1 Cor 1:17-2:5, 9:15-18, 15:1-14, and 2 Cor 4:1-6; and the relation of the righteousness of God to faith and unity in Rom 1:1-17, 10:14-17. He follows a similar pattern in each chapter: first he reconstructs the historical situation, then does an exegetical study of the passage considered, on the basis of which he draws conclusions about Paul's theology of preaching in that text (book, situation). He does not claim that these are examples of Paul's preaching; we have no authentic Pauline sermons. But Paul does speak about preaching and expound his theology of preaching in these passages.

A concluding chapter synthesizes the results and applies them in brief fashion to the contemporary situation. B. stresses that Paul's preaching arises out of his concern for the gospel, and so is "the direct vocal activity of the creative word of God in time and space" (p. 192). Preaching is based on the conviction of the sovereign authority of God and is to enact the will of God in a medium that is alive, creative, and dynamic. Preaching must be universal, since the gospel is universal; in fact, one must preach because proclamation corresponds to the character of the gospel itself. B. concludes by evaluating some modern scholars on preaching and making suggestions for a theology of proclamation today.

I was surprised to discover no use of Paul's last authentic letter, Philippians, since it offers much material for his concerns. More than any other letter, for example, Philippians 1 distinguishes the person of the proclaimer (Paul) from the proclamation. His imprisonment, which stimulates the preaching of others, is therefore no drawback to proclamation.

However, those whose primary responsibility in the church is public proclamation would benefit from B.'s research. He might redirect the aims, comfort the minds, and inspire the efforts of preachers. Finally, B.'s book came to this journal for review only recently. Therefore the tardiness of the review is no indication of the value of B.'s work. It is a useful addition to the literature on Paul and preaching.

Edgar Krentz
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

The Deutero-Pauline Letters: Ephesians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians, 1-2 Timothy, Titus. Edited by Gerhard Krodel. Proclamation Commentaries. Revised Edition. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993. x and 102 pages. Paper. $10.00.

Many scholars feel that Paul did not write these six letters. The first edition of this work, published in 1978, summarized the origins, theological content, and value for proclamation today. It was a signal success. Now welcome the revision that will give it another generation of useful life. Two writers update what they wrote in 1978: J. Paul Sampley on Ephesians and Gerhard Krodel on 2 Thessalonians. Sampley essentially updates what he wrote fifteen years earlier, taking account of recent social interpretation, and providing an up-to-date bibliography. Krodel's revision is more drastic, taking account of the recent large studies of 2 Thessa-

lonians by R. Jewett, F. W. Hughes, Glen Holland, and the 1988 Louvain essays edited by Raymond Collins. He outlines the thought of the letter using recent rhetorical analysis and discusses authorship more briefly than in the first edition. His concluding comments point out the value of the letter today—and propose the provocative theory that 2 Thessalonians suggested 1 Thessalonians was a forgery!

Arland J. Hultgren's and Walter F. Taylor's chapters replace Joseph Burgess on Colossians and Reginald H. Fuller on the Pastoral Epistles. Hultgren gives a straightforward report about scholarly opinions on authorship, character of the opposition, discusses three major theological issues (Christology, ecclesiology, and moral instruction), and then gives an exegetical survey of the letter. He recognizes that the writer cites the hymn of 1:15-20 in order to personalize its message for the people addressed. Taylor gives an extensive introduction to the Pastoral Epistles, an all too brief rhetorical outline that regards all three letters as a single unity[sic!] in the order Titus, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy. Since he based this on unpublished papers by William J. Beckwith, he should have given a fuller discussion of this rhetorical theory; as it is presented it is impossible to evaluate. He suggests the writer responds to the need for the stabilization of the churches by stressing the institutionalization of the church through good order and through accommodating the earlier more free social structure of the church to the structure of contemporary society.

This is a welcome update of a useful volume. It now uses gender-inclusive language, has much more extensive bibliographies and a useful index of passages (not in the first edition). But when you purchase it—and I urge you to do so—keep the first edition, too. Krodel's discussion of the authorship of 2 Thessalonians and the chapters by Burgess and Fuller present useful material, some of which drops out of the revision.

Edgar Krentz

The Macmillan Bible Atlas. By Yahanon Aharoni and Michael Avi-Yonah. Completely Revised Third Edition by Anson F. Rainey and Ze'ev Safrai. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1993. 215 pages. Cloth. $35.00.

The new edition of this atlas makes an excellent resource even better, outstanding even. Since the first edition of 1968 (2nd ed. 1977) the Macmillan Atlas has been the best resource for historical geography related to the Bible, both Hebrew and Christian. The 271 maps (seven more than in the first edition) provide information about almost every biblical narrative, movement of persons, the history of Israel's occupation of the land of Canaan, the rise and growth of Christianity, military engagement, political treaties or alliances, routes and highways, settlements, cities, archaeological sites, and the like. Depending on the map's scale, physical features (hills, mountains, passes) are indicated.

The atlas provides amazing amounts of information: movements of people or armies are indicated by lines with arrows, battle positions are clarified; boxed comments call attention to significant biblical passages or archaeological discoveries; growth of kingdoms (e.g. David's or Herod Agrippa II's) are made clear; significant plans (e.g. Damascus), inscriptions, or artifacts are illustrated in careful drawings next to relevant maps; and finally, each map is interpreted by a brief, informative text. A list of the maps in chronological order provides an overview of the atlas, while the aids in the rear of the volume correlate the maps with the relevant books of the Bible, give a comparative chronological table, and provide a gazetteer of places related to the maps. The only missing information, as far as I can tell, is a table listing the illustrations and giving the published source from which the drawings are made.

The third edition is also a significant revision of the first two. (Edition 2 corrected some errors, but it was not a fundamental revision.) The two editors, both familiar with archaeological discoveries and ongoing scholarship, have revised the maps to reflect the new knowledge. Legends to the maps reflect historical method (references to patriarchs by name in the legends

have disappeared). The result is a reliable, informative, up-to-date atlas that belongs on the shelf of every student of the Bible's history or literature. There is no alternative that as clearly aids in the understanding of the relation of history to topography—though other atlases may give a better impression of the land through color photography, more brilliant color separations in printing. Regular consultation of this atlas will lead to increased appreciation of the sweep of biblical narrative and understanding of the history reflected in the Bible. Make it your constant companion as you read the text.

Edgar Krentz

The Influence of the Gospel of Saint Matthew on Christian Literature Before Saint Irenaeus. By Eduard Massaux. Book 3: The Apologists and the Didache. Trans. Norman J. Belval and Suzanne Hecht, ed. with introduction and addenda by Arthur J. Bellinzoni. New Gospel Studies 5,3. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1993. xxviii and 259 pages. Cloth. $25.00.

This volume completes the three-volume translation (with bibliographical updating) of Massaux's work, originally published in 1950 and reissued with a bibliographic supplement covering 1950-1985 in 1986. Volume 1 of the translations (1990) covered the use of Matthew by the earliest Christian writers: 1 Clement, Barnabas, and Ignatius of Antioch. Volume 2 (1992) covered later Christian writers: 2 Clement, Polycarp, and other writings (apocalypses, non-canonical gospels, agrapha, and some Gnostic texts). Volume 3 discusses the influence of Matthew on the Apologists (Aristides, Justin Martyr, Tatian, Apollinaris of Hierapolis, Athanagoras, and Theophilus of Antioch) and the Didache. Massaux concludes that these writers knew and used Matthew, especially the Sermon on the Mount—and, surprisingly, in a text form closer to the Western text than the Eastern. Citations are more precise in the apologists than the earlier writers. He argues on the basis of a detailed analysis of presumed citations and allusions. While many scholars agree that the apologists knew the gospels, there is no agreement about the use of the gospels by the earlier writers. Thus the view proposed in the first two volumes of this set present Massaux's argument that is disputed in recent scholarship.

The translation is well done. The editor provides a preface to this volume which reports on scholarly research on the question post-Massaux. Whereas Helmut Koester argued that the Apostolic Fathers knew only oral traditions, recently Wolf-Dietrich Köhler and Klaus Wengst have once again concluded that these early writers, from 1 Clement to the Apologists, knew and used the Gospel of Matthew. The ongoing debate makes this English translation welcome, since it assures us that the work will once again command attention in the English speaking world.

Edgar Krentz

Studies in Ancient Greek Epistolography. By M. Luther Stirewalt, Jr. Society of Biblical Literature Resources for Biblical Study Nr. 27. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993. viii and 87 pages. Paper, $19.95; cloth, $29.95.

This volume contains four studies that students will consult for years to come to understand the ancient Greek letter. The first study is a brief history and typology of ancient Greek letters down to the second century C.E. Stirewalt points out that the letter, the major form of written communication between separated parties, arose from the need to conduct business of state (the official letter, to accompany an oral message) and business (the commercial letter). People, scholars first and then others, soon adapted it for personal needs (the familiar letter). Thus communication between two parties is the usual (normative) setting. Other types of letters develop that use the letter form to address wider audiences: letters on professional or technical subjects, letter essays. Finally there also develops the fictitious letter (school exercises and letters designed simply to entertain). Thus the letter form embraces much more than true communication between specific individuals or groups.

The second essay argues that the collections of letters attributed to ancient prominent people are not forgeries, a charge first raised by Richard Bentley about the letters of Phalaris in the seventeenth century. Stirewalt argues that ancient testimonia to the forgery of letters (especially Galen's) may apply to individual letters, but not to the collections.

The third essay is a brief introduction to the use of the chreia (illustrative anecdote) in ancient letters. Stirewalt discusses the types of chreia, their literary forms, their use in school exercises, and the use of chreiai in the letters of Diogenes and Crates. He quite properly bases his discussion on the *Progymnasmata* of Theon of Smyrna.

The final essay gathers the terminology used by ancient Greek writers, including the New Testament and some patristic authors, to describe letter writing (the list of authors studied is impressive). He concludes that ἐπιστολή and γράμματα are synonymous and that there is no linguistic basis for Deissmann's distinction between letter and epistle (see *Light from the Ancient East*).

Stirewalt provides an index of the letters cited or mentioned in essay 3. One disturbing typo occurs in footnote 23 on p. 35: twice for the word "treatise" the text reads the metathesis "treaties," a political term that is quite impossible here.

Luther Stirewalt spent a lifetime studying ancient letters. These four studies, which give a clear account of ancient letter writing style and form, should prove useful to beginning students and scholars alike. While there are few references to the New Testament in the book, students of the New Testament will find many points of illuminating contact between Stirewalt's material and New Testament texts. It is indeed a resource for biblical study at a very fundamental level.

Edgar Krentz

Briefly Noted

The reprint of Ronald Brownrigg's **Who's Who in the New Testament** (Oxford University Press, $13.95) should find a welcome in parish libraries. Brownrigg summarizes biblical, historical, and topographic evidence for every character in the New Testament, most broadly conceived (he identifies six centurions). Clear and informative, it does not require an extensive base of biblical knowledge by the user. It will benefit every reader. *Edgar Krentz*

Women in every Christian tradition struggle to "come to terms with" the Bible. Experience teaches them that the Bible has been used to "keep them in their place," while the lived faith of the Bible persuades them that the gospel in the Bible liberates them from the various forms of oppression. Two women, both professional theologians, seek to formulate a theory of interpretation that validates this liberating experience while respecting the biblical text.

Sandra M. Schneiders uses contemporary literary theory in **The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture** (Harper, $20.00). She begins by discussing the New Testament as Word of God to discuss how faith and tradition function in interpretation. Only then does she discuss the traditional methods of interpretation to conclude that the text is the result of paschal imagination by a faith community. This reformulation of a classical Roman Catholic position validates the liberating interpretation of feminist theology.

Frances Young takes a different way in **Virtuoso Theology: The Bible and Interpretation** (Pilgrim Press, $15.95). Using the analogy of musical performance she characterizes interpretation as performance art that is gov-

erned, on the one hand, by the text (composition), yet is open to a variety of interpretations. Yet not all interpretations are equally valid. This is a perceptive, stimulating discussion that takes into account the need for authenticity, the role of tradition and doctrine, the need for and use of criteria, and the role spirituality, "inspiration," and improvisation play in both musical and interpretive performance. This book will lead any reader to reflect on unexamined presuppositions, intuitive reactions to varying interpretations, and the nature of biblical truth.

Edgar Krentz

Pastors who look for volumes to bring them up to date in areas of theology will find **Christian Beginnings: Word and Community from Jesus to Post-Apostolic Times**, edited by Jürgen Becker (Westminster/John Knox, $24.99), a useful and interesting review and extension of their understanding of early Christian history from Jesus to the end of the first century. The authors discuss "Jesus of Nazareth" (Christoph Burchard), "The Oldest Jewish-Christian Community" (Carsten Colpe), The Circle of Stephen and Its Mission" (Karl Löning), "Paul and His Churches" (Jürgen Becker), "The Synoptic Evangelists and Their Communities" (John K. Riches), "Post-Pauline Christianity and Pagan Society" (Peter Lampe and Ulrich Luz), "Apocalyptic Currents" (Ulrich B. Müller), and "Johannine Christianity" (C. K. Barrett). Seven essays have bibliographies (multi-lingual) but no footnotes, while the other has notes but no bibliography. All are informed, coherent, and clear. I find the one by Lampe and Luz the most creative. I heartily recommend this volume for pastors' and parish libraries. *Edgar Krentz*

Richard Hays reminded Pauline scholars some time ago that Paul's thought often has a latent Old Testament basis; Paul's intimate knowledge of the Hebrew Bible is not shared by moderns, who often recover such allusive thought only by diligent research. James Aageson, Associate Professor of Religion at Concordia College, Moorhead, Minnesota, uses what he calls a "conversational hermeneutic" to describe Paul's use of the OT in **Written Also for Our Sake** (Westminster/John Knox, $9.95). There is always a divide between the ancient text and a modern interpreter, between Paul and the OT, between us and Paul. We cannot apply modern criteria to Paul's use of the Old Testament nor simply take his method over. After examining Paul's use of the OT as a Christian Jew, he argues that Paul had to modify his use in order to preach to non-Jews. He used the OT text in the light of developing christological convictions and the needs of his hearers. Aageson illustrates this by examining aspects of Paul's OT interpretation: Abraham as a figure of inclusion of all in the people of God (Romans 4), Israel as the rootstock into which the Gentile community is grafted (Romans 9-11), Christ and Adam (Romans 5), and Jesus in relation to Torah and wisdom. He concludes by summarizing Paul's christological mode of interpretation and drawing implications for the task of theology today. Many should benefit from this stimulating, clear, and relevant book. *Edgar Krentz*

Mark A. Powell provides useful, surprisingly comprehensive guides to recent research on Luke—**What Are They Saying About Luke?** (Paulist, $5.95)—and Acts—**What Are They Saying About Acts?** (Paulist, $6.95). Both volumes discuss origins, composition (sources, redaction, etc.), theological emphases, and social-ecclesial concerns. The Acts volume, written later, discusses the literary unity of Luke-Acts and the contributions of literary criticism to interpreting Acts (not discussed in the Luke volume, though Powell is himself a sophisticated practitioner of literary criticism!). Disregard the misspelling of Diogenes Laertius on p. 63 of the Luke volume, since Powell is a sure-footed guide who will lead you into Luke's fascinating two-volume work. Tolle, lege!

Edgar Krentz

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Preaching Helps

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost—Christ the King, Series B

Get a Grip!

On what? "Get a grip—on yourself," we say. It's a line we drag out when our friends are falling apart. When they are out of control. When the order of their lives is collapsing into chaos.

Here in the Bay Area one of my friends is director of GRIP, Greater Richmond Interfaith Project. It is an instrument through which members of religious communities work together on issues of food, shelter, jobs and more. They are trying to get a grip on the community's physical and spiritual problems.

Both our contributors in this issue speak about getting a grip. One of **Ramona Bouzard**'s overarching images is that of the household of God. Where did we get that word "household"? What has holding or gripping got to do with houses? She speaks in particular of "the economy of the household of God." She relentlessly presses us to consider the strange economics of the family of God, making good use especially of James as she makes her case. Why do we have such a tight grip on material things? Why do we hoard up and hold onto our precious privileges so steadfastly? Why is it so hard for us to relax our grip on things and reach an open hand to the needy? Why are we so slow to get a grip on things unseen and fading not away?

Todd Murken fixes his attention (and ours) especially on Hebrews. And especially on the repeated admonition to "hold fast our confession!" Get a really good grip on our confession. Which, he explains, means getting a really good grip on Jesus as perfect priest, perfect savior.

Both our writers are people on the move, who sat still just long enough to compose these pages for fellow pilgrims.

Ramona Bouzard has spent the past fifteen years as pastor at King of Glory in Houston, Texas, and at Trinity in Fairless Hills, Pennsylvania. But by the time this issue is in the grip of readers she will be residing in Waverly, Iowa. Her husband has accepted a position in the Religion Department of Wartburg College. At the moment of writing, Ramona, like all good pilgrims, did not see every detail of her future life but was ready to move ahead in trust.

Todd Murken is in the thick of a doctoral program in systematic theology at LSTC. During Epiphany he joined Pastor Kurt Hoffmann at First English Lutheran Church in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, to form that congregation's first co-pastorate.

The letter of James is addressed to "the twelve tribes of the Dispersion," and Hebrews pictures the faithful as people on the march, heading toward the city of the living God, the new Jerusalem. Here we have no abiding city. Here everything is mutable and transitory. We look forward to a city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

These scriptures and this time of the church year are strong reminders that we live in time between the times. In time toward home, time toward the end, time toward the Day of Christ the King. Our thanks to Ramona and Todd for lifting our eyes and our hands from their fixation on the visible and tangible to the fundamental realities spelled out in the world's most gripping Story.

And good preaching to all of you out there as you help folks get a grip on real Life.

Yours,

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

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost
September 25, 1994

Psalm 54:1-4, 6-7a
Jeremiah 11:18-20
James 3:16–4:6
Mark 9:30-37

First Reading

The Mark lesson includes the second reference to the Son of Man rising from the dead in chapter 9 and it constitutes the second passion prediction in the book of Mark. There are more to follow. Jesus attempts here to open the hearts and minds of the disciples to his mission. He describes quite clearly what is to happen to him. The disciples respond by giving him blank stares, recognizing neither Jesus nor the message he bears.

The comment of the narrator here is packed with possibilities for preaching: "but the disciples did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him" (v. 32). Like children who know the answer will be "No," or the ailing patient who knows deep within that something is amiss but isn't sure if she really wants to know the truth, the disciples are curious but they don't necessarily want to know the whole story. It is not just a matter of blissful ignorance. The disciples have heard enough to know that this Jesus-following is radical, life-changing business.

The disciples' fears are confirmed when, in response to their vying for first place, Jesus starts talking about service in the household of God. "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all" (v. 37). As hard as we try we cannot smooth the sharp edges of his words, not even with our fears about misleading the vulnerable into serving abusive people and systems. The reality, as Meeks describes it in *The Economy of God*, looks like this: It is a 'given' that as human beings we will be slaves to something. The question for us as Christians is whether we will be slaves/ servants to the God who made us or to something else.

Jesus closes by bringing a little child before them as an example of welcoming those who are considered least. If we are to truly be part of the household of God, then our job entails welcoming and receiving (δεξεται) others into God's house. Jesus says that as we extend others these simple household courtesies we welcome and receive him. The example of welcoming a child illustrates the need for Jesus' followers, both the early church and God's people today, to relearn household etiquette as a way of life with God. We would much rather form a committee, write a social statement, or claim we don't have enough money to do the job, than do the simple and gracious thing of welcoming others into God's house. So it is that we find the disciples' fears continuing to haunt us. RB

Pastoral Reflections

Were it not for Mark's ingenious connecting of his second passion prediction to these words on service, there would be no gospel here, no promise of life *gratis* (not even v. 37). For verses 33-37 are an intra-ecclesial lesson on ecclesial values. Jesus is not egalitarian the way we sometimes paint him to be. He encourages ambition (35b): someone will be first, the rest of us will be less (cf. Mk 10:40b and Mt 11:11). Some will have great rewards and others less. If this surprises our hearers it is because we have poisoned discipleship by making grace a principle instead of the encounter between a damned person and the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus does not eliminate greatness but corrects its definition: not sway, grandeur, or numbers of fawners, but, contrarily, service such as receiving a child (who cannot repay, cf. Lk 14:14). Greatness is to receive "for my name's sake" (v. 37) those people so paltry that there is no other reason to receive them! The recipients of our service are so negligible that our serving them is necessarily stealthy—as inconspicuous as our Lord's undercover passage through Galilee.

The gospel must be mined from v. 31, which is more helpful for showing Jesus' willingness to die, and hence his death's usefulness (cf. Mk 14:24), than his prescience. But to unfold that succinct gospel we can capitalize on the discussion of service here (cf. 10:45). Jesus is the greatest because he has "received" the least—us!

Us "children" (immature, vulnerable, poor), us he has received and done so in no other way than by his dying at the hands of—people (us). The Son of Man is handed over to humans who "receive" him to his death, in order that he might receive them back into life, and without a trace of resentment on his part! (CAUTION: connecting the idea of service to the gospel of Christ's death requires the *EXPLICIT* disclaimer that this service of his saves us by atonement, not by providing us an example whereby, following it, we can save ourselves. Since not even Jesus could make himself understood (v. 32) don't let's us take any chances.)

Mark thought Jesus' teaching needed a lead-in with some bite, so he prefixed verses 33-34. Our preaching, too, should advance the law that reduces our hearers, and us, to silence before the holy Questioner. James is a fine resource thereto. Why are there wars, why do we have not, why do we receive not? "Because you have been friends with the world instead of friends with God." Does 3:17 describe *your* thought-patterns? No? Why not? Is it because, like me, you nurse a jealous and selfish ambition instead of the ambition to greatness via receiving little ones? TM

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost
October 2, 1994

Psalm 135:1-7,13-14
Numbers 11:4-6, 10-16, 24-29
James 4:7-12 (13–5:6)
Mark 9:38-50

First Reading

The disciples' argument over who is the greatest shows them once more trying to eke out their own little kingdom. They want to own what is not theirs to own. They attempt to buy rights to God with their following of Jesus. "...we tried to stop him because he was not following us." Notice that the word "follow" (ἀκολουθέω) is the same word Jesus uses to call his disciples. It is instructive to note that John says they tried to stop the man "because he was not following *us*" and not because he was not following *Jesus*. Their whining sounds remarkably like the accusations the religious leaders point at Jesus; accusations which say, in effect, "We own property rights to God's Word and you're not playing by the rules, so get out."

Jesus reverses the disciples' priorities and refuses to allow them to try and control the power of God's Word. Jesus doesn't stop here. The consequences of trying to own God also touch and change all our actions, especially those where we try to judge or manipulate others in or out of God's household. Setting up a stumbling block (σκανδαλίζω) is the designation that Jesus gives to that kind of behavior. Jesus makes painfully clear that any action that we do which hinders others from coming to him sets a stumbling block in front of them. Jesus gives no excuse and no relief for us when he repeatedly uses this stumbling image to point back to his followers. It is better to be rid of that which causes us to stumble in relationship to God, even if it is our hand, foot, or eye. We might add, even if it is our relationships, our money, our belongings, or in some cases, a particular way of being the church.

"If any of you puts a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would

be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea" (9:42), says Jesus. That word sets before us the radical importance of keeping straight in our minds and actions who we belong to and what our relationship to God looks like. Deed follows faith, and faith follows good doing, and, as the book of James points out, we can't have one without the other. We cannot claim to be doing God's work when either our methods or message prevent others from seeing and knowing God. RB

Pastoral Reflections

This collection of logia is tied together verbally by "for your/my name's sake" and "offend" (σκανδαλίζω) but substantively by evaluating the tie a person has to Jesus. Is half a tie, by exorcistic use of his name, important even if the exorcist is not a church member ("follow *us*")? (Yes.) A tie to Jesus is so important, that an unbeliever who gives a drink to someone tied to Jesus will receive a (temporal) reward. The tie is so important, that anyone who disrupts it would be better off drowning with a millstone clerical collar. The tie is so important, as it preserves us from the eternal worm and permanent fire and brings us to life, that we would be better off losing hand, foot, and eye than that tie.

Note that Jesus, according to the apostles, is the original (and vivid!) Christian preacher of hellfire. We preachers need to ask ourselves why we do not follow him in this. Do we think we know God better? Are we afraid of appearing uneducated? Perhaps, indeed, Jesus' style is not effective today; but let us make sure we do not change his message!

In this pericope the gospel is presumed and not explained. But it is "presumed" here in a far different way than it is presumed in our society. The way we presume it calls to mind Luther's description of the pseudo-publicans, who say they are sinners but do not consider God's animosity but think of God's compassion. They do not die and rise again, but continue comfortably, for their comfort is not the gospel of the Crucified, but the *idea* that God is merciful. They do not repent, and are not forgiven. Because we are all more or less infected by this virus, this text's stress upon the decisiveness of the tie to Jesus should be salutary.

I intend to have James 4:13–5:6 included: it is importantly counter-cultural and utterly scriptural. Now, the Bible tells of many rich people who are not evil; James scores *these* rich because their profit is unjust (v. 4), their use of wealth lascivious (5), their conduct rapacious (6), and their businessing arrogant (4:13-16a) rather than humble (4:7,10). Although we modern preachers are generally silent about the need of workers to revere their employers (in contrast to the apostolic writings), this is no excuse on this occasion to be silent about unscrupled business practices.

To preach God's law and threats as honestly as Jesus, Mark, and James will require some nerve! And frightening our hearers, as they do, is not our whole task. It will take mastery of the Evangel for us to provide good enough gospel to resurrect those whom the law has killed! The life-giving power of Jesus' name, hinted at in Mark, will need to be unfolded in a very convincing and attractive way. TM

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost
October 9, 1994

Psalm 128
Genesis 2:18-24
Hebrews 2:9-11 (12-18)
Mark 10:2-16

First Reading

Relationships and the testing of these relationships are front and center in these scripture lessons. The wonder of the closeness and intimacy that is intended to be part of human dealings is frightening for those of us who spend our days either building up or tearing down walls of fear and defensiveness. The pure comfort and fearlessness that Adam and Eve felt in God and one another's sight is long gone. We nurse our fears and brokenness these days. We break God's intent for wholeness into tiny pieces of pain that fragment and separate us. The Genesis image of God's design judges many of our relationships in an age where we no longer seem to have a sense of humor or regret about our failings. Yet its image also builds hope in us, hope of how, by God's grace, those relationships will one day be whole again.

The Hebrews lesson furthers hope for all our relationships by emphasizing our relationship to Christ. Christ is pictured here as our sibling, the One who shares the same family and parent. Anyone who wants the Christian faith to be some supernatural, otherworldly, spiritual journey will be disappointed to find that Jesus Christ was like us, female and male, in every respect. All this is not some fluke but came to pass so that Christ's life, death, and resurrection might become packed with promise despite the pain. Verse 18 ties Christ to us by his sufferings. This relationship is defined not as one in which we suffer on behalf of Christ but rather as one in which he lives our suffering so that God's Word might have integrity as it comes to us in our testing and suffering. In good times as well as in times that are marred by pain and brokenness we are sister and brother with One whom we can trust knows us and our need.

Mark's story of the Pharisees' testing of Jesus on the question of divorce and Jesus' own disciples testing him on who is important in God's household rings a wake-up call for the church and its leadership. Repeatedly, almost tiringly so, Mark's Gospel presents us with a Jesus who is barraged by those who want God to rubber stamp the flawed and painful status quo. We don't like hearing of our failures in our relationships, whether that comes under the heading of married or divorced, friendship, church family, or family of origin. We want to know that there are rules and tools to make it all look like "Father Knows Best" or "The Dave Barry Show" (take your pick according to generation!). We want to be able to define our relationship to God with clear cut, legally recognizable rules so that there is no faith or responsibility involved.

The last section of the lesson speaks volumes about the way of God's household. The "important" adults are more than ready to send away the children, not just speaking sternly to them but rebuking them. "Rebuke" (ἐπιτιμάω) is the same word used by Jesus when responding to Peter's denial of his passion prediction.

It is late and there are important things to be done. Perish the thought that these little ones might have something to do, something to say about the household. Jesus' inclusion of them is not a sweet side-story. You'll notice that Jesus is indignant (ἀγανακτέω) at his companions' assumptions and behavior. He not only welcomes the children but places them first in the household. What would the church and our world look like if we, at Jesus' command, followed suit? RB

Pastoral Reflections

Gulp; what shall we say about divorce? If we try to be kinder and more "pastoral" than Jesus (!) by relaxing one of his commandments, many will praise our "compassion." If we say what Jesus says, as he says it, we will be criticized.

Begin at the beginning, like Jesus. Marriage, both the institution and one's own spouse, is a blessing from the philanthropic Creator. Despite the suggestion in *LBW*, p. 203, that

couples' vows alone make them married, Jesus says God marries people through the "one flesh" unification. The sexual union of man and woman supersedes even the biological connection of parents to child (Gen 2:24). And the two are one not *only* during sexual intercourse, intermittently. The bond is forged by God so permanently that even subsequent to a legal divorce the bond persists so intact that it can be adultered against. In v. 9b, Jesus flatly proscribes divorce. Divorce is also awful. So let us not sheepishly, irresponsibly fail to warn against future divorces for fear of offending participants of past ones.

So why are divorces? Jesus calls it hardness of heart (though not necessarily on the part of both spouses). Abuse is a pathology. *Of course* divorce is sometimes the lesser of two evils. While we need to say that, as Jesus does at first, we also need to say finally that that is the exception, not the rule. We know what needs to be done: thank God continuously for marriage, give to one's spouse *before* receiving, be grateful even for what your partner does as duty while doing your duties without expecting thanks, and remember to love and not just to negotiate the chores. But when outside pressures increase, it is easy to stop making this effort in order to concentrate on the other needs. Then the partner complains, rightly! Then hardness of heart can set in: unwillingness to repent and repair, to return marriage to the high priority God gives it. If we preachers say, or say Jesus says, divorce is not an option, then many of us married people may be careful how we treat our life-long partner. (I admit that this permanence makes some the more hardhearted. The Creator's law only increases sin in those without repentance.) Luther called marriage a school for character. So it is! Marriage has not only shown me my faults, but taught me to confess them and to work to reduce them. Hardheartedness is denial, the refusal to listen to these very painful but very good lessons.

But we preachers must give some gospel good enough to handle the accurate accusations our marriages level at us. Consider Hebrews. Chapter 2:9 begins in mid-thought, the "but" referring to the indisputable observation in v. 8c, which is true also of our marriages. The promise of the subjection of all to Jesus is indicated by the fact that Jesus, the lowly, is himself exalted already. The ramifications are on their way.

This down-up movement introduced in v. 9 is taken up in v. 10 as good news for us. The down part is God's way of making sure we have no second-rate salvation or Savior, but perfect. And perfect means becoming our flesh-and-blood brother, because only by breaking through death from *our* side does he perfectly free us from the fearsome bondage.

Verse 18: The suffering and temptation that perfected him (5:8-9) is Gethsemane's fear of death (connects to 2:14-15). The temptation, then, is not to immorality but to apostasy, the loss of faith in God to overcome death with life.

Hebrews may be tied to the divorce subject thus. (1) Jesus does not help the tempted to feel OK about defeat by temptation, he helps them to beat temptation. (2) The temptation is to distrust God. (3) Trusting God to preserve and give life to us humbles us into softheartedness. (4) Further, by faith we receive such a wealth of life that we can afford to spend life on our spouses and marriages. (5) Trusting God also means knowing the goodness of his law that our marriages are worth our best efforts, especially efforts at repentant softheartedness. TM

Twenty-First Sunday after Pentecost
October 16, 1994

Psalm 90:12-17
Amos 5:6-7, 10-15
Hebrews 3:1-6
Mark 10:17-30

First Reading

Ownership is the theme that stands out in the lessons for Pentecost 21. Who owns us and who owns what we usually consider our own? The answer to that questions is, "God does." The One who made us is the One to whom we belong and the One to whom all creation belongs. Ownership here is not claimed for the purpose of selfish misuse but for the purpose of good care and life.

This theme is spoken of in Amos as God makes reminder of the poor and needy and who they belong to. They are God's own, just as we are. Therefore God's people have no excuse to either "trample the poor" (5:11a) by hoarding and greed, or by allowing either individuals or institutions to do the same. We cannot "push aside the needy at the gate" (5:12) and feel justified because we have responsibilities of our own making. God's *justice* and *righteousness* (OT terms packed with depth) are not moved or changed in definition by our economics, politics, or personal circumstances.

The Hebrews lesson speaks of God as house builder, the "builder of all things" (Heb 3:4b). Moses was faithful as a servant in God's house. "Christ, however, was faithful over God's house as a son, and we are God's house...." It makes a difference to whom the house belongs when it comes to how the house and its inhabitants will be treated. If it is God's house then there will be plenty for all; not only in grace and forgiveness but when it comes to the basic necessities of life. What belongs to God will not be hoarded or bought and sold at the expense of peoples' lives. When understood in this way our entire orientation is changed. We are now to see the world and ourselves through the sight of the builder not simply through the lens of our desires.

The economics of the household of God comes out loudly and clearly in Mark's story of the young lawyer who wants to know the way to eternal life. This man is not some malicious, greedy soul. He is simply struggling with possession; not demon possession but the reality of being possessed by God. We can try to kid ourselves into believing that following Jesus isn't such a difficult thing, yet if there is one thing that stands in our way of truly living as full members of the household of God it is shown in our dealings with money and other valuables. Our treasuring these things above all else, including God, finds us defensive before God and the world. When one lives by the law then the attempt is to try to remake the rules of God's household. When humanity's rules take over, our purposes and not God's are served. "I've kept all these since my youth," the young man answers Jesus. What he has not done is put God before the rules, and in so doing he becomes deaf to God's righteousness and mercy.

It is necessary for us to face the question of God's ownership of our ministry as individuals and congregations, as synods and regions. Have we so claimed ownership that we are unwilling to allow God's rules to enter into the picture? If the body of Christ, the church, is God's gift to the world, how are we to live with that gift? Do we return it and try to get a better model, or perhaps a gift that costs a little less so that we get some change in return? These questions beg an answer in every age. RB

Pastoral Reflections

In this pericope the writer of Hebrews again pushes his or her principal goal: hold fast the confession about Jesus (confessing is not different from believing; it is believing orally). The argument here is a comparison of Moses and Jesus, to the latter's advantage, yet not by demoting Moses but by promoting him, the religious servant among God's people. So, the problem that this text is meant to address must be believers underestimating Jesus, as only one more *servant, in* the house, testifying to what *will be* spoken, whereas actually he is much more (a god-like superiority, v. 4): a *son, over* the house, who

speaks the *final words* (1:2). This problem, if unchecked, leads to the dire loss of Jesus' superiority, and so losing among all the valid clamors for obedience his unique voice of grace. And that would be fatal.

But the problem is not esteeming Moses, it is squandering Jesus. He is estimated (divine passive) at a much greater glory. So, do you and your people appreciate him the way God does? In this text God's role for Christ is unabashedly religious; he is occupied with the relations between God and the people. And he, super-competent, works for both sides. Toward God: the strong ὅθεν (therefore) of 3:1 harks back at least to 2:17f. where this high priest expiates the people's sins, removing God's wrath against them (not contrary to a begrudging god's will but as faithful to the merciful God).

Toward the people: this high priest, having suffered and been tempted (not to a moral failing but to abandon faith in his God) is able to help his tempted sisters and brothers. His help is not by belittling their temptations and nullifying their success or failure in coping therewith. He helps them to persevere in faith through the temptations. For (v. 6) we are God's house only *if* we keep hold of the boldness, the swagger, of our hope.

Thus, the problem of faith is addressed evangelically. (Walther stressed that urging people to believe is not enough, the pastor must "preach faith into their hearts.") Hebrews does not merely say "believe better," although that is the goal. Rather, "consider God's commissioned high priest, whom we (holy ones) confess, Jesus." Faith is strengthened by considering him, since he is so impressive a high priest. Considering him will help us hold on to the swaggering boast of our Hope. TM

Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost October 23, 1994

Psalm 91:9-16
Isaiah 33:10-12
Hebrews 4:9-16
Mark 10:35-45

First Reading

We are all aware of the power of words in our world. Even with the overload of printed and spoken words that invade our daily lives, words have not lost their power to move, build up, or destroy. The words of those with whom we live most closely are especially powerful for us. If that is true for words in general, how much more true must it be for the word of God which created the universe, the word of God who loves us and makes a home with us.

God's word in the Isaiah passage is one of judgment. One would do well to extend the lesson through verse 16: its message of God's judgment is not fully explored if only verses 10-12 are used. The message is clear. God's judgment is not simply for Zion's enemies but for all who would measure God's gifts and love.

The writer of Hebrews is an unrelenting witness to the power of God's Word. "It is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow. It is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (v. 12). This description is painful to hear much less to experience, and any who have struggled with God's word as it seeks to renew and remake us, know its power and pain as well as its comfort and joy. God's Word, Jesus Christ, brings God's power of judgment but does so as One who has integrity and promise. "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weakness..." (v. 15). For he has been through hell and back to bring us life. The confidence that is ours because of Christ Jesus gives us the ability to go to God in all our need without fear of retribution or laughter. On Christ's account God understands and knows our need. We can also be sure that God in Christ is inti-

mately aware of who we are and what we must struggle with as human beings.

We are near the end of the year of Mark and more than halfway through the Gospel of Mark. You would think, then, that the disciples would at least be *starting* to understand who Jesus is and what God is about in him. But neither seems to be happening. The ongoing controversy about who deserves first place is starting to make the reader feel like she is out in the middle of a playground with a group of elementary students, or in a group of adults vying for first place in the checkout line at a sale!

Lest we think that James and John are exceptionally dense, when the other disciples find out what has happened they become indignant (ἀγανακτέω), a word for anger which also, in other contexts, speaks of self-righteousness (see Mk 14:4, Mt 21:15; 26:8). We too should be careful then about the indignity we feel when those outside God's family accuse us of selfishly trying to grab a portion of God's house on earth for ourselves. The word "servant" comes quickly to Jesus' lips as he gathers together his disciples and responds to their bickering: "Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all" (vv. 43b-44). It was not until after Jesus' resurrection from the dead that a new attitude was raised up among his disciples. It is only as we live the resurrection life that a new way is found among God's people the church. RB

Pastoral Reflections

This lectionary system omits (characteristically) the frank discussion in Heb 3:7–4:8 of the historical fact of God's lethal wrath against his own people, and so obscures the poignancy of the opening "so then" (ἄρα) of v. 9: the promised rest remains for fortunate us, but in part because it was withheld from the disobedient desert generation. Can we dare be honest about what it will mean if we do not learn from their sad example? If we can be, it puts biblical urgency into v. 11, "So strive!"

Is "strive for rest" nonsense? No, for now is the time for striving toward; the entering to rest will happen at God's granting. However much we can draw advances on our eschatological pay to enjoy it in the present, now is not the time for that final kind of rest, and now is particularly not the time to cease from striving for faith.

Why? Because you cannot fool the Word of God. This word is not like Santa Claus who knows if you've been bad or good, *allegedly*. This Word is *on the page*. You can read it yourself and see that it knows you, even your thoughts and intentions (as Luther said, "better than you know yourself." And it knows your congregation better than you do, too, which is why you study it.)

It is oddly automatic for us, at this, to think of the Word's discerning in moral terms: odd, because morals is not Hebrews' concern, but faith! It is just this the Word discerns so cuttingly: our misguided preoccupation with morals and concomitant casualness toward our confession, our presuming upon grace and boredom with the labor of believing.

Then, like a genuinely evangelical preacher, Hebrews says: Let us hold fast our confession. Not because disobedience is fatal (though it is) but because we have such a terrific high priest! Not the 'Ιησους (v. 8) who did not give rest, but the' Ιησους the Son of God who has already gone before us. ('Ιησους is both Joshua and Jesus!)

So what good is that? He "sympathizes" with our weakness. This should not be misunderstood. "Sympathize" does not mean he knows how tough it is so he excuses our lapses, leaving us failures but trying not to notice. He who did not sin (=fail in faith, 3:18f.) mercifully and graciously *helps* (4:16, 2:18) us to hold faith, to believe, so we can follow him to the rest. This rest is given graciously, but not without conditions: (1) Christ dies, (2) Christ expiates, (3) Christ rises, (4) goes through the heavens, (5) provides for announcement of this good news, and (6) bolsters the faith of the dimly burning wicks. He does all this so that believers will hang on to all these wonderful *conditions* by which entrance to rest is made for us.

This help we ask for, Hebrews says, boldly. Brazenly, because we have not only an expectation of receiving, but have encouragement to ask. Such brazenness we have because we have so terrific a high priest. TM

Reformation Sunday
October 30, 1994

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

First Reading

Shall we trust God or not? This question has sounded down the hallways of history and haunted even the most faithful. Both the scripture lessons for Reformation Sunday and our whole reformation tradition call us to live as people who trust God above all else, for God has been trustworthy beyond our wildest dreams.

Psalm 46 is a moving witness to God's steadfastness in the midst of upheaval and change. The psalmist uses the imagery of nature and its powerful physical changes to address our fears of all change and challenge. "Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea...." Those who have experienced earthquakes have a story to tell us about fears and the earth moving. Those who have been blessed with old age can tell the story of change and the fears attendant to it with a whole other perspective. Those who come after this age of change in the church will have another story to tell. We hope and pray that, despite our propensity to flee at the first indication of a shake-up in tradition or position, we will look back on the fears we now harbor and find that we were faithful to God's love despite our uneasiness. We trust God to lead us through our fears about the shape of the church and the inclusion of folks we have been all too happy to exclude from the gospel. The invitation in verses 8 and 10 is for all.

The promise in Jeremiah that there is a day coming when God will sculpt new hearts and faithfulness among us is both anxiety producing and full of hope. We believe that in Christ that work has already been put into action. We also live in hope that God's sculpting us in the shape of Christ's cross will one day give us the wholeness we long for so dearly. God who has claimed us as God's own has given us love that will not let us rest easy when it comes to our hate, and mercy that will not let us accept injustice, at least not in the name of God.

Paul's discussion in Romans about the righteousness (δικαιοσύνη) of God directs us to the core of our reformation celebration. We are called to remember first of all God's righteousness bestowed on us through faith. Through that righteousness we cannot return with a clear conscience to behavior as individuals or as a church, that is not within the standards of God's righteousness. In simple terms that means that we can't live a double standard, especially not as God's people. While we might be encouraged by social convention and the normal operating procedure of the world to accept greed, hatred, retribution, and revenge as normal and natural, the good news of God's love in Christ Jesus and his cross puts to death that system and calls to life mercy, justice, and lavish acceptance and grace.

The few short verses from John's Gospel remain central to our understanding of what it means to be free. You will notice that Jesus is speaking to the Jews who believed in him, not the unbelievers. He reminds them that they are not free because of their association with the ancestors, physically or spiritually, but they are free because of their residing, remaining (μένω) in his word. While we cannot have a permanent place in God's household by virtue of our obedience (since we are slaves to something other than God) we have a permanent place there by virtue of Jesus Christ, the son, whose home is open to all because of God's hospitality and welcome. RB

Pastoral Reflections

While you admit that Paul and John say it as well as it can be said, you think your people would be well served by hearing it, for once, a different way, at least to alleviate the suspicion that only Paul says *sola gratia, solus Christus, sola fides.* So this Reformation Sunday, why not try Hebrews 5:1-10?

This pericope, as cut, is pure Christology; it speaks directly and only about Jesus the Christ, providing us abundant material for preaching the gospel (which is the only reason for preaching, being the only way to promulgate faith). But

towards what goal does Hebrews use this excellent gospel?

It is found in last week's 4:14-16: hold fast the confession, because the high priest we confess is so excellent. His excellence consists precisely in that he knows weakness, so that when we are weak we can hopefully ask him for help not to falter but to cling to faith. It is to that end that Hebrews elaborates this grand yet exceedingly tender Christology. From this purpose it is clear that the identification of Jesus with a high priest is not to prove that Jesus fulfilled some odd, prior requirement that it takes a high priest to save us. Rather, the writer ingeniously takes up the category of high priest in order to explicate Jesus' history.

We all wish (or claim) Jesus can solve anything. But his job description in Hebrews is specific: "appointed to things having to do with God, in order to offer for sins gifts and sacrifices." In Earth, Inc., a high priest is vice-president for divine-human affairs, and his task is to remedy by offerings the damage done to that relation. This VP is not scornful of the ne'er-do-wells who make all that work for him; rather, being "of the people, for the people" *he knows what it is like.* So much so that he has to make offering for himself first, before he can do anything for them.

It is that deep solidarity of Jesus with you and me, having to offer even for himself, that Hebrews means to unfold in vv. 7-9 (referring to Gethsemane). It seems the Holy Trinity wanted no salvation, no *Savior*, for his beloved humans who was less than perfect. And to be perfect, the Savior learned an obedient trust in the Father by being bereft of everything else. No safety net. Jesus recognized the awfulness of death and so with a strong cry and with tears he pleaded and begged God, *whom he knew could save him from death* (this certain knowledge is the very prick of his faithful anguish). Thus he learned to trust obediently the God who said "no" to his prayer and did not spare him death, the same God who, because of Jesus' reverence, then did say "yes" to his prayer, and saved him from death not by postponement but by outright victory.

Because he was perfect (in that way) he was eligible to be not a temporary fix (like the OT cultus) but the source of eternal salvation to those, Hebrews specifies, who heed him (so he is eternal as a Melchizedekian priest). The goal, recall, is to keep faith, and the reason to do so is the excellence, both in exaltation and in perfect weakness, of this high priest of the people and for the people.

In our day, there is something inapposite about this text that assures that Jesus knows *perfectly* well what it is like to be ready to flee from obedience because of faltering faith, and therefore is sure to help us when we cry out, "I believe, help thou mine unbelief." Inapposite, because, frankly, we do not very much mind failing to obey. We sin, knowing we can confess and receive "entire forgiveness."

Perhaps this text could be used to illuminate the biblical connections from faith to obedience. But if so, obedience is not the purpose of faith but only faith's skin. And certainly High Priest Jesus is only secondarily a model for us; primarily he is so excellent a high priest that he inspires our trust. TM

All Saints Sunday
November 6, 1994

Psalm 34:1-10
Isaiah 26:1-4, 8-9, 12-13, 19-21
Revelation 21:1-6, 9-11, 22-25; 22:1-5
Matthew 5:1-12

First Reading

"O taste and see that the Lord is good; happy are those who take refuge in him." The song of the psalmist sets the tone for our All Saints celebrations and remembrances. The psalmist begins with praise of God and then remembers what God has done for him. But this offering of praise reaches out beyond a self-centered, 'Thank you Jesus for all you've done for me.' The psalmist offers an invitation and encouragement for others to trust in the God who has so touched his life, "The LORD redeems the life of his servants; none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned" (v. 22). This part of Psalm 34 which is not included in the reading for All Saints holds out

the promise of God's continued goodness even unto death. All who seek refuge in God shall find God's home and God's heart.

While there are those who fear that preaching the Revelation text will offer people an easy out and the promise of cheap grace, a serious look at the book of Revelation cannot offer what we might be tempted to give. The marvelous picture of hope that we find in Revelation 21 and 22 cannot be melted down into a golden calf of nostalgia nor can it support a world view which says, 'Who cares about the way I live today?'

The Revelation reading for this Sunday offers the hope of God's homing with us (v. 3b), a promise of a new day and not just some more of the same old things. It is a reminder that we are not alone, whether we perceive that as a promise or a threat.

Notice that verse 6 is included in the listing of the reading. "Then he said to me, ' It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.'" It is only as we come to accept that God is the beginning and the end of all things that we will be able to give up trying to control the beginning and the end of all things, including other peoples' lives and our own. Making this claim along with John of Revelation we are led not only to thanks and praise to God for all our days but we are called to faithfulness to God whose being forms a frame for our lives and futures.

In an age of horrible wars and unrest vv. 22-25 offer a different vision, one which we are called to seek out through our work for peace. We are reminded in Revelation that God's will is not to be established simply among the chosen, but all the nations will one day walk by God's light. We cannot bring about that hopeful day, even by all of our best negotiations, but we confess that God can. If we do not believe that God is capable of changing our hearts and lives, and the hearts and lives of the whole world, then we have believed in Christ and his cross in vain.

There is hope for us, for our children, for the hopeless. It is hope which is born out of God's struggle in Christ with sin, death, and evil. It is hope that springs from the promised water of life which flows from the home and throne of the Lamb and flows outward to eternity. It is hope that is won with everlasting love, judgment, and mercy, especially for those who do not receive those things from us.

The Revelation promise is the promise that all that keeps us from God—jealousy, hatred, prejudicial fears, self-centeredness—and all that keeps the world from God—aggression, national pride, greed, and racial hatred—has an ending. It is an ending that is in God's hands, an ending that has its new beginning in Christ, whose cross has sealed a new covenant and whose resurrection has delivered us into a new age. RB

Pastoral Reflections

Admitting that in biblical usage "saints" = believers because they all have the Sainting Spirit, still they are not the saints in "All Saints." "All Saints" are Christ's best and brightest, the church's Pro-Bowl team. It does not threaten the gospel, but only our egos and our society's debilitating envy of achievement, to extol excellence in faith.

This sermon could be a pep-talk on excellence in discipleship. (The beatitudes warn our hearers that the excellence they achieve will probably be known only to our heavenly Father, for now.) It may be well to aim at high school kids (to whom I preach far too seldom). On the verge of adulthood the world is their oyster; sell them the pearl of great price! We *need* another Augustine, another Elizabeth of Thuringia, another Martin Luther King, another Lucia; why not one of them?

Ah, but how? Augustana 21 says we remember the saints (with thanksgiving, I would add) for three reasons, *in this order*: first, as examples of how greatly God gives grace to sinners (Peter! Augustine!), second, as examples of how faith sustained our forebears in the worst trials, and *finally* as examples of good living. For the cultivation of excellence this indicates not bluntly to begin acting like the Virgin, or Gregory the Great, or Bonhoeffer, but always first acquiring the grace and faith they held, then transmitting that Spirit into action through whatever abilities we severally are made of.

The beatitudes themselves catalog those spiritual dispositions that suit Christians and equip them for doing God-pleasing, not showy human-pleasing, deeds of righteousness. They are re-

quirements, and so law. But they are also gifts. Luther said in 1528, "I have said before that these eight items are nothing but instruction about the fruits and good works of a Christian. Before these must come faith, as the tree and chief part or summary of a man's righteousness and blessedness, without any work or merit of his; out of which faith these items all must grow and follow." Excellence begins with faith. And we, sister and brother preachers, serve up the gospel persuasively, deliciously, and generously so that faith may abound and excellence increase. One of your hearers, with your help, might make the All Stars. TM

Twenty-Fifth Sunday after Pentecost
November 13, 1994

Psalm 107:1-3, 33-43
I Kings 17:8-16
Hebrews 9:24-28
Mark 12:41-44

First Reading

God's generosity humbles us and makes pale the very best of our giving and service. This is one Sunday when a theme illustrated by all three lessons and the psalm could be used as an approach to preaching.

Psalm 107 is a beautiful testament to the all-encompassing generosity of God. God not only cares for all creation and particularly looks out for God's people but even more, God cares for those most in need. "God raises up the needy out of distress and makes their families like flocks" (v. 41). So it is that God doesn't just put a band-aid on deep seated injustice and want but instead brings those in need into God's household where in relationship they can find help and hope. The psalm ends as it begins, with praise of God's steadfast love, an example in form, of the reality of God's grace.

God's generous provision is found in places where those of us who expect God to function on a barter system don't ever guess we will find it. The story of the widow of Zerephath is a good case in point. The prophet who is to bring the Almighty God's word to the people is provided for by a poor widow and before that, in verses 1-7, by the birds of the air. When the widow tells Elijah that she has only a bit of oil and flour, that little bit, used by God's hand, becomes a never ending source of provision that is not used up. The widow, with nearly nonexistent resources, is put into service and provides, through God, for the ongoing life of God's word in her day.

Mark's story, known by the title of the Widow's Mite, would be more accurately called the Generous Widow. This story not only questions our accepted standards of financial giving but our entire way of thinking about scarcity and abundance. We might describe the widow as having little to contribute to the treasury of the church and indeed to society in general. We might also make the assumption that, because she had little by our standards, she would also have little desire to give thanks to God and even less of a desire to share what she has. Human nature would show us that the more we have the more difficult it is for us to share it generously. The widow surprises everyone because in her want she apparently doesn't give a second thought to whether she is to respond generously to God. She does so as naturally as any child who truly loves their parent. The question is not, "What do I keep for myself and what do I return to God?" but rather, with thankful heart, "What more can I return to my God?"

On the other hand those who are most able to give—and I am not necessarily speaking about those whom we call the 'rich'—find themselves clutching frantically to keep what they consider their own. Our society is abundant in things but poor in spirit and the more we acquire, the more difficult it is for us to consider returning all that we have to God's care and use. It is not that all the poor are generous or that all those who have plenty are greedy, but rather that abundance and generosity become relative terms in our society. The majority of those who reside in our society have incredible abundance, but our tendency is always to direct our attention to what we do not have. The 9th and 10th commandments become our undoing.

Jesus' message to *all* of us speaks of God's generosity, a wealth which comes to us without a credit reference and in relation to nothing other than God's desire to share heavenly love. It is a message about abundance and God's ability to give abundant life in Christ to all. It is a message that calls into question our standards of generosity, standards which at least in God's example do not begin with 10% of our lives but 100% of God's love and 100% of our lives returned for God to use in making a home on earth for all people. RB

Pastoral Reflections

This pericope is one summit of a range of comparisons between the Christ's self-offering and the old law (=sacrificial system, 10:1, not Pauline law). Chapter 7 compared priests, chapter 8 compared covenants, and 9:1-10:18 compares the ministries (8:6 λειτουργία), that is, what the priests *do* for the sake of the covenants. The call for these comparisons (as with Moses in chapter 3) was not that there were devotees of Levitical liturgy among this preacher's audience ("Hebrews" notwithstanding), but was to have a foil to show how great is the covenant that Christ has instituted. The original preacher of Hebrews was interested in the gospel, not sacerdotery. His or her genius was to ransack OT cultus to take advantage of early Christian hints that Christ was a victim (rooted in the Last Supper "my blood shed for you") and priest of atonement. But the point of the comparisons, for the original preacher and us, is to tell the gospel grandly, attractively, persuasively (the whole goal of Hebrews is "hold fast the confession").

The chief point of the many comparisons (8:6) is that Christ's covenant is better because it has better promises (which is why his priestly style is better, it is just fitting). Specifically, the gifts and sacrifices of the Old Law can deal only with fleshly matters (9:9f.) but the blood of the Christ can cleanse the *conscience* from dead works (9:14). This intriguing statement reveals Hebrews' inter-active environment. *Our conscience cannot be cleansed without involving us.* The gospel is objective, but our consciences are not relieved of their nasty attachments to self-justifying works (hopeless—"dead"—though they are) by Christ's bleeding until we *believe* (Hebrews' theme) that his sacrifice of himself is enough to "put away sin" (9:26) once and for all, ἅπαξ. To drop that faith, as many do, is to return to dead works, not good ones, and cease to "serve the living God," 9:14.

To accent this superiority of Christ's covenant, the pericope capitalizes on one magnificent way in which Christ's ministry is superior to that of the priests in the tabernacle: ἅπαξ ("once and for all," 9:26b, 28). Repetition, even annual (9:25), bespeaks ineffectiveness. The Christ offers his sacrifice ἅπαξ because it works. Ἅπαξ is the epitaph over our sin's guilt. Ἅπαξ is also the indictment against all our *faithless* attempts to appease God ourselves. Christ has dealt with sin ἅπαξ, period. That dismal subject is closed between believers and God, so much so that its closure is the turning point of cosmic history (9:26b). Sin is not even on the agenda for his Second Coming (9:28).

This may be a rare, fit occasion to inflict a Greek vocable on our hearers, for ἅπαξ is a dandy. The gospel is gospel only if it is the last word; anything subsequent restricts it, crimps the fullness of God's grace in Christ. And ἅπαξ is a very final word.

Just so strong a gospel as this is necessary to create in us the kind of faith the widow had; faith that made her gift, and will make ours also, praiseworthy to the Christ instead of a reckless "dead work" to gain God's favor. TM

Christ the King
November 20, 1994

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

First Reading

You can hardly find a Psalm that is more joyful and celebrative than Psalm 95. It not only speaks of God's wondrous acts of creation but God's claiming to be our God, and we the people who belong to God. The call to faithfulness which begins in verse 8 along with the verses which follow should not be left out of the psalm's singing or reading. All too often the breaking up of the psalms into bits and pieces fails to give us the full range of their message.

The prophet's message in Jeremiah 23 is not easy listening for the leaders of the church, nor even for the lay folk who are called to witness to God's love. There is promise there that a remnant of God's faithful will remain even though the leadership has driven away God's flock, Israel. As is so often the case, God will be the one who gathers the people back together and will make of them a whole people. It is the Lord whose righteousness will enliven and make new. As you place this lesson in context do not miss the fact that verse 1 is excluded from the lesson. It reads, "Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! says the Lord." Why this verse is excluded we can only guess. If the woes of Holy Scripture are kept out of the sight of God's people we will only become more and more like those shepherds who scattered instead of gathered God's people. It should, without a doubt, be included in the reading and the preaching of this text.

Colossians 1 is poetry, an example of early Christian hymnody. The praises of Christ Jesus are sung as the author describes him as the "first-born of all creation" (v. 15), "he is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (v. 17). "In him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell and through him God was pleased to reconcile to God all things... making peace through the blood of his cross" (vv. 19-20). The phrase "in him all things hold together" holds mighty power and promise for our day when it seems that much of what we know is changing and breaking apart at a rapid rate of speed. In Christ Jesus we find a center, a gathering place, a source from which we can find sustenance and form for life in the world. In the midst of the trials of divorce, separation from children, sickness, poverty, and the feeling of helplessness in facing the stress of modern life there is One who gives us courage and hope and a sense of the whole.

The graciousness of the message continues as we enter Luke's account of Jesus' death on the cross. Met on all sides by opposition and desertion, Jesus is dying on the cross. What do we find him doing? Offering the thief beside him a place in God's home called paradise. For one who himself was facing death because of his misdeeds there would seem to be no word of grace, but here we find it in the suffering One. Perhaps you have found grace in the dying words or actions of a beloved one, perhaps you have met hope even in the midst of separation and pain or the finality of death. If you have, then you too know the power of Christ whose graciousness extends to the grave and beyond. RB

Pastoral Reflections

The pericope-pickers, taking a cue from the other three passions, in which Jesus' ironic kingship is indicated by purple and crown, entitle this episode "Christ the King." Even though Luke expunged the literary royalty, the theological point works as well here, where Jesus, in regal fashion, grants entrance to his kingdom to one of his subjects. In Colossians, likewise, the operative question is: Which realm are you in, the dominion of darkness or the kingdom of God's beloved Son? (The different nouns seem to point deliberately to two realms not merely separate but qualitatively different.)

Colossians and Luke speak in complementary ways about how one enters Jesus' kingdom. Colossians stresses the action of God the Father (vv. 12-13) with Jesus as his instrument (v. 14), but Luke attends to Jesus' action. In vv. 35-38 first [Jewish] rulers then [Roman] soldiers ask

Jesus to exercise his authority (respectively, religious and political) to save himself. The irony, of course, is evangelically delicious. Precisely because Jesus is indeed Christ (v. 35) and king (v. 37), the one thing he cannot do is save himself. This section, as it were, poses a question: If you are in power, what are you doing up there?

The answer is that he uses his position, characteristically, to save others, not himself. Does this sound weak, unkingly, power*less*? Well, is he not your Lord? Does he not command your life and devotion and allegiance? He is power*ful*. So powerful that right-handed king Jesus, without coercion but only by his love and grace, commands more effectively than all the left-handed kings in the world. More importantly, he alone has power to promise paradise (cf. *LBW* #124, stanzas 3-4).

Yet "what he is doing up there," governing in weakness, does not govern all. Luke answers the vv. 35-38 question in 39-43, with a poignancy in the dialogue that artfully gives life to a thoroughly didactic scene. The first felon joins the rulers and soldiers by echoing their taunt, "save yourself," adding "and us!" The original irony is here doubled, for by *not* saving himself and them *that* way, Jesus *is* saving. This felon, by asking too little of Jesus, misses everything and remains a denizen of the dark dominion. The happier alternative is the second felon's case, Luke's textbook proper response to Jesus. He (1) fears God, (2) confesses he is undeserving, (3) confesses Jesus' innocence and unjust death, and (4) calls on Jesus for help. *He* receives the promise of paradise. Luke-Acts says relatively little about Jesus' death as atonement. Luke focuses on people's response to Jesus: the resurrection shows Jesus is God's chosen; now, whose side are you on?

Preaching that is true to the scriptures generally and to these two texts in particular will have to clarify: (1) it all begins with God the Father of Jesus Christ who rescues us through Jesus. (2) Jesus' part is to rule his kingdom ironically, through powerlessness and sheer grace. (3) This creates two alternative realms, Jesus' and darkness'; people belong to one or the other. (4) One's citizenship is determined by one's response to Jesus. To prevent people from dwelling in pride or fear on their response, as though it were a decision they make, it would be well to emphasize #2 and its grace. This will strengthen people's faith. TM

Thanksgiving Day November 24, 1994

Psalm 65
Deuteronomy 8:1-10
Philippians 4:6-20
Luke 17:11-19

First Reading

The lessons assigned to Thanksgiving Day set out for us as grand a feast as we find on any of our dinner tables. You may want to consider orienting folks around the Thanksgiving theme by using one of these marvelous texts in place of one of the regular lectionary texts for Christ the King Sunday. In the meantime, let's sample some of the food prepared for us here.

Not unlike the retelling of the story of the origins of the Pilgrims, we find in Deuteronomy the retelling and so reliving of the Exodus story and the giving of the commandments. Here, as opposed to the account found in the book of Exodus, we discover a more detailed commentary on the whys and wherefores. God, the One who provides and prepares all the food we receive, has used food as a way of nurturing God's people in faith as well as bodily needs. Verse 3 reads, "God humbled you by letting you hunger, then feeding you with manna, with which neither you nor your ancestors were acquainted, in order to make you understand that one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord."

The food which comes from God, whether for body or spirit, is given to us that we might be nourished for life with God. While we can become satiated on thanksgiving feasts, whether on Thanksgiving Day or other days, even that nourishment is not enough to give us true life.

These well-known words from Deuteronomy (words later quoted by Jesus in his temptation in the wilderness) bring a transforming word to

our thanks-giving and our ministry both inside and outside of the church. It is not enough and will never be enough that we eat and drink, play, love, work, rejoice, and struggle. Not even coming to know ourselves better through experience, therapy, or personal growth groups will be enough to nourish life that is lasting and whole. It is only as we receive manna from heaven, the food of God's loving Word, Jesus Christ, that we will hunger and thirst no more.

The verses from Philippians 4 continue the theme of sustenance which can be found in relationship to God.. Paul gives his personal testimony about his acquaintance with hunger and fullness. His closing words in verse 13 are the rich dessert of Christian thanksgiving. Their simple yet eloquent statement of faith invites each of us back to God's table again and again. "I can do all things through the One who strengthens me."

The story of the cleansing of the lepers calls God's people to account. How is it that we find folks outside the household of God more generous in their thanks to God than we are? The answer to that question may be a commentary on the way we live out of thankfulness as God's people. Will we indulge only in great feasts of self-satisfied thanks, or will our lives become so entwined with the body and blood of our Lord that the heavenly feast of blessings and thanksgiving is tasted by all the world, especially those most hungry? RB

Pastoral Reflections

Before reading the gospel a preacher could say, "After the reading, I will ask you a trick question. I will even tell you now what it is: how many lepers were made well?" After the reading she says, "OK, how many were made well?" A bright soul or two will say, "One." The preacher grins and begins.

For the issue here (*pace* Martin Bell) was never a platitude on the ugliness of ingratitude. Luke has bigger fish to fry, else v. 19 would be superfluous. What *really* sets this ex-leper apart from his nine fellows? "But one of them, seeing he was healed, *returned*" (v. 15). We are not told the others did not praise God, we are told the one *returned*. Again, Jesus' puzzlement is not that the nine are not thankful, but that they are not here ("where are they?"). He asks not why no one worships God, but why none other is found "*returning* to give glory to God." Beside the repeated interest in return to Jesus, note how "glorify God" is coupled with the man's falling at Jesus' feet both in the narrative (15b-16a) and in Jesus' speech (18-19a).

What sets this ex-leper apart is his return to and, so, focus on Jesus. It is to this that Jesus says, "Get up and go; your faith has made you well" (σώζω, *not* the same vocable as in 14 or 15). Faith?? Yes! The story's point is to recognize or believe that *Jesus* is the instrument and locus of God's making well. What sets this leper apart, his saving faith, is not gratitude but knowing at whose feet to fall down. (His ethnicity, besides Lukan irony, may indicate the greater ease that Luke's lowly have in being grateful for a middle-man like Jesus, while the snobby Jewish lepers wanted to give their thanks directly to God.)

This is the perfect text for American Thanksgiving in 1994. It compels us to remember that in all things, even earthy things like a good harvest, any livable relation between us and the Creator is always through the Christ. And this in both directions. Coming: if the universe has mercy, if the crop is good, it is not because God generally created but because "though [Christ] all things are made" (cf. Col 1:15-20). Even in the OT, when God was merciful he was so through the Christ (1 Cor 10:4, Gal 3:8, Jn 5:39f.). The heavenly Father who knows how to give good gifts is the Father of those incorporated into his Son.

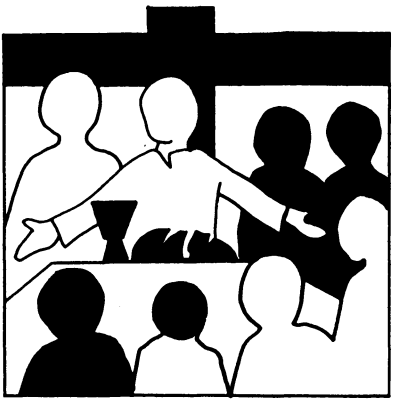
And going: how could even our thanks ascend Christlessly to the Father? But although they are too impure, too confused by self-interest to be acceptable to him, when purified by passing through his go-between, Jesus the Christ, they are to him sweetest incense, purest psalm.

Luke tells us it is saving faith to glorify God through Jesus the Christ for mercy received.

So, our harvest thanksgiving, especially our sermons, must be at Jesus' feet, be Christic worship, neither pagan nor theist. The Word is to be invoked and spoken. The blood-family's gathering's praise needs to be marked by Jesus' cross just like the water-and-Spirit-family's gathering's Great Thanksgiving. TM

From Survival to Mission

Jerry L. Schmalenberger
President
Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary



My sixtieth birthday gave me occasion recently to rethink my 29 years in parish ministry and six years as president of Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary.

If I had my life to live over again I would be a parish pastor and top it off with an opportunity to teach in a Lutheran theological seminary and give some direction in shaping leadership for the church, just as I've had the privilege of doing!

However, in this day of paradigm shifts in all areas of our lives, I believe that we must move our thinking from survival mentality to one of mission.

Here's what I might do differently if starting again in the parish:

I would probably spend less time trying to preserve the history of the institution and a lot more time envisioning what the future ought to be on God's behalf.

I would not spend nearly as much energy in developing member loyalty to the congregation and myself as I would in discipling members to be loyal to the Christ. I believe this would avoid losing many who come in the front door and go out the back in rather rapid fashion.

In my new member classes I would spend less time on congregational assimilation and more time helping them understand what it means to be a Christian in this day and how to follow the Christ in their own ministry every day.

I am sure I would try to move my ministry from being completely taken up with caring for those *inside* the church to ministering to what we now call "the extended congregation." This group of people are those who are in the web of the congregation, usually the unchurched friends or family members of the active membership. They appear to be the very best prospects for evangelization and bringing into the family of God.

While I would continue to welcome those already in the congregation, I would probably spend more energy inviting the unchurched. We now live in a time when, as Christians, we are almost a minority. The unchurched are all around us, many waiting to be invited.

I would change my evangelism style from one that emphasized program to one that emphasizes personal witnessing. It seems crucial now that individual members of the congregation learn how to witness out loud to the people with whom they work, live, and play all week.

I would change the multicultural dimension of my ministry from what I now believe was almost a cultural paternalism to a ministry which values the richness of many cultures and offers multilingual worship forms, using inclusive language and celebrating our diversity.

I certainly would want to move beyond seeing stewardship as a way of raising funds for mission to its broader aspect of being a caretaker of all creation. I'd now place heavy emphasis on stewarding the earth's resources, our own health, our families, our abilities and spiritual gifts, as well as our money (including estate planning).

I would not be content with the spiritual dwarfism of my members, but would take very seriously the need for regular opportunities for revival, renewal, and spiritual direction.

By now I certainly know that we cannot view America as a Christian nation. Instead we ought to view America as a mission field with ourselves as missionaries, and congregations as mission stations.

All this is to say that if I were to start in my parish ministry again, I would try to move from a success-and-survival mentality in ministry to a servant ministry.

I suppose some could view both the need for drastic paradigm shifts in how we do parish ministry and how the laity of the congregation carry out their ministry vocation as threatening, and long for the "good old days." However, as I view this time in the history of our church, it looks to me like a grand opportunity to gain renewed vigor and fresh approaches for witness through visionary leadership that is willing to risk new ways of being God's people in God's world.

At age sixty, if I were starting over in the parish, I think I would try the above with anticipation of great joy and aliveness for trying.

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