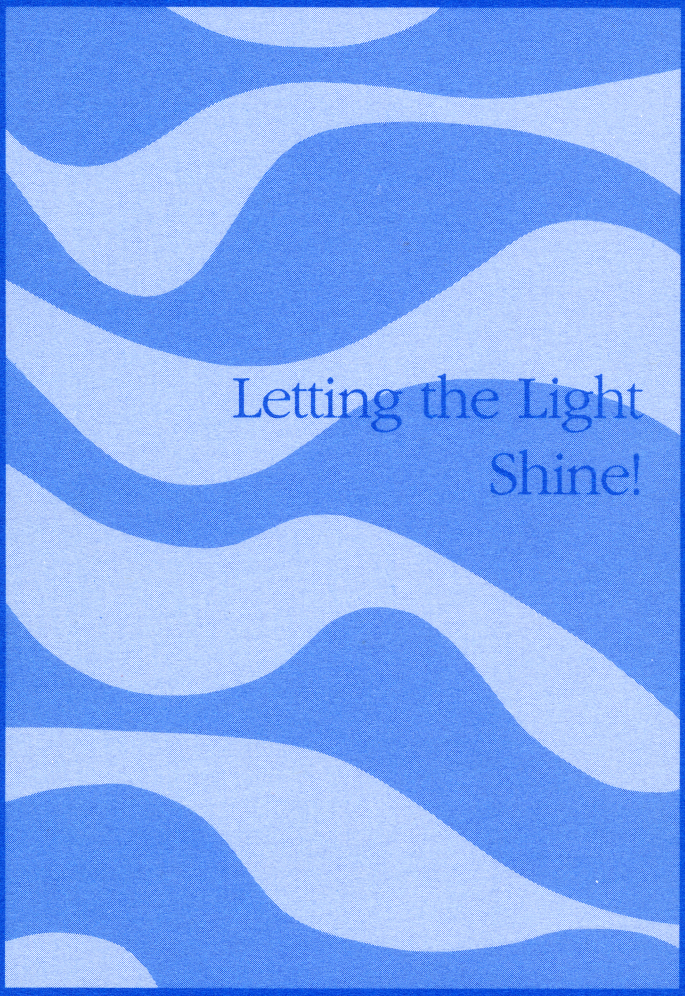
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CURRENTS

in Theology and Mission

Currents

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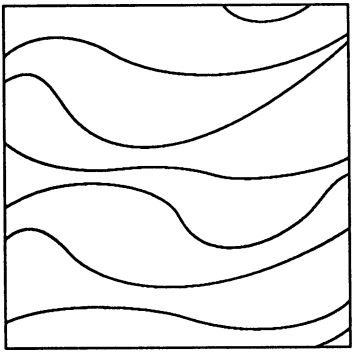
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Letting the Light Shine!

After untold numbers of committee meetings, negotiations, institutional self-sacrifices, prayers, and visionary dreams, our parents—and even some of our siblings—in the faith put together the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago in the 1960s. Eventually six predecessor seminaries slipped into this rich stew, that has been bubbling along in Hyde Park for a quarter of a century. Last February, LSTC dedicated its annual Professional Leadership Conference to reflections on our silver anniversary and asked from where we have come and where we are going.

"Letting the Light Shine" was the theme of that conference and of the whole anniversary year. Faculty, alumni, and friends of the seminary probed our urban, pluralistic setting, our ecumenical history and vision, and our intellectual context in the shadow of a great research university. LSTC is not only a parade example of the uniting of northern European traditions; it is also the place where African-American and Hispanic Lutheran traditions have flourished.

From that potent mixture, with the Spirit's blessing, has come light, even more Light.

Kathleen D. Billman proposes that ministry is the place where we discern that light can be harsh as well as inspiring, and darkness can be holy as well as terrifying. Commitment to pastoral ministry means listening before we speak and claiming darkness as well as light as a dwelling place of God. In our parishes and in our seminaries we need to create safe and hospitable places where we can share our uncertainties. We all live in a collision of worlds and completing claims: light comes from the realm of God, where the call to kinship comes through grace and water; against that realm is arrayed a world that defines kinship along the lines of blood and law.

Philip Hefner seeks a witness in response to our situation of moral confusion. No other concern has been more urgent in LSTC's life these past twenty-five years than receiving the traditions of the gospel and struggling to retell those traditions in ways that are faithful to the past and yet also available to our present. The challenge to the believer is to translate the behavior of ritual, grounded in story, into praxis in the world of the everyday. He finds special resources in our catholic self-understanding, the Bible, the liturgy, our sacramental sensibilities, and the doctrine of vocation. Our common weakness as Lutherans is our reluctance to give theological grounding to behavior and good works.

Edgar Krentz reviews the paradigm shifts in biblical studies over the short lifetime of LSTC. Historical criticism is now one method among many, not all of which are mutually complementary. Social analysis has recreated the cultural and social context in which the text was written, and it has diagnosed the underlying structures of the interpreter's world that determine which meanings are allowed to filter through. Literary interpretations of the Bible range from narrative and rhetorical criticism, here found useful, to the more problematic areas of reader-response and deconstructionism. Finally, there is a conscious effort today to realize the value of our different starting points, as men and women, rich and poor, WASP or African-American. The biblical interpreter, now as before, uses every means of interpretation that will illuminate the dark corners of our minds and our world through the light of the Word.

George Lindbeck recaps the past several centuries of history in order to make some educated guesses about what the future holds for the Christian church. Christianity, like the world itself, will no longer be eurocentric: it is in the Far East, Africa, and Latin America that the future of the church looks most promising. As far as ecumenism is concerned, the search for unity has faltered in recent times not least because of the weakening of the center. Strengthening the center is imperative, not only for intra-Christian communication but for the church's very survival and ultimately for the sake of the world; unless we knit the bonds of global Christianity more tightly, the future of humankind will be even dimmer than it seems.

Richard P. McBrien spoke at a special convocation that marked the silver anniversaries of LSTC and the Catholic Theological Union. Though shaped by the Second Vatican Council, his remarks have stirring power across denominational lines. He sees the church as a mystery or a sacrament, not primarily as an institution. The ministry in the church belongs to the whole people of God; in the twenty-first century ministry will not be confined to the ordained, and ordained ministry will not be restricted to males. The mission of the church includes service to human needs, as well as preaching and administration of the sacraments. Because the church is a communion, its institutional structure is collegial rather than monarchical. The church is ecumenical and eschatological, it is never an end in itself.

Morris J. Niedenthal reflects on the use of imagination in preaching and how we feed on sensual attentiveness. Preacher, what do you see? The task of the preacher is to engage listeners at the deepest level of their experience and in their struggle to make sense of life. How do they reconcile their experience with their convictions? What enlightens a preacher's imagination is a simple fact: the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.

Albert Pero, Jr. offers cultural-transcendence or self-transcendence as light for the future of the church. Black people in the time of slavery sang not only to make their work days easier, to but gain existential, metaphysical, and eschatological insights that were impossible for most white people to attain at that time. Jesus' modality of self-transcendence meant living out the value of self-giving love. To be engaged in self-transcendence means a readiness to listen, to enter into the real life situations of people, to give up our illusion of power, to meet people on their own terms, and to accept the fact that we do not possess the whole truth.

Jay C. Rochelle defines spirituality as the entire complex of words and signs in which we dwell and by which we appropriate the faith. Prayer arises in response to the promises which we discern and receive through our meditative reading of scripture, our common life in the body of Christ, and our daily lives. The heart of evangelical devotion in the

sixteenth century became prayer. Veit Dietrich assisted in the shaping of a Lutheran piety that is hallmarked by faith-active-in-love. He coined that marvelous line about adorning the doctrine of the Word with a godly life and conversation.

In a sermon at the opening Eucharist, **Gunnar Staalsett** subsumed light, love, and life within a theology of the cross. Justified by faith to do justice, we need to be reminded that we are the light of the world, but even more, that our light is Christ. He urges us not to confuse the full light of Christ with our little personal torch.

Alumni reflections were offered at the anniversary celebration by **Mary Ann Moller-Gunderson, Richard J. Perry, Jr.**, and **Stephen D. Samuelson**. They remember the joys (the gracious invitation to press toward a defensible theology), tears (a professor wrote at the end of one paper: From now on you have permission to think for yourself and write down your own thoughts) and missed opportunities (ignoring the light of faith that students bring to the seminary) of theological education. Each of them calls, in her or his own way, for letting the light shine with renewed intensity.

Finally, **Jerald C. Brauer** tells of his role as bridge between seminary and university in bringing the Catholic Theological Union and LSTC to Hyde Park. The founding days are now over; the constructive days are upon us.

No one, Jesus said, after lighting a lamp puts it under a bushel basket, but on the lampstand, where it can give light to the whole house.

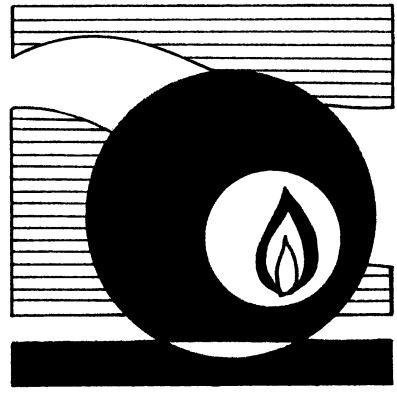
In the same way....

Ralph W. Klein
Editor

Holy Darkness, Kindly Light: Ancient Gifts for Ministry in a New Era

Kathleen D. Billman
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

It is tremendously challenging to be asked to reflect, first in a presentation, and then in conversation with you, on ministry in the twenty-first century. It is challenging because reflecting on the future of ministry raises questions which, if seriously addressed, deeply influence our *present* ministry, our here and now lives.



All kinds of questions are currently being raised about the future of ministry. There have been a host of demographic

studies, analyses of social trends, and surveys of congregational attitudes. It is terribly important to examine the context in which ministry takes place.

But for the next few moments I invite you to join me in pondering *these* questions: What future is *God* laboring for in the world? Where do we find evidence of the one who came to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives and new sight to the blind, to set the downtrodden free, to offer abundant life to us all? What do our responses to these questions mean for our attempts, in our ordained and lay ministries, to offer Christian leadership to the people and the world God loves?

I do not claim prophetic clarity about the future. But in the tradition of the prophets, I recognize that God continually calls us to see that the seeds and signs of the future are embedded in our present choices, choices ventured in the midst of our complicated lives where we all too often see through a glass dimly. Because I am a *pastoral* theologian I search for evidences of God's labor, Christ's empowerment, and the seeds and signs of the future in the world of ministry. I ask myself over and over, as one who has been a pastor and is now a teacher of pastoral care: What am I learning about the future from those who are struggling and yearning to receive new life in the present? What does it mean to care for people in life-giving, empowering ways, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God's grace, as we enter the future together?

Explore with me, for a few moments, an experience of pastoral ministry. In its rich complexity, I believe we may discover resources for discerning God's labor in the world, Christ's empowerment, and the seeds and signs of the future. All that we bring to ministry—the ways we have been shaped by our culture and social location, the ways we have received and understood Christian tradition and biblical witness, the ways we have known God's presence in our lives—come into play when we practice ministry. I do not think we really know what we believe, what we hope for, who we are, apart from that ministry. In coming to terms with our practice—not just what we believe we ought to do, but what we actually do—we re-encounter all that has shaped us, in fearful and wonderful ways. Sometimes reflecting on what we have done is more fearful than wonderful. But such is the mystery of God that even the moment of profound judgment is often a moment of profound grace as well. But let me be as specific as I can. I will tell you a story from my own ministry.

Recent newspaper stories using the term "illegal aliens" have reminded me of a woman I knew when I was a pastor in New Jersey, a woman I will call "Dora." I remember the morning she came up to me after worship, in the spring of 1991. I was hurrying to get downstairs to help lead a youth group meeting when she intercepted me.

Dora was crying. She was so upset that it was hard for me to make out exactly what she wanted, but gradually I understood that she needed help getting a green card. She showed me the business card of an immigration counselor, and I agreed to go with her to the church-sponsored immigration office later that week.

It was only in the immigration office that I understood the specifics of what she wanted so desperately from me. If only I would apply for her to be my live-in housekeeper and child care-giver, she might be able to get a green card. I listened in stunned silence as the immigration counselor explained the process. In order for Dora to be legally admitted to the United States, she would have to go back, at some point, to her

war-torn country and wait for my application to be processed. The entire process could take months, even years. Moreover, going back to her country was precisely what Dora feared.

I asked the immigration counselor a lot of questions that afternoon—about every imaginable alternative to what Dora was proposing. I asked questions about immigration laws, quotas, rules regarding refugee status, the works. No alternatives were realistic in Dora's particular case, even though the idea she was proposing was seriously problematic, both for her and for me.

It was there in that immigration counselor's office that I told Dora what only a few people knew in the spring of 1991: I had just accepted a call to the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago and would be moving away from the Trenton area the following spring. I thought that the giving and receiving of this news would be the worst moment of the afternoon. I was wrong. The worst moment was when she said, with tears streaming down her face, "I could go with you," and I did not say yes.

There are rare moments when we see ourselves from more than one angle at once. It was like that for me in the moments before I left the immigration office. I stood up to say good-bye to the immigration counselor. All the immigration manuals were lying between us on her desk. I looked into the eyes of the counselor with whom I had conversed about the law, whose hand reached across her desk to shake mine. It seemed to me that both of us felt victimized by those neatly-written manuals on her desk. At least I thought I detected some note of common frustration and helplessness that connected us. I read no judgment in her eyes as Dora and I prepared to go.

But as I looked at Dora's dark-skinned and weary face, I suddenly saw us as I imagined we looked from Dora's eyes: two white people who could discuss, in calm and logical ways, the laws that named her an "illegal alien." I saw myself, as I imagined I looked to her: an American pastor with a blue car and the freedom to go anywhere she wanted, who didn't have to worry about a green card, or war, or being in exile far from home; someone who had the luxury to be able to ponder the nuances of the law without its affecting her personal survival; a pastor who could think of no Christian she personally knew, including herself, who would be eager to fill out that application.

> God continually calls us to see that the seeds and signs of the future are embedded in our present choices.

I am sure that my name will never be proposed for the office of Attorney General of the United States. But what a strange irony it is to realize that while I would never get in trouble with Congress for the decision I made in that immigration office, I remember it as a moment of shame, not self-congratulation. At any examination of my life and ministry I would not be proud of that moment.

But because of moments like that, I have been challenged to name some things about ministry that I believe are true right now and I suspect will still be the case even in the twenty-first century.

> Ministry is the place where we discern that light can be harsh as well as inspiring and darkness can be holy as well as terrifying.

Ministry is the place where we discern that light can be harsh as well as inspiring and darkness can be holy as well as terrifying.

Jay Rochelle said that words create worlds.[1] Yes, I believe they do. We live with the wonder and pain of that truth on a daily basis, scarcely recognizing how words shape the ways we are able to imagine ourselves, our work in the world, and to envision our future.

In 1967 Ossie Davis wrote an article entitled "The English Language is My Enemy." A cursory look at *Roget's Thesaurus* revealed that the word "whiteness" had 134 synonyms, 44 which were favorable and pleasing to contemplate (such as "cleanness," "purity," and "trustworthy") and only 10 that were mildly negative. Conversely, the word "blackness" had 120 synonyms, 60 of which were distinctly unfavorable (such as "dirty," "threatening," and "sullied"). Twenty of those words were related to race.[2] Davis' struggle with the English language, among other things, gives voice to the way words *limit* as well as create worlds. I think he would have agreed with Wittgenstein: The limits of our language determine the limits of our world.[3]

Ministry is more than words. But since words are important, what can we as pastors and church leaders do to point toward the magnificent horizon of God; to use words that help create worlds of life-giving possibility rather than limitation? I would like to share two pastoral commitments and strategies regarding words.

Listening before we speak

The first commitment is to listen before we speak. I once participated in a "listening campaign" in a huge inner city congregation. The purpose was to listen to what motivated people to come to church, what things they worried about and cared about, how they experienced God's presence in their lives, what ministry they wished their church would undertake. I interviewed an 80 year-old woman. It was a wonderful conversation. She cared passionately about young people. She never missed a Sunday service except in times of illness. At the end of the interview I noticed that she was weeping. I asked her what the tears were about and she said, "I've been in the church for 80 years and this is the first time anyone ever asked me what I thought."

My experience in the church (which perhaps is very different for many of you) has been that pastors do not ask people much. We would rather tell people things. Or we start to ask them what they think, but as soon as they say something theologically

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[1] See Jay C. Rochelle in this issue, 390ff.

[2] Ossie Davis, quoted in Vernon E. McClean, "How Racism is Embedded in the Fabric of Language," *New York Times*, January 24, 1988.

[3] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co., 1922), 5.6-5.62.

"incorrect" we have to interrupt them to correct their misperceptions.

This tendency to constantly correct is probably not helpful for most folks, but it is especially deadly for those who have always doubted their capacity to name their experiences. In an article describing a methodology for pastoral care and counseling with women, Christie Neuger names the capacity to "hear women into speech" *prevenient grace*—grace which "comes before" our conscious awareness of it. She writes,

> It seems to me that this sense which women have of needing to have a confidence in their own belonging and in their own truths prior to exploring their realities, is not dissimilar to the theological notion of prevenient grace. The theological tenet of prevenient grace is that God's love and assurance surround a person before she or he even knows that it exists. It is this sense of confidence in God's love and our own place in the world that gives birth to the possibility of life in faith. Prevenient grace is the necessary condition... for our ability to respond to God's care and acceptance. [It] may be a very helpful theological starting place in a pastoral theology for the care of women. It seems to offer a counterpoint to the strong message of not belonging that the culture persistently transmits to women.[4]

Again, the first commitment is to listen.

Claiming darkness as a dwelling place of God

The second commitment is to claim darkness as well as light as a dwelling place of God. It is undeniable that *much* of Christian imagery regarding light and darkness is dualistic: darkness is associated with death, chaos, and evil; light with life, order, and goodness. But not *all* of it is. And this is very important for worship, ethics, spirituality, and pastoral care.

No matter how much we say the church is for sinners, the fact of the matter is that most people perceive the church to be for the "good people"—those who are free from inner chaos and darkness. But sometimes something wonderful happens. We may discover—and I refer to Mary Ann's words[5] because she was so clear and powerful about this—that we are not the only ones who are broken and flawed, struggling and groaning; and in one another's company we may begin to care about the groaning of the whole creation.

The commitment to claiming our darkness as a realm of God is a commitment to create safe and hospitable space in our congregations to share our uncertainties. It is a commitment to bring from the margin to the center of church life our struggles with sexuality; with addictions of various kinds; our struggle with difference—all those places our travail is rendered more painful because it is suffered in isolation. It is also a commitment to bring from the margin to the center all the *people*, all the voices, that have been despised and excluded.

One of the most pastoral acts I ever did was to offer, together with colleagues, a sermon and education series called "The Christian in Relationship." We spent two Sundays talking about biblical interpretation. Then we wandered into some of the issues that make people's knees knock, like Belshazzar's when he saw the handwriting on the wall (Dan 5:6).

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[4] Christie Cozad Neuger, "Feminist Pastoral Theology and Pastoral Counseling: A Work in Progress," *Journal of Pastoral Theology*, Vol. 2 (Summer 1992): 35-57.

[5] See Mary Ann Moller-Gunderson's reflections in this issue, 400 ff.

I learned more about some of the families in my congregation in those weeks than I had in three years. Parents talked about their unmarried children who were living with their lovers. I learned about how

Darkness is both terrible and holy, a place of death and birth. Light, too, is double-edged; it can be both gentle and blinding, warm and cold.

people were struggling because loved ones were homosexual. Finally there was a place—in the *church*—to talk about real struggles of life and faith; to share their discoveries and their groaning.

Groaning in travail is a metaphor of birth, and it may be nourishing for us to be reminded that new life is created in the warm darkness of the womb, that sheltered, holy space. Psalm 139 captures the wonder of it:

> If I asked darkness to cover me,
> and light to become night around me,
> the darkness would not be dark to you,
> night would be light as day.
>
> It was you who created my inmost self,
> and put me together in my mother's womb;
> for all these mysteries I thank you:
> for the wonder of myself, for the wonder of your works.
> You know me through and through,
> from having watched my bones take shape
> when I was being formed in secret,
> knitted together in the limbo of the womb.
> —Ps 139:11-15, *The Jerusalem Bible*

In this view, darkness is the place of birth, of creativity, of mysteriously being knit together.

In his commentary on the Magnificat, Luther said a very fascinating thing about the relationship between body, mind, and spirit. He wrote,

> In the tabernacle fashioned by Moses there were three separate compartments. The first was called the holy of holies: here was God's dwelling place, and in it there *was no light.* The second was called the holy place; here stood a candlestick with seven arms and seven lamps. The third was called the outer court; this lay under the open sky and in the full light of the sun. In this tabernacle we have a figure of the Christian... [whose] spirit is the holy of holies *where God dwells in the darkness of faith, where no light is. For [Christians] believe what [they] neither see nor feel nor comprehend....*"[6]

There is mystery and paradox here. But paradox isn't an unfamiliar term for the heirs of Luther, is it? Darkness is both terrible and holy, a place of death and birth. And light, too, is double-edged; it can be both gentle and blinding, warm and cold. Sensitivity to context helps us grasp the complexity and the truth in all these experiences.

Perhaps it is not surprising that Luther described the realm of the spirit as a place of

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[6] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 21, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), 304; emphasis mine.

darkness and mystery in the context of his reflection on the Magnificat, that great song of reversal, where the hungry are fed and the rich sent empty away, the humble are lifted up and the proud brought low.

That is what I vaguely understood in the immigration office with Dora. A reversal occurred there. Dora was utterly clear about who she was. She was clear that she was not an illegal alien in God's world—it was *my* world that named her so. She had no moral or ethical dilemma. *I* was the one who was confused, because suddenly I experienced a collision of worlds, with their competing claims: the claim of the realm of God, where the call is to kinship—kinship by grace and water, as Pete Pero might say[7]—and the claim of the world that defines kinship along the lines of blood and law.

In the Broadway musical, *The Phantom of the Opera*, the phantom, rejected because of his physical disfigurement, lives underneath the opera house, using only candles to lighten the darkness where he composes his music. In one of the most haunting and beautiful songs in the musical he sings a song of longing—longing for company and connection in the darkness: "Turn your face away from the garish light of day, turn your thoughts away from cold, unfeeling light; and listen to the music of the night." In another verse of the song the phantom uses the phrase, "hard as light and soft as candlelight."[8]

How interesting that in the late 1800s John Henry Newman's hymn, "Lead Kindly Light," juxtaposed two similar images of light in the same hymn. He begins, "Lead kindly light, amid th' encircling gloom, lead thou me on! The night is dark, and I am far from home; lead thou me on." And in the very next verse he says, "I loved the garish day, and spite of fears, pride fueled my will; remember not past years."[9]

To the homeless searching for home, a kindly light is well cherished; to people rejected by those whose light is harsh and cold, the darkness may be the only place where they can make music.

> Rupert Neale tells the story of Goethe who was about to die, crying out, "Light, the world needs more light!" Many years later the philosopher Unamuno heard this and wrote, "No, Goethe was wrong. What he should have said was warmth, the world needs more warmth. We shall not die from the dark but from the cold."[10]

When our commitment to caring for God's people leads us to examine the world from the vantage point of those most wounded by it, to enter the darkness with them and recognize it as both terrifying and holy, the terrible dichotomy we have created between pastoral and prophetic ministry, which has crippled us for years, may at last disappear.

But in addition to the *words* there are the daily realities of what we see and do—so usual, so ordinary, that we are not aware of how these daily sights and deeds are shaping us, too, unless something happens to awaken us.

In her compilation of essays, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, Alice Walker

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[7] See Dr. Pero's article in this issue, 380ff.

[8] "The Music of the Night," music by Andrew Lloyd Webber, lyrics by Charles Hart, additional lyrics by Richard Stilgoe, copyright ©1986, The Really Useful Group plc.

[9] "Lead Kindly Light," words by John Henry Newman, music by John B. Dykes, *The Methodist Hymnal* (Nashville: The Methodist Publishing House, 1966), #272.

[10] Penelope Washburn, "Feminine Symbols and Death," in *Theology Today* 32:3 (October 1975).

includes a 1967 essay about what it was like to be awakened to life and knowledge:

> [We] only truly live by knowing; otherwise [we] simply perform, copying the daily habits of others, but conceiving nothing of [our] creative possibilities... and accepting someone else's superiority and his own misery.
>
> When we are children, growing up in our parents' care, we await the spark from the outside world. Sometimes our parents provide it—if we are lucky—sometimes it comes from another source far from home. We sit, paralyzed, surrounded by our anxiety and dread, hoping we will not have to grow up into the narrow world and ways we see about us. We are hungry for a life that turns us on; we yearn for a knowledge of living that will save us from our innocuous lives that resemble death....
>
> It was just six years ago that I began to be alive....
>
> Six years ago, after half-heartedly watching my mother's soap operas and wondering whether there wasn't something more to be asked of life, the Civil Rights Movement came into my life. Like a good omen for the future, the face of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was the first black face I saw on our new television screen. And, as in a fairy tale, my soul was stirred by the meaning of his mission....
>
> Because of the Movement, because of an awakened faith in the newness and imagination of the human spirit, because of "black and white together"—for the first time in our history in some human relationship on and off TV... I have fought harder for my life and for a chance to be myself, to be something more than a shadow or a number, than I had ever done before in my life. Before, there seemed to be no real reason for struggling beyond the effort for daily bread. Now there was a chance at that other that Jesus meant when He said we could not live by bread alone.[11]

As theologians we recognize the moral confusion about which Phil Hefner spoke so powerfully.[12] Phil paints a big picture. Walker captures it in the image of watching the soap operas.

When we—and the people for whom we care—awaken to a passion for the world, this is surely one sign of God's activity.

But many who watch the soap operas are filled with longing, as well as moral confusion. As pastors we pray for the imagination and the surprising gift of grace to enable us to find ways to recognize, to value, and to call to life those who yearn to be known. When we—and the people for whom we care—come to life, awaken to a passion for the world, this is surely one sign of God's activity. In the joy and travail of helping to birth this passion we participate in God's labor of giving birth to the future.

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[11] Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984 ed.), 121-25.

[12] See Philip Hefner in this issue, 335ff.

Focusing the Spectrum: The Task of Theology

Philip Hefner
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LSTC's twenty-fifth anniversary is about a place—this city, this neighborhood, and this seminary. Robert Wilken, himself a Lutheran theologian who walked these same Hyde Park streets when he was a student, has reflected beautifully about the Christian sense of holy place in his recent book, *The Land Called Holy: Palestine in Christian History and Thought*.[1] While his subject is *the* holy places—Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and the entire land of Palestine—he prompts us to consider what it means to call any place by that term, *holy*.

Wilken cites moving testimony from a ninth century monk who, after the Muslim conquest of Palestine, wrote a treatise, "Traces of Christ," to catalogue the "places that bear witness to God's presence on earth." His work lists the existing Christian communities in each historic place, because those communities bear witness to what happened there; without the communities, the sacred places would be simply mute stones and earth and marble. So, he writes: "the church of Nazareth in Galilee of the Jordan *bears witness* to the annunciation of Mary by the archangel Gabriel...; the church of the river Jordan... *bears witness* to the baptism of Christ in the river at the hands of John... ; the church of Kursi, east of the sea of Tiberias, *bears witness* that he healed the man possessed who was called Legion" (252).

The church that established and sustained this place, LSTC, intended to bear witness to God's presence and work, and those of us who have staffed this place share that intention, as do all of those who came here over this quarter century to study the Word of God and prepare for vocations to that Word and in that church. We are the living community that bears witness to that presence in this place, so that people will not pass by, unenlightened, seeing only mute sidewalks and silent steel and glass.

I want to bear witness to the shape of God's presence in Christ as it has dwelled here at 55th Street and University Avenue in Hyde Park for me. We know, of course, that when Christians remember the past, they do not face backwards, rather they are looking over their shoulders while they walk forward into the future. So, when I recapitulate the theological spirit that has animated this place for me since its beginning in 1967, my recollections are also a proposal about the future of theology here.

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[1] Robert Wilken, *The Land Called Holy: Palestine in Christian History and Thought* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

Situating our witness

How could we characterize the situation in which this community has been placed? It may surprise you that I characterize it as one of moral confusion. *Our situation has been one of confusion about how to live our lives in ways that are in harmony with what we know to be the truth.*

I recall vividly, when I arrived to teach here in 1967, an exhibit at the Museum of Science and Industry that enabled visitors—men, women, and school children—to climb into a model helicopter, take hold of a machine gun, and experience the thrill of shelling a Vietnamese village. One of the greatest educational museums in the world, placed in a proud multi-cultural, liberal, university community, enabled all of us vicariously to gun down an enemy. This persists in my memory as an epitome of our moral confusion, not just in Hyde Park, but also in the entire nation, relevant not just to LSTC, but to the whole church. And it is not just 1967, it is 1993 as well.

We can catalogue many examples of our confusion. How to insure adequate and healthy families; how to educate children of all ethnic groups, both genders, and all economic and social classes; how to wage peace in an economy that is dependent on producing and selling the *materiel* of war; how to maintain a vigorous economy that is also friendly to the natural environment; how a Lutheran Church that bears indelible marks of the culture of its original Northern European immigrants can become a church of many other cultures; how to understand the life that God has given us when it is sculpted by biomedical technology at every point, from conception through birth to the termination of life at the end. This is only a fragmentary catalogue.

We know the truth. Hyde Park is a neighborhood that specializes in truth. It is home to a great university that boasts dozens of Nobel prize winners, devoted to the quest for scientific truth, social, economic, political, and philosophical truth.

Hyde Park is also the location of more theological schools, faculty, and students than nearly any other community in the world—the "world capital of theology." Our religious traditions speak of truth—that God has given us our lives, that God created us all in the image of God, as brothers and sisters, to live together in love, that God desires all persons to receive what they need for their lives, that the gospel message handed down to us is a gospel that transcends any particular culture, including the cultures that brought it to us.

Secular truth and sacred truth, if we can make such a distinction, are concentrated here in an intense mixture, along with historic social experiments—the first federally funded urban renewal project took place here in the early 1960s, in one of the few neighborhoods in the country that has been fundamentally interracial for over four decades, a Chicago ward that has not elected a machine politician to the city council in over one hundred years. Here we live in the ambience of quarter-million dollar condominiums. Frank Lloyd Wright, I. M. Pei, and Mies van der Rohe have left architectural monuments here, matching our two Henry Moore sculptures. We must have the only shopping center in America with a Paul Granlund sculpture. We are bordered on the north and the south by two communities that were described in last Sunday's newspaper as the most deteriorated neighborhoods in America, neighborhoods that have been home to the most innovative community organization movements in history and also to the Blackstone Rangers and the El Rukn gangs.

Little wonder that in the midst of all this, we find ourselves, again and again,

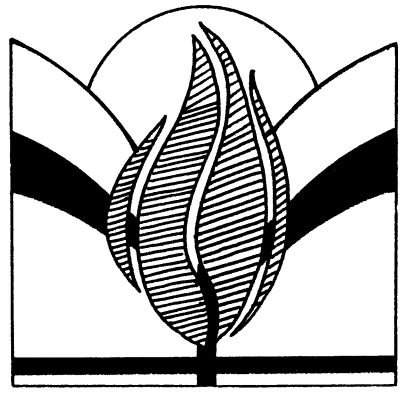
unable to act in ways that are commensurate with what we know to be true. This is our confusion. It is a confusion that I have wrestled with since the first day I stepped on campus, winding my way through a building that was only partially completed in September of 1967, walking around sawhorses, stepping carefully over winding cables, worshipping in this very auditorium when it had no upholstered seats, only rugged concrete contours. We all know the symbols and rituals of our confusion in the late 1960s—the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert Kennedy, the 1968 Democratic Convention, the "Chicago Eight" on this very platform, speaking and shouting to a standing-room-only crowd. Faculty and students and staff struggled mightily together to determine what our appropriate response should be. We suspended classes so we could meet together more freely, we formed deputation teams to visit congregations, we pleaded with a reluctant bishop to address us here. Finally, in desperation, we revised the curriculum; that was the only thing we had control over.

What we see more clearly today than we did in 1967 is that our confusion and our inability to act are survival issues. How we conduct our lives has everything to do with the future, the human future and the planetary future.

The big picture

How do we fashion our witness in response to this situation of moral confusion? There is more to it than moral exhortation and better information about the world around us, even though these are also essential. We need stories or myths that tell us about the world and our place in it. We have examples:

1. In the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5:43-48) Jesus paints this picture of reality:



The Father in heaven makes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. Those who would be his children will act accordingly, practicing love not only for the neighbor, but also for those who are enemies.

2. In Philippians 2, Paul describes the way things really are in the great kenosis hymn. With the words, "let this same mind be in you that was in this self-emptying Christ Jesus," Paul lays down specific guidelines for behavior, including "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves," "Do all things without murmuring and arguing, so that you may be children of God without blemish."

Reworking the big picture

The basic contours of the big picture, the fundamentals of our myths and stories, are given to us in the tradition that has been handed down to us. However, like all the generations that have gone before us, we do not have complete consensus on what all of those fundamentals are, and furthermore, we have the task of re-telling the stories in

The great challenge to the believer comes in translating the behavior of ritual, grounded in story, into praxis in the world of everyday.

ways that convey *our* witness to the presence that God has shared in *our* place and in *our* time. Unless we do this re-telling successfully, we cannot preach a vivid message about how things really are.

No other concern has been more urgent in LSTC's life these past twenty-five years than receiving the traditions of the gospel and struggling to retell those traditions in ways that are faithful to the past and yet also available to our present.

Joseph Sittler reminded us in the early 60s that nature would be a major challenge to our theology. Do we have stories that make it clear that God really cares about our survival and that of the planet? Do our stories really help us to understand at a profound level why we should conduct our lives so as to advance the cause of people and the creation around us? Do they adequately depict for us the placement of both women's and men's experience? Do we have the stories that value the traditions of those Christians who have traveled a road different from our own from Bethlehem to the late twentieth century?

Most of the systematic theology of the twentieth century has concentrated on the reworking of this story component of our faith. Gordon Kaufman states the goal of theology as that of reconstructing the concept of God so that it can provide overall orientation for human life. These theologies equate pictures of reality with the concept of God. Confusion about the big picture is tantamount to a confusion about how we should think of God. Hence, the concept of God has been the focus of theological reconstruction. The concepts of God proposed by these theologies are novel, each of them requiring that Christians shake off older images of God and adopt new concepts. God favors the poor; God is friend, lover, mother; God is a process of reciprocity between the finite and the infinite; God is a process that is always opening up to new possibilities, until its fullness is revealed at the end. Each of these innovations makes a difference for how we live our lives, and each of them is to be tested in terms of their faithfulness to the past and their adequacy for the future.

From the big picture through ritual to praxis

We do not ordinarily move directly from the story that contextualizes our action to concrete behaviors in the world. Ronald Grimes speaks of the necessity for an "interlude" between our telling stories about reality and our entering "the arena of the social world where ethical decision making and character formation count."[2] He identifies this interlude with ritual. I suggest a *story-ritual-praxis connection.* In our rituals we consider symbolically how to act out the behavior that is harmonious with the reality that is depicted in our stories. The

[2] Ronald Grimes, *Ritual Criticism* (Tuscaloosa: Univ. of Alabama Press, 1990), 164.

great challenge to the believer comes in translating the behavior of ritual, grounded in story, into praxis in the world of everyday. All three elements of this "connection" make up our Christian witness in the situation of moral confusion.

We may exemplify the myth-ritual-praxis connection in our eucharistic liturgy. The ritual action of the Eucharist begins in the *missa fidelium* (mass of the faithful) with the offering. Participants make their offerings in the bread, wine, money gifts, and, finally, in presenting themselves and their lives at the altar, with those of the entire gathered community. The ritual and its prayers integrate these offerings with Jesus offering his life, specifically on the cross. The story of Jesus and his being God's Son, the *logos,* constitutes the myth. This *is* the way things really are. By the integration of our offerings with Christ's offering, we are told in the ritual interlude that we are one with Christ, that our lives are accepted as instruments of God's work, that Jesus' offering is what it means for human lives to be caught up in God's work in the world.

The symbolic action of the ritual consists of actually offering one's gifts, including one's life, identifying with Jesus through the act of incomparable unity—eating Jesus' body and drinking his blood in the company of the other persons present, who are also the children of God, and being drawn by God's powerful grace into that act of Jesus. The final step in the process is leaving the sanctuary after the ritual and engaging in the praxis that will take the ritual outside the church, living out the life of Jesus in the world. This is essentially the movement of the second chapter of Philippians: having the mind of the kenotic Jesus Christ as our governing principle, we look not to our own interests, but to the interests of others, because this is the mind of that Jesus (2:4-5). We have prayed in the offertory prayer,

> Through your goodness you have blessed us with these gifts. With them we offer ourselves to your service and dedicate our lives to the care and redemption of all that you have made, for the sake of him who gave himself for us, Jesus Christ our Lord.

In these words, presence of Christ is clear. In the eucharistic prayer, we pray for the Spirit to come upon us, asking that we who have eaten the bread-body and drunk the wine-blood "may live to the praise of your glory." The christological undergirding is made even more vivid if we pray after the reception,

> we pray that in your mercy you would strengthen us through this gift, in faith toward you and in fervent love for one another.

Or

> Almighty God, you gave your Son both as a sacrifice for sin and a model of the godly life. Enable us to receive him always with thanksgiving, and to conform our lives to his.

Along with the many other facets of this ritual, we are forgiven our past sins and thereby liberated for making our offerings, and we also declare our solidarity with all of our brothers and sisters by embracing them in the kiss of peace, which is another of the symbolic enactments of the covenant *shalom* that run through the ritual of the Eucharist.

The point of this elaboration of the eucharistic ritual is that the participants have undergone a profound reorganization of their consciousness. This is why the ritual interlude exists, and this is the deep significance of the classical maxim *lex orandi lex credendi,* the order of ritual grounds the order of our belief. The world of the worshippers has been put together in

a very definite way: What is the way things really are? Answer: the world is in God's hands, and what God does in this world is set forth in the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. In the symbolic behavior of the ritual, our lives are united in an indescribably intimate fashion to Jesus' act on the cross. This is not imitating Jesus' action, rather it is being drawn into union with it. As a consequence, our lives outside the sanctuary are to be conformed to that offering in which Jesus made *shalom* real in his world. Unless our consciousness is organized by the powerful testimony of this myth and its symbolic acting out in the ritual, we will hardly have the insight and strength that are required, if we are to be agents of God's *shalom* in our worlds.

The ritual of the Christian tradition has always been understood in this LSTC community as a treasure of the tradition that we receive joyfully and to which we are accountable. Just as our re-telling the stories has often been unsure and stumbling, so our sense of the sharp-edged power of the ritual has at times been dulled. But the liturgies of the tradition have never been absent from the weekly round in this place.

What our world needs most

As in the 1960s, our culture today lacks the convincing pictures of reality (the way things really are) and the clear ritual enactments of the life that flows from these pictures. Our culture lacks, in other words, the capacity to organize the consciousness of its members in ways that are adequate to the world we live in. Consequently, Americans are unsure about how to live their lives in ways that are commensurate with these interpretations.

Our culture's defect is finally a defect of myth and ritual. My example of the museum exhibit in 1967 focuses this fact. The reality-picture centered on an enemy in Southeast Asia, the ritual was climbing behind a machine gun and pulling the trigger. Little wonder that the actions of Americans were so confused. We also pulled the trigger on Martin Luther King, Jr., on the brothers Kennedy, and on many others. On last January 31st, millions of us gathered around television sets to watch the best and the brightest of the athletic world engage in what Vince Lombardi called the "effort to knock down the other guys the best you can." The Super Bowl is one of the great American rituals. Youngsters who were polled say Super Bowl Sunday is more important than the Fourth of July. Advertisers know it is important; they paid $28,000 per second to show their commercials. Are we surprised that the praxis that flows from this ritual interlude includes more domestic violence than on any other single day of the year? Let me say it again: our culture's defect is a defect of myth and ritual, and it shows in our moral confusion, which is a crisis of praxis.

One of the major challenges that confront the church is to resource the regeneration of our culture's mythic and ritual life out of the Christian tradition and out of its current reading of the signs of the times. The theological and religious resources of LSTC and of the church stand under this mandate, given to us by God in our time and place: to regenerate the story-ritual-praxis core of our church and of our culture. Theology aims at this, and to this it should be subservient, to invigorate the story-ritual-praxis connection. The preoccupation of 20th century theology with reorganizing our concept of God has been helpful, but it is not enough—the total connection with ritual and praxis is essential if our witness is to be what it is called to be.

I believe that this mandate is what LSTC has received through all the years of

its existence. The shape of our faculty and the form of our curriculum have always centered around the story, the ritual, and the praxis. We have not always been clear about it, and we have at times wandered in the wilderness, but we have taken this mandate as the reason for our being. The classic stories of our faith have been remembered and cherished here, and the rituals of the liturgy have held a central place in our corporate life. Praxis has also been constantly on our minds, both in the curriculum and in our common life. Our witness of the past quarter century leaves no doubt about this.

The question is whether we have properly grasped the connection between myth, ritual, and praxis, and whether we have integrated them adequately, so that their connection can truly respond to our situation of confusion. Surely we have not. The witness we bear is that all the segments of the connection are important, and that none of them can be neglected in our community life. What the next quarter century must understand is that the connection is fundamental to the aims of the seminary and of the church—this is what theology is for, this is the spirit that breathes through our personal devotion, this is the substance of our ministry, this is what it means in our situation to love God with all our hearts and minds and souls—to increase the love of God in church and world. We must be dedicated in this place to the connection of the church's story, ritual, and praxis.

We must be dedicated in this place to the connection of the church's story, ritual, and praxis.

Lutheran resources for regenerating myth-ritual-praxis

1. Justification by grace through faith—essential foundation

If we are to conduct our lives in ways that truly live to the praise of God's glory, we must have confidence that reality does resonate to our lives. The gracious promise of the Eucharist tells us precisely this: that it makes sense to conform our lives to Jesus' life of outpouring for the sake of all, and that as fallible and unworthy as we may believe ourselves to be, the judgment of God is that our lives are fit vessels for grace, suitable instruments for the working of God. There is no greater word of promise conceivable for us in our world today. This is the most daring proclamation of the gospel imaginable in our world today—that life is worth living, no matter who or what we are, because the way things really are is an ambience of grace and meaningfulness. It is also a proclamation that is lacking in our culture. Science is unable to provide it. Marxism, therapeutic psychology, free market economics, various forms of contemporary hedonism—none of these is able to speak persuasively of the resonance between human life and the way things really are, even though none of them makes any sense without that resonance.

The message of forensic justification by grace received through faith stands as one of the most powerful and critical mythic formulations for our current context. We have devoted much effort over four and one-half centuries to elaborate its significance within the context of the medieval traditions of the angry God in heaven and

also in the context of the guilt-ridden human person. In many respects, this has been a continuation of Luther's wrestling with the issues of the hidden and revealed God. That wrestling grew out of his refusal to divide reality into two realms, the God realm and the non-God realm. It emerged from his sense that unless all of reality means, nothing particular can have meaning. He labored under inadequate concepts of nature, and he was tightly bound to the churchly discussions of his day. We are in a position to acknowledge his sound intentions and carry his thinking in more adequate and promising directions for our time.

Now it is time to restate this myth of forensic justification and its doctrinal elaborations in the context of the natural and social world, as they are understood by the contemporary natural and social sciences and as they are encountered by us in a global society that is faced increasingly with the questions of quality of life on the one hand and of surviving or not surviving, on the other. I call this the essential backdrop for responding to our cultural context, because without it nothing else makes much sense.

2. Specific resources from the Lutheran tradition—a quick survey

Lutherans are not without substantial theological/religious resources for the task of regenerating the myth-ritual-praxis core of our culture. We itemize a few, with a minimum of commentary.

a) Our catholic self-understanding.

b) Our holding to the Bible.

c) Cherishing the liturgy. We must mine that liturgical tradition ever more intensely and also devote ourselves to interpreting and shaping it in ways that make it available for our context. The liturgy as presently done in our churches often disguises the central ritual vision as much as it bears witness to it. We must focus more sharply on the central ritual and its power. It is from the base of our own ritual vision as Christians that we encounter and regenerate the rituals of America. This ritual gives us our primary knowledge of what it means to act out the behavior that is commensurate with how we believe things really are.

It is from the base of our own ritual vision as Christians that we encounter and regenerate the rituals of America.

d) Sacramental sensibilities and theology. The context requires that we draw convincing connections between ultimacy and the realm of everyday, between the way things *really* are and the way things appear to us in the everyday. The myth-ritual-praxis framework founders without such connections. We have powerful resources in our traditional conviction that the finite is capable of the infinite (*finitum capax infiniti*), which rests in turn upon the classical view that grace presupposes and supports nature (*gratia supponit naturam*). This is enshrined in our familiar doctrine of the Real Presence. This sensibility is invaluable in our efforts to regenerate our culture's defect of story, ritual, and praxis.

e) Theology of vocation. In the sixteenth century, the Lutheran theology of vocation was a powerful and revolutionary presentation of the coherence of myth and ritual in the motivation for and carrying out

of everyday praxis. The myth and ritual of the Eucharist, for example, were elaborated directly in daily vocation, for in that daily life and work the individual bore Christ's cross in the way that was engendered by the contours of the actual world in which Christians lived.

3. Potential weaknesses of the Lutheran tradition in our context

a) Our reluctance to give theological grounding to behavior, good works. Some time ago, after I had spoken to a group of pastors about the culture-crisis of our time and the significance of conducting our lives in ways commensurate with what we believe about God, a member of the group took issue with me. "As important as this message is," he said, "we must focus on what is primary, not on what is of secondary importance. Our relationship to God is of first importance, and how we behave is secondary." That, in my opinion, is a quintessential statement of a basic Lutheran defect in discerning the gospel, and it could bar us from effective witness in our time. Of course, relationship to God is the primary element of the gospel. The error is our thinking that this puts behavior or praxis in second place. After all, the center of our eucharistic and baptismal ritual is action, and in both cases it refers to Jesus' action on the cross. The message of gospel love is not that God accepts us in isolation from our actual living, but rather that our lives are accepted in their entirety, including our behavior, and all of it is to conform to Christ's action. If we separate the two, we sow seeds of alienation, interior alienation, between the essential self that God accepts in grace and the lives in which that self is incarnate. Such an alienation is based on dualistic views of human being that violate every piece of wisdom that is available to us.

The 1986 Harare Statement of Black Lutherans has got it right:

> ...we take issue with that European-American understanding of justification that affirms and maintains a radical dichotomy between God's activity of justification and sanctification.... Hence, while acknowledging that Christians are simultaneously saints and sinners, we also assert unequivocally that there is an inextricable link and relationship between who one is, namely a baptized and adopted child of God, and what one does, namely living and acting in conformity to the will of God.... In this regard, the message of the epistle of James with its emphasis upon the connection between faith and good works embodies an understanding of discipleship which is indispensable to the faithful confession of Christ.[3]

If we cannot speak clearly about behavior and how it is related to the way things really are, we will have virtually nothing constructive to contribute to our current context.

b) Appropriating tradition through radically innovative interpretation. My perception of the issues arising from our current context places very great demands upon us. A radical interpretation of Lutheran tradition is at stake, for example, in my insistence that a church that is centrally grounded in the myth of forensic justification must learn how to preach about the importance of behavior. Similarly, it will tax our Lutheranness to retrieve Baptism and the Eucharist as both rituals of forgiveness and also rituals of God's enablement.

We must regain our understanding that our myth is essential for us, not despite its being myth, but precisely because it is myth.

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[3] Albert Pero and Ambrose Moyo, eds., *Theology and the Black Experience* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988), 266-67.

The same is true of ritual. Critical historical thinking has often looked upon myth as an embarrassment to be decoded, while important strands of Lutheran theology have considered the rituals of the faith to be infinitely inferior to the words and the doctrines of the faith. These biases against myth and ritual are simply wrong-headed, and they will inhibit our effective ministry in America. We must help our people understand that myth is essential, and so is ritual.

Our crisis in praxis today stems from the fact that genuinely new situations (think of in vitro fertilization) have emerged that have never in human history been contextualized in myth and ritual. In these situations, new knowledge has been generated that did not exist before and therefore has never been interpreted religiously. Furthermore, new forms of praxis are called for that have never before been considered. Even old dilemmas, like the conflict between ethnic groups, is now occurring in new contexts. It is these novel conditions that necessitate radically innovative interpretations of traditional myth and ritual. In some cases, they also require new mythic and ritual forms.

In nearly every instance where the New Testament speaks of the central action of Jesus Christ, whether in his crucifixion or in his life before that, it links that action to self-giving love on the part of his followers. The second chapter of Philippians is just one example. In many segments of our culture, terms like "sacrifice," "altruism," and "putting the welfare of others before our own" are considered to be unfortunate, even pathological. We can grant that there is some truth in these critiques, but even when the pathology is accounted for, there remains at the heart of our faith the Love Command. That command stands at the core of our myth, it is enshrined in our ritual, and it is an absolute governing factor in our praxis. The Love Command stands at the heart of the witness that I perceive as integral to this and of which I am a part.

By the fourth century, Christians from other countries were making pilgrimages to Palestine. Theodoret of Cyrus tells the story of Peter of Galatia, who went to Palestine from Syria "in order that by *seeing* the places... he might worship *in them* the God who saved us" (Wilken, 116). He knew God was not confined to a place, but he nevertheless wanted to see physically, with his eyes, what in his soul he knew to be true. Paulinus, a fourth century bishop from southern Italy, wrote that in viewing the places and their relics, "one sees the whole power of the Cross in [a] tiny fragment" (117). In celebrating our twentieth-fifth anniversary in Hyde Park, we make a kind of pilgrimage, in the sense that the halls and rooms here have been filled with a presence that precedes our assemblies this week, and also that the community here—which includes you all, in one way or another—bears witness to that presence. It is not that Christ is more present here than in every parish and office of our church, nor that the Christ who has been here is different. Rather, the point is that Christ has been here, in very specific ways and forms, and continues to be here, and we bear witness to that fact. Christ's presence here is a reality that puts our world together, in story, ritual, and praxis, resourcing the conduct of our lives in accordance with that reality, so that, as our eucharistic prayer puts it, we may live our lives to the praise of God's glory, and thereby be bearers of new life in the crisis of moral confusion that haunts our American society. The point of coming to LSTC, to this fragment of Christian witness, is to see in this community's quarter century the whole power and the whole future of Christ.

Biblical Interpretation for a New Millennium

Edgar Krentz
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

A speaker on an occasion like this should be witty, informative, challenging, and well read—all in the space of thirty minutes.[1] There are scholars who can do that. Benjamin Jowett, for example, the great master of Balliol College in the nineteenth century, laid the foundations for university reform at Oxford and changed British university education forever. After his essay calling for critical study of the New Testament aroused a storm of protest, he turned to philosophy; his translation of Plato in five magnificent volumes became an English classic. One of his Balliol colleagues, Henry Charles Beeching, showed the high regard Oxford dons had for him in the little poem,

> First come I; my name is Jowett.
> There's no knowledge but I know it.
> I am master of this college:
> What I don't know isn't knowledge.[2]

I am no Jowett. What I don't know is profoundly large—and growing daily, especially in my own discipline, New Testament interpretation and theology. Twenty years ago I knew much more. Then I optimistically cited R. P. C. Hanson's statement that "the battle for the acceptance of historical criticism as applied to the Bible has been won"[3]—and called the statement a truism. The battles for historical critical study would have some aftershocks in the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod's Uncivil War and in the contemporary problems in the Southern Baptist Convention, but critical study arrived triumphant.

Its triumph on the American scene took place in the period between the two world wars, only to disintegrate in the biblical generation after the 60s. Today critical study of the Bible is secure in academia and all of the main-line churches, including the Roman Catholic Church, except for the Orthodox churches in their homelands.

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[1] I have kept the oral form of the address, but added footnotes to point the interested reader to further, and perhaps better, resources.

[2] From Ved Mehta, "What Shall I Read? An Oxford Memoir," *The American Scholar* 62 (1993): 59.

[3] Edgar Krentz, *The Historical Critical Method* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 3. Citation from Hanson's "Introduction" to *Biblical Criticism* by R. Davidson and A. R. C. Leaney (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1970), 13.

Critical study, yes; but not necessarily *historical* critical study. Growing disappointment with some of the seemingly sterile results of historical criticism, increasing interaction between biblical studies and other disciplines in university departments of religion, the use of interpretation in the service of differing interest groups—to say nothing of the influence of politically correct attitudes—and the interest in and growing participation of scholars from other disciplines in biblical studies have led to a veritable disintegration of biblical studies into a series of interpretive camps whose members often seem almost unable to speak to one another, let alone understand what others are saying. Robert Smith describes this as the balkanization of Gospel studies generally.[4]

Several recent writers find it necessary to discuss questions of method before they can address themselves to topics of interest or importance, e.g. N. Thomas Wright[5] and Brevard S. Childs.[6] Recent books on exegetical method now must discuss alternative methods to historical criticism to do their task adequately,[7] while the recent outstanding reference work, *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*,[8] contains major articles on "Black Christian Interpretation" (90-92), "Canonical Criticism" (105-7), "Feminist Interpretation" (231-34), "Ideology" (309-11), "Inner-Biblical Exegesis" (312-14), "Intratextuality" (320-21), "Liberation Theology" (396-97), "Literary Criticism" (402-5), "Materialist Interpretation" (430-32), "Methodology" (449-51), "Narrative Criticism" (488-89), "Narrative Theology" (489-91), "New Hermeneutic" (491-93), "Psychological Interpretation" (571-72), "Reader-Response Criticism" (578-80), "Rhetorical Criticism" (599-600), "Semiotics" (618-20), "Structuralism" (650-55), and "Synchronic Exegesis" (657-58), along

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[4]Robert H. Smith, "Interpreting Matthew Today," *Currents* 19 (1992): 424: "Asking where we are in Matthaean studies today is all too much like inquiring about the situation in Yugoslavia. One thing only seems certain: chaos is the order of the day. We are today witnessing the balkanization of Gospel studies.... Practitioners of various methods hardly speak with one another, and interest groups proliferate." Smith discusses historical criticism, redaction criticism, literary criticism, rhetorical criticism, and liberation-feminist criticism.

[5]N. Thomas Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God vol. 1 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992): 1-144.

[6]Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testament: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 1-94.

[7]See, for example, Terence J. Keegan, *Interpreting the Bible: A Popular Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics* (New York, Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1985), 40-144, where he discusses structuralism, reader-response criticism, narrative criticism, and canonical criticism. He covers historical criticism in 15 pages! John Rogerson, Christopher Rowland, and Barnabas Lindars, *The History of Christian Theology:* vol. 2: *The Study and Use of the Bible*, ed. Paul Avis (Basingstoke: Marshall Pickering; Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1988), 380-97 ("Interpreting the New Testament Today"), discuss sociology and structuralism, narrative and canonical criticism, and rhetorical criticism. Robert Morgan and John Barton, *Biblical Interpretation*. The Oxford Bible Series (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), discuss "Theology and the Social Sciences" (133-66), "Theology, History and Literature" (167-202), "Literary Study of the Bible" (203-68). See also Christopher Tuckett, *Reading the New Testament: Methods of Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987).

[8]*A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, ed. R. L. Coggins and J. L. Houlden (London: SCM Press; Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990).

with more traditional topics such as "Biblical Criticism" (83-86), "Exegesis" (220-22), "Hermeneutics" (282-84), "Historical Criticism" (284-85), and "Textual Criticism" (681-87) to illustrate the developments of the last 20 to 25 years. The terrain in the area of biblical interpretation has hills and valleys that are the result of tectonic upheaval, populated by descendants of the historical critical ancestors who have intermarried with members of other scholarly races.

What does a map of the interpretive terrain look like today? Let me draw the contour lines of the hills and valleys, but in 50-meter gradients, not 5-meter ones. That is, this description will necessarily oversimplify, parody, and (some might say) even misrepresent specific interpreters. Or, to use a somewhat different set of categories, what does a social analysis of the structure of knowledge in biblical interpretation look like today? Today we are looking at that map not in the first place to admire the landscape, nor even to use it to plot a trip. Rather our goal is to arrive at the destination on the map labeled "ministry," a ministry rooted in the gospel, immersed in the scriptures read with the greatest care possible, to witness to the Lord of the scriptures coherently, cogently, comprehensibly, *con amore*. And that includes reading them in a manner comprehensible to people today.

Of course, historical criticism has not folded its tents and crept from the field.[9] Even those who practice the most radical new interpretive methods lean on the results of historical criticism, while bringing new questions and new starting points to the text. Few and far between are those who read the Bible a-historically and a-critically. But the optimistic view of historical science that motivated the quest for "what really happened" is no longer present. The

The terrain in the area of biblical interpretation has hills and valleys that are the result of tectonic upheaval...

scattered critical voices of twenty years ago have grown into a double-chorus of critique.[10] They blame historical criticism for aridity of approach, for concentrating on "the world behind the text," to the neglect of the world in the text or before it. They claim that historical criticism is more concerned with sources and the intention of the author than with the text that is actually there. Following Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger they believe biblical interpretation is in a state of crisis[11] and seek a way out of it, either by modifying historical criticism, supplement-

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[9]It is even making its way slowly into the Orthodox churches. See Petros Vassiliadis, "Greek Theology in the Making: Trends and Facts in the 80s—Vison for the 90s," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 35 (1991): 33-52.

[10]Though evangelical Christianity in general practices the same historical critical methods as other scholars, a few still reject the method *in toto* because it undervalues the Bible as Word of God. See Eta Linnemann, *Historical Criticism of the Bible: Methodology or Ideology?* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990).

[11]*Biblical Interpretation in Crisis: The Ratzinger Conference on Bible and Church,* ed. Richard John Neuhaus (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1989).



ing the method, or replacing it with other critical or para-critical approaches.

Listen to a few typical voices of recent times. Brevard Childs speaks in favor of "canonical criticism" as an alternative to historical criticism.[12] He recognizes that it has made massive contributions but sees major problems with it. It assumes "that the historical critical approach is suitable, indeed, mandatory for every correct reading of the Bible" (35). It assumes "a uniformly historical-referential reading of the biblical text" (36), "identifies the key to a text's meaning with the determination of its historical origin," and "has not done justice in interpreting the New Testament in its function as authoritative, canonical literature of both an historical and a contemporary Christian community of faith and practice" (36). Childs' canonical criticism claims to "take the significance of the final form of the text" into more adequate account, a claim which he describes briefly on pp. 48-53.

Sandra M. Schneiders, a Roman Catholic biblical scholar, argues that "mainstream biblical scholarship has been guided by its espousal of and fascination with a method, namely, historical criticism, rather than by a developed hermeneutical theory."[13] She strives to formulate a method that will take full account of the Bible as sacred scripture, while leaving the interpreter free from the straight-jacket of authorial intent that allows for "transformative understanding" (169-78). "Authorial intent" implies a rejection of some, at least, of historical criticism's concerns.

In a recent book of overpowering size (476 pages of text in 10-point type, and a 29-page bibliography in 9-point type), N. Thomas Wright describes the effect of postmodernism in literary studies.[14] He reminds us that biblical interpretation must keep three aspects of interpretation in creative tension: the historical, the literary, and the theological. He calls for "critical realism" in interpretation and proceeds to describe that realism. Only with all three aspects in play will we be able to answer adequately the questions, "(1) How did Christianity begin, and why did it take the shape that it did? and (2) What does Christianity believe, and does it make sense?" (10).

None of these scholars rejects historical criticism outright, but all now regard it as one among many arrows in the exegete's quiver. Scholars impatient with its apparent attempt to go behind texts to an earlier substrate or with its apparent archaeological cast—interest in the past without concern for the present—look for methods to answer questions that arise in our present. I do need to state as an aside that (1) not all historical critics were uninterested in the

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[12]Brevard S. Childs, *The New Testament as Canon: An Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984).

[13]Sandra M. Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament As Sacred Scripture* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991), 23.

[14]N. Thomas Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (n. 5).

present, and (2) that there were alternative approaches combined with historical criticism long before the last 25 years, e.g. Ernst Käsemann's cry from the heart that if his work were of no possible benefit to someone like Dom Helder Camara, he "would not want to remain a New Testament scholar."[15] Some contemporary critics have a very truncated view of history. Rudolf Bultmann's article on the light symbolism in Sophocles' *Antigone*, for example, was one of the trenchant critiques of National Socialism as government run amok, while Karl Barth's critique of historicism in the introduction to his commentary on Romans is well known.

Nonetheless, recent developments have been both exciting and provocative. They reflect the changing terrain of scholarship and the sociology of knowledge in our own time. To disregard them would be to remove ourselves from our own world. And they have implications for the way we read, understand, interpret, and proclaim the Bible. Let me name just a few of these new criticisms, describe the problems they raise, the contributions they make, and then ask a few questions about their relation to theological education and ministry.

Extensions of historical criticism

There is today a renewed interest in locating the texts of the New Testament securely within their own social world. I call it a renewed interest because good historical interpretation has always had that concern, as the great commentary of Paul Billerbeck, the magnificent study of Hellenistic-Roman culture by Paul Wendland, the works on *Zeitgeschichte*, and the volumes of the Chicago school showed years ago. But today, at least, American scholars have lost their Qumran mania, their parallelomania, and their suspicion of *Religionsgeschichte* in the flush of enthusiasm for the tools of social analysis and social theory. And I like it.

In **Social Criticism**[16] scholars draw on a variety of sources to recreate the cultural and social context in which a text was written. They use methods drawn from sociology, cultural anthropology, archaeology, etc.[17] Scholars active in this area often differ sharply from one another as they read the ancient world. In **Social Description** scholars use data drawn from every source about antiquity to map the first century world. They deal with all the *realia* of life, but not just with *realia*. They describe all conditions of life in the biblical world that were absorbed under the influence of the environment. The data often illuminate details of ancient life. Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, for example, interprets 1 Cor 11:17-34 in the light of the size of dining rooms in Roman villas, the social customs surrounding meals in the Roman world, based in part on the *Cena Tremalchionis* in Petronius' *Satyricon*, Juvenal's fifth *Satire*, Martial's *Epigrams*, and Pliny, *Ep.* 2.6.[18] Suddenly New Testament scholars are be-

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[15]Ernst Käsemann, "The Problem of a New Testament Theology," *New Testament Studies* 19 (1973): 236.

[16]I take the terminology here from David Rhoads, "Social Criticism: Crossing Boundaries," pp. 135-61 in *Mark & Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, ed. Janice Capel Anderson and Stephen D. Moore (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992).

[17]A good introduction is Carolyn Osiek, *What Are They Saying About the Social Setting of the New Testament?*, 2nd ed. (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1992).

[18]Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth*. Good News Studies 6 (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1983): 153-61.

ginning to read again the literature of Greece and Rome, not always as critically as they do the New Testament, and not always all of the texts they should. But the gain is nonetheless tremendous.

Models are a useful heuristic device but sometimes prevent the historian from seeing aspects of the text that do not fit the model.

Social Historians go beyond social description to write a history of the development of Christianity as a social phenomenon in the ancient world. How does the Pauline teaching on marriage and virginity in 1 Corinthians 7 fit into the sumptuary laws adopted by Augustus to counteract the tendency of young Roman elite either to marry very late or marry not at all? How does the developing structure of primitive Christianity (*πρεσβύτερος, ἀπόστολος, ἐπίσκοπος, διδάσκαλος, προφήτης, γραμματεύς, κ.τ.λ.*) fit into the society of the time? What does Paul's use of the school of Tyrannus in Ephesus as a teaching location say about the nature of early Christianity's self understanding?

In the **Sociology of Knowledge** students ask about the underlying structures that determine what meanings are allowed for people. We Americans assume the superiority of (American) democracy, the four freedoms, universal public education that results in (almost) universal literacy, the availability of good roads, public transportation, labor unions, industrialized production, and rapid dissemination of news and knowledge—none of which was there in the biblical world(s). Shame societies presuppose a different ethics in doing business, while the concept of friendship is often quite different in a world where personal patronage controls human status and relationships. Read Richard Saller's description of that system and you will know that to be *φίλος τοῦ καίσαρος* or *φίλος τοῦ θεοῦ* does not mean a Damon and Pytheas or David and Jonathan relationship.[19] Some alumni in this room will never forget the word "benefactor" that tripped so frequently from Red Fred's lips.[20] The patronage system ran throughout the Roman world and affected also the life of nascent Christianity.[21]

The **Use of Social Science Models** is the most highly controversial process in social analysis.[22] Data from the ancient Mediterranean world are sparse—though

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[19]Richard P. Saller, *Personal Patronage Under the Early Empire* (Cambridge, London, et al.: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

[20]Frederick W. Danker, *Benefactor: Epigraphical Study of a Graeco-Roman and New Testament Semantic Field* (St. Louis: Clayton Publishing House, 1982).

[21]See also Paul Veyne, *Bread and Circuses: Historical Sociology and Political Pluralism*, tr. Brian Pearce (Harmonsworth: Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 1990); and *Patronage in Ancient Society*, ed. Andrew Wallace-Hadrill (London and New York: Routledge, 1989).

[22]See Bruce Malina, *Christian Origins and Cultural Anthropology: Practical Models for Biblical Interpretation* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1986); Howard Clark Kee, *Knowing the*

we have more about the Early Roman Empire than any other period.[23] But outside of coinage, potsherds, and inscriptions there are almost no quantifiable data, especially about the non-elite, non-literate *οἱ πολλοί*. So New Testament scholars borrow models of village or peasant societies from cultures that could be studied in modern times, and then apply their conclusions to the New Testament world. Many find this highly illuminating; I find it highly suspect.[24] Models are a useful heuristic device but sometimes prevent the historian from seeing aspects of the text that do not fit the model. Some find millennial cults, such as the cargo cults of New Guinea, illuminating for early Christian communities, and then apply that model to 1 Thessalonians (incorrectly), pushing the community into that rigid model.[25] I think the sociology of knowledge, based on an intimate and wide knowledge of ancient texts, archaeological data, numismatics, and epigraphy will yield a far more useful picture of the structure of the ancient world and the variety of attitudes and viewpoints in the early church. So there you have my bias.

You will find the results of such social inquiry both illuminating and disturbing. I have for some time wanted to teach an adult forum in some parish, using Gerd Theissen's novelistic reconstruction of the social setting of Jesus' ministry as my basic text.[26] And I suspect that you would find it exciting too. Go on to read Kazantakis' *Last Temptation of Christ* and you will have more than enough to discuss for some time.

Good historians—and that term includes historical critics of the Bible—recognize that there is no such thing as totally disinterested, objective historical interpretation. Who we are affects what we deem worth our looking at, the headland from which we observe it, and therefore the weight we will attach to what we see. It is therefore not surprising that one highly important development of recent years has been the confusion of the craft by the introduction of headlands galore: feminist and womanist interpretation, African-American interpretation, liberation theologies of many stripes, Marxist or socialist interpretation. It would do positivist historians—including historical critics in biblical studies—good to read works of theory, e. g. Paul Veyne,[27] or Bultmann's famous essay, "Is Exegesis Without Presuppositions Possible?"[28] We need a renewed discussion of the difference between objectivity and uncommitted or presuppositionless historical inquiry.

Now if this makes you uncomfortable—and if you're not, you ought to be—if this makes you uncomfortable because the interpretations that come out of these other voices often challenge, modify, or even

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Truth: A Sociological Approach to New Testament Interpretation (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989).

[23]Ramsay MacMullen, "Introduction: An Abundance of Data in Ancient History," in *Changes in the Roman Empire: Essays in the Ordinary* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 3-12.

[24]For a reasoned critique see Bengt Holmbeg, *Sociology and the New Testament: An Appraisal* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990).

[25]See, for example, Robert Jewett, *The Thessalonian Correspondence: Pauline Rhetoric and Millenarian Piety* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 159-78; Jewett draws heavily on the writings of social theorists.

[26]Gerd Theissen, *The Shadow of the Galilean* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987).

[27]Paul Veyne, *Writing History: Essay on Epistemology*, tr. Mina Moore-Rinvolucri (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1984).

[28]Pages 289-96 in Rudolf Bultmann, *Existence and Faith: Shorter Writings of Rudolf Bultmann*, selected, translated and introduced by Shubert M. Ogden (New York: Meridian Books, Inc., 1960).

Narrative critics remind us that we read texts as wholes; thus they raise a most serious challenge to the classical, sacred custom of reading snippets from them liturgically.

reject what you think the scriptures say, well, think on these things. No New Testament writer ever expressed one syllable of support for democracy over against Roman imperial structures—even though Athenian democracy was five and a half centuries old by the time Paul wrote his first letter, from Greece at that. Yet we Americans have often spoken as though American democracy were the divinely ordained system in which more people found freedom and meaning than any other system. Yet tribal structure may be more humane.

Literary interpretations

Some attempt to get past the limitations of historical critical research by reading the New Testament with the methods of (modern) literary criticism. The literary reading is often a more decisive break with historical criticism—though it need not be.[29] It has had wonderful effects, though not as revolutionary as some of its practitioners have thought. I have been fortunate to have David Rhoads, one of the path-breaking literary critics, as a colleague for the last five years. Team teaching the basic course, Interpreting the New Testament, with David has been instructive and fun—and I use both adjectives advisedly. Literary reading of biblical texts covers a broad spectrum of approaches: Narrative Criticism, Reader-Response Criticism, Structuralism, Post-Structuralism, Deconstructionism, Rhetorical Criticism. It is impossible to evaluate all of them here. I personally find narrative criticism and rhetorical criticism immensely fruitful, when practitioners do not claim them as the only valid method. I question the value of reader-response criticism and deconstructionism as practiced by many, especially when they argue that meaning lies first and foremost in the interplay between text and reader. But that is a subject for another day.[30]

Narrative criticism is a salutary reminder that the Gospels and Acts are more than a combination of sources, traditions, and liturgical pieces. Rather they are true

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[29]The literature is immense. See Mark Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), for a good discussion and a useful bibliography. Also useful are Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, "Narrative Criticism: How Does the Story Mean?" and Robert M. Fowler," Reader-Response Criticism: Figuring Mark's Reader," pp. 23-49 and 50-83 in *Mark & Method*, ed. Anderson and Moore (n. 16).

[30]There is immense variety in the application of literary criticism to biblical texts. Three papers at the 1992 Society of Biblical Literature meeting illustrate the problem, all printed in *Society of Biblical Literature 1992 Seminar Papers*, ed. Eugene H. Lovering, Jr. (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992): A. K. M. Adam, "The Future of Our Allusions" (5-13); Mikeal C. Parsons, "What's 'Literary' about Literary Aspects of the Gospels and Acts?" (14-40); Mark Allen Powell, "What is 'Literary' About Literary Aspects?" (41-50).

oral or written compositions, with plot, characters, presumed authors, and intended readers. Narrative critics remind us that we read texts as wholes; thus they raise a most serious challenge to the classical, sacred custom of reading snippets from them liturgically. They suggest that pastors preparing to preach on a Gospel can no longer read one or two commentaries on that particular story, but must become interpreters of the wholes. Combine narrative criticism with historical criticism, without straining either, and you have powerful resources for teaching, witness, and revitalizing life. There is also a danger of overly enthusiastic appreciation of literary qualities. Consider this sentence: "Biblical texts are not simply conglomerates of disjointed and unsophisticated religious tradition, but carefully crafted works of great artistic accomplishment which we should study as unified wholes."[31] Really? Tertium *datur!* Powerful works, yes; unified wholes, yes; but no one who has read some of the classics of ancient literature would claim that they are "carefully crafted works of great artistic accomplishment." Here my backgrounds in Hellenic, Hellenistic, and Roman literature shows through.

But there is also a theological and hermeneutical danger in this literary approach. It is also possible to disregard the historical situation and work, *mutatis mutandis,* with the principle that "beauty is in the eye of the beholder."[32] With that phrase I identify some practitioners of **reader response criticism** and **deconstructionism,** who locate meaning almost entirely in the mind of the reader, ultimately placing the determination of meaning in the reader and making the text a quite secondary matter. "Meaning occurs not between the covers of a book or between the margins of a page but in the consciousness of the one who reads."[33] That is either a truism about learning or a radical mistake—one shared by a multitude of critics, I should add. Even more serious, it is striking that practitioners of these criticisms often show little interest in the true questions of history; for them the historical Jesus is extra-mural.

A third development in literary reading of New Testament texts is the growing interest in **intertextuality** in interpretation. Richard B. Hays most strongly introduced this into the interpretation of Paul's letters.[34] Intertextuality, important at least since T. S. Eliot's essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919), has flourished under the influence of Harold Bloom (*Anxiety of Influence,* 1973). It is in a sense the application of the sociology of knowledge to the interpretation of texts. Readers and authors, like Paul and the congregation(s) at Rome, who share a world of meaning (the Old Testament) will hear echoes of its language and the structure of its thought where we do not. Such reading is often provocative, engaging, enriching, yet leaves the modern reader with the question whether the non-Jewish Christians could have heard all that!—a form of reader-response criticism of my own. Brevard Childs faults the method because it "suggests that a modern

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[31]W. Randolph Tate, *Biblical Interpretation: An Integrated Approach* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 64.

[32]I think this statement entered literature in *The Prince of India,* a novel by Lew Wallace (1827-1905). It was also used by Margaret Wolfe Hungerford in *Molly Bawm* (1878). See *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations,* 2nd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1955).

[33]Janice Capel Anderson and Stephen D. Moore, "Introduction: The Lives of Mark," in *Mark & Method,* 15.

[34]Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

Christian exegete can simply adopt Paul's method and read back into the Old Testament the full content of the Christian message when guided by the freedom of the Spirit," which Childs regards as a modern form of allegory.[35]

A fourth major change in reading the New Testament is the remarkable resurgence of interest in **rhetorical analysis** of New Testament texts. It all began with Prof. Betz's writing of the commentary on Galatians in the Hermeneia series, some fourteen years ago.[36] Interest was fueled—and in some ways sidetracked—by a little book written by George Kennedy, Professor of Classics at North Carolina University, *New Testament Interpretation Through Rhetorical Criticism.*[37] In recent years rhetorical analysis blooms on every hand, and references to the authorities on ancient rhetoric, such as Kennedy, H. Lausberg,[38] Josef Martin,[39] Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca,[40] abound, and one finds modern theoreticians of rhetoric mentioned frequently, e.g. Wayne Booth[41] and Kenneth Burke.[42] And you know the method has really arrived on the scene, when Fortress Press issues a volume on it in the Guides to Biblical Scholarship series.[43] It is amazing how many of those volumes seem to describe approaches that some scholars now regard as passé.

Rhetoric was a major element in education in the Early Roman Empire, as S. F. Bonner demonstrated.[44] Rhetoricians defined it as the art of persuasion. Its subdivisions were five: Invention, Arrangement,

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[35]Childs, *Biblical Theology,* 84-85.

[36]Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979).

[37]George A. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation Through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1984). Kennedy earlier published an important series of works that comprised *A History of Rhetoric* in antiquity: *The Art of Persuasion in Greece* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963); *The Art of Rhetoric in the Roman World 300 B.C.–A. D. 300* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972); *Greek Rhetoric Under Christian Emperors* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983). These volumes tell the story from its presumed beginnings by Corax and Tisias through Theodore Metochites in the fourteenth century (the end of the Byzantine empire). He also wrote *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition From Ancient to Modern Times* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1980), a one-volume history that covered the rise and influence of ancient rhetoric from its origins to its decline in the nineteenth century.

[38]H. Lausberg, *Handbuch der literarischen Rhetoric* (2nd ed., 2 vols. Munich: Max Hueber Verlag, 1973).

[39]Josef Martin, *Antike Rhetorik: Technik und Methode.* Handbuch der Altertumswissenschaft 2.3 (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1974).

[40]Ch. Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation,* tr. John Wilkinson and Purcell Weaver (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969).

[41]Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction.* 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

[42]Kenneth Burke, *The Rhetoric of Religion: Studies in Logology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970).

[43]Burton L. Mack, *Rhetoric and the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990).

[44]Stanley F. Bonner, *Education in Ancient Rome from the Elder Cato to the younger Pliny* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977), 250-327; see also Donald Lemen Clark, *Rhetoric in Greco-Roman Education* (New York: Columbia, 1957). P. J. J. Botha, "Greco-Roman Literacy as Setting for New Testament Writings," *Neotestamentica* 26 (1992): 202, suggests that in any village there would be only one person who could read and write, the scribe.

Style, Memory, and Delivery. Modern scholars have too often concentrated on defining the rhetorical situation (bouleutic, dicastic, or encomiastic rhetoric) and determining the arrangement (the structure of an oration) than with invention (proof via evidence, λόγος, ἦθος, πάθος, τόποι) and style (vocabulary, arrangements of thought and words, fit matching of words to thought).[45] Rhetorical criticism also has great promise, because it reminds us that the ancient world was more an oral than a written culture, that the texts of the New Testament were more often heard than read. Literacy was not widespread.[46] One strong argument, among others, for mastering biblical Greek is to appreciate the use of oral techniques of communication in the language.

Ideological interpretations

"Give me a place to stand and I can move the universe," old Archimedes said. The dictum also applies to interpretation. The person of the interpreter often dictates what she will hear in a text. We are all ideological interpreters, caught in the web of our own past's spinning. What is new today is the conscious attempt to realize the value of differing starting points in our interpretation of scripture. The result is a complex, often contradictory set of interpretations: WASP readings, feminist criticism, Afro-American interpretation, liberation theologies of every stripe. In many ways scholars using these methods are the most original and fascinating biblical interpreters to read today. They demonstrate the value of coming to texts with new questions that bring forth new answers. They also raise fundamental questions for ministry today and tomorrow. In part, at least, our discussions of language for God, of the role of women in the church, of questions of genetic engineering, abortion, sexual mores, and the like arise from such new questions. And they all raise the old question: How do we know when the Scripture's *deus locutus* is also the *deus loquens* for our day?

Evaluations

What do we say to all this? And not in abstract, but from the concrete vantage point of the ministry of tomorrow? What significance do such arcane topics have for "the upbuilding of the saints for the work of ministry"? I think much, in every way—but only if evaluated and used within a broad framework. My evaluations must almost of necessity take the form of brief assertions or questions, since I do not have the time to argue each point at length.

1. *Dangers*

a. *Concentration on one approach* to the exclusion of others. For example, one can be immured in the past, if social criticism becomes the single approach to interpretation, or lose almost entirely an appreciation of the historicality of the Credo's confession *et incarnatus est..., passus et sepultus est sub Pontio Pilato,* if literary approaches exclude the historical. Both can disregard seeking the message for today—or can enhance the process immensely.

b. That is, such concentration on literary interpretation can also lead to modern forms of gnosticism. Just as past genera-

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[45]Richard A. Lanham, *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms.* 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California, 1991), is a useful book for the neophyte and beyond.

[46]See William V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1989) and *Literacy in the Roman World.* JRA Supplementary Series 3 (Ann Arbor: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 1991).

In interpreting Jesus for our age we may falsely import our age into the Bible to proclaim a Jesus tailored to our wants, not drawn from the witness of the scriptures.

tions of extremely conservative scholars tended to write dissertations in philological or text-critical studies, now some use reader-response criticism or deconstructionist criticism to avoid facing the hard historical questions. When meaning lies in the "eye of the beholder," then the text ceases to have an integrity of its own, and we are close to the allegorical interpretation of Origen.[47]

c. *The danger of modernization.* Historical interpretation, social interpretation, etc., show us the temptation to make Jesus our contemporary. "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild, Look upon this little child...," I was taught to pray long ago. But Jesus is not only "meek and mild"; he is also judgmental, harsh, and demanding. In interpreting Jesus for our age we may falsely import our age into the Bible to proclaim a Jesus tailored to our wants, not drawn from the witness of the scriptures.

We also run the danger of losing Jesus, through social or historical research, in the mists of ancient religiosity. Jesus, the first century Jew, and Jesus, the cult God of a new mystery, or Jesus, the key to early Christian mysticism, magic, and religiosity may leave us in the first century, without the Kyrios of the proclamation of the early church.

d. *Ethnic hostility:* anti-Semitism and literary criticism. Literary analysis in the four Gospels stresses the study of plot and character. It leads understandably to the conclusion that according to the four Gospels, the "Jews" killed Jesus—and such literary insight may be used, wittingly or unwittingly, to foster anti-Semitism in our day.[48] We dare not use the Bible to oppress Jews or anyone else.

e. *False ecclesiology and anthropology.* Interpretation that is *pro domo,* done to benefit a particular interest group, may lead to a less universal view of the church than that of the New Testament itself. Or it may lead to a false anthropology that assumes God in Christ asks for less repentance and faith for some than others. Defending the poor and working for justice for the poor (noble and praiseworthy activities!) may suggest that the church should disregard those who have benefited from modern industrialization as automatically guilty, second-class people, not as humane as others. "God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all" (Rom 11:32 NRSV) and "Welcome one another, therefore, as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God" (Rom 15:7 NRSV)

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[47]See, for example, the essay by Stephen D. Moore, "Deconstructive Criticism: The Gospel of Mark," *Mark & Method,* 84-102. (He crosses out the word "Mark" in his title.)

[48]The literature on the New Testament and anti-Semitism is immense. See Ellis Rivkin, *What Crucified Jesus?* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1984); John Gager, *The Origins of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Oxford, 1985); *Jews and Christians: Exploring the Past, Present, and Future,* ed. James H. Charlesworth (New York: Crossroad, 1990).

still hold. The great bell of the gospel still rings for all alike.

f. *Where does authority lie?* The oversimplified analysis of Rudolf Bultmann's existential interpretation of the New Testament raised the question of the location of authority a generation ago. Today the question is raised again by these new methods of approach. The *Christus patiens,* the one who suffered under Pontius Pilate as the creed puts it, is still the source of and power of our proclamation, though new methods of interpretation may help us to proclaim him more clearly and forcefully.

g. *The ethics of interpretation* is a final issue that arises from this survey of modern methods.[49] When is it legitimate to bring in data from outside the time, place, and culture of the Bible to interpret the Bible? Must the sociological tendency to canonize quantification of data lead to a new orthodoxy, the orthodoxy of the social situation? Or, to ask another, must our evaluation of Jesus' identification with the poor and oppressed in Galilee lead inevitably to an underplaying of the role of the wealthy in the NT (Phoebe, Chloe, Barnabas, Stephanus, and the other hosts of the house churches or benefactors of Paul) and our own world? How do we validate or invalidate new methods for use in and for the church and gospel? That is a question that we can only raise today, and call for an on-going discussion among us all.

2. *Contributions*

But my purpose today is not simply to raise a Jeremiad about the state of biblical interpretation. (While I have spoken almost entirely about the New Testament, almost every point applies also to recent scholarship in the Old Testament.) There is much good that should be hailed with joy.

a. It is a great gain that the literary critics have reminded us to read the biblical texts as integral works that are more than the sum of their identified parts. Source, form, and tradition criticisms contribute much to our understanding of the inherited quality of our language, but they tend to focus our attention behind or alongside the text. Literary criticism reminds us that the structure of a book, its characters and plot, cannot be recovered by reading pericopal systems, not even the three year lectionary cycle. We interpret the books of scripture, not the snatches of them included in the lectionary.

Rhetorical criticism reminds us to pay attention to significant aspects of biblical texts. Aristotle defined rhetoric as the τέχνη τοῦ πειθοῦς, the art of persuasion. Scholars pay more attention these days to the means of persuasion: the enthymemes and the exempla, the ἦθος, πάθος and λόγος of persuasive speech. (In my opinion they pay too much attention to trying to define the genera of speech [bouleutic, dicastic, epideictic] and too little to ἦθος, πάθος and λόγος.) And rhetoric is also the art of speaking well, εὖ λέγειν, of fitting word to content in an homogenous fashion.

b. A second major contribution to our use of the Bible is the awareness that the "posture of the interpreter" is a significant hermeneutical factor. Preaching begins for many of us with the conviction *deus dixit, deus dicit*—"God has spoken, God is speaking." Biblical interpretation recognizes that interpretation begins with the serpent's question in the garden of Eden, "Yea, hath God said...?" spoken piously, but with the re-

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[49]After writing this lecture I came upon J. Botha's article, "The Ethics of New Testament Interpretation," *Neotestamentics* 26 (1992): 169-94. He discusses the problem raised by generations of commentary on the text of the Bible which often inhibit a fresh hearing.

peated imprecatory prayer, *doce me, domine, doce me*, "teach me, Lord, teach me." Luther spoke of theology as "die Grammatik zur Sprache der heiligen Schrift," a grammar for the language of scripture.[50]

Social interpretation of all kinds reminds us that the Bible is an ancient book, whose culturally formed system of knowledge is no longer ours. Reading the Bible is a cross-cultural experience!

c. *Recovering the foreignness of the Bible.* Social interpretation of all kinds reminds us that the Bible is an ancient book, whose culturally formed system of knowledge is no longer ours. Reading the Bible is a cross-cultural experience! We have little concern for ritual purity in our world, where purity is more liable to be understood in terms of ecology and food preparation. Western travelers in the Middle East find the eyes painted on the front and back of taxis and other cars quaint, because we no longer think that the evil eye affects us—though the Galatians may have thought that Paul's eye problem was evidence of the evil eye, while he accused them of suffering from enchantment by the same process (Gal 3:1-2).[51] No more plastic Jesus, less regurgitated baby's pap, that's what good cross-cultural interpretation brings as it shows the relevance of ancient society and its ethos, so different from our own.

Martin Marty recently wrote an article that describes the University of Chicago Divinity School's "Introduction to the Study for Ministry" course (now titled "The Public Church and Its Ministry").[52] In it he describes how students read arcane books written by the faculty and discussed their implications for ministry. He described their reaction to Hans Dieter Betz's essays on the Sermon on the Mount. They asked Betz, "How can we preach and teach the Gospel of Matthew if the 'Sermon' is very likely a text of Judaism taken over by the Gospel tradition?" "By teaching and preaching with integrity," is the Betz answer (17). Marty tells similar stories about Anne Carr, David Tracy, Jerald Brauer, and Langdon Gilkey.

d. *A voice for the voiceless.* Last week David Rhoads lectured on Liberation Theology's interpretation of the Bible to LSTC juniors in our course, Interpreting the New Testament. His first sentence sharply caught up the students: "Any interpretation

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[50]The phrase is drawn from Johann Georg Hamann, as cited in Johannes von Lüpke, "Theologie als »Grammatik zur Sprache der heiligen Schrift« Eine Studie zu Luthers Theologieverständnis," *Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 34 (1992): 227.

[51]John H. Elliott, "The Fear of the Leer: The Evil Eye from the Bible to Li'l Abner," *Forum* 4.4 (1988): 42-71; Jerome H. Neyrey, "Bewitched in Galatia: Paul's Accusations of Witchcraft," *Paul in Other Words: A Cultural Reading of His Letters* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), 181-206.

[52]Martin E. Marty, "On the Divinity School's Introduction to Ministry Course," *Criterion* 11, 3 (Autumn 1992): 15-19.

of the Bible that can be used to oppress people is wrong!" Now there's a sentence to conjure with. These new ways of reading the Bible help us to restore integrity to the text, because they teach us to read it in its own world, recognize its problems and difficulties. It was a world of authoritarian relationships. Personal patronage, that system in which the weaker are called on to fawn upon the stronger, runs throughout.

e. *Enhancement of the toolbox,* no small gain. An exegete feels naked without a text—and I am no exception. In the year of Matthew, there is a great text that fits this address, Mt 13:51-52:

> "Have you understood all this?" They answered, "Yes." And he said to them, "Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old."

Scripture is our treasury. Interpreters will continue to find things old in the Bible that tie us to the catholic tradition of the church; and things new, as the standpoint of the exegete, the needs of society, the problems in church and context, and the questions of the interpreter change. And that is a blessing.

f. *Authority in proclamation.* There is a bewildering variety of possibilities for interpretation. Many of you may say with the Bible, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; I cannot attain it." Which pushes us back to the question: How does one preach, teach, think as Christian so as to speak a word with authority? How do we live with ourselves when we are called to proclaim from such a confusing scripture? Luther gives us some insight with his word to Erasmus: *Tolle Christum e Scripturis! Quid amplius in illis invenies?* (Take [Accept] Christ from the Scriptures! What more will you find in them?) Indeed, there's the point from which to deal with things old and new, variety of exegetical results, the frustration of ever-changing methods, the feeling of frustrated out-datedness as we think along with contemporary biblical interpretation. I can illustrate this with an anecdote about a church in St. Louis, Missouri. When it was built about a century ago, three bells were hung in the belfry. Following good German custom they named the bells *sola scriptura, sola gratia,* and *sola fide,* a good Lutheran triad. After ten years *sola scriptura* cracked and had to be recast. In the discussion that led to the recasting, one member moved that the bell be named "Ebenezer"—the name of the parish—and the motion carried. So now *Ebenezer, sola gratia,* and *sola fide* ring out each Sunday. And that is an allegory, for if you have *sola gratia* and *sola fide,* you still do have *sola scriptura.*

The theme for this celebration is drawn from the Gospel for this week, Mt 5:13-20: "Let your light so shine before people that they see your good works and glorify your father in the heavens." For a biblical interpreter that means using any means and every means of interpretation that will illuminate the dark corners or our minds and our world through the light of the word—the λόγος ἔνσαρκος of our faith and salvation. God bless these methods and your interpretations in ministry.

Ecumenical Imperatives for the 21st Century

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Historical periods do not always correspond to the calendar. The historian, John Lukacs, for example, says that the twentieth century has already ended and the twenty-first begun.[1] We shall say more about this chronology when we look at the prospects of the twenty-first century for the world at large. Then, in the second and third parts, we shall discuss the church's prospects, and the imperatives, especially the ecumenical imperatives, which flow from them.

The future is by definition unknown, and a discussion such as this is hypothetical: if such and such developments occur, then such and such will be the shape of the challenges which Christians face. Yet hypotheses are necessary to guide action. If we risk no surmises about what the future will bring, we shall either freeze or flounder. It is better when playing blind-man's buff to guess poorly than not to guess at all.

Our thinking about the future, however, is not entirely guess-work: it inevitably draws on the past. Memory supplies the materials out of which we construct pictures of things to come. It is important, therefore, to remind ourselves of the last centuries before speculating about the next.

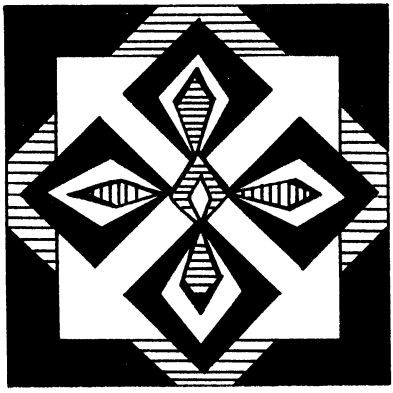
The nineteenth century began historically even if not chronologically with the final defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo in 1815. It proved, after a somewhat slow start, to be the most progress-oriented and optimistic period in Western civilization. It surpassed in this respect even the previous hundred years. Under the influence of evangelicals like Wilberforce, the British stopped the slave trade on the high seas through the power of their imperial fleet in the first part of the nineteenth century, and some decades later, the Americans ended slavery in their own country, once again partly under evangelical influence, after a

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[1] John Lukacs, *The End of the Twentieth Century and the End of the Modern Age* (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1993).

bloody civil war. Science and technology advanced by leaps and bounds, and almost all of it seemed beneficial. Educational levels and living standards rose rapidly, and democracy spread more and more widely. Much of what we now regard as bad was then seen as good. Colonialism, for example, was said to improve the lot of backward peoples, and such explanations seemed plausible even to revolutionaries like Karl Marx. Modern medicine, education, and missionary activity did, after all, improve nutrition, lengthen the life span, and speed the growth of population. Industrialization was hard on the laboring classes, but even they were optimistic: when they rebelled, it was in hope of a proletarian paradise. Whether women were better off in Victorian than pre-Victorian times is perhaps debatable, but there is no doubt that consciousness of oppression, the precondition for protest, became increasingly widespread. Not everyone, to be sure, was happy about modernity, and there were prophets of doom like Henry Adams who foresaw a woeful future. Yet most people thought progress could not be stopped. Among Christians, growing numbers supposed that the millennium was at hand. The world, among other things, was becoming peaceful. Not a single major, multi-national war occurred in a hundred years, and many thought that bloodletting among "civilized" powers on the scale of the Napoleonic conflicts had forever become impossible. Utopian dreams proliferated.

Then came the twentieth century which began, historically if not chronologically, with the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. It ended after the bloodiest seventy-five years on record, according to John Lukacs, with the fall of the Berlin wall, the collapse of Marxist ideology, the break-up of the Soviet Union, and the end of the Cold War. Yet despite this supposedly triumphant close of a desperate century, most people fear a future more dismal than the past. The Balkans are again in uproar, the world order of the Cold War period is unraveling, and no one knows what mixture of anarchy, tyranny, and (we hope) democracy will replace it.



Further, the effects of science and technology have turned vicious, and while the nuclear threat to the planet may have diminished, the ecological one grows worse day by day. The free-market democracies may have won the Cold War, but they are falling into deeper and deeper social and cultural crises. They seem to be turning into aggregates of competing special interest groups unable to collaborate for the common good or plan for future generations either financially or environmentally. Sober observers like George Kennan[2] think a society such as the United States is becoming inviable. The sense of community and the standards of behavior which make life together possible are being less and less effectively

[2] See his *Around the Cragged Hill: A Personal and Political Philosophy* (New York: W. Norton, 1993).

transmitted. This is a problem deeper than wars' destructiveness or the collapse of political or economic systems such as has occurred in the East, for at its worst it makes reconstruction impossible. Perhaps the capitalist West, led by America, is spiraling downwards much like the late classical civilization of Greece and Rome. If so, our decline is likely to be faster than the centuries-long process which led to Rome's definitive fall.

The situation is different and diversified in the non-Western world.[3] Japan has moved to the forefront with astonishing speed since it was opened by Admiral Perry a hundred-fifty years ago. South Korea and the three little Chinese tigers of Taiwan, Hongkong, and Singapore are making the same leap more rapidly, almost in a single generation. Furthermore, if the economic miracles now underway along the South China coast move inland and northwards, the world in a few decades will finally find itself confronted with the long predicted Chinese colossus. As a developed nation of more than a billion inhabitants, it cannot help but change the balance of power. Indeed, as is often noted, this balance is already shifting from the North Atlantic to the Pacific rim.

Even if the center does not shift decisively to East Asia, ours will no longer be a eurocentric globe. Haves and have-nots will still be with us, but the distinction will not be between Europeans and non-Europeans. Similarly, victims and victimizers, the oppressed and their oppressors may be as numerous or more numerous than ever, but as we already see in Bosnia and Somalia, they will not so often be distinguished by color. Many Westerners will be relieved no longer to be the main targets of criticism, but that will not automatically make matters better: non-racist brutality can be as bad as the racist variety.

Implications of a changed world for the churches

Next let us look at some of the implications of a changed world for the churches. First, Christianity, like the world itself, will no longer be eurocentric.[4] A rapidly increasing proportion of church members will be African, Latin American, and East Asian (especially Korean, and, it seems likely, Chinese). To be sure, Christianity will not everywhere expand. It will perhaps almost entirely disappear from those Muslim lands from which ancient Christian minorities are now fleeing. Nor is it likely to increase to any great extent in Japan or in the Hindu and Buddhist areas of South Asia, and the decline which has long been in progress in the traditionally Christian countries of the West seems likely to continue. It is in the Far East, Africa, and Latin America that the future of the church looks statistically most promising.

Financially, however, it may well be that Christians will on the whole be poorer rather than richer in comparison to the rest of the world's population. Of the three areas in which Christianity is growing, only the East Asian gives promise of affluence. Furthermore, the newly affluent and newly Christian East Asians, as is characteristic of

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[3] Data supporting the picture presented in this paragraph is widely available, but perhaps most fully (though at times with idiosyncratic interpretations which I have avoided) in Paul Kennedy, *Preparing for the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Random House, 1993).

[4] The most complete compilation of statistics on Christian growth (and decline) are to be found in David Barrett, *World Christian Encyclopedia* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1982), and in his "Annual Statistical Table on Global Mission" published each year since 1989 in the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research.*

the recently converted, tend to be more conservative theologically and more imbued with missionary zeal than their Western counterparts. Already the South Korean Presbyterians, for example, are sending more missionaries abroad in proportion to their numbers than the mainline denominations of Europe and America. Conservatism is also present in impoverished, have-not countries. The rapidly increasing Protestants (mostly Pentecostals) in Latin America tend towards the right, while the religion of both Catholics and Protestants in sub-Saharan Africa, where the greatest growth is taking place, is in many respects much more like that of earlier Western generations than of modern times. This, in turn, will react back on the West. An African pope before the end of the twenty-first century seems probable. He will almost certainly, like most non-Western Christians, be religiously more old-fashioned than many Westerners will like, and yet he will also, it may be assumed, be deeply concerned about the plight of the poor and the oppressed (as is also the present pontiff). It is not the West which will be calling the tune.

In the historically Christian countries, the prospects are not bright. In Eastern Europe, to be sure, the collapse of communism has released a great surge of religiosity, but much of this consists of the ideological misuse of religion for nationalistic purposes. It resembles what we in America think of as Ku Klux Klan Christianity: hoods, burnings and lynchings combined with crosses. Fundamentalism is not the right word for this phenomenon: the Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, and Muslim purveyors of violence in North Ireland, Croatia, Serbia, and Bosnia are not infrequently admitted atheists who care nothing about scripture or church tradition, much less literalistic interpretation. Religion is a tool they use to gain legitimacy and spur on the troops. But so powerful is this blend of religiosity and nationalism in the newly liberated lands of the East that it imperils the churches and threatens to evoke secularist reactions. We do not yet know whether Christianity will emerge genuinely strengthened from the long Marxist night.

It is in the Far East, Africa, and Latin America that the future of the church looks statistically most promising.

In the West, the problems are also grave though less dramatic. As far as the United States is concerned, sociologists like Withnow and Hunter[5] tell us what most of us suspect in any case: the center is weakening, polarization is increasing, and the once main-line denominations are shrinking and moving to the left. There would be some comfort in this if the left were biblically prophetic or even communally liberationist, but instead current anti-traditionalists are often the *avant garde* of a consumerist society focusing on human potential,

[5] Robert Withnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), and James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars* (New York: Basic Books, 1991).

new age religiosity, and individualistic entitlements.

It seems, in other words, that the old line churches, like other parts of the American polity, are less and less able to transmit the heritage. Seminaries complain that biblical literacy declines with each entering class. The problem when LSTC and the Catholic Theological Union established themselves in Hyde Park a quarter century ago was how to make the churches effective agents of social change. The churches' survival was taken for granted, but it is precisely that which is now in question. There are, so sociologists say, fewer and fewer communities held together despite contentions by an identifiable core of shared beliefs and group loyalties. Rather, like society at large, they are becoming heterogeneous collections of special interest groups united, if at all, by bureaucratic management. Transmitting even a modicum of communal ties and creedal commitment is increasingly left to the conservatives. The center is not holding.

Ecumenical imperatives

This brings us to ecumenical imperatives. The search for unity has faltered in recent times not least because of the weakening of the center.[6] Strengthening the center is imperative for intra-Christian communication, and intra-Christian communication is necessary for ecumenism. Second, intra-Christian communication and the ecumenism which it makes possible is urgent, not only for the sake of the churches dispersed throughout the world, but for the world itself.

One characteristic of the Christian center is, to cite a phrase of the late Hans Frei, "generous orthodoxy." To be generously orthodox does not necessarily mean being "ecumenical" in a formal sense. The generously orthodox, rather, are those who in any situation, whether denominational or ecumenical, resist polarization, seek to mediate between right and left, favor reconciled diversity rather than uniformity, and work for pluralistic unity within the framework of distinctively Christian belief and practice. This, it needs to be stressed, is an intra-Christian, not interreligious task. It does not exclude interreligious dialogue (or what is sometimes called the "wider ecumenism"), but it centers on promoting Christian unity, not on relations to other religions. The touchstone for such unity is Jesus Christ, God with us, as witnessed to by scripture. He is the one, so the ecumenical center maintains, by which all religions including Christianity must be tested.

There are other ways of making this christological and ultimately trinitarian affirmation; but however stated, it seems the indispensable condition for effective dialogue between the major Asian, African, American, and European manifestations of the Christian movement. Faith and Order and the World Council of Churches have again and again discovered that they risk losing most of their constituency if they drop trinitarian communal profession as a condition of membership. Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholics, Reformation Protestants, and Pentecostals from all five continents are able to develop ecumenical openness to each other on the basis of tacit or explicit adherence to the Nicene faith, but not otherwise; and the demographics of Christian growth which we earlier noted

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[6] Robert S. Bilheimer, *Breakthrough: The Emergence of the Ecumenical Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), describes and notes the dependence of ecumenism on "the church of the center" (212, 214-23).

World-wide Christian ecumenism in its bilateral and multilateral multiplicity has no secular counterparts.

suggest that this will be even more true in the future. It is commitment to the finality of Jesus Christ which enables these fantastically different groups to become part of a global network of communication, a single domain of discourse and cooperation.

Furthermore, in the second place, the importance of this global network and domain of discourse in the fragmented and disintegrating twenty-first century seems undeniable. World-wide Christian ecumenism in its bilateral and multilateral multiplicity has no secular counterparts, and nothing anywhere near as extensive exists in any other religion. Divided Jewish groups, to be sure, exercise mutual helpfulness better than Christian ones, but their communicative network is much smaller. Islam, Buddhism, or Hinduism may have potentialities for their own internal ecumenism, but these are as yet underdeveloped. Not that this underdevelopment should be a cause of Christian satisfaction. We need to be open to the possibility that it is in part for the sake of others that Christians have become in this century, not only the largest but the dialogically most practiced community or family of communities, whether religious or non-religious, on earth. (The communicative networks maintained, for example, by scientists are more extensive and more intensively used than those of religious folk, but they are functions of professional groupings, not communities.) Perhaps God wants the Christian example to help other communal traditions actualize their own world-wide networks of discourse. To the extent these webs of communication develop and intertwine, their contribution to saving humanity from itself in the coming century might be immense. Christians have learned from as well as taught much to others in the past, and scripture gives them reason to believe that God wills this process of interaction to continue to the eschaton.

In conclusion, let me mention four points which should be kept in mind. First, the twenty-first century needs global communities of communication. Second, Christians are potentially and to some extent actually such a community to an unparalleled extent. Third (to mention a theme I have only implied rather than developed), this communicative community lives by interconfessional and intercontinental argument—or, if you prefer, ecumenical dialogue—over what it means to be faithfully Christian in deed and word. Fourth, Jesus Christ is the center, touchstone, matrix—that is, womb—of these discussions.

The last point, needless to say, is fundamental for piety. It reminds me of something I heard shortly before giving this talk from a black woman who is a committed feminist:

> We turn to Jesus not because we need a man to rescue us; we turn to Jesus because he understands! Jesus is not a Black woman, but he knows what it means to be gifted and have those gifts rejected by his own people. Jesus is not a Black woman, but he knows what it means to be scorned and abandoned by those closest to him. Jesus is not a Black woman, but he knows what it means to be misunderstood and silenced by those

> in power. Jesus is not a Black woman, but he knows what it means to be scared. Jesus is not a Black woman, but he knows what it means to be an outcast and to suffer. Jesus is not a Black woman, but he knows what it means to be betrayed.... Jesus is not a Black woman, but he knows what it means to be beaten and mocked and stereotyped. Jesus is not a Black woman, but he knows what it is to be resurrected! Sisters... God sends one who knows what we feel and what we experience to raise us up over and over again.[7]

I have heard prayers which paraphrase these words—they are, after all, Bible-based—in every Christian group with which I have worshipped from Swedish Pentecostals to Tanzanian Lutherans, and from Rome and Moscow to Beijing. Not all those who pray in this fashion are ecumenical, but without this prayer, ecumenism is impotent. It is in turning together to Christ because he was tempted even as we are yet without sin (Heb 4:15) that blacks and whites, men and women are united in Christian fellowship. We cannot know whether this common turning to the common center will draw the churches throughout the world further together in the coming century, but we can know that unless we knit the bonds of global Christianity more tightly, the future of humankind will be even dimmer than it seems. Christ prays that his disciples be one, not only for their sake, but for the world's sake (John 17). Never has the ecumenical imperative been more urgent.

Unless we knit the bonds of global Christianity more tightly, the future of humankind will be even dimmer than it seems.

[7] The Reverend Barbara Essex in a speech at a Conference on Womanist Theology at Hartford Seminary, February 6, 1993.

The Future of the Church and Its Ministries: Imperatives for the 21st Century

Richard P. McBrien
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University of Notre Dame

I am indeed honored by the invitation to address this important convocation marking the 25th anniversary of the founding of the Catholic Theological Union and of the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, and to celebrate as well the Association of Chicago Theological Schools and its common association with the Divinity School of the University of Chicago. It is also a special pleasure to share the platform today with George Lindbeck, to whom we are all indebted for his many years of theological teaching and scholarship.

Since our time is limited, I shall get directly to the subject matter of my presentation, "The Future of the Church and Its Ministries," developed from a Catholic theological and ecclesial perspective, and in keeping with the theme of this convocation: "Imperatives for the 21st Century Church." I shall focus briefly on six ecclesiological themes rooted in the documents of the Second Vatican Council and indicate how these themes have shaped, and will continue to shape, the church and its ministries as we move together into a new century and the beginning of the third Christian millennium.

I should say, parenthetically, that one of the earliest and best ecumenical assessments of the council and its ecclesiology was done by Professor Lindbeck himself, in a book to which I still refer in my own courses on the church; namely, *The Future of Roman Catholic Theology: Vatican II—Catalyst for Change*, published in 1970.

1. The first and most basic ecclesiological principle at Vatican II is that the church is a *mystery*, or *sacrament*, and not only or even primarily an institution or organization.

To say that the church is a mystery, or sacrament, means, in the words of the late Pope Paul VI, that it is "a reality imbued with the hidden presence of God." In other words, the church is not just a religious

organization to which we belong or which we serve. It is the corporate presence of God in Christ, with a unity created and sustained by the Holy Spirit. "I believe in the church" does not mean "I believe in, am loyal to, the leadership or the rules of the church." Only God is the proper object of faith—but in this case, God as present and active in the church.

The council's sacramental understanding of the church has helped us to see how essential renewal and reform are to the church's mission and ministries. More and more since Vatican II, the church has been challenged to practice what it preaches, because we recognize now more clearly than before that the church has a missionary obligation to manifest visibly what it embodies invisibly. The church is called to be a visible, communal sign of the invisible, renewing presence of God in the world and in human history.

The principle of sacramentality has immediate impact on the ministries of the church as well. In the face of growing secularization, this means that the ministries of the future, and the ordained ministries in particular, will have to be exercised, even more than in the past, in accordance with a spirituality of martyrdom, or of witnessing.

Accordingly, it will no longer be sufficient that a particular ministry be a *designated* ministry, as if the minister's official status within the church were of the highest importance. In an age of increasing sensitivity to the principle of sacramentality, the ordained minister will have an even greater responsibility to be a credible witness to that for which he or she stands and serves.

In the Catholic ordination rite, for example, the bishop hands over to the newly ordained priest the paten and the chalice. As he does so, the bishop addresses the ordinand with these words: "Know what you are doing, and imitate the mystery you celebrate: model your life on the mystery of the Lord's cross."

"The first means of evangelization," Pope Paul VI declared in his 1975 apostolic exhortation on evangelization, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, "is the witness of an authentically Christian life." He continued: "Modern men and women listen more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if they do listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.... It is therefore primarily by its conduct and by its life that the church will evangelize the world, in other words, by its living witness of fidelity to the Lord Jesus—the witness of poverty and detachment, of freedom in the face of the powers of this world, in short, the witness of sanctity" (n. 41).

The 1971 World Synod of Bishops, in its document "Justice in the World," had made a similar point: "While the church is bound to give witness to justice, it recognizes that anyone who ventures to speak to people about justice must first be just in their eyes" (III, para. 2).

And the U.S. Catholic bishops' 1986 pastoral letter on the economy italicized this same point: "All the moral principles that govern the just operation of any economic endeavor apply to the church and its agencies and institutions; indeed the church should be exemplary" (para. 337).

Because the church is a sacrament, it must evangelize and minister for justice through martyrdom for justice. We ourselves must be prepared to live up to the high standard to which we presume to hold others.

Less and less is the world—church members included—impressed with titles, offices, and self-centered display. More and more, preaching and other forms of ministry require credibility and authenticity. People are looking for genuine moral

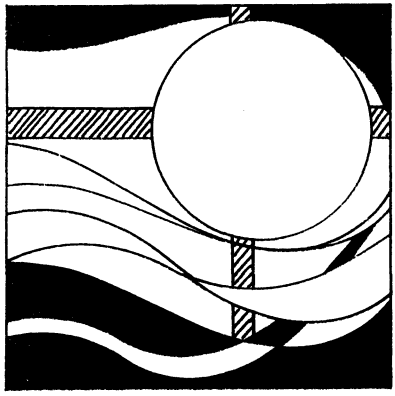
and spiritual authority, even as they are rejecting its counterfeits, authoritarianism and pietism.

2. A second major ecclesiological principle adopted by the council is embodied in its teaching that the church is the whole *people of God.* The church is not only the hierarchy, the clergy, or members of religious communities. It is the whole community of the baptized. And that community is marked by a rich diversity of gender, of class, of education, of social status, of race, of ethnic background, and of culture.

The people-of-God principle also highlights the plurality of charisms and ministries which have always belonged in the church, and which since the council have begun to flourish anew. One of the council's most important affirmations, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium,* declares that charisms are available to all the faithful, "of every rank" (n. 12). Indeed, the whole church, and not just the ordained or religiously professed, is called to holiness (*Lumen gentium,* ch. 5).

We find this people-of-God principle realized, with very different degrees of success, in parish councils, in base communities, in the multiplication of ministries, and particularly in ministries associated with the liturgy, education, and social justice.

The church that enters the 21st century and the third Christian millennium will be a church in which even more of its members, laywomen and laymen alike, will be ministerially involved, as they are increasingly today. This means that ministry, now and in the future, cannot and will not be confined to the ordained, and ordained ministry will not be restricted to males. One doesn't need any scientific surveys to verify what is obvious to anyone with eyes to see and ears to hear; namely, that the great majority of ministers in the Catholic Church today are



women, and this is likely to remain so into the next century and the new millennium. At the same time, the alienation of Catholic women from the official church is one of the most serious pastoral problems we face in this last decade of the second Christian millennium. The recent, highly publicized failure of the U.S. Catholic bishops to produce an acceptable pastoral letter on women, after nine years of effort, only underscores the problem.

The so-called vocations crisis is likely to get worse, not better, in the years ahead. The number of Catholic seminarians continues to decline. One researcher, Richard Schoenherr of the University of Wisconsin, has anticipated that by the year 2000 the number of priests will be half what it was in 1966 and will be almost twice as old. Only 15 percent, he projects, will be under 36. By the year 2005 there will be 5,000 fewer active diocesan priests in the United States than there are today, and 14,000 fewer than in 1966. Even if the rate of new ordinations were to increase by 25 percent (a development no one expects) the total decline by the year 2005 would be 34 percent rather than the currently projected 40 percent. Indeed, current research projects that by the middle

> The church and the world will turn away from those ministers who seek only to lord it over others, to dominate and control them, to threaten and censure them.

of this decade the ordination rate will be 69 percent lower than it was in the mid-1960s. By 2005 almost half the priests will be over 55. Both Schoenherr and another researcher, Dean Hoge of the Catholic University of America, have described these trends as irreversible.

And yet many Catholics continue to deny a reality that is as close as the nose on their faces. So, too, did Detroit for too many years deny the economic challenge from Japan and Europe. Detroit auto makers continued to produce huge gas-guzzlers at a time when energy-conscious consumers were looking for smaller cars. We all know how that contest came out.

For the moment, however, we are still in a kind of patchwork stage, having changed Mass schedules to permit fewer priests to celebrate more Masses on a given weekend; closing and consolidating seminaries and religious houses so that fewer of them look fuller; sometimes even subtly, or not so subtly, lowering standards of admission, ignoring the results of psychological testing or the reports of pastoral supervisors and associates, many of whom are women.

If the church is to maintain the highest standards of ministerial performance into the 21st century and the beginning of the third Christian millennium, it will have to be open to ordained ministries that are not always full-time, that are exercised by married people as well as celibates, and by women as well as men. Social scientists like Hoge and Schoenherr recommend these changes, insisting that they will end the current vocations shortage in the Catholic church. Others, however, seem convinced that the problem will somehow go away through prayer and fasting, or by purging seminaries of so-called dissident theologians, or by more inventive techniques of making personal contact with prospective candidates for the priesthood. Such people should be forced to write on the blackboard 10,000 times each the words "Toyota" and "Honda."

As Eugene Kennedy stated it in an article five years ago entitled "The Problem with No Name": "...the male-bonded culture of clerical life is in ruins because it is a vestige of the great days of privilege, not because people lack interest in ministry" (*America*, April 23, 1988).

3. A third major ecclesiological theme is contained in the council's teaching that the mission of the church includes *service* to human needs in the social, economic, and political orders, as well as the preaching of the word and the celebration of the sacraments.

Therefore, evangelization essentially includes the pursuit of justice and the transformation of the world. As Pope Paul VI wrote in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, evangelization involves "a message especially energetic today about liberation" (n. 29).

It is highly instructive that even so conservative a pope as John Paul II should continue to be so forthright about the

church's social teachings. This is evident not only in his three major social encyclicals—the 1981 encyclical *Laborem Exercens* (On Human Work), the 1988 encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (On the Social Concern of the Church), and his most recent encyclical *Centesimus Annus* (The Hundredth Year)—but also in the homilies and public addresses he has given in the United States and Canada, in Central and South America, in Poland, in the Philippines, in Africa, at the United Nations, and elsewhere around the world.

If this emphasis on social justice and human rights is so central even in a conservative pontificate, we can legitimately speculate that it will continue to be so in pontificates to follow.

Listen to John Paul II's words: "We cannot stand idly by, enjoying our own riches and freedom, if, in any place, the Lazarus of the 20th century stands at our doors," the pope declared at New York's Yankee Stadium in October of 1979. "In the light of the parable of Christ, riches and freedom mean a special responsibility. Riches and freedom create a special obligation."

He made the same point again in New Orleans, at Xavier University, in September, 1987: "It is not enough to offer to the disadvantaged of the world crumbs of freedom, crumbs of truth, and crumbs of bread. The gospel calls for much more. The parable of the rich man and the poor man is directed to the conscience of humanity and, today in particular, to the conscience of America."

And preaching in Edmonton, Alberta, in September of 1984, the pope used strong words that still ring with power, especially in light of the recent Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro: "In the light of Christ's words, this poor South will judge the rich North. And the poor people and poor nations—poor in different ways, not only lacking food, but also deprived of freedom and other human rights—will judge those people who take these goods away from them, amassing to themselves the imperialistic monopoly of economic and political supremacy at the expense of others."

The church is a servant church, like Jesus himself who came "not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mk 10:45). The world and the church of the next century will be looking for people who are prepared to lay down their lives, figuratively and sometimes even literally, in the service of others, like Archbishop Oscar Romero and the six Jesuits and the four church women of El Salvador. The church and the world will turn away from those ministers who seek only to lord it over others, to dominate and control them, to threaten and censure them.

4. A fourth ecclesiological theme is expressed in the conciliar teaching that the church is a communion—a communion between God and ourselves (the vertical dimension) and a communion of ourselves with one another in Christ (the horizontal dimension). Because the church is a communion, its institutional structure is *collegial* rather than monarchical.

The Catholic Church is not a single international parish under the pastoral leadership of the pope, subdivided into dioceses and parishes for administrative efficiency. The church is a communion of local churches, each of which is the body of Christ in its own particular locale (*Lumen gentium*, n. 26). Together these local churches constitute the universal church. Their unity is rooted in the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit, manifested especially in the celebration of the Eucharist.

This communal notion of church underscores the traditional importance of coun-

cils, synods, and conferences of bishops in the life and structure of the church. As a result the ordained ministries of the future will be increasingly differentiated and decreasingly uniform.

In those areas of the world like our own where democratic, collaborative, participatory forms of governance are taken for granted, ministry will be exercised in an increasingly collegial manner. Presbyterial councils, in union with the bishops, will exercise deliberative, not only consultative, authority, but in collaboration with other conciliar or synodal expressions of the local church, including especially the diocesan pastoral council.

> The church is not an end in itself but exists always and only for the sake of the reign of God.

Ministerial spirituality and its canonical forms will also differ from region to region. It will take longer for some regions to accept a married clergy and the ordination of women, not only to the presbyterate but to the episcopate as well. But these developments are inevitable. Some may rather perish than consider the thought. But none of us can hold back the future.

5. A fifth ecclesiological theme is expressed in the conciliar principle that the church includes more than Catholics. The church is the whole body of Christ: Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Anglican, Protestant, and Oriental Christian alike. The church is e*cumenical*, literally, it embraces "the whole, wide world."

The church's future ministries will continue to be ecumenically-oriented, in the conventional sense of the word. And eventually we may even see a formal mutual recognition of the validity of one another's official, or designated, ministries, as various ecumenical dialogues have recommended, but with little success thus far. On the other hand, the recent response of the Vatican to the final report of the first Anglican/Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC I) suggests that such changes will not come tomorrow.

In the meantime, however, our individual Christian churches have to nurture and strengthen their own ecclesial identities, rooted in their own distinctive theological, doctrinal, liturgical, canonical, and spiritual traditions. We recognize, after all, that there is no "ecumenical church" as such for which future ministers are prepared. There are only individual churches that are themselves ecumenical in outlook and practice, to one degree or another. It is within and for these individual churches—Catholic, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Episcopalian, Methodist, Greek Orthodox, and the like—that individuals are prepared for pastoral ministry.

But even as we attend to the nurturing and strengthening of our own individual traditions, we have to attend at the same time to our common ecumenical project in its broader, literal sense, embracing "the whole, wide world." The church's ministers will need to have a global and universal outlook, seeing the whole world and all of the world's religious communities as God sees them, loving the world and all humanity as God loves them, and serving the world and all humanity as God serves them;

namely, with understanding, compassion, forgiveness, mercy, patience, and a stubborn refusal to give up on our sisters and brothers, inside the church and out.

6. A sixth, and final, ecclesiological theme is embodied in the conciliar teaching that the church is not an end in itself but exists always and only for the sake of the reign of God. In other words, the church is an *eschatological* community.

The church is "already" and "not yet" within the reign of God. Insofar as it is "already" under God's reign, it is itself a mystery, or sacrament, and an object of faith ("I believe in the church"). Insofar as it is "not yet" within the reign of God, it is a sinful church on pilgrimage through history, holy but always in need of penance, reform, and renewal.

The ordained ministries of the future will be like the church itself: a pilgrim reality, on the way, always in process, ever subject to change, constantly adapting to new circumstances, new challenges, and new opportunities.

Just as we cannot really imagine what the church will be like in another 100 years (because we can't really imagine what the world will be like then), we cannot really imagine what ordained ministries will be like in the year 2093 and beyond.

But whatever the changes, there will also be certain constants in the ordained ministry as in the church itself. The church, however it is ministerially structured 100 years from now, will still be proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ and the promise of the reign of God's justice and peace, and so, too, will its ordained ministers. The church, however it is ministerially structured, will still be celebrating the Eucharist, the anticipation of the heavenly banquet to which all of us have been called. The church, however it is ministerially structured, will still be renewing and reforming itself in order to project a clearer, more credible, more compelling sign of Christ's abiding presence in, and abiding care for, the world. And the church, however it is ministerially structured, will still be employing whatever resources it has to minister, like the servant Christ, to the poor, the troubled, the oppressed, the bereaved, the lost, and all those in need.

In summary: if these six ecclesiological trends emerging from the council should continue to develop throughout the current decade and into the next century, the church of the future will be a church more conscious of itself as a sacrament of Christ and more conscious of its missionary obligation to practice the faith that it preaches.

Secondly, the church of the future will be a more democratic church, recognizing that the church always includes the hierarchy and other official leaders but is never coextensive with them. The church is the whole people of God, without artificial divisions imposed by gender, race, class, or canonical status.

Thirdly, the church of the future will be more fully engaged in social ministry, conscious that the martyrs of El Salvador like Archbishop Oscar Romero, the four churchwomen, and the six Jesuits and their housekeeper and her daughter were not murdered because of their defense of papal authority and the hierarchical structure of the church, but for their courageous commitment to social justice and human rights. The faith that the church proclaims will be a "faith that does justice," to use the words of the 32nd General Congregation of the Society of Jesus.

Fourthly, the church of the future will be less centralized because more sensitive and responsive to local needs, local cultures, local traditions, and local charisms.

> The church of the future will be more aware of its own limitations, less prone to equate itself with the reign of God.

Fifthly, the church of the future will be more ecumenical—still Catholic or Lutheran or whatever at its core, but more genuinely open and responsive to the presence and activity of God to be found outside the church, among people everywhere.

Finally, the church of the future will be more aware of its own limitations, less prone to equate itself with the reign of God, and, therefore, less inclined to march across the stage of history as if the church, not God, were the center and driving force of the mystery of salvation.

The future church is still in process. Like the reign of God, it is "already" but "not yet." We are—*all* of us—an important and indispensable part of the "already." Our hope is to see and experience what is "not yet." That hope is rooted in an unshakable faith in Christ, who is "the same yesterday and today and forever" (Heb 13:8) and an unshakable faith in the Holy Spirit, who makes "all things new" (Rev 21:5).

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Enlightening a Preacher's Imagination

Morris J. Niedenthal
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

It was 1954. A Thursday in October, 1954. I know it was Thursday because H. Grady Davis lectured on Thursday in the course on Preaching on the Pericopes. Monday and Tuesday were exegesis of the pericope with Arthur Vööbus. Wednesday was theological interpretation of the text with Joe Sittler. And Thursday were the homiletical possibilities of the pericope with Grady Davis. We had been studying the lesson from Matthew 6—"Do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink.... Look at the birds of the air... and consider the lilies of the field." You know the text. That Thursday Grady looked at us and said, "Gentlemen" (Grady had this habit of being overly generous in his salutation, and, yes, unfortunately, we were all males). "Gentlemen," Grady said, "When the time comes for you to preach on this text you will probably do almost everything under the sun except what the text advises. You will probably consult every commentary available, and you will scrounge around for sermons on this text. But you probably won't do what the text suggests—you won't "Look at the birds of the air" and you won't "Consider the lilies of the field." And you probably won't do these things because you will lack the audacity, the audacity to believe that these nimble creatures of God might be your teachers." That's what Grady said, and I remember it.

The first time this lesson came up in the lectionary after I was ordained, Grady's prediction was accurate. I consulted all the commentaries available. I scrounged around for sermons on the text. But I did not look at the birds of the air. Nor did I consider the lilies of the field.

Years later, I was at our farm in Wisconsin. I had been preaching in a rural parish in our vicinity. Monday morning I looked at the text for the upcoming Sunday—Matthew 6: "Do not be anxious about your life—Look at the birds of the air—consider the lilies of the field." "No, no, not this time Grady," I said to myself.

Three years earlier I had put up a purple martin house on the barn lawn. This year was the first year martins came and stayed. Two of them. I had named them Sam and Sally. Now on this particular Monday, I was encouraged by a text of scripture to look at the birds of the air. And I did—especially at Sam and Sally. It was breathtaking. I saw their graceful movements as they rode air currents. I saw them suddenly

swoop down and gobble up a mosquito. I saw a brilliant purple sheen as the sun's rays reflected off of their bodies. I saw them nestling together in their little room. Magnificent! Ideas for the sermon were piling up. And it was only Tuesday! Wednesday morning, I got up early and went out to do



the chores. I fed and watered the chicks and the hens. I cleaned out the barn. Then I returned to the house and sat down on the steps. I looked up into the sky, hoping to see birds—especially Sam and Sally. I kept looking around in the sky, but no birds. It was early. Maybe Sam and Sally were still sleeping. I looked at the martin house, and then my gaze moved down the pole. Down at the base, something was lying there. I ran to the pole, and there on the ground was a bird with purple wings outstretched. I picked it up. It was Sam, dead, probably pecked to death by another bird. I went back to the house, got a paper bag, put Sam in it, dug a hole beyond the apple tree and buried Sam. I returned to the house and sat down on the steps. The wrens were noisy. I looked up and saw them trying to preserve their territory by fighting off the sparrows. They had to protect their territory. I decided I had better go to town and buy chicken feed. As I approached the car, I noticed that the windshield was cluttered with bird crap. I scraped it off, and went on my way to town. As I was slowing down for a stop sign, I saw a beautiful rooster pheasant lying on the roadside—dead—probably hit by an automobile.

After I got back home from town, I began pondering what I had been experiencing. On that Wednesday, I began learning about some crucial aspects of one's imagination, and how one's imagination is enlightened. I am still learning, but I want to share with you two discoveries that came to me on that Wednesday.

The first is that enlightening one's imagination demands cultivating and nurturing one's sensual awareness and perception. One's imagination feeds on sensual attentiveness.

St. Ignatius knew that. In his Spiritual Exercises, Ignatius advised that a person meditating on a biblical text needed to compose the place. So, for example, we might meditate on the Christmas story from St. Luke. How do you compose the scene? What's that road like to Bethlehem? How is Mary walking? Do you have any sense for the bodily weight of truth she is carrying? And that manger? What's it like? Do you see anything? Can you compose the place and the characters? Then Ignatius urges one to utilize all one's senses. What are the aromas you smell? What are the sounds you hear? What does the texture of that manger feel like?

Why all that? Time is precious. But we are talking about imagination. And I think Ignatius knew that the truth we want to communicate is a very physical and bodily truth.

Tom Troeger knows that, too. Advising preachers for imaginative growth, Tom suggests:

1. Alert the eye to keener sight.
2. Feel the bodily weight of truth.
3. Listen to the music of speech.
4. Draw parables from life.
5. Dream of new worlds.
6. Return to the source.[1]

I want to concentrate on the first suggestion. Alert the eye to keener sight. Preacher, what do you see? What do you see?

Oh, all of us are busy folk. Meetings galore. Classes, preparations, hospital visits, sermon preparation, family and children obligations. But, preacher, what do you see? Well, I've seen lots of people and activities and programs, and hospital visits. So, preacher, what do you see?

Ed Riegert contends that a preacher must first become a "seer." If preachers achieve nothing else in a lifetime than the capacity to see," Robert Young wrote, "that is enough... the power to see, and to see for others is the essence of preaching."[2]

I think of Moses on Mt. Nebo. What do you see, Moses? "Well, I've been with these people for forty years, tracking through the desert; and many of them wanted to go back to Egypt. But I kept insisting that we keep going and that up there ahead of us was the promised land. So one day we stopped early, and I wanted to get away from their complaining. I went up this mountain, Mt. Nebo I hear they call it now. And I looked out and I saw *the promised land*!"

That's what Moses saw. Of course, it looked like any other desert land with a river before it. But Moses saw the promised land. And he died there, unable to enter the promised land.

An interesting image of a preacher. Hearing a word to go and lead God's people, listening to their complaints, and telling them that there is a promised land. And finally, up on that mountain, you see it. And you die. Never able to enter the promised land yourself. But amazingly, those complaining folk do enter the promised land.

Preacher, tell me, what do you see? You'll probably see tensions and contradictions and oppositions. Yes, that is what I saw on that Wednesday. On Tuesday, I saw mobility and grace and freedom and love, but on Wednesday, I saw death and warfare and crap. I experienced the conflicts, tensions, and oppositions. A second learning on that Wednesday—the imagination operates on the juxtaposition of opposites.

The poet Wallace Stevens described imagination as "the power that enables us to perceive the normal in the abnormal, the opposite of chaos in chaos."[3] And Paul Wilson wrote that "imagination exists because of the juxtaposition of opposites." And it leads us to a new awareness, a new entity.[4]

In mid-December I was studying a text from Matthew 11 in preparation for a sermon I was to preach on Sunday—and many of you preached on that text, too. John the Baptist, after hearing what Jesus had been doing, sent his disciples to Jesus asking whether he was the one, or should they wait for another. And Jesus said, "Go tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the person who is not offended at me."

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[1] Thomas Troeger, *Imagining a Sermon* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990).

[2] Edward R. Riegert, *Imaginative Shock: Preaching and Metaphor* (N. Burlington, Ontario, Canada: Trinity Press, 1990), 29.

[3] Martin Marty, "Interestingness and the Imagination," *Word and World* 5 (1985): 233.

[4] Paul Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988).

But I was offended—the tension you see, the juxtaposition of opposites—as I thought of my mother who is emotionally and mentally disoriented, living in a nursing home. My sister and I and many others have prayed that she might be healed. After, all Jesus has the power to cast out demons. But not out of my mother. And I was offended—you see the tension, the juxtaposition of opposites. The imagination, however, presses on to something new beyond the oppositions.

Then I saw Stacy Augman, a nurse who cares for Mom in the nursing home. She loves and cares for Mom dearly. Occasionally on her day off, Stacy brings her infant daughter, Amy, to visit Mom. Stacy knows that Mom loves children. As they enter the room, Mom relaxes, smiles, walks toward them with arms outstretched. She holds Amy gently, caressing her hair, speaking softly words that no one can understand. A problem arises, however, when it's time for Stacy and Amy to leave. Mom is not about to give Amy back to her mother. Mom becomes quite belligerent. Then, for some reason, God only knows why—little Amy starts laughing. Then Stacy starts laughing. And finally, Mom starts laughing and gives Amy back to her mother. This ritual of devotion, laughter, and surrender has been repeated a number of times. I've thought sometimes that a liturgy might be created around those movements of devotion, laughter, and surrender.

Imagination feeds on the juxtaposition of opposites. In an article entitled "A Matter of Words," Charles Leps claims that

> the pulpit is the place where faith and experience contend for the hearts and minds of people as in the history of Israel. That history was the struggle of men and women of faith to reconcile their experiences of defeat (Judges), of exile (Isaiah II), of prosperity (Amos), of suffering (Job), of betrayal (Hosea), and of meaninglessness (Ecclesiastes), with their conviction about the purposes of God for them.... The essential task of the preacher is to engage one's listeners at the deepest level of their experience in the struggle to make sense of life, that is, to reconcile their experience with their convictions.

Well, I left you back on Wednesday, didn't I? Some professors, as you know, have a habit of digressing. Thursday did arrive, and it brought other tensions and oppositions. I was visiting with a neighboring farmer, and we were discussing crop rotations on our land. Then Raymond asked, "What are you up to today?" I told him I was working on a sermon for Sunday. "What are you going to talk about?" Raymond asked, as he kept working on a motor he was repairing. I told him the text: "Look at the birds of the air—they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns. And yet God feeds them." "Jesus," Raymond said, "sounds like all preachers, God feeds them." Then he got up, pointed his finger at me and said, "Morry, God may feed the birds of the air, but God needs the seeds we farmers grow to feed them." Another tension, and I didn't need another one on Thursday.

"Morry," Raymond asked, "did you ever hear the story about a new pastor who was visiting the members of his congregation? He called on a farmer who was down in his garden hoeing. The pastor introduced himself, and thinking he needed to say something religious said, "That's a mighty fine garden you and God are raising." The farmer stroked his chin and said, "Yeah, I guess you could put it that way—but you should have seen the hell of a mess this was when God had it all alone." Another tension.

On the way back home, it dawned on me that while birds neither sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, you and I—humans—

can. Maybe that's why we are of more value than the birds of the air. You and I can plan and act for a new, a transformed *future*. Moreover, you and I are already known by a God who will not let us go. So do not be overly anxious about your life.

Well, Sunday came. And in my sermon I took the folk with me through the week-long process of discovery. Too often, I think, preachers give people their conclusions and then try to illustrate the meaning. Occasionally, at least, take them with you through the process of discovery and affirmation.

So, that's what happened to my imagination one week when I remembered what Grady said. But, of course, Grady knew and you probably know and sometimes even I know that what enlightens a preacher's imagination is a simple fact: the light shines in the darkness, in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it!!

So be it, Lord, for you and for me.

Too often, I think, preachers give people their conclusions and then try to illustrate the meaning. Occasionally, at least, take them with you through the process of discovery...

Cultural/Self-Transcendence

Albert Pero, Jr.
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The following essay is an abbreviated form of a much longer research project that Professor Pero hopes to publish in the future.

The main concept for our study is "self-transcendence." What a concept! Christian theology suffers from big words, beautiful words; but the actual meaning of the concept is not too far from the people since it comes from observing the people. Our treatment of the concept will not be approached from merely philosophical viewpoints as others have done so eloquently, but more from a theological and scientific point of view. Self-transcendence for our purposes has to do with human beings and how they relate not just to God, but to one another. The concept is based on several texts in the scriptures dealing with the image of God, and consequently our own image of our identity: Col 1:15, 1 Cor 15: 49, Rom 8:29, 2 Cor 3:18, and Col 3:10.

The early Christians were in search of reality, wholeness, meaning, and completeness, as we are today. It is the nature of humanity to search and strive for this perfection in life. We reach out and pull back and reach out again and again. The search for reality, for the early Christians and for us, is a reaching out, a leaving of self, reaching out to the transcendent. When it comes to unifying the separated, fragmented life, it takes Jesus Christ. For the apostles, Christ is the self-transcendent foundational model. Self-transcendence is not some meaningless abstraction or dreamed-up philosophy. No, in Christ it is a coming together, the reconciliation of all things and people, all politics and economy.

I want to introduce a concrete illustrative model of self-transcendence as witnessed in the black experience. There are several reasons why I have chosen the Afro-American cultural experience as the model of self-transcendence. First of all, this model affirms that all Christians are concerned about the truth. The black situation has generally been neglected or badly distorted in our society. Common popular myths prevail as a result. There is the popular myth that Africa is a "dark continent" in which there has never been any culture or social development. There is also a myth that Afro-Americans have never made any significant contribution to history. Christians should not be content to let their views of the present day be shaped by a false view of the past.

Secondly, Christians are concerned about persons. A person finds himself/

herself in relation to the past. The answer to the question "Who am I?" comes largely from our relationship to history. James Baldwin says to the white community, "I am not who you think I am," and he is right. Discovery of who the Afro-American really is can come in large part from discovering who he/she really has become in his/her historical situation. Baldwin goes further and indicates that the white person's inability to accept blacks as persons is related to their inability to accept themselves. Therefore the study of the black situation may be revelatory in other cultures' efforts to understand themselves as persons, as well as in their effort to understand the black person as a person, if we are authentically to become part of an inclusive community.

Thirdly, the Christian is concerned about communion or communication as he/she attempts to correlate the kerygma to cultural situations. Many attempts at communication between black and white today are phony and superficial because they are attempts to communicate as though nothing had ever happened. Honest communication must begin by facing the events that have brought our world to its present tragic state. Perhaps as we face these facts together we can begin to communicate and discover a real common life as children of God that has so long been denied.

Fourthly, for the white community and others, a study of the black experience and its self-transcendence can mean the deliverance from false condescension if it brings to others the discovery that they have as much if not more to receive from the black person as they have to give in the process of "organic union." In short, we must in love understand and become each other with all our religious, political, social, and economic different formulations in order to face the present intelligently and bring about a different future—a future in which the "praxis" of faith in Christ is as much the pivotal point of life in one culture as in all Christian cultures.

Probably the most magnificent drama in the last thousand years of human history is the transportation of some ten million human beings out of the dark beauty of Africa to these American shores. It was the rape of the continent, seldom if ever paralleled in ancient or modern history. Black persons, having been snatched up out of a deep spiritist culture and brought into the white community's strange and cruel world, relied heavily in this early period upon both supernaturalism and emotionalism as means by which they could adjust themselves to perplexing, baffling, staggering, and strange experiences in America.

> ...the slaves who had been torn from their homeland and kinsmen and their friends and whose cultural heritage was lost, were isolated and broken men, so to speak... not only did religion draw the Negroes into a union with their fellowmen, it tended to break down barriers that isolated them morally from their white master.[1]

Though white people suppressed every attempt on the part of black people to be free, they failed to listen to the slaves' songs or their philosophy "wrapped up" in those songs. Black people not only sang to make their fifteen- and sixteen-hour work days easier, they sang with hope about their miseries and gained existential, metaphysical, and eschatological insights which were impossible for most white people to ascertain at that time. Examine if you will the following black songs:

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[1] E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Church in America* (New York: Schocken Books, 1962), 8-9.

Didn't my Lord deliver Daniel
and why not every man?
He deliver'd Daniel from the Lion's
den,
Jonah from the belly of the whale,
And the Hebrew children from the
fiery furnace,
And why not every man?

Nobody knows the trouble I've seen
Nobody knows but Jesus.

Swing low, sweet chariot,
Coming for to carry me home.

Go down Moses
Way down in Egypt land.
Tell old Pharaoh
To let my people go.

These few excerpts from black spirituals historically typify what the Christian religion has meant to the black experience.

Authenticity cannot apply itself to the true function of the black church without taking into serious discussion the disenchantment, the destruction of all family ties, the dehumanization, the rebellion, the struggle for emancipation, and the unique ability toward self-transcendence by communing with God through song.

There are those with whom I have been in extensive dialogue who say that without music it is doubtful that the black person would have survived. It served as a cleansing agent in eradicating present difficulty through emotional expression, it lifted up a transcendent future with better possibilities than the present, and it brought the celestial down to earth. Troubles, joys, trials, tribulations, power, and heaven are basic themes in most of the black spirituals. Shouting and great exultation were still basic characteristics of the black church of this period. The slave Christians were ingenious: by singing and shouting, they received self-transcendent strength to endure physical and mental suffering that few others could endure. The church was the sole institution in which power was used both creatively and self-transcendentally. In many instances the church serves today in the same capacity.

Given this cursory historical component of the black situation, we ask: "What has it been like to live in the black experience?" Better yet, "What is it like to be a black American?"

What is it like to engage in self-transcendence or to experience being black in America? Very few white people have tried to find out. One man did, and he received a rude shock. John Howard Griffen, a southern white newspaperman, shaved his head and darkened the color of his skin and lived as a black for a time in the deep South. He found himself exposed to hatred and viciousness. He found that the new color of his skin confined him to a closed world in which there was no future. Griffen describes the impact of his experience most vividly in his book *Black Like Me*, which has since become a movie.

As Frazier points out, the word "prejudice" means pre-judgment in the sense that it is a judgment concerning objects and persons not based upon knowledge or experience.[2] To see the effects of segregation on the black community in America, we recommend Part V of the book entitled *The Negro in the United States* by Frazier.[3] The chapters deal with the problems of health and survival, of unemployment and poverty, of family disorganization, of crime and delinquency, of mental deficiency and insanity. Also of particular importance is chapter 27 which deals with the nature of race prejudice and its effect on the black. In

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[2] Frazier, *The Negro Church in America*, 65.

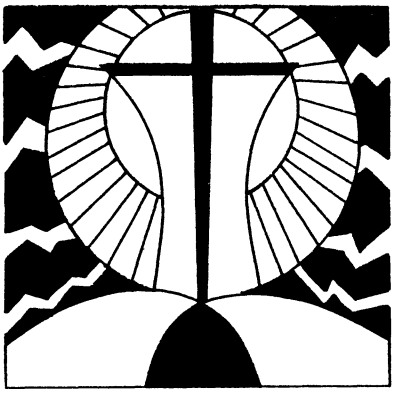
[3] Frazier, *The Negro in the United States* (Macmillan, 1957).

short, the white majority has built up a whole set of ideas and behavior patterns concerning the black race which are groundless. The black then suffers the consequences of this falsely-based behavior.

What is it like to be black in America? Ralph Ellison suggests that the black person is the "invisible man." Because of prejudice, whites do not really see blacks as persons but as figments of their imagination; Ellison says, "I am invisible simply because people refuse to see me. The invisibility to which I refer occurs because of a peculiar disposition of the eyes of those with whom I come in contact." Ellison reflects on the consequences of being invisible and notes, "you are constantly being bumped against by those of poor vision. Or, again, you often doubt if you really exist."[4]

Ellison's comments point to a basic biblical conviction that to be a person depends upon being accepted as a person. This would suggest that if black people seem inferior to white people, perhaps it is because whites have denied the humanity of blacks rather than because black people are really inferior.

What is it like to be black in America? Richard Wright suggests that it requires the constant role of deception. Black people must constantly hide their true selves and present the false face that white people want to see. In order to survive, the black person's life must become a deliberate lie. As a friend advised, "When you are in front of white people, think before you act, think before you speak. Your way of doing things is alright amongst our people, but not for white people. They won't stand for it." This advice proved difficult for Richard Wright, for as he put it, "it was simply impossible for me to calculate, to scheme, to act, to plot all the time. I would remember to dissemble for short periods and then I would forget and act straight and human



again, not with the desire to harm anybody, but merely forgetting the artificial status of race and class."[5]

I have tried to uncover one of many basic facts: that the subordinate or inferior role has not come naturally to the black person as some races have tried to suggest; rather, it is a role that has been forced upon the black person in basic violation of his/her personality.

The black person's experience in America can be seen to have been caught between the *natural desire* to fulfill one's being as created by God and the unnatural need to fulfill one's being as prescribed by the white society, i.e., to be of no consequence or to become "white." And so the struggle continues.

To become "white." How could that be? I thought you were black? How is it possible for you to become white if you are black? Well, it is possible. And black people have once again offered us the key to

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[4] Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: Signet Books, 1952), 7.

[5] Richard Wright, *Black Boy* (New York: World Publishing, 1945), 203-4.

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our understanding of how an inclusive community can exist in peace and harmony within a multi-cultural context of diversity.

Let us look a little deeper into the black experience. From an ontological perspective, black people were forced to become white people by adapting to the white culture. While the experience was a negative one as has been described earlier, from a positive point of view, black people became "de facto" white. The self transcendent process took so well that blacks negatively adopted code names for one another like "oreo cookie" or "vanilla wafer," meaning the degree to which a black had become white. The system in American white schools also indicates the proficiency of blacks with culturally white academic courses. Indeed we could analyze every fiber of American white culture and discover black people more capable than whites in these areas. From a world perspective, I have found black people who were, culturally speaking, British, German, Dutch, French, Spanish, Portuguese, etc. The punch line to this, if I might add a little humor at this point, is to pick up the daily paper during the basketball season, turn to the sports section, and there find a picture of a black basketball player leaping high in the air to stuff the basketball into the basket and in so doing winning the game. The title reads, "Fighting Irish Win Again by Two." And on the black young man's jersey is printed the team name: "Irish." "Truly the black man has become everyman."

While others planned to destroy black people, God has once again turned it into good. For black people have established an empirical, existential model of self-transcendence, returned to indigenous roots and must now positively initiate a continuance of self-transcendence with the added ingredient of affirmation of their roots.

Another human experience of going beyond self is found in the black woman who has been in the Black Experience—the mother of mothers, taking care of her children and those of whites, the house keeper's housekeeper; she is woman, mother, brother, father, sister, manager, economist, executive, psychologist, lover, friend, politician—indeed her self-transcendence has been so pervasive that it has engaged practically every facet of life. Indeed she is as much cosmopolitan as cosmic.

Still another human experience of going beyond is found in role playing within the movie and television industry. This role playing is so effective today that it is thought to be one of the most formidable forces of influence on human behavior. While we could cite a host of programs and movies which substantiate this point, one contemporary movie entitled "A Force of One" is one of the most important ones depicting crossover roles.

The concept of cultural transcendence as a foundational concept for actualizing ecumenism and human solidarity is no longer a figure of speech in my theological thinking. Science has helped me to see in an

empirical way that even scientists are beginning to sense the links extending all the way from the tiny mitochondria that live in cells to the vista of ever-expanding galaxies. Other terms that describe this transcending transformation are multicultural, global awareness, ecological consciousness, and world-openness, to name a few. To me, all of this describes the yearnings and gropings toward the wholeness and oneness of the self with the energy that flows in, with, under, and through the creation. The idea of "brotherhood" is expanded into "being-hood." The tradition (as I will illustrate in a paradigm from the African-American culture) that has always been normative for the African-American churches and the African-American community is not the Western Christian tradition per se, although this tradition is an important source for African-American people. More accurately, the normative tradition for African-American people is that tradition correlated with the scientific position mentioned above and governed by the principle of non-racism which we call the "Black Christian Tradition." This tradition is depicted by the biblical doctrine of "the parenthood" of God and the kinship/beinghood of all peoples—which is the contemporary non-sexist version of the original expression of "the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of men."[6]

It could be argued that we need not worry about the rest of the universe and humanity when we are so far from having achieved the ecological and human solidarity needed. After all, the only destiny that counts is immediate satisfaction and self-interest. But the greater challenge is to see our oneness and unity contextualized in the broad stream of life. By doing so, we might achieve a greater respect for each other. It is what Teilhard de Chardin calls the "omega point"—the inclusive view of all reality.

Since I have been a professor of theology at LSTC, I have become more aware of the theological shifts within our modern era. One has to run at breakneck speed to keep up only to find that once you catch up, the rules of the game have been changed again. But I have learned that all the theological and ecclesiastical shifts and changes, through they be important, are not as important as what happens to the person internally. One thinks of black theology, white theology, liberation theology, African theology, the nagging questions of identity, the women's movement, the political questions—all of which threaten to tear Christian communities asunder. Conditions in life of separatism between rich, poor, oppressed, oppressor; life and death, body and soul; all signs of which a theologian called Martin Luther King, Jr., was aware and offered a solution. A theological understanding which I would propose as a theological approach to grounding the experience of self-transcendence is the theology of Martin Luther King.

Martin Luther King, like few other theologians, not only wrote and preached his theology but externalized it in a most dramatic form. King could be designated "Theologian for Our Time," because for King, action was not only an expression of theology but also a source of theology. He stood within the liberal theological tradition which has always considered experience as a valid substantial source of theology.

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6 See this valued principle stated well in M. L. King Jr., *Trumpet of Conscience* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 56, and the Quadrenniel address of the Bishop's Journal of the 20th Quadrenniel Session of the General Conference of the A.M.E. Church held in St. Stephens A.M.E. Church, Wilmington, N.C., May 4-22, 1896, p. 98.

For Martin Luther King, Jr., action was not only an expression of theology but also a source of theology.

Since we are in need of a theology which reconciles God and people, ideologies, classes, races, and sexes, Martin Luther King is certainly one person whose thought and work have made a significant contribution to such a theology of reconciliation which, as we shall see, is one of the outcomes of self-transcendence. In so doing, King set for himself a mission involving three tasks: intellectual, moral, and political. *Intellectually*, King sought to reconcile the separation between God and the person. *Morally*, he sought to reconcile the separation between violent advocacy of change and the nonviolent acceptance of the status quo. *Politically*, his goal was to reconcile a faulty present with an ideal future.[7]

Since self-transcendence within America is a key to unity, ecumenism within a contextual form of an inclusive community is of special interest to us as represented by those aspects of King's theology which characterize it as being specifically an "American theology." One such aspect was King's determination to seek resolution for theological dualisms wherever they occurred. Another trait which seems peculiarly "American" is the tendency to express theological refection in action rather than in writing.

Specifically in his writings, he sought some type of synthesis between the concepts of the transcendence and immanence of God. Secondly, he dealt with the nature of God in relation to the problem of evil. But perhaps his most important contribution for our purposes in this area is his thinking about God and humanity relative to the application of the philosophy of personalism to the person of God.

God was profoundly real for M. L. King. For validation of this understanding, we turn to King's personal experience.

> I have always believed in the personality of God, but in past years the idea of a personal God was little more than a metaphysical category which I found theologically and philosophically satisfying. Now it is living reality that has been validated in the experiences of everyday life. Perhaps the suffering, frustration, and agonizing moments which I have had to undergo occasionally as a result of my involvement in a difficult struggle have drawn me closer to God. Whatever the cause, God has been profoundly really to me.[8]

God, for King, was the God of the Universe, the God and Father of all people. And the person stood in a relationship of tension. "Man is neither villain nor hero."[9] There is a somewhat Lutheran position here that the person is "simil justus et peccator"—sinner and saint simultaneously. The point here is that if one views all of humanity as God's children, then self-transcendence becomes desirable for all cultures.

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[7] For explicit theological positions, see King's *The Measure of a Man* (Augsburg Fortress, 1988), *Strength to Love* (Augsburg Fortress, 1981), and his dissertation (Boston University): "A Comparison of the Conceptions of God in the Thinking of Tillich and Wiemann."

[8] M. L. King's dissertation, p. 22.

[9] King, *Strength to Love*, 107.

The real distance between people and cultures is created by something other than diversity of sex, color, or ideology. It is created by the lack of *agape*. Eliminating distance between people and cultures is effected by, as you guessed—agape. Without agape love, even Christianity would not be what it is; because of agape, Christianity is uniquely what it is. Were the agape component missing, self-transcendence and Christianity would simply not be what history has shown them to be. The agape motif is thus fundamental to self-transcendence. It becomes the very grounding of the experience itself.

This grounding is first experienced in the ultimate roots of the image of God,[10] whose personal identity is best described as Love. And as God's creation we too possess God's attributes, the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, faith, hope, understanding. Herein is our identity and the personality traits of self-transcendence that we possess. We have and possess them by faith in Jesus Christ who becomes the power, source, and revelation of self-transcendence.

Philippians 2:1-11 is the classic revelation of Jesus' self-transcendence:

> Your life in Christ makes you strong, and his love comforts you. You have fellowship with the Spirit, and you have kindness and compassion for one another. I urge you, then, to make me completely happy by having the same thoughts, sharing the same love, and being one in soul and mind. Don't do anything from selfish ambition or from a cheap desire to boast, but be humble toward one another, always considering others better than yourselves. And look out for one another's interests, not just for your own. The attitude you should have is the one that Christ Jesus had: He always had the nature of God, but he did not think that by force he should try to become equal with God. Instead of this, of his own free will he gave up all he had, and took on the nature of a servant. He became like man and appeared in human likeness. He was humble and walked the path of obedience all the way to death—his death on the cross. For this reason God raised him to the highest place above and gave him the name that is greater than any other name. And so, in honor of the name of Jesus all beings in heaven, on earth, and in the world below will fall on their knees, and all will openly proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord, the glory of God the Father.

Christ became human in every way that we might through faith be saved and obtain the fruits of the Spirit for one another. It is in this spirit that we understand the apostle Paul's self-transcendence toward his fellow brothers and sisters in 1 Cor 9:19-23.

It is not my purpose to get into a long debate over the interpretations of the image of God because this phrase has a history as long and as complex as the cultural situations in which the Bible has been dealt with in modernity. I merely want to argue that God created humanity with dignity and character traits in order that something may happen between God and humanity that culminates in a unity of meaning between God, all living life, and nature.

This is the image we glean from the apostle Paul in 1 Cor 9:19. This is the image we receive for ourselves. It is a picture of unity in diversity all related to giving glory to God.

Realizing that there is no single Christology, not even in the Bible, but rather many Christologies, our Christology within this work is that Jesus is Messiah, preaching the kingdom of God, whose modality was

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[10] C. Westermann, *Creation*, trans. J. J. Scullion, S.J. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), 32-63 and 49-60. An acceptable view for me of the *imago dei*, 49f. See also A. R. Peacocke, *Creation and the World of Science* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979).

and is self-transcendence or living as others/in behalf of others in suffering, death, and resurrection, i.e. in *sacrifice*. The basic work of God therefore has to do with sacrifice-suffering. This M. L. King interpreted as non-violent resistance. Thus it is in suffering that we participate in God's kingdom—not as pathological masochists but in behalf of the health of others. This sacrifice and suffering is not an act of human appeasement, but a divine human self-transcendent process in which God approaches humanity. It is God drawing close to people in the world. Jesus being crucified *outside* of the sanctuary, sanctified the outside. As the evangelist John put it, the Word was *in the world.*

Many Christian people know of no pompous, imperialist Christ, but rather a Christ who has become the wretched of the earth, who has become a man of sorrow, acquainted with grief.

Jesus Christ is the model for Christians and is an example in his life, death, and resurrection. Jesus never shut himself off from people in order to become religious. If Jesus was truly human, all of the components of every human person had to be present in him. Through his relationship with God, Jesus totally committed himself to the process of self-transcendence, i.e. to living out of the value of self-giving love, and is thus a model for living an authentic human life. So it is that we have a tradition with Jesus as model.

Yet Christ is more than just a model. He is the Way and the Truth, which was expressed in his becoming us that we might become him and one another.

Christian self-transcendence as it responds to the human condition is an authentic way of life in which the person finds the truth in becoming "little Christ" to his or her neighbor through Christ. Anything that is a way of life must be active. By being aware of the process of self-transcendence and by being open to the process, our separated exclusive lives can grow and mature and become an inclusive Christian community.

Christianity is a relational religion. One's relationship with God can only be expressed and tested through a love relationship with other human beings. Only through this human process can a person say that he/she is in relationship with God.

One begins to get the idea that by entering into this process of self-transcendence a person's life begins to change and grow. The same change and growth happens in society and community. Authentic human existence, then, requires that a person consciously enter into the process of self-transcendence and then remain open to the process of struggle with one's own prejudices. Christian theology is integrally related to the process of self-transcendence because genuine Christianity is authentic human existence, self-transcendence or nothing at all.

Self-transcendence involves identity, vision, relationships, and "praxis," as one becomes the other in sacrificial love. Secondly, self-transcendence is grounded in Jesus Christ and God's future which comes into focus in the resurrection whereby God is seen to be the author of the "new world." Thirdly, such self-transcendence automatically alters the world from a killing world to a loving world stopping short of bloody revolution, yet pushing beyond just mere reform toward transforming the symptoms and causes. It does so through non-violent resistance to evil with the power of the fruits of the Spirit.

Therefore to be engaged in self-transcendence means:

1. in Martin Luther's terms, "experiencing the other side." It means a readiness and a willingness to listen to others, to learn from them, to allow them to be our teachers.

2. a readiness and willingness to enter completely into the real life situations of people, to experience their lived reality with them in such a way that their questions become meaningful for us. Real questions today arise out of real situations of suffering and experience.

3. a readiness and willingness to give up our illusion of power, our temptation to impose what we have to offer; it means to set aside our own projects, our own programs, in order to discover with people—not for them—what their projects and programs are.

4. a readiness to meet people on their own terms, in their own time; it means to recognize that waiting, as painful as we may find it, may well be a more powerful force than acting.

5. a readiness to accept the fact that we do not possess the truth, the only right way of doing things; it means to accept our own need to grow in the truth, to be disposed to accept the message and values of others and therefore to be continuously open to further conversation as a result of our dialogue with them. In a very real sense, it will be our own openness to conversion that will make it possible for others to be converted. If I let someone help me, maybe they will allow me to help them remove whatever in their lives is a stumbling block to fuller human development and to growing into the mystery of God. To develop deep personal relationships; it means to realize that in listening to others, in taking them seriously, in identifying with their world, we are saying "yes" to them, we are affirming them.

The concept of self/cultural transcendence has been presented as moving toward a self-conscious transformation of one's self, others, and the environment. It can include cultural life, ecology, and the future. In all these dimensions the most important factor about this paper is that God

> Jesus never shut himself off from people in order to become religious.

the Holy Spirit works at the core and center of this world and its history. Our search for identity and community, found in a glimpse through self-transcendence in correlation with science, can be the initial clue we need for unity in diversity.

The theological and scientific sources, both black and white, have demonstrated a strong argument for our continued experimentation into the truth of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in harmony with science.

The understanding of God's relation and interaction with the world based on the "personality character" that we have been developing in light of the sciences, is congruent (I believe) with an understanding of hope for the future that is grounded in the "fruits of the Spirit" (Galatians) of the transcendent/immanent God and revealed in Jesus Christ.

I hope this exercise has illustrated the unique triangle between God, nature, and humanity.

Finally, I trust that I have not given the impression that the doctrine of cultural transcendence is yet another theoretical concept of theological abstractionism, but rather an apprehensible way of life freely given to all people as a gift of the Holy Spirit which we receive by faith and live out in joy and happiness. What this all means is that since blacks have become whites, then whites can become blacks, especially since Jesus has become us all.

Lutheran Spirituality: Lost, Found, Revised

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Let us begin by observing that *words create worlds*. That thought is the governing theme for this lecture. Words create worlds.

On the basis of this governing theme, I want to define spirituality in a novel way. I want to offer this definition: *Spirituality is the entire complex of words and signs in which we dwell and by which we appropriate the faith.* I am thinking of Heidegger's notion that language is the house of being when I use this definition, but I want to expand it so I added the word "signs" to help us get an image of the total surrounding in which we grow up in the faith. There is great power in this surrounding. Literary critic Northrop Frye in his 1982 masterwork *The Great Code* considers the Bible, especially in its English and German dress, to be central to the development of western consciousness and capable of enormous transformative power. Today I am searching for the particular Lutheran surroundings in which we grew up.

Lutheran piety cannot be defined as a set of religious practices. If we look at it from the viewpoint of the person who dwells in the complex of words and signs, then Lutheran piety is a perception or an attitude before it is a set of practices. One might say that we focus attention on the substructure of faith. Because the distinctively Lutheran slant on faith is attitudinal more than it is devotional, we tend to think of ourselves as not having a "spirituality." At the same time, because the distinctively Lutheran approach to faith is attitudinal and perceptual rather than expressed in devotional practice, we have always had a broad understanding of what's Lutheran, and thus have produced a wide variety of forms.

We may agree that the essence of the faith is the gift of God's grace, for which we return thanks. We offer our sacrifice of prayer, praise, and thanksgiving, but our attitude of thanksgiving is more important than the forms we use to express it. Melanchthon's commentary on Colossians is instructive here; Melanchthon goes on for pages at great pains to insure that we do not consider free will to be operative in matters of faith.[1] The natural side of our humanity is concerned with intellect, reason, and will; but in matters of faith, only the Holy Spirit can raise up new persons in Christ. Only the

[1] Philip Melanchthon, *Paul's Letter to the Colossians*, trans. D. C. Parker (Sheffield, England: University of Sheffield Press, Almond Imprint, 1989), 46-56, commenting on Col 2:8, esp. 49-51.

Holy Spirit can gather the community of the faithful. This leading can only be known within; to be a Christian is not bound up with piety and practice so much as it is a matter of mystery and calling.

The interiorization of faith, which had begun with Augustine, advances considerably in the Lutheran movement; external criteria by which to measure *faith* are eschewed, and so outward displays of piety are reduced to secondary status. In any case, there are no external criteria for whether or not one is Christian.

We would not define Lutheran spirituality as piety or devotion because we have emphasized the grace that flows from the cross and resurrection of Christ so that we feel awkward, if not guilty, talking about how we appropriate grace. To discuss spirituality as devotion or piety seems to diminish the gift of faith, which always comes by way of address through the gift of the Holy Spirit. "Faith," as Luther said, "is the empty hands by which we receive the gifts of God." If you focus on the shape or size of the hands, you diminish the gift.

We know the shape of evangelical Christianity; it is centered on faith and obedience. These are our hallmarks. Luther answers the implied question, "Why pray?" in his large catechism, with: "because God commanded it and promises to hear us." The conviction that God is bound to the promises of the gospel characterizes evangelical faith at its best, and stamps it with *robustness, clarity*, and *simplicity*. To cite Luther again from the Large Catechism:

> It is true that what has heretofore been offered as prayer—wailing and chanting in the churches, etc.—was really not prayer. Such external, ceremonial things, when properly observed, serve as an exercise for young children, pupils and simple minds; while they may be called singing or reading exercises, they are not real prayer. To pray as the second commandment teaches, is to call upon God in every need. This God requires of us and has not left it to our choice. We are under obligation to pray if we would be Christians....[2]

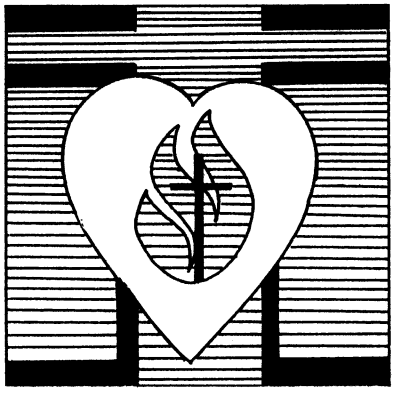
Prayer arises in response to the promises which we discern and receive through our meditative reading of scripture, our common life in the body of Christ, and our daily lives. There is a blessed ordinariness to it all.

In the Lutheran movement there is no yearning after devotional methods or techniques, because such things may come to replace the pure address of the gospel. Any form of mysticism that places the initiative with the believer is ruled out of evangelical faith. This is both our freedom and our curse: *freedom* because it is radical and opens us up all the way, even toward the "religionless Christianity" of a Dietrich Bonhoeffer; *curse* because it leaves us with no markers or methods by which to identify spiritual growth—except the passion and search for justice and righteous living.

At this point, recall the definition of spirituality as the complex of words and signs within which we dwell. Lutheran reformers and others like unto them, most notably the Calvinists English and Continental, judiciously pruned the tradition and the liturgies of the church so as to display anew the gospel which they believed to be obscured in the overladen texts and devotions of the late middle ages. They did not receive the traditions *carte blanche* from the Roman church but, on the other hand, neither did they eschew them entirely in a radically biblicist movement as we find in Anabaptist groups like the Mennonites or the Amish.

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[2] Martin Luther, *The Large Catechism*, trans. J. N. Lenker (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1935), 131.



By staying on this middle ground, evangelical faith grew and developed on a humbler but clearly centralized basis, yet one which did not eschew the value of tradition. Text enough remained to make liturgy a school for prayer in the evangelical tradition, but underbrush enough was cut to bring to light the gospel of God's saving grace in Christ.

If we define spirituality as the complex of words and signs, it is important to note what is present, what absent in the religious complex handed down by the reformers. First, what is present.

Reforming churches retained a lectionary, historic collects, and the basic *ordo* of the mass. Reforming churches retained two events which they understood as sacraments, if not more. In some areas of reform, a eucharistic prayer was retained, in others the liturgy skipped from *sanctus* to *verba*, but in all cases prayers were minimized with an eye toward gospel proclamation.

Translation of the Bible into local languages put evangelical faith into a linguistic frame and a historic tradition that promised depth, continuity, and longevity. In a very real sense, literacy replaced devotion as the key to piety. I'll return to this in a moment.

Absent in evangelical religion were usual accoutrements: pilgrimages, medals, novenas, rosaries, and other devotional aids. It is difficult for us, so much later, to realize how dramatically such changes affected the consciousness of the ordinary Christian believer. We can only sketch the outcome.

1. The heart of evangelical devotion became prayer, understood as response to the Word of God and in particular to the freeing Word of the gospel. Many generations of Lutherans have used resources for daily reading and meditation on scripture such as the *Losungen* ("watchwords") of the Moravian church, since such resources sink us into the words of the Bible in order to point to the presence of God in daily life.

2. Biblical literacy went hand in hand with prayerfulness, each one enhancing and deepening the other. The outcome of such prayer could not help but be the desire and the willingness to discover what it meant to be obedient to the call and the will of God. Prayer itself became a journey of discovery rather more than an assessment of need; prayer for *guidance* is common to the evangelical tradition.

3. At the same time, because prayer seeks to discern the presence and the will of God in daily life, and because the customary devotional aids are absent, *imagination* is a key to the experience of God in Lutheran piety. I am not now thinking of the imaginal world of a Jakob Boehme or the fantastic imagery of the spiritualists, who combined alchemical notions with biblical/philosophical thought to come up with whole world views. I'm thinking more of the pietist experience of the faith which was nourished rather directly by the simple and homely images of scripture, apart from any speculation. There was a spurt of new religious art at the time of the Reformation; it was realistic and stark, for that was the religion itself: sparse, minimalist, and real-

istic. Yet the images that emerge for those who interact with scripture were powerful and nourishing. If the reform shifted the ground from devotional aids to literacy, it also shifted the ground from allegory and symbol to more concrete, one might say more Hebraic, patterns of imaginal work. In this kind of reading, the meaning of a text emerges in the historical and social context of a reader who understands the text itself in an historical and social context.

4. The historical and literal meaning of the text is to be preferred above all fanciful reading and, strange though it may seem, this gives way to a renewed use of the imagination, one that would lead us forth into obedience and loving actions. The analogies are practical, socketed into the reader's daily world, even as the biblical scenes depicted by Cranach or Dürer woodcuts blur the line between biblical and contemporary life. To see this shift in imagination, one need only compare Luther's commentary on the Lord's Prayer in his booklet, "For Master Peter the Barber on how to pray"[3] with the allegorical imagery of Teresa of Avila's commentary.[4] These two contemporaries approach the same text with quite different sensibilities. The loss of symbolic readings of text, like the loss of symbolic discourse on sacrament, may render both of them more useful, practical, and proximate to the world of the reader.

The complex of words and signs which form a particular piety leads toward transformation, even as Frye remarked on the Bible's ability to transform consciousness through its peculiar language.

Transformation occurs when a gap is opened in one's consciousness, in which gap the usual way of perceiving reality is altered through either the conviction that a new perspective is more true or a previously-held "fact" becomes an inner truth. I am using a humble definition of transformation here; any connection with the reality of God is out of my hands. I am merely telling you what I think transformation means on an experiential level.

The Lutheran approach to the Christian faith, we have said, adopted a reduced complex of signs. Gone was the opulence of the medieval methodology. The focus henceforth was on the ability of words to convey the Word in such a way as to evoke faith and to work transformative patterns in the life of the hearer.

Proclaimed words open up space for transformation when they upend our customary understanding of faith and/or life. As an example of how the reforming movement created a renewed complex of words and signs capable of leading to transformation, I want to turn to the work of Veit Dietrich.

Veit Dietrich was born December 8, 1506, and died March 25, 1549. He is one of the lesser known reformers, but he served as Luther's scribe and then as pastor at St. Sebaldus Church in Nuremberg. Dietrich wrote prayers and liturgical materials for the church of the reform. In particular he was author of the *Agend-buchlein* (1543) of Nuremberg and was known to early American Lutheranism as the compiler of the collection of Luther's sermons known as the *Haus-Postil.* Dietrich wrote many collects which came to America via the Muhlenberg liturgy and became part of the "complex of signs."[5] The Nuremberg Agenda

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[3] Appendix I in Doberstein, *Minister's Prayer Book* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), 437-60, esp. 439-43.

[4] *Teresa of Avila, The Way of Perfection,* trans. F. Benedict Zimmerman (London: Thomas Baker, 1911), chaps. XXVI–XLII.

[5] Cf. Bernhard Klaus, *Veit Dietrich: Lebun und Werk* (Nürnberg: Selbstverlag des Vereins für bayerische Kirchengeschichte, 1958).

was published by Christian Sauer in Philadelphia in 1762 along with the Muhlenberg liturgy, and it became basic to the textual resources for early American Lutheranism.

> If words create worlds, then it is crucial that those who function as myth- and ritual-makers have some sense of what's central, what's not...

Dietrich's systematic theology did not influence the reforming church, rather it was his practical theology, liturgical construction, and education for piety that would have impact. So, for example, it was he who recast the lessons for the last three Sundays after Pentecost from themes which emphasized judgment to those which emphasized eschatology, the coming of the kingdom through the Spirit of Christ. To him, also, we owe the restructuring of the church year so that the Festival of the Transfiguration, stuck on a weekday in August, was moved into place as the last Sunday after the Epiphany. These are strategic changes in the complex of words and signs.

Dietrich is an important figure, even if largely unknown to American audiences. His prayers are modeled on the collect-form, but they brought a new and evangelical spirit to the church which assisted in the shaping of a Lutheran piety that is hallmarked by faith-active-in-love. Luther Reed says of these reforming movement prayers:

> Professor Althaus shows how, at the very beginning of the Reformation, the mystic-Augustinian type of prayer which had prevailed throughout the entire Middle Ages, stopped at one stroke. In its place entered a type of prayer based entirely upon scripture. The historic collects took on a new meaning as a preparation of the spirit for hearing the Word of God and a request for the blessing and the wholesome fruit of the Word.... While numerous prayer books of private preparation contained prayers reflecting the spirit of contemporary mystical or subjective groups, the prayers of the 16th-century agenda are noteworthy for their scriptural and objective character.[6]

Dietrich's prayers thus help to construct the complex of words and signs that will be evangelical spirituality. In recent American use, his prayers were used until the time of the *Service Book and Hymnal.* Doberstein included three of them in his *Lutheran Prayer Book* and five in the *Minister's Prayer Book*, and the old collection of *Collects and Prayers* supplemental to the *Common Service Book* contained six.[7] Two collections are available, one in German and one in English, of his Gospel collects, which were intended to be read each Sun-

[6] Luther D. Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1947), 285. The reference is to Paul Althaus, *Zur Einfürung in die quellengeschichte der kirchlichen kollekten in den Lutherischen agenden des 16. Jahrhunderts* (Leipzig: Edelmann, 1919).

[7] John Doberstein, *A Lutheran Prayer Book* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960), and *The Minister's Prayer Book* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959; *Collects and Prayers for Use in Church*, ed. Emil Fischer, Luther D. Reed, and Paul Zeller Strodach, authorized by the United Lutheran Church in America (Philadelphia: Board of Publication of the ULCA, 1935).

day in conjunction with the reading of the Gospel before the homily.[8]

Here is one of Dietrich's prayers often used in conjunction with a celebration of the reform of the church:

> O Lord God, who in the time of the awakening of thy Church didst graciously rekindle the light of thy saving Word and didst shine in our hearts to give us the knowledge of thy beloved Son Jesus Christ: grant that we may always follow that blessed light and also adorn the pure doctrine of thy Word with a godly life and conversation, through Jesus Christ thy Son our Lord. Amen.[9]

Note the careful construction of the prayer; in it Dietrich offers a linguistic model that balances between the faith which receives God's gifts of grace and the faith which steps out boldly in loving actions. This is instructive and exemplary of the peculiar reformation piety which is at the heart of our complex of words and signs that create a world. Note especially the closing phrase, adorning the doctrine of the Word with a godly life and conversation. Through spare phrases like this, Dietrich was able to convey both the simplicity of faith and that good works are a necessary outcome of faith and a sign of spiritual depth. So much for our look at Dietrich.

What conclusions can we draw from this study? There are four which emerge as we reflect on this historical data.

1. The tradition may be altered if it is done on the basis of clear evangelical criteria. Those criteria center around the discernment of whether or not the tradition bears Christ's saving, grace-filled power to the community of faith.

2. Sometimes less means more. When devotional or liturgical materials were cleared away that seemed to obscure the gospel, the gospel shone forth more brightly than when it was supposedly highlighted. Spareness gives brighter detail to what remains.

3. A wide variety of forms can be used to express the Lutheran understanding that faith is active in love. There is an open-endedness to the tradition that can be richly inclusive.

4. This is not work for amateurs or dilettantes. If words create worlds, then it is crucial that those who function as myth- and ritual-makers have some sense of what's central, what's not, and act as gatekeepers as well as those who would invite innovation and change.

Now, to recall Northrop Frye at the conclusion, what we have in Lutheran spirituality is a *bricolage*, a term used by the French anthropologist and philosopher Claude Levi-Strauss to refer to an assemblage of signs by which we create meaning. This assemblage of signs has been adequate for spiritual formation for Lutherans in past generations. The question is whether or not it is capable of assisting in God's transformation of a broad and inclusive people today. Understood in accordance with my modest conclusions, I maintain that it is. The future structure is up to us.

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[8] Otto Dietz, *Die Evangelien-kollekten von Veit Dietrich* (Leipzig: Wallmann, 1930); Sigfrid Estborn, *A Church Year in Prayers—The Gospel Collects of Veit Dietrich* (Guntur: Board of Publication of the Evangelical Lutheran Churches in India, 1937).

[9] From Doberstein, *A Lutheran Prayer Book*, 96, collect #11.

Letting the Light Shine

Gunnar Staalsett
Lutheran World Federation

Text: Matthew 5:13-20

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we have seen Christ's glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father full of grace and truth.

What better affirmation can we give of our faith? What more appropriate greeting can I bring to you from the churches of the Lutheran World Federation on every continent? It is to reflect the glory of Christ, his grace and truth, that the Lutheran School of Theology was founded 25 years ago. It is for the mission and unity of the church that our member churches around the world celebrate with you today. The Lutheran World Federation is a communion of churches. Our churches are committed and bound to one another by common history and by a willingness to live from God's Word. We rely upon God's grace, sharing a universal priesthood and an ordained ministry in the service of the gospel. As a spiritual, sacramental, confessional witnessing and serving communion, the Lutheran World Federation is nourished by theological study which reflects the light of the gospel. It is to rededicate ourselves to the vision of a shared theological responsibility that we celebrate this festival Eucharist today.

As a comparatively young theological institution in an old tradition, you stand at a crossroads bombarded with spoken and unspoken queries: What is the object and aim of theology for people of this generation and the next? Is there any reason apart from sentiment for maintaining the name "Lutheran" in an ecumenical age? Is an academic institution an adequate setting for the mission of the church?

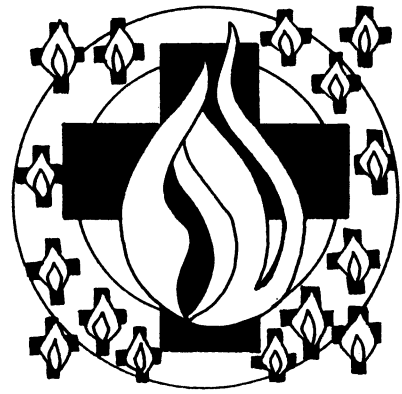
Your hopes for these days of thanksgiving, reflection, and rededication have been encapsulated in the theme, "Letting the Light Shine." The scripture readings in this season after the Epiphany offer us a wealth of material for our meditation. The prophet Isaiah calls us to loosen the bond of injustice, to let the oppressed go free, to share our bread with the hungry, to open our homes for the homeless (58:5-9). His is the voice from former Yugoslavia, Somalia, Liberia, and from the millions of women and men on every continent and even in this land who from the depth of their despair and agony cry to God for help at this very moment. "You shall call and the Lord will answer. You shall cry for help, and He will say, here I am," says the prophet. The Psalm for today enumerates the blessings of the righteous: "They have distributed freely, they have given to the poor; their righteousness endures for ever" (Ps 112:9). Do we dare to take hold of this promise at this dark moment in human history? St. Paul re-

minds us of the mystery of true wisdom: "We speak God's wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. These things God has revealed to us through the spirit, for the spirit reaches everything, even the depth of God" (1 Cor 2:6-12).

Then the Gospel text for today brings it all home to us in a direct, searching, and exhilarating crescendo! "You are the light of the world!" With these words we are brought to the most decisive moment in our life: that of our baptism. In the baptismal liturgy a candle is given to the baptized with the words of our text: "Let your light so shine before others that they may see your good works and glorify your father in heaven" (Mt 5:16). So we are reminded of the great privilege we share with all the baptized in each and every place today and through the ages, to preach the crucified and risen Christ. In this priesthood of all believers which we all share in Christ Jesus, we are called to proclaim the praise of God and bear the creative and redeeming Word to all the world.

Let your light shine! The word "light" resonates well in our religiously pluralistic age. It joins with "love" and "life" to a religious therapeutic triad for a new age. In our post-modern society a "theology of light" is in. Without biblical substance it easily becomes a light theology, low in calories, quickly to be consumed and without energizing effect for the awesome tasks facing the Christian church at the end of this century.

You are the light of the world. This is not a general anthropological or philosophical observation. It is not a definition of being a Christian. Rather, it is one pedagogical way of explaining who Christ is and how Christians should reflect him in their



lives. Rather than letting the word "light" explain who Christ is, let us for a moment try to understand *light* in the light of Christ. The biblical reflection on Christ as the light of the world offers a different orientation for life and eternity than that of the many self-appointed gurus and saviors of today. "In Him was life and the life was light of humankind." With a theology of light, love, and life it is impossible to stay within the apostolic affirmation of the Old and the New Testament, and with the creed and confession of the church universal, except in the context of darkness, hatred, and death. It was out of physical and spiritual darkness carrying the sin of the world and the judgment of God that Jesus cried on the cross: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Therefore we can as Christians not speak theologically of light and love and life except as a theology of the cross, as a theology that takes sin and judgment, grace and redemption with biblical seriousness.

Let your light shine! Luther would be in no doubt about what this means. Nor would he have dwelt for a moment on inherent qualities which make some more

readily be persons of light than others. To Luther, that which makes it possible to say about any person—regardless and often in spite of personal gifts and qualities—that he or she is a light to the world, is simply

> We can as Christians not speak theologically of light and love and life except as a theology of the cross.

because of justification by faith through grace—and nothing else. To let your light shine is to let the gospel of Jesus Christ shine.

Does not this somehow make sense, even if St. Paul calls it a mystery? Who are we to pretend to fill the world with light and love and life? Indeed, there is no place for triumphalism on behalf of human light in a world of want, anxiety, and death. Are we not constantly and daily reminded that evil has a demonic dimension which cannot be exorcised by good intentions?

Luther would have said: Let us not be fooled. To let your light shine is not to do good works. But if the gospel light shines on your good works, those who see it may give glory to your Father in heaven.

It is not only a Christian who does good works, who cares for the hungry and is dedicated to a life in mercy and solidarity. Acts for justice are there for every human being to understand and to do. And they are being done, by Christians and Muslims and Buddhists and people of no faith except in themselves and in humanity.

So what is the difference? Certainly the role model of Jesus is important as it was for Francis of Assisi. And so is the motivating love when he gave himself to die for us which is reflected in the death of persons like Archbishop Romero and the many other martyrs even of our generation. Likewise, the admonition to keep everything he has taught us has directed so many missionaries when they responded to the Great Commission. All this conditions a Christian for good deeds, to be an agent of light. But the great difference, that which sets people apart and which truly reflects the wisdom and mystery of God, is that through baptism and faith we have been grafted into the body of Christ, our crucified and risen Lord and Savior. This is how Paul explains this mystery to the Galatians: "For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who lives, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not nullify the grace of God; for if justification comes through the law, then Christ died for nothing" (Gal 2:19-20).

So dear and central is the article of justification by faith to Luther that he bursts out: "For what is Peter? What is Paul? What is an angel from heaven? What are all the creatures in comparison with the article of justification? For if we know this article we are in the clearest light; if we do not know it, we dwelt in the densest darkness" (Luther on Gal 2:11). No wonder then that Luther insists: "The article of justification and of grace is the most delightful, and it alone makes a person a theologian and makes a theologian a judge of the earth and of all affairs."

Justification and justice? Light and reflection? Justification by faith sets us free to do justice. The many different ways in which this justice is bodied forth is not dictated by the gospel but guided by the commandments, by the law of God, written and unwritten. Therefore, Jesus says: "I have not come to do away with the Law of Moses and the teachings and the prophets, I have not come to do away with them, but to make their teachings come true" (Mt 5:17).

We need constantly to be reminded that we indeed are the light of the world, but even more so that our light is Christ. This light of Christ is visible, but not divisible. As the *one* light, it fills the cosmos much as the lamp-light fills the room. The church universal is the bearer of that light. To mistake the fullness of the light of Christ for my personal little torch, or to claim it exclusively to one historic confession rather than to the church universal, would be to trivialize Christ who as the creator, redeemer, and head of the church himself is "Light from Light, true God from true God" (Nicene Creed).

Letting the light shine! How? Remember the words of the prophet Isaiah: "In his light your light shall break forth like the dawn.... You shall call and the Lord will answer. You shall cry for help, and he will say: Here I am."

The light of God is the light of grace. We pray with words of the ancient Divine Liturgy of St. James for this gift to rekindle our hearts, warm the church universal, and shine throughout the world:

> Shine within our hearts, loving God,
> the pure light of your divine knowledge
> and open the eyes of our minds
> that we many comprehend the message
> of your gospel.
> Instill in us, also, reverence for your
> blessed commandments,
> so that having conquered sinful desires,
> we may pursue a spiritual life,
> thinking and doing all these things
> that are pleasing to you.
> For you are the glad tidings,
> the illumination,
> the savior and the guardian of our souls
> and bodies, O God,
> together with your only-begotten Son
> and your Holy Spirit,
> now and forever, and to the ages. Amen.

Alumni Reflections at LSTC's 25th Anniversary

Mary Ann Moller-Gunderson
Richard J. Perry, Jr.
Stephen D. Samuelson

Reflection 1

I still remember my first class session at Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. It was Carl Braaten's introduction to systematic theology. I have never known a more terrorizing moment in my life.

No one warned me that Dr. Braaten did not speak English! He spoke that day of hermeneutical principles, epistemology, soteriology, eschatology, and, I suppose, a host of other "ologies." I did not understand a word of it. Since I started seminary midyear, I missed out on the usual orientation. No one told me there was such a thing as a theological dictionary. So when I began that night to look up Carl's words in Webster—I panicked! They weren't there.... In class that day, Dr. Braaten told us he intended to dismantle everything we believed—bit by bit—until nothing remained. Then he said, "You will be expected to rebuild a faith system which you can defend—one piece at a time; a system based on the gospel of Jesus Christ, rather than on sentiment or Sunday School teachings." Dr. Braaten promised to press us toward a defensible theology. It was a fearful and exhilarating moment.

I had come to seminary as a very new Christian—so new that my faith system was something of a clean slate. It took me only about two and a half minutes to dismantle my shallow faith constructs. The rebuilding process was for me a sheer gift.

Grace upon grace—until I knew for sure that upon which I could stand. "For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor 2:2).

So this was the first gift in my seminary education. LSTC offered me the precious opportunity to question everything, to engage in serious study, and to challenge the very foundations of faith. LSTC filled my ravenous hunger for the Word of God. I longed for the deep and abiding faith which I witnessed in you who were my colleagues and professors. You became my root system, although you did not know it. You were the great cloud of witnesses through whom God held me fast. I learned the following kernels of faith, which I have

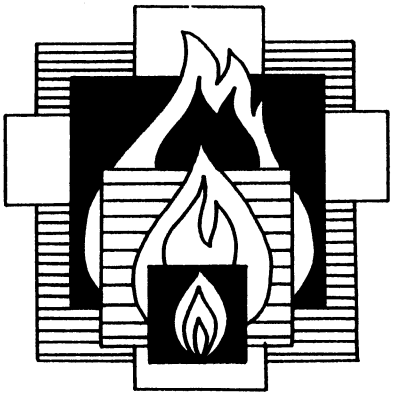
needed every day of my life since leaving LSTC:

1. You taught me that "...while we were yet sinners, Christ died for the ungodly" (Rom 5:8). When I arrived, I thought I was the only one who was broken and flawed. It took me about half an hour to discover otherwise! I resonated to the words of St. Paul: "The good that I would I do not, but rather, I do the very thing I did not intend" (Rom 7:15). When you live 18 years without Jesus, you know what St. Paul meant. At LSTC, I learned that sin is a condition which has infected all of us. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23). The knowledge of sin helped me see beyond my own condition into a world which Sue Monk Kidd says is "hip deep in tears." You taught me that the whole creation groans in travail and that on our own, we do not much care.

2. The second kernel of faith I packed into my suitcase before leaving here was that "there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:1). No condemnation! "For by grace we have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God" (Eph 2:8). LSTC taught me about justification, the center from which all else emanates.

Several weeks ago, I accused my nine-year-old daughter of something she did not do. I apologized and asked her to forgive me. Maria traced the sign of the cross on my forehead and said, "It's OK, Mommy. I forgive you. Remember you're a child of God and that God loves you, even though you hurt my feelings." And she ran off to play. Justification by grace. Undeserved, amazing grace. I can't make it through a day without it.

3. The third foundational element of faith came to me from LSTC and was regularly questioned here as well. St. Paul



writes, "Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us. Our competence is from God, who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant" (2 Cor 3:5-6).

It took me a long time to learn this one because of the mixed messages about women in ministry in those days! There were, I think, six of us women on an M. Div. track 20 years ago. A darkness set in on our experience when others sought to define and limit our competence, based on gender issues. We had been allowed into the house, but we were clearly still considered guests — expected to use the guest towels.

This is what many people of color tell me is still their experience in the Lutheran church. We have relegated them to the status of visitors who are not free to rearrange the furniture.

I was told that some looked upon women in ministry as a scourge—a kind of computer virus which needs to be eliminated in order to keep the system pure. I suppose some hoped we would just grow weary and go home. We were only six, but then 16, and 32, and 320... and you know the rest of the story.

Labeling the newcomer a stranger is pejorative. If anyone is strange, is it not us?

"So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new." Women serving as pastors of the church were one of the new things God, in Christ, was doing 20 years ago. It was an ordeal to accept our competence as emanating from God because so many questioned whether this was possible for a woman. By the time I left LSTC, I knew I could not survive as a parish pastor if this was my idea, or if competence was something I had to generate. My colleagues led me ever deeper into the truth that "of this gospel, I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace" (Eph 3:7).

4. The final nugget of faith for which seminary prepared me is the perpetual need for reform within the church. We read, "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery" (Gal 5:1).

The major challenge for the ELCA in the new millennium is re-imaging ourselves as called by God to do mission in our current context. We have not had to be a contextual church before now. We generated enough members from those who got off the boats and their babies. But our primary mission cannot be with those who are on our church rolls already. This will require a major shift in attitude. *Lutherans Say...* research indicates that only 32 percent of ELCA clergy said sharing the faith is "very important," and 14 percent of our laity agreed that faith sharing is "very important" in their lives.[1] One has to wonder whatever happened to the Great Commission in our church.

The ability to minister effectively in our context—even if we thought that was important—has been outstripped by radical shifts in our context in the United States. We have not understood those changes well enough.

Let me begin by sharing the disturbing news. In this nation, there are currently four million Lutherans who are not affiliated with a congregation. They have joined the ranks of the unchurched. We have not kept our people. The percentage of Lutherans in the population has declined from 4.5 percent in 1960 to 3.3 percent in 1990.

When we question who is coming into the ELCA from the outside, there are on average between nine and ten thousand adult affirmations of faith annually. Since 1965, the Lutheran Church in California has not grown. Yet that state received over seven million new residents (half Anglo and half Hispanic) while our church suffered a slow decline.

There is change within the church in terms of what our members value deeply as well. As Lutheran Christians we have always maintained that Word and Sacrament are the marks of the church. It is sufficient for the true unity of the church, according to our Lutheran Confessions, that the word is preached and the sacraments are administered. Yet, in the most recent research done for *Lutherans Say...*, our ELCA members reveal disturbing trends.

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[1] *Lutherans Say...* #5 (1992), Department for Research and Evaluation, ELCA.

Members were asked to rate which of the following elements of faith were very important to them. The preached Word was considered very important by only half of the laity. The sacraments fared a little better, with 65 percent of the laity signaling them as very important. Only 20 percent of our laity and fewer than 40 percent of our clergy rate Bible study as a significant part of life. If we expect our Lutheran Confessions to save us, beware! Only 25 percent of ELCA clergy value them highly. Finally, a whopping 20 percent of the laity consider liturgical worship as vitally important, although most laity consider the liturgy ordained by God.

As we look toward the new millennium, we have some internal work to do in re-centering ourselves as a Word and Sacrament community. The ELCA needs to bring a fresh, distinctive, and grace-centered Word to our rapidly changing United States. This has always been our unique contribution as Lutherans. We are awash with grace. The time is ripe to rethink our mutuality with the newcomer in our church, as well as with the new immigrants. A century ago, one of every thirteen immigrants was a person of color. Today, that ratio is one of every three immigrants. Those who come are as valuable as we are. How do we connect with the light of Christ, which is already present in many who come, rather than assuming that we alone are bearers of the light?

It is popular these days to speak of hospitality to the stranger. Yet, labeling the newcomer a stranger is pejorative. If anyone is strange, is it not us? Martin Marty says, "What a Hare Krishna hymnal would be to us, a Lutheran hymnal is to newcomers."

The first time my father worshipped in a Lutheran church, he asked why we pass the offering plate twice. He said, "Look here. You have a collect and an offering." If we invite newcomers at all, we often treat them as guests until and unless they are remade into our Northern European image of the faith. So long as we see this as a church which needs guarding against "foreign" influence, rather than as Christ's body, we are in danger of idolatry. The ones who are coming are not strange at all. We are the ones with a distinctive language and liturgy which are strange indeed to the newcomer.

The implications for mission are enormous. To whom is God sending us these days as partners in mission—not as the object of our mission, but as distinctive partners? How might these newcomers reform and reshape our church in the new millennium? What gifts do they bear which the world and our church desperately need? Remember that the early church worried about watering down their ranks with so many Gentiles. Do I sense the same fear today with respect to people of color? Instead of labeling the newcomer strange and fearing that people of color will dilute the faith we treasure, can we apprehend the strength they bring to this church? Can we glimpse their need to join us in mission? Will we honor the integrity of their faith experience, trusting that they will re-form what needs changing in us?

Church folk often genuinely seek to minister to the spiritual needs of the unchurched. Yet only three in a hundred Americans say their lives have not been touched by Jesus. They do not want us to minister to them. They ask us to help them discover their ministry, their purpose under God. This is the missing piece in their lives.

An African American woman on our staff told me last week, "I'm suspicious of anyone who calls my people marginalized. There is nothing marginal about me at all! I'm made in the image of God!" She reminded me that Christ already lives in this

one. The new immigrants, the unchurched, and people of color will not come to the ELCA to be taken care of, to be done unto. They will come because this church needs the brilliance of the light of Christ emanating from them.

The task in the new millennium is to balance our need to preserve the substance of the Lutheran church with God's intent to re-form us into a people who reflect the context in which we engage in mission.

Mary Ann Moller-Gunderson
Executive Director, Division for Congregational Ministries, ELCA

Reflection 2

We have come this afternoon to begin a conversation on how LSTC can let its light shine in the next 25 years. We come as graduates from a diversity of seminaries with an abiding love for the heritage of our particular seminary. Also, we come with a love for the gospel. Through baptism, our diversity of heritages are united in the institution called the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago.

We represent a diversity of opinions about (1) what a seminary education meant for our ministry; (2) how what we learned here shaped our ministry, and (3) what is the challenge or unifying Lutheran theme for the next 25 years. It is our hope and desire that this will stimulate your mind and spirit as we together seek to shine brightly in the 21st century.

I want to begin by recalling a little song that became popular during the Civil Rights Movement. It emanates from a person some people considered unlettered and without social graces. Her name is Fannie Lou Hamer. She came from a little town called Ruleville, Mississippi. One of the favorite songs of Mrs. Hamer was entitled "This Little Light of Mine." In the midst of social and spiritual darkness, Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer was known to break into a song. Through group participation songs, she could galvanize ordinary people as they faced brutal oppression in Mississippi.[1]

In simple yet profound language, this song became a symbol of the mysterious faith and durability of the African American spirit. In tribute to her witness, it is fitting that we sing this song of faith and hope.

This Little Light of Mine

This little light of mine,
I'm goin' to let it shine;
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

God gave it to me
I'm goin' to let it shine;
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

Everywhere I go,
I'm goin' to let it shine;
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

Hide it under a bushel, No!
I'm goin' to let it shine;
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

All through the night,
I'm goin' to let it shine;
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

What a song of faith, freedom, and hope!

For the next few minutes, I would like to focus on two dimensions of my seminary

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[1] Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer served as SNCC Field Secretary (1963-67) and was a co-founder of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party in 1964. See the newly published biography by Kay Mills, *This Little Light of Mine: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer* (New York: Dutton, 1993).

education—relationships and recognizing darkness in the world. Then I will make some comments about the challenges I see in theological education.

The importance of relationships

The central concept I received from an LSTC education is the importance of relationships. By relationship I do not mean the "touchy feely" type that became popular during the 1970s, though there is no doubt that movement was important for some people. Relationship, as I am using the term, means an ability to enter into dialogue, action, and reflection with a diversity of people from a variety of contexts. Relationships point toward that process through which each light shines.

This is one of the strengths of an LSTC education. Over coffee, or a cup of wine on Friday afternoon, or a beer at Free-B, students, faculty, and administration could dialogue together. The gospel light shone brightly as we made connections with each other. Some conversations were heated, yet we could still laugh and cry *together.*

I came away from LSTC understanding that every human being has a relationship with God, a relationship with self, and a relationship with the world. My calling as a pastor was and still is today determined by how one engages, for transformation and transcendence, other people whose light is also a gift from God.

Recognizing the darkness

On a deeper and more profound level, an LSTC education aided me in recognizing darkness for what it is and naming it. Let me illustrate this from my ministry in North Carolina. To get synodical leadership on the train of what we called "inclusive ministry" in those days, I arranged a meeting between some African American people in Durham, North Carolina, and synodical leaders. We did this because I felt that to reach the African American community, relationships had to be built with the people.

No matter where we may be or when the hour, God presents opportunities for us to let our light shine.

After introductions and laying out why we were meeting, an African American brother asked a simple but poignant question: "Before we go any further, we want to know what is your church's position on apartheid in South Africa?" There was an uneasy silence for three or four minutes. Finally, one of the white Lutherans spoke in flowery terms about what the synod was planning to do.

In our debriefing of that experience, it became very clear that the "leadership" was uninformed about the Lutheran Church's position on an issue of importance to African American people. The most disturbing fact was, here was an opportunity to let the light of the Lutheran Church shine. In essence, they had flunked their matriculation test for engaging African American people. No matter where we may be or when the hour, God presents opportunities for us to let our light shine.

While I learned to recognize the darkness, I did learn to recognize the light. This became evident, for me, when African American students sought an African American professor and some African American

courses. Some members of the faculty and administration listened, and some did not particularly care for the direction we were suggesting. Nevertheless, the light of God's grace shone brightly when the first African American Lutheran theologian became a faculty member in 1975. While the journey to that point was difficult and filled with much emotion, there was rejoicing!

Major challenges: the next 25 years.

What major challenges do I see for the next 25 years? What unifying theme can Christian Lutherans gather around as we seek to let our light shine?

First, we must come to see that the world is far more complex than it was when Tillich, Barth, and others were in their heyday. The forces that shaped their theology and practice are somewhat different from the forces that impinge on contemporary students and faculties in seminaries. The vocation of pastor must have as its foundation an understanding that theology is shaped by the historical consciousness of people. It is no longer a field before which other partners bow. Since it is important to know how everything is related to God, increasingly theology must be in conversations with other disciplines: culture, sociology, science, philosophy, and history.

Second, theological education must consider the student body. It is far more diverse than it was 25 years ago. Students are older and more mature. They come to seminary with families and represent a broad array of ethnic groups, women, and persons who have self-identified sexual orientations. Each has networks of relationships already established. With the increase of students from Africa, India, China, and other countries, seminary education takes on a new dimension.

This new dimension calls us to develop a new principle of interpretation of the gospel. To be hermeneutical companions is to be able to enter relationships in pursuit of a Christian meaning to history. This understanding communicates that seminary education is more than just transmitting ideas, thought-systems, and beliefs. Seminary education thus understood considers the context from which future pastors came and to which they will be going. Social and theological analysis become critical tools in the education of pastors.

Finally, we cannot ignore the light of faith the students bring to the seminary. There is no greater darkness than when African American students are told their community's experience with God does not matter. There is no greater darkness than when African American and African students are ignored as resources in class discussions.

"This little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine." The ultimate goal of an LSTC education is to aid pastors in the exploration of their relationships with God who gives the light. Moreover, LSTC must be an example of how inspiration can be gained from the diversity of lights. For what purpose? So those who leave this institution are equipped to let their light shine brighter than ours.

Richard J. Perry, Jr.
Chicago, Illinois

Reflection 3

When I was a kid, I thought that being a Swede was about the best thing in the world. I'd always brag about being 100% Swedish, but I stopped that when a friend told me about hearing a guy ask a bartender, "Hey, do you want to hear this great joke about these two Swedes?" And the bartender said, "Now, you better just wait a minute. I happen to be 100% Swedish. And that

woman down there by the cash register—she's my wife, and she's 100% Swedish, too. And that young man you see through the doorway working in the kitchen, he's our son; and, of course, he's 100% Swede, too. Now do you still want to tell that joke?" The man answered him, "Not if I'm going to have to explain it three times."

But I hadn't heard the story nor yet seen the light when I was in high school and college, coming to the conviction that I was being called into the ordained ministry. And, being 100% Swede and provincial, I wanted more than anything to attend Augustana Seminary in Rock Island. When I went to Augustana College for a couple of years, I even managed to live in the seminary dormitory my sophomore year.

But that was as close as I came to going to the Rock Island seminary that had produced all our interns when I was growing up, that had produced my father, and that had produced my father's colleagues whose stories I loved to overhear as a kid. But I couldn't go to their, to *our* seminary. I had to go to the new Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, and I was sure I'd be missing something. It wouldn't be the same.

And, of course, it *wasn't* the same. Because it was in Hyde Park and in the city, it was better. That's the first thing I want to say. "Let your light shine before others," but not just before Swedes. Learn about that light with others, and not just with people who look like you and who think telling Swedish or Norwegian jokes is the normal thing people do. Proclaim that light to others, and not just to people who share your ethnic heritage. "A city built on a hill cannot be hid," but if the people in the little hill city are not prodded to speak or embody the good news with those in the larger metropolis in the valley, how faithful are they? While it still had challenges to face and prejudices to overcome in its first decades, for the mostly male student body of '67 and '68 LSTC served to free seminarians from identifying Lutheranism with a particular place or national background.

> LSTC must be an example of how inspiration can be gained from the diversity of lights.

It's right that we're celebrating the fact that the light has shone with a broader cast because those smaller predecessor seminaries moved to Hyde Park. Because the seminary was here, I and my fellow students were able to attend lectures and enroll in courses from RC's, and UCC's, and Presbyterians in the cluster and see that Lutherans aren't the only enlightened ones. (After all, in Mark Noll's new *History of Christianity in the U.S. and Canada*, Lutherans are referred to on only 12 of his 520 pages, and surely the light of the gospel must be reflected on *some* of those 500 other pages!)

Our first couple of years here my wife and I and other students worshipped at Woodlawn Immanuel, a struggling but in many ways vital inner-city church north of the University of Chicago campus; and throughout my ministry—in both rural and urban areas—the memory of that experience would remind me that faithfulness often does not show signs of traditional success.

Living and worshipping and studying in the multi-cultural environment of Hyde Park has meant that I have never been able

to worship in a single-race congregation without sensing that the nature of our worship is somehow impoverished by our sameness, whether that sameness is due simply to demographics or to the racism that infects our country and our church. So the move to Hyde Park is one thing to celebrate as it helped some of us to break out of our parochialism and see the larger church and world.

Among the many other things that could be noted about 25 years of the light shining in Hyde Park, the one I'd like to raise up is the influence of the faculty who came here from a variety of places—both those who came from those first predecessor seminaries and those from Seminex. It is only as I approached middle age that I began to appreciate the moves you faculty made when you came to this new place—upsetting families, establishing yourselves with colleagues, struggling sometimes with loneliness and always the need for affirmation and a sense of significance. (I don't think I'm being too presumptuous.)

But whatever challenges you endured in the transition to this place, I think it was worth it because you faculty are the most significant factor at a seminary. What makes you so significant? It's not your cyclical tinkering or wholesale revamping of the curriculum that leads people to leave this place as pastors who bear witness to the light. But it is who you faculty are—your values and convictions and faith commitments (seen in worship and in and outside the classroom)—that leads seminarians to want the light to shine through them.

I was sitting up there in my junior year when Phil Hefner preached the sermon that so moved me at the memorial service for Martin Luther King, Jr. "I want to claim his convictions," I said to myself. At his Baccalaureate Pentecost sermon to our class Morry Niedenthal said, "The world will demand that you be popular, and successful and friendly, but the church asks you to be faithful," a phrase that I've recalled dozens—no, hundreds—of times in my ministry.

It was this guy right here [Wes Fuerst] who along with Phil Hefner gave me a D in my first quarter in an integrated introduction to theology course. I can't remember the name of the course and barely even the subject matter, but I do remember the comments you two put at the bottom of my abysmal term paper that did no more than summarize *Letters and Papers from Prison*: "From now on you have permission to think for yourself and write down some of your own thoughts." When you get down to it, I suppose it was that permission that led me to say yes to the scary invitation to speak here today.

I don't think we can overemphasize the significance of a passionate faculty bearing witness to the light. Part of it is an appreciation for what you teach and what you write. That's why we pay attention to new faculty who are appointed and granted tenure and why we come to summer school classes and why we look forward to the faculty lectures today and tomorrow. But of equal significance with the content of your lectures is what we've learned from your style and commitments. I frequently pull out the notes from Dave Rhoads' Gospels lectures at a statewide theological conference a few years ago. But what sticks with me most from those lectures is Dave's commitments and passion about what the church should be or could be in light of the various Gospels themes.

As a pastor returning to the seminary for summer courses I was shaped most one summer by overhearing faculty member Frank Sherman argue forcefully with a visiting professor about the State of Israel. When I've knocked on doors for evange-

lism calls I've been strengthened by my memories of driving with a faculty member to do "cold calling" door-to-door in a North side changing neighborhood as part of field education. And when I think of the seminary's commitments I think of Bill Lesher making a weekend road trip to my first parish, sleeping Friday night on a basement hide-a-bed, to share his theological commitments with a church council at a Saturday morning retreat.

All of these images stick with us over the years to guide our ministry and make us want to be pastors who are willing to take risks. They keep us going when we don't particularly feel like leading one more retreat. They make us want to preach more than C+ sermons. They tell us we ought to put ourselves out for confirmands who certainly are no more ignorant and obnoxious than you faculty thought we were when we arrived as juniors in the Fall of '67 to sit on the concrete foundations of this unfinished auditorium for our opening convocation.

Celebration of this gift leads me to the challenges facing LSTC. As it has in the last quarter century, the faculty will be the key to the character of this institution in the next. That's the way it should be. College alumni speak of *alma mater* or "nourishing mother," and while students of my generation would decry *in loco parentis* institutional behavior, I think we need more of an *in loco parentis* attitude in the seminary.

As loving parents who desire and nurture the best, the faculty need to be telling seminarians and pastors what to think and how to behave. You have to have enough love for who we are as a Lutheran church to say, "If you want to be a part of the people who make up this particular movement of the Christian Church, here's how we do it. You're not part of a multiple-choice church where you pick your options and discard the others."

Isn't that what makes us different from the divinity schools at Yale or the University of Chicago? Especially when fewer seminarians come from church-related colleges and when many come from other careers and cannot be counted on to know even the basics of the biblical and Christian traditions, the seminary needs to say, "This is what we are about." Only a strong unified faculty can do this.

> The seminary should serve as a leaven for the corporate loaf of the parish.

Of course, to pull this off, the seminary has to see itself as a model community where the faculty don't merely do their own thing in their discipline, publish their articles and books, and pretend LSTC is the U of C with *LBW* worship. There has to be real commitment to the character of life together as Lutherans on the part of the faculty. This does not mean that there should be anything less than academic excellence. As Elton Trueblood once said, "Holy shoddy is still shoddy." But without the faculty also saying, "Here's how you ought to be different because you came to LSTC," academic excellence itself means nothing.

Seminarians come here from an individualistic society. College students study on their own; they compete for grades. College graduates make it or break it on their own in their first career. We all know the individualistic "habits of the heart" about which Bellah wrote. Seminarians have those

same habits. But when seminarians come here they need the seminary to provide a transition to corporate, communal life. That's what we're trying to nurture and build up in the congregation: what it means to be a people tied together under the Lordship only of Jesus Christ. The seminary should serve as a leaven for the corporate loaf of the parish.

Let me close by indicating what a Lutheran seminary led by a faculty committed to community might look like. Here are just a few examples of how we might better prepare our pastors to let the light shine in the 21st century:

1. Corporate worship within the learning community for both faculty and students would be required. The demands of student employment or family pressure might threaten this, but the seminary needs to say, "somehow we'll work this out, but it must be done. We have to worship together. Everything else we do stems from this." Worship cannot be an add-on and never a choice issue that could be based on who's preaching or what order of worship is being used or convenience of schedule. How can we fight those attitudes in the parish if the seminary doesn't model a different outlook?

2. Corporate/group learning rather than individual learning would be stressed. Once we leave here we try to get our parishioners to learn together. Pastors study pericope texts together over pancakes or sandwiches and, at their best, they cooperate on interparish programs. Why then use the individualized university model of learning and evaluation?

3. Corporate discussion of personal stewardship practices. How can pastors lead their congregations when seminarians never have to talk about what they give and when they never hear from faculty about what they think is an appropriate response to God's grace?

4. Corporate discussion of pastoral ethics. When I was in seminary the closest we got to discussing sexual abuse by clergy was an anonymous survey conducted by a student. The seeds for a private and personalized Lone Ranger style of ministry can be planted while in the seminary, but when they start to grow they can also be weeded out or de-tasseled.

5. Regular critique from a confessional basis, in classroom, in coffee hour discussion, and in convocations, of the culture's demands. More should be said here, and more qualities could be added, but time is short.

I know all this presumes a church that desires to be distinctive, a church that is more than the Democratic party on its knees, as Hauerwas has described us. (By the way, did you wonder if Clinton checked the ELCA quota guidelines when he divvied up his cabinet slots?) Of course, in many ways we don't have this distinctive church. Instead of letting the light of the gospel shine, we too often cherish the values of being nice or tolerant or open-minded or getting motivated for social justice or packing them into church in any way possible or letting the world set our agenda. But by insisting that all agendas and values are subservient to the claim that Jesus Christ is Lord and reflecting that chief conviction in its life together, the seminary can help the light to shine better in the ELCA in the next quarter century.

Stephen D. Samuelson
Racine, Wisconsin

New Light in Hyde Park

Jerald C. Brauer
Naomi Shenstone Donnelley Professor Emeritus of the History of Christianity, University of Chicago

I am deeply grateful for this honor jointly given to me by the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago and by Catholic Theological Union.[1] It has special meaning for me because it is a recognition of my work in ministry as well as my work in education. In fact, I could never separate the two. Theological education is the life's blood of the church, particularly for those churches rooted and grounded in an ancient tradition of ministry that demands that we be prepared to know and to articulate that faith that is in us, and that we seek to minister to our neighbors not only with our hearts and souls but also with our minds.

This vision of ministry demands a particular kind of education. In founding the University of Chicago, William Rainey Harper and his fellow Baptists were determined that nothing less than a great research-oriented university was the proper place for a divinity school, so as a condition for founding the university, Morgan Park Baptist Theological Seminary became the university's divinity school. Thus, in a sense, the university was founded on the divinity school.

But Harper did not stop there. His vision was to bring into the university context other theological institutions. Initially, that invitation was to found divinity houses as integral to the university, and the first of these was Disciples Divinity House. A generation later, the concept was enlarged to invite theological seminaries to locate by the university and each to develop a special arrangement with the Divinity School. First came Chicago Theological Seminary, then Meadville Theological School, and for seventeen years, the original four institutions functioned as federation with a single theological faculty. After the breakup of the federation and its faculty, I was determined, as dean, to create a new situation by finding additional partners to engage in theological education in the university context. First came the Lutherans, then the Roman Catholics with Catholic Theological Union, and later we negotiated to bring Jesuit School of Theology, and finally McCormick Theological Seminary.

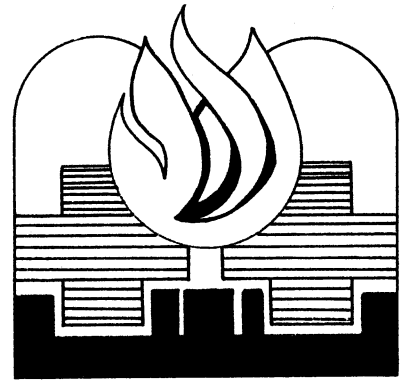
I found myself in a peculiar position with regard to the Lutherans. As both dean of the Divinity School and president of the Lutheran Church in America's newly founded Board of Theological Education, I was concerned both with the church's seminaries and with the university's Divinity School. Fortunately, there was no conflict of interest, because the Lutheran board,

[1] Dr. Brauer was given a joint Founder's Award by the Lutheran School of Theology and the Catholic Theological Union at a convocation on February 13, 1993, marking the founding of the two schools.

faced with the task of reducing its fourteen theological schools to a more reasonable number, developed a specific set of criteria to determine the number and location of its seminaries. The criteria, adopted by the church in convention, made sense then, as they do today. Lutheran seminaries were to be located in university, ecumenical, and urban settings.

Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago represents something very special in Lutheranism. The day it opened as an independent part of the University of Chicago family it embraced the union of four theological institutions. Later, two other seminaries joined to embody six former Lutheran seminaries in a single new school. This is unparalleled in American theological education. Would that it became a model for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in its efforts to deal with theological education.

This is not the time or the place to recapitulate the history of that institution; suffice it to say that it did not happen without extended discussions and maneuvering, careful planning, and deep commitment. The question was not only the merger of these diverse institutions but also its final location. There was a considerable body of opinion that the new school should be located adjacent to Northwestern University; however, the key figures in determining that it be in Hyde Park were Donald Haigus, dean of the Lutheran Seminary in Maywood; Karl Matson, president of Augustana Seminary in Rock Island; Howard Weeg, president of the Illinois Synod; and Franklin Clark Fry, first president of the Lutheran Church in America and an extraordinary churchman whose deft hand combined the vision of the necessary with the achievement of the possible. Many hours were spent in my office in Swift Hall discussing these problems.



The origins of Catholic Theological Union and its decision to move adjacent to the University of Chicago make an equally exciting story. Vatican II and a radically changing situation for ministry within Roman Catholicism were the two primary operative forces. Probably the catalyst was the appearance of Cardinal Leo Joseph Suenens, one of the four president moderators at Vatican II, as the Thomas Lecturer at the University of Chicago. Prior to Vatican II, no Roman Catholic student was permitted by the Catholic Church to attend the Divinity School as a degree student, nor was any Roman Catholic theologian allowed to deliver a lecture in the Divinity School. When we invited Suenens to open the doors, little did we realize what would happen. Not only did he lecture to packed halls; he engaged in dialogue with over 100 Roman Catholic and Protestant theological professors and over 500 Roman Catholic and Protestant seminarians from throughout the Midwest. What a liberating and exhilarating experience for all! We discovered that we needed each other and that we wanted to work in conjunction—Christians engaged in a common ministry while we

dialogued over our differences and shared our common heritage.

Within a few years, more Roman Catholic students were enrolled for degrees in the Divinity School than from any other Christian group. At the same time, I received a call from Paul Bechtold and his colleagues to discuss the possibility of a group of religious theologates combining and moving to a site adjacent to the university, to become an independent part of the university family. Now that was exciting! I did everything possible to encourage them.

In this new situation, a major problem remained. Land was very tight in Hyde Park, and there was considerable opposition to moving new institutions in the heart of the neighborhood. To place them on the periphery as buffers was acceptable, but to place them at the center of the university was questionable. Throughout the discussions, I had the enthusiastic support of the university administration—President George Beadle, and Provost and later President Edward Levi. Levi immediately involved Julian Levi, the "mover and shaker" concerning all things involving the university and its neighborhood. He co-opted Walter Blum of the law faculty, who probably should receive honorary degrees from these institutions, for it was he, on behalf of the university, who was in charge of the very sensitive negotiations to find and obtain appropriate space for each of the schools.

Why did theological institutions wish to come, and why did the university wish to have them? The answer is given by this convocation today. The university draws strength from such good neighbors and fellow educators—it gains intellectual resources, physical sustenance, neighbors and friends, and mutual support in a common enterprise. The university needs and cherishes such strong intellectual partners. On their side, theological schools require an eminent university to provide a challenging ecumenical and urban center in which to conduct their work, and they need the presence of other theological institutions.

This convocation, in my judgment, marks the close of the first epoch of the move of these theological institutions. It is fitting that this be called Founders' Day, because that is the nature of the first epoch. The question now is, What awaits the gathering of these seven theological schools in the context of the University of Chicago and its Divinity School?

We do not know, though one thing is clear: now that the schools have settled in and become comfortable with each other, it is inevitable that new stages of cooperation will follow and build upon the solid immediate past. Theological education in the churches and in the university is at a critical point in its history. Here in Hyde Park, we have a context in which to explore new ways to combine the very best of our past with the challenges of the present in order to create a new, dynamic, prophetic, yet learned ministry. The founding days are over; the constructive days are upon us.

Book Reviews

The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant. By John Dominic Crossan. San Francisco: Harper, 1992. 507 pages. $30.00.

This controversial volume by a Roman Catholic professor of biblical studies at DePaul University in Chicago has received much media attention. It is billed as "the most comprehensive determination" of the historical Jesus, because it makes extensive use of the non-canonical Gospels as well as traditions about Jesus from the non-Gospel writings of the New Testament and from early Christian literature. The book depicts Jesus as a "Cynic" peasant of Jewish Palestine. It also places Jesus squarely in the contexts of the larger Mediterranean world and of the turmoil in first-century Israel.

Part one, entitled "Brokerage Empire," identifies the Mediterranean world as a pre-industrial society built on the exploitation of slaves and other peasants for the benefit of a small ruling elite. It is a society preoccupied with honor based on a patronage system from top to bottom, the results of which were exploitation and oppression. Crossan highlights the Cynics as a group which resisted the system. They chose extreme poverty, went from city to city, and engaged in offensive public behavior designed to ridicule the social conventions of honor and patronage. Crossan argues that there was little difference between Palestinian Judaism and the Judaism of the larger Hellenistic world. Therefore, Israel (including villages like Nazareth) was not isolated from these patronage features of the Mediterranean world.

Part two deals with "Embattled Brokerage" and details the peasant resistance to the patronage system of Romans and upper class Jews in Israel which culminated in the Roman-Jewish War of 66-70 C.E. The war was caused by economic deprivation so severe as to push the peasants below subsistence level, resulting in many forms of resistance: peaceful protests, messianic leaders engaging people in armed resistance, prophetic figures leading people into the desert to see signs of salvation, bandits making social protest, the Sicarii carrying on terrorist activity, and holy men bringing relief through miracles of healing. All these represented forms of predominantly peasant protest against the exploitation of the brokerage system.

Part three, "Brokerless Kingdom," reconstructs the historical Jesus. Jesus resembled Cynics in so far as they went from place to place and used meals as occasions for social protest. Jesus differed from Cynics in that he went to rural villages rather than cities and to private houses rather than public places. In relation to other Jewish forms of resistance, Jesus resembled most fully the holy men of Galilee who were miracle workers, such as Hanina ben Dosa and Honi the Circlemaker.

Crossan argues that Jesus initially adopted the apocalyptic program of John the Baptist oriented to the future but then rejected this for a wisdom orientation to the present. As such, Jesus did not expect any apocalyptic figure, including himself, to usher in an imminent end of the age. Rather, he embraced the conviction that the kingdom of God was already present in the subversive events of his own ministry. Jesus freely healed people with no strings attached. He practiced open commensality—eating meals with people regardless of their social status or purity rating. Thus, he manifested a kingdom of nobodies, people with no status, people below the subsistence level. He encouraged the spreading of this kingdom through his mission from village to village and the mission of his disciples. All of Jesus' actions were a form of protest. Healing outside the standard rituals of the society posed a cultural threat to existing institutions such as the Temple. The egalitarian relations of open commensality challenged the exploitation of patronage, the preoccupation with honor, the societal boundaries, and pervasive gender distinctions.

As such, Jesus' protests were "a combination of free healing and common eating, a religious and economic egalitarianism that negated alike and at once the hierarchical and patronal normalcies of Jewish religion and Roman power" (422). Jesus' words and actions were "calculated to force individuals into unmediated physical and spiritual contact with God and unmediated physical and spiritual contact with one another. He announced, in other words, the brokerless kingdom of God" (422). For this subversive activity, particularly his attack on the Jerusalem temple, Jesus and his followers endured rejection, persecution, and finally crucifixion.

Crossan's picture of Jesus is based on an extensive re-dating of non-canonical materials and a rigorous selection of traditions. He argues that the Gospel of Thomas I, the Gospel of the Hebrews, a "Cross Gospel" reconstructed from the Gospel of Peter, the Secret Gospel of Mark, several fragments from other Gospels, as well as collections of sayings (Q), miracles, and signs (based on the Gospel of John), all predated the earliest canonical Gospel of Mark written in the early seventies. Crossan makes use only of those Jesus traditions which have two or more independent attestations from among the various independent sources—some sayings and parables, a handful of miracles, and several episodes about Jesus at table. His criterion for authenticity excludes an extraordinary number of traditions. Crossan does not discuss the birth narratives, and he argues that the passion narratives were created from Old Testament prophecies (except for the fact of Jesus' death as a crucifixion at the hands of Pontius Pilate). The resurrection stories and nature miracles arose from controversies about power and authority in the early Christian communities.

Crossan's work is fresh and original. He makes extensive use of cross-cultural historical and anthropological studies to unpack the dynamics of revolution, the forms of peasant resistance, the function of apocalyptic, and the understanding of exorcism and magic. He offers a comprehensive rethinking of the sources for the historical Jesus. He presents a brilliant and engaging portrait of Jesus as a Cynic-type holy man. The book is sometimes hard to follow and does not make explicit the relationship between different parts of the book. Many scholars will reject Crossan's controversial reconstruction of early Christian traditions. Others will question the limitations imposed by his strict historical criteria. Also, his portrait of the historical Jesus as a Cynic does not seem able adequately to account either for the crucifixion or for the vitality of the early Christian movement.

Nevertheless, no subsequent portrait of Jesus will be the same in light of his reconstruction. For anyone interested in studies of the historical Jesus, this is must reading.

David Rhoads
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

Jesus in Global Contexts. By Priscilla Pope-Levison and John R. Levison. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992. 208 pages. Paper. $17.99.

This fascinating and important book is written on the supposition that the Christian theological center of gravity has shifted from Europe to Africa, Latin America, and parts of Asia. It is an affirmation that Christology is a conversation between biblical text and context. The authors unpack the views of Jesus in theology from four regions: Latin America, Asia, Africa, and the liberation theologies of North America. In each section, they deal with the contextual issues to be faced, the sources and methods for Christology, and the resulting portraits of Jesus.

Latin American theologians face the issues of economic, political, and religious dependency on first world countries and the internal social stratification resulting from it. They draw on Marxist social analysis and themes from biblical portrayals of the kingdom of God. Theologically, they replace development theories with liberation theologies and a prophetic critique calling for action in favor of the poor.

Asian Christians must define their role as a small minority amid Asian religions and the extensive poverty caused by colonialism. To construct a Christology, they draw upon folk religion, the resources of other religions, and their own socio-economic realities. Their theol-

ogy emphasizes the cosmic dimensions of Christology. They portray liberation as a process of humanization, becoming suffering servants in response to the pain-love of God in Jesus for suffering humans.

African Christians have to deal with the effects of colonialism on society and the church. "African theology" appropriates models from African culture and religions to portray Jesus as elder brother, chief, and healer. "South African Black theology," in solidarity with Black America, uses the experience of blackness as the starting point for theology, emphasizing the struggle for liberation from passive suffering to a life of redemptive suffering. "African Liberation theology" seeks socio-economic as well as cultural liberation.

In North America, feminist theologians seek to recover women's history in relation to Bible and tradition, to revise traditional symbols for God, and to reform patriarchal structures. Black theology affirms the black experience by drawing upon black leadership models, spirituals, and African traditional religion. Throughout these two movements run two competing notions of liberation: liberation by freeing the oppressed and liberation through reconciliation of all people. Unfortunately, this chapter on the North American scene does not include emerging womanist and Hispanic theologies.

These brief sketches do not do justice to the rich texture of themes which the authors weave together in their treatment of each group. The book concludes with a dialogue between the approaches, assessing theological methods and the uses of the Bible. I highly recommend it to pastors, teachers, and interested lay people as a compendium of significant theologies emerging around the world. Everyone who reads it will find it hard to resist further exploration of the many books and articles treated there.

David Rhoads

The Feminine Face of God: The Unfolding of the Sacred in Women. By Sherry Ruth Anderson and Patricia Hopkins. New York: Bantam Books, 1992. 250 pages. Paper. $12.00.

I finished reading this book as I was taking the Jeffrey Express bus home from downtown Chicago. A woman sitting next to me looked at the cover of the book with much interest. She asked, "The Feminine Face of God? That's an interesting title. What's the book about?" I was caught a bit by surprise, but I replied, "Well, it's about women and their experience of the divine. It's about the uniqueness of women's spirituality. It's about diversity and women's search for spiritual truth and meaning." Not a bad description, I thought, for a book which encompasses so much in its 250 short pages.

The Feminine Face of God is a compilation of women's stories, ideas, and experiences of the sacred. The authors decided to write this book and embarked upon a journey to find women from across North America who had served as sources of spiritual inspiration and renewal for women. Many of these women had founded spiritual communities. Others are artists seeking to integrate spirituality with artistic expression. They interviewed thirty women who each had a unique story to share about her spiritual journey. The result is a powerful attestation to the diversity of women's spiritual experiences.

The authors insist upon one central aspect of women's spirituality: there is a new spiritual consciousness being raised in women which does not fit into old, traditional categories of spirituality. This is demonstrated clearly in three aspects of women's spirituality addressed in the book: the importance of the body in experiencing the divine, the centrality of prayer and meditation for a developed spirituality, and the emphasis upon trusting inner guidance in making decisions and learning about truth. Each of these areas has traditionally been negated or denied by religious traditions whose spiritual norms are established by male leaders, pastors, priests, and rabbis. The stories shared in *The Feminine Face of God* move beyond these old norms and open up new possibilities for renewed relationship with the divine.

The diversity of women's spirituality is reinforced by the authors' choice of interviewees coming from a wide variety of religious traditions. The traditions of Jewish, Catholic, Protestant, Buddhist, and New Age Spirituality are all represented in the book. This element of the book is both a strength and a weakness. On the one hand, the inclusion of such a wide range of religious perspectives certainly reveals that women can find spiritual strength and renewal from within any of these traditions. But the weakness of this approach is that the central source of strength in each tradition is not set forth as paramount to the possibility of spiritual renewal. For example, as a Christian, the central core of my spiritual life is belief in a risen Christ, the one God-incarnate who was known as Jesus of Nazareth. Because of this belief in Christ, I can do no other than profess Jesus as the salvific hope for the world. This is not a dis-affirmation of other religious traditions. But if I am to be true to my Christian call, I cannot speak a word of praise to any other deity than the God made flesh in Jesus of Nazareth.

In this critique, I am not implying any judgment or indictment against other religious traditions than Christianity. Rather, as a person committed to effectual change and renewal within the Christian tradition, I believe strongly that focusing on the person and work of Jesus Christ is imperative if the Christian church has any hope for transformation. Jesus was a liberator, a friend to the poor, an advocate for women, and a peacemaker. He did not join the warring forces of the Zealots, the group from which a number of his disciples came. Rather, Jesus modeled for his followers a life of non-hierarchical, non-judgmental commitment to those around him. If Christian spirituality loses sight of this central messianic reality, the Christian church will move even more quickly along the path toward hierarchical, elitist, patriarchal destruction. Christians must claim that a committed spiritual life begins and ends with professing the way of Jesus as the hope for the world.

If *The Feminine Face of God* could have allowed these central, life-giving realities within religious traditions to take more precedence in the book, it would be a far stronger piece of work. Nonetheless, the voices of the many women who share their stories and speak their truths make for a valuable resource and an encouragement for women's spirituality. I was especially struck by the wisdom of chapters 8 and 9, "Intimate Relationships" and "The Making of Relatives." Here are sound insights on the tension women experience between nurturing the inner self and meeting the external demands of those around her. I recommend the book. Both men and women would benefit from its wisdom.

J. Elise Brown
Bronx, New York

Paul and Perseverance. Staying In and Falling Away. By Judith M. Gundry Volf. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1991. 326 pages. $19.95.

This revised doctoral dissertation, accepted by the Evangelisch-Theologische Facultät of the University of Tübingen in 1988, has the strengths and weaknesses of doctoral dissertations. Volf bases her discussion on the genuine Pauline epistles; however, she does include 2 Thessalonians as genuine. Her language throughout the book is inclusive.

Lutherans do not speak frequently of the doctrine of perseverance. Volf concludes that the exegetical investigation confirms the Reformed doctrine of perseverance.

Volf discusses thoroughly, divided into four parts, all the subjects relating to the topic. The question she is attempting to answer is: "Does Paul assume that Christians will remain in salvation?" The first part deals with the eschatological tension and the staying in (salvation). She beautifully emphasizes God's own initiative and efficacy in the work of salvation, and the tension between the work God has begun and the still outstanding future completion. She rightly opposes E. P. Sanders' thesis that "salvation is by grace but... works are the condition of remaining 'in'" (1). The certainty of salvation always is based on God's action in Christ alone and God's election in eternity. God's indwelling Spirit brings the blessings of salvation into present experience and guarantees the future completion of salvation (33). No conditions are attached to God's saving work. "Divine faithfulness guar-

antees continuity in salvation despite threats to it" (81). "Up against God's faithfulness and love, present afflictions and tribulation fail to make Christians' hope of final salvation less sure" (82).

The second part investigates human conduct and its relationship to future salvation. Volf examines all the passages in which Paul speaks of human sinfulness and divine judgment. Although she sees negative consequences of human sins, nothing affects final salvation. One example may be discussed here: 1 Cor 5:1-5, the man who committed sexual misconduct. The offender should be formally and practically excluded from the life of the church, but this should be done with the hope of the man's salvation (v. 5). Then she writes, "Should the man not 'be saved on the day of the Lord,' however, because he did not repent and convert, no loss of salvation would have taken place. 1 Corinthians 5 rather illustrates that Paul recognizes the possibility of false profession and does not base certainty of final salvation on church membership." Thus, she believes that the exclusion of anyone from salvation only indicates that the first conversion was not true and that such a person is a false confessor. "The 'unrighteous' inside the church are as much unbelievers as the 'unrighteous' outside" (137). Is this less a condition than to say that through a person's actions the salvation that was reserved for this person was lost? Why was then God's original act of election or calling for that person ineffective? This leads willy-nilly to the doctrine of double predestination. Volf believes that ethical conduct is not irrelevant, but ethical failure does not lead to the loss of salvation although it has other negative consequences and implications. Yet she goes so far as to say, "According to Paul it is also possible to lose one's membership in the 'in-group' on account of immoral conduct, namely by falsifying one's Christian profession by one's behavior." Is this not the same as saying that ethical failure may cause the loss of salvation?

The third part proceeds to the question of faith and falling away and deals mainly with Romans 9-11, Galatians 5, and 2 Cor 13:5. According to Volf, although Paul takes seriously in these passages the threat of alienation from the gospel of Christ, he maintains a divinely-inspired confidence that the worst will not happen (216). Although perseverance cannot be automatic, it is compatible with Paul's doctrine of salvation by grace alone. He makes continuity in salvation a possibility which *will* (emphasis Volf's) come to realization rather than a logical necessity (228). It is hard to see the difference between these two statements.

Part four deals with Paul's own mission and the possibility that it might have been in vain. Here she concedes that some passages portray the real danger of his converts' loss of salvation (Gal 4:11; 2 Cor 6:1) but asserts that it is also possible to interpret them as not compelling us to accept this view.

Her general conclusion is that ethical failure does not exclude true Christians from salvation, but there is no salvation for those who stand outside the gospel of grace. This means that converts to Christianity who abandon faith in the gospel of grace through which they were initially saved can put themselves outside the sphere of its saving power.

Despite her disclaimer, this reviewer had the impression that Volf interprets Paul's statements in a way that they support the Reformed theory of perseverance.

The book is not free from typographical or printing errors. An annoyance is the hyphen used in the Greek type. Some readers may find it disconcerting that German and French quotes frequently are not translated.

Wilhelm C. Linss
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

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The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory. By Carol J. Adams. New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1991. 256 pages. Cloth, $22.95; paper, $12.95.

This is not the book to be reading if you wish to spend an inconspicuous, leisurely afternoon in the library with no disturbances. The cover of *The Sexual Politics of Meat* certainly turns heads. It sports a fully unclothed woman sitting on her haunches, looking back over her shoulder with a red cowboy hat on her head. Her body is sectioned off into meat cuts: rump, loin, chuck, rib. The significance of the cover is clear: historically women have been treated like slabs of meat, sectioned into "cuts" which objectify her body and deny her mind. In this book, Carol Adams makes a provocative connection between feminism and vegetarianism. She considers male dominance and meat eating to be absolutely interrelated. The book argues that to consider eliminating meat from one's diet is to consider displacing one aspect of male control. It also demonstrates that the oppression of animals and the oppression of women are linked together as the by-product of a patriarchal system.

Adams believes the treatment of animals and women has historically been shockingly similar. In her opinion, both go through a three-part process of objectification, fragmentation, and consumption—animals through the traditional meat market and women through the misogynist meat market. The compelling point for Adams is that both animals and women are victims of a patriarchal system which, out of a false necessity, creates a weaker subject upon which to prey.

Although the book presents a unique, virtually nascent idea, there are significant shortfalls in the topic. Even though Adams admits that excessive meat-eating is a culturally determined reality, the book still makes a dangerous assumption: that vegetarianism is a life-style which can be chosen by any human being who wishes to protest both the oppression of animals and the oppression of women. The unfortunate reality of two-thirds of the world is that the majority of people do not have the luxury of choosing whether or not to eat meat. People in parts of the world where meat-eating is a rarity could read Adams' book and simply not make the connections. Adams fails to state that choosing vegetarianism is a luxury, a reality that has only made a significant impact in Western countries where meat is an abundant food source. In fact, in most of the Western world, refusing to eat meat for political and/or ethical reasons is still considered eccentric. Meat remains an assumed staple of the Western diet.

So the question I have regarding Adams' theory is this: Does her theory apply to non-affluent societies that do not have such ready access to abundance, or might her theory have more to do with a Western capitalistic world-view rather than with meat-eating in and of itself? It seems to me that excessive eating, excessive oppression of other living creatures, and excessive violence are direct manifestations of a competitive, capitalistic society that is more concerned with success and monetary gain than human well-being. The connection between the oppression of women and animals is well taken, but the reality of oppression goes far deeper than Adams explores. Becoming a vegetarian does not imply the just and respectful treatment of women; nor does advocating on behalf of the women's movement imply the kinder treatment of animals.

I accepted the opportunity to read this book with enthusiasm because I am both feminist and vegetarian. As I said earlier, the connections Adams makes between feminism and vegetarianism are interesting and thought-provoking, but I believe there are many more important books for a person to read on both topics. If one wishes to explore vegetarianism, *Diet for a New America* is an excellent introduction. *Sexism and God-Talk* by Rosemary Radford Ruether or *Making the Connections* by Beverly Wildung Harrison are both exceptional books on feminist theology. Vegetarianism and feminism are better treated separately, and many important insights can be learned by reading classic, solidly researched and written books in each respective area.

J. Elise Brown

The Scandalous Message of James: Faith without Works is Dead. By Elsa Tamez. New York: Crossroad, 1990. viii and 102 pages. Paper. $8.95.

This book is a translation of Tamez's *Santiago: Lectura latinoamerican de la epistola.* She attempts to understand James within its own historical context to determine what the text meant at the time of its writing, i.e., she performs critical exegesis.

Most interpreters, in the historical critical tradition, follow Dibelius in understanding James as parenetic diatribe; the text is loosely structured without tight relationships between its subdivisions. As a general rule such interpreters have been white Northern European or North American males.

Tamez is of Mexican descent and teaches in Costa Rica. At least culturally and geographically she is outside the mainstream tradition of biblical exegesis. She brings a variety of concerns to the text that traditional interpreters do not, especially economic and political concerns.

A major presupposition in Tamez is denominational. Tamez comes out of the Wesleyan tradition. She devotes an entire chapter to the perfectionist tradition in Wesleyanism. Interestingly, Tamez sees the Christian perfection called for in James as an issue of honesty and sincerity and not an issue of education, social or economic position, and arrogance. More than likely most Lutherans would agree with this concept of perfection except that they would use the in-house jargon, "the way of the cross." Lutherans especially posses "intellectual baggage" regarding justification apart from works of the law and a hermeneutical suspicion towards any legalistic or self-justifying reading of the biblical text, especially in interpreting James. There is a sense in which the Wesleyan and Lutheran traditions are talking past each other through use of denominational jargon.

Tamez insightfully notes that James indicts the rich in no uncertain terms; they are apart from the community. She bases this insight upon her reconstruction of the early church as economically poor and oppressed by the economic upper classes.

The linchpin of Tamez' discussion is the historical reconstruction of the community of James. Was it rich or was it poor or perhaps some of both? Even if the early Palestinian church was poor, the date of writing is also crucial to her argument. If James is late, then the community could have had, by the time of writing, rich members.

Tamez' cultural background sensitizes her to such socio-economic issues in exegesis. However, Tamez seems not to consider the possibility that James was writing a document of the severest moral reprimand and exhortation to rich Christians.

Purely within the realm of historical reconstruction Tamez raises some significant issues. In her reading, merchants and landowners take on the significance of major institutions which actively oppress the lower classes who work for them. Martin seems to view the merchants and landowners as would be seen in a middle class American congregation, i.e., small business people who are guilty of dysfunctional social relationships but not grand scale societal injustice.

At the level of historical reconstruction the work of Tamez raises more questions than it answers. At the level of pastoral concern for the poor and oppressed Tamez has provided an excellent resource. The book is a clearly written, well researched, and worthy introduction to "liberation exegesis" and is of great value for pastors, teachers, students, and anyone interested in the critical analysis of ancient texts, using historical methods, in order to speak to the concerns of today.

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Preaching Helps

First Sunday in Advent—The Transfiguration of Our Lord, Series B

Advent–Christmas–Epiphany

I imagine Adam asking Eve, as they exited the garden, "What time is it?" They needed to know where that day stood in relation to all other days in order to move their herds or gather food in timely fashion.

But we human beings devise calendars not only to discover when thaw will follow winter frost but also to remind ourselves who we are. Calendars put names on our past and present and future. They tell us in what lineage we stand, and they embody our hopes for the days of our life and beyond.

The ordinary calendar of our larger social life runs from January first till the last day of December. Chinese New Year (we're still in the Year of the Rooster as I write) always takes me by surprise, when I am thinking Epiphany and looking for Ash Wednesday. The Jewish Year begins sensibly about the time that school starts again in the fall. The Muslim year runs only 354 or 355 days, so that Muslims get 33 years where the rest of us have only 32.

The days of the universe, they tell me, stretch out in nearly unimaginable numbers, just as the stars and galaxies send light across distances I cannot begin to comprehend. Our calendars measure time but also stamp time with human meanings, so that the terrible size of time does not overwhelm us and so that our days are not just "one damn thing after another."

Calendars help all of us—Jew, Muslims, Christians, Westerners and Chinese and all the others—to carve out a manageable space within which

to live lives of hope and joy. In the beginning when all was a formless void, God made light and God made the calendar: day one and day two down to the end of the first week. God removed the terror of the dark and of the potential meaninglessness of endless stretches of time.

The church's year invites us to live with the people of God in every age, to see our days as marked by great promises and startling fulfillments, to listen to God's voice speaking in prophets and wise men, to contemplate great gifts and great escapes, to celebrate the awesome eruption of divine life in the midst of ordinary life in the short span of days lived by Jesus of Nazareth.

Four people, involved in a variety of ministries, assist us in our contemplations as we enter a new church year. **Donna L. Stevenson** recently received her Ph.D. in Biblical Studies at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California, and is currently writing a commentary on Chronicles for Hendrickson Press. **Eldon L. Olson**, Ph.D., is Director of Consultation to Clergy and works out of Seattle, Washington. He previously contributed studies on the texts for Lent in 1991 and writes now on Epiphany, which he calls the season of "subtle appearances of the hidden God." **June Eastvold Nilssen** is the poetic pastor of University Lutheran Church in Seattle, Washington. Her "Pastoral Reflection" on Christmas Day is a communion hymn to be sung to the tune of *LBW* #148. You have her permission to sing it at will. **Susan M. Kintner** has served congregations in California and Oregon and is currently on the staff of the Wellsprings Counseling Center in Portland, Oregon.

Thanks to these colleagues in ministry for reminding all the rest of us what time it really is.

Yours, in timely fashion,

Robert H. Smith
Editor of Preaching Helps
Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary
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First Sunday in Advent
November 28, 1993

Psalm 80:1-7
Isaiah 63:16b-17; 64:1-8
1 Corinthians 1:3-9
Mark 13:33-37 *or* Mark 11:1-10

FIRST READING

Where is God? The urgent language of Isaiah 63-64 rises from the assumption that God is elsewhere. The theology of Isaiah is a theology of the location of God, a theology which requires contemporary readers to evaluate our own understanding of the location of God. The particular aspect of God's location in this reading is that God is in "heaven." This is the language of verticality. God is "above." Because of Israel's rebellion, God has withdrawn in anger from the midst of Israel. The result is that Israel was defeated by its enemies. The prophet pleads with YHWH to come down from heaven in order to defeat these enemies and restore the wholeness of a community marked by separations.

Most significantly, there is separation from God. The prophet holds God responsible for the separation. The prophet says that YHWH has caused the hardening of hearts which made the people stray from God's ways. By placing this responsibility on YHWH, the prophet is also expressing his conviction that God is in fact God. It is a bold declaration of the power of God. This point is emphasized in the metaphor of the potter and the clay.

The address to God as Father is very unusual in the Old Testament. One of the radical differences between Israel and other Ancient Near Eastern peoples is that the God of Israel was not regarded as the progenitor of the people. When the language of "Father" is used, the purpose is to compare the closeness of YHWH to Israel, by analogy to the relationship between human children and their own fathers. (Clearly, not all human fathers are examples of nurture for their children, and so the value of the analogy is often dependent on particular human experiences.)

It is also clear that there is separation in the community itself. The language of "I-we" in contrast to "they" indicates that the prophet speaks for a small group within the larger community. The smaller group feels itself separated from "Abraham/Israel," and yet takes responsibility for what the larger group has done. This kind of community division is consistent with the experiences of post-exilic Judah, which is probably the geographical, historical, and social origin of this portion of Isaiah. The prophet and his community wait for their complete restoration as YHWH's people after the brutal experiences of exile.

The Father language, the reminder of Israel's history, and the confession of sinfulness are part of a bold plea of YHWH to return. It is a plea for the restoration of wholeness and oneness to a community aware of its divisions and its separation from God. DLS

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

The custodian left my office door ajar. Someone entered. When I arrived that morning a green cactus plant was on the coffee table. No one knew how it got there. Plants have a tendency to die when placed in my care. I forget they are living. Paintings, sculpture, fabrics give color and beauty without water or words of encouragement. Plants are different, especially indoors. They hold you accountable. You have to keep an eye on them, poke the soil to test for dryness, stop to evaluate their day to day condition, compliment them on how lovely they look. It's pressure. They depend on you to survive. And people criticize: "When's the last time you watered that thing?" or "Your plant isn't doing so well, is it?" or "Have you thought of moving it into the sun?"

Somebody did move it. One morning it wasn't on the table. It wasn't on my desk. I realized I missed it. As quickly as it appeared, it disappeared. Did the giver decide it was in the plant's best interest to take it back? Not fair! It was my plant now, for better or for worse. I had a relationship with that cactus. It had three blossoms ready to open. When I turned the key I expected to be surprised by a burst of color. But I got a different surprise. The plant was gone!

It felt like when the rock kicked up under my car and cut a hole in the radiator. Just like that!

Or when the phone rang on New Year's Eve. A hollow voice said, "I won't be at your party. The police came. My daughter Sally got killed this morning. On her way to ski. Drove around a curve. Head-on. Right into a semi-truck. Instant."

Take heed, watch; for you do not know when the time will come. JEN

Second Sunday in Advent December 5, 1993

Psalm 85
Isaiah 40:1-11
2 Peter 3:8-14
Mark 1:1-8

FIRST READING

The familiar passage from Isaiah is marvelously poetic and needs to be read poetically. It is full of metaphor and poetic personification. The core issue is exile. The poet considers Israel's exile in Babylon as punishment for Israel's sins, a punishment which has now been completed. It is time for the exiles to return from Babylon to Judah. What is most important here is that the Babylonian exile was not just the exile of the people, but the exile of YHWH. When YHWH abandoned the temple and went into exile, Jerusalem and Judah were left abandoned. The result was the destruction of the city and temple by Babylon. The essential affirmation of this poetry is that YHWH is returning from exile.

The Glory of YHWH is the visible manifestation of YHWH's presence. The promise that the Glory of YHWH shall be revealed is a promise of YHWH's return. The metaphorical language makes the point that YHWH comes as King. The imagery is that of a Babylonian New Year ceremony in which the king comes in triumphal procession to renew his claim to his kingship. Here, YHWH returns across the wilderness to reclaim YHWH's kingship in Zion/Jerusalem. The language of kingship is explicit in 40:10-11. YHWH comes to rule. The metaphor of shepherd is also a familiar characterization of the role of the king as shepherd. The use of metaphor continues with the human exiles described as sheep in the care of the returning shepherd.

Some aspects of these lines which are not obvious in English are the change in person and gender of speakers. The imperatives of 40:1 and 2 are plural. Many commentators understand that the scene is an analogy to royal court language. The repeated verb, "comfort," is active. Those who are to do the comforting are the members of the heavenly court whose role is to comfort "my people." The imperatives of 40:9 are feminine singular, representing personified Jerusalem and Zion. Although Jerusalem and Zion are often used as parallel terms in Hebrew poetry, the historical difference between them is that Jerusalem was the city of the human king and Zion was the dwelling place of YHWH, the divine King YHWH. Jerusalem and Zion are personified as messengers to the cities of Judah that YHWH is returning in triumphal procession to Zion. In the language of poetry, Jerusalem and Zion have voices and announce the good news of YHWH's return.

Since these lines are some of the most familiar in the Old Testament, it is important to think about the rhetorical purpose behind them. The prophet's task is to persuade the exilic community to leave Babylon, the center of empire, and "return" to Judah. The language of "return" is misleading, however, since most of the exilic audience had no direct memory of Judah. A contemporary analogy would be a post-Soviet Union invitation to American grandchildren of World War II refugees to return to the Eastern European land of their grandparents. Just as few Americans would accept such an invitation, most exiles were unwilling to go back to Judah. Throughout the exilic portions of Isaiah, the prophet is faced with the same rhetorical challenge: to persuade a reluctant audience that God has triumphed over Israel's enemies and is calling Israel home. DLS

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

John the Baptist came to sleep on the church steps. He prepared the way for several others who followed him. The neighbors protested, especially the classy babe on the corner who walks her poodle past our corner every morning. John and his followers offended her. No: threatened her. They were dirty. They defecated in the bushes. (She carried a scoop for her dog!) She organized a protest group. They came to my office like a brood of vipers, snarling under the veneer of middle class propriety. Flyers were circulated. The congregation held a public forum. A task force was appointed. John and his followers appeared nightly on the porch. Solomon's Portico, I liked to call it. There were demands to post the sanctuary doors with Criminal Trespass signs. We were to canvass the area to collect money for the Yellow Cab Company to pick the guys up and haul them downtown to a shelter.

We decided to form our own plan. Teams from the congregation did a night watch patrol. They learned the names, the stories, the problems of the men who came to our door. The porch became a meeting ground. John and his friends educated those who came to see them about what it is like to survive on the streets. There had been fear on both sides. The fear began to deepen into faith and hope. John and his followers were a portent of what was to come in this urban wilderness. More and more panhandlers, runaways, alcoholics have found their way into the University District. But the small group that found its way to our porch have moved into treatment, or warmer quarters, and certainly into a place of validation.

In Advent time the night comes early and temperatures drop quickly. Snow is in the forecast. No one comes to the porch these cold nights. But those who came in summer and fall opened the way for us to better understand; to set things straight.

I met one of our visitors on the street one morning and he asked, "Why do the Lutherans have all the love?" Because you stirred us up! You appeared and called us to reality. You challenged our splash in the font and took us into the fire of controversy and sacrifice. As the fire grew, we refined our vision. It is not that we know so well how to love the unlovable. Somebody came after you entered the steps. The Holy Spirit herself! And in that Spirit we all came closer to the Kingdom.

I didn't say that to him. It would have sounded like a sermon. But I knew in my heart that that is what happened. JEN

Third Sunday in Advent December 12, 1993

Luke 1:46b-55
Isaiah 61:1-3, 10-11
1 Thessalonians 5:16-24
John 1:6-8, 19-28

FIRST READING

The reading from Isaiah is an extraordinarily rich pericope. In Luke, these words inaugurate the public ministry of Jesus in the Nazareth synagogue (Lk 4:16-21). When Jesus asserts that this scripture has been fulfilled in his audience's hearing, he is making an implicit claim that he is the promised messiah, "the anointed one." In most occurrences in the Old Testament, the anointed one is the king. Ideally, the king's primary role was to protect the society as a warrior, a judge, and a priest. Isaiah 61 is concerned with the role of the anointed one as the ideal judge. A key word here is "righteousness."

Contemporary Christian readers tend to understand "righteousness" as a reference to moral rightness. For Lutherans, the word has particular significance as one of the distinctives of Lutheran theology and identity. It is precisely because the word is so familiar and so important that exegetes need to be clear about the intended meanings of "righteousness" in Isaiah. The words *sedaqah* and *mispat* are variously translated as righteousness, justice, and judgment. Although the word has a range of meanings in the Old Testament, "righteousness" is fundamentally a legal term. The righteous one is the innocent party in a legal dispute. The role of the just judge is to ensure that

the innocent are vindicated and that the guilty are punished.

Isaiah 61 promises that the role of the anointed one is to do justice. There are several overlapping themes here. The reference to good news to the poor recalls the Jubilee legislation of Leviticus 25. The promise of liberty to the captives and release of prisoners has specific meaning for people who have experienced exile. The reference to the "day" refers to the expected "Day of YHWH" when God will vindicate the innocent and powerless and take vengeance on the oppressors. All of this is proclaimed by the one anointed by the Spirit of YHWH. The basis for YHWH's justice is that YHWH God is the King of the universe who fulfills the kingly role of the just judge. The theme of mourning for Zion is also an important aspect of this pericope and recalls the promise of Chapter 40 of YHWH's return to Zion. It is the return of YHWH as King which is the basis for God's justice. What is especially important is that God's justice refers to positive actions in creating and preserving a community which has been separated and oppressed by the experience of exile. DLS

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

The church spends too much time trying to duck the question, "Who are you?" Rather than admit that we really haven't figured that out, we order airplane tickets, book a hotel meeting room somewhere in the middle of the American wilderness, and ask, "Should we have a quota system or shouldn't we?"

It is like putting butter on a cat's paws. All the world is reduced to the pads on his own extremities. He becomes obsessed, totally preoccupied with licking them clean. If anyone asked the cat, "Who are you?" he would probably reply, "Annoyed." A pig, a caterpillar, a dog, a squirrel could give the same answer. Even a human being! "Who are you?" means just that. Not, Where do you need to scratch right now? or What's your current stance toward life? All God's critters get distracted with the unexpected struggles of existence. That's common ground here on the planet. What distinguishes one level of existence from another?

Culturally, what distinguishes the church from any other entity?

The church could be seen as just another corporation totally immersed in financial survival.

The church could be seen as just another philanthropic international social service agency.

The church could be in line with the Kiwanis Club, or the Elks, or the American Legion as another Club to belong to.

The church could be just another hierarchy brought low by sexual misconduct.

The church could be an erudite circle of theologians wasting their minds on intellectual queries pertaining to nothingness.

The church could be pussycats filling the pews, licking their paws to be cleansed of their sins.

So, are we content with picking one of the above or is there yet another way to define ourselves? Our assignment: to answer those who ask, "Who are you?" JEN

Fourth Sunday in Advent December 19, 1993

Psalm 89:1-4, 14-18
2 Samuel 7:(1-7) 8-11, 16
Romans 16:25-27
Luke 1:26-38

FIRST READING

At the heart of the promise to David in 2 Samuel is the promise of the presence of God. Behind the promise is an understanding of the relationship between gods, temples, and kings in the Ancient Near East. Gods were understood to be gods of place, and kings were temple builders. In order to worship a god, it was necessary to know the god's location. A temple is a house for a god. Temples were built at places of intersection between heaven and earth. By building a house of a god, the king ensured that the god would remain in that dwell-

ing place. This continued presence of the god would ensure blessing for the land and people who lived on the land. Blessing is whatever produces abundance of life—land, sufficient rain, bountiful crops, fertile livestock, and human life and health. The role of the earthly king was to represent the heavenly king, in order to ensure the well-being of the human community. Building a house for the god also legitimated the rule of the human king. The earthly king ruled under the authority of the heavenly king. All of this understanding of gods, temples, and kings is evident in this pericope.

The Hebrew *bayît* is "house," a word with a range of meanings. In this pericope the promise to David involves an interplay between three distinct meanings: temple, palace, and dynasty. King David decides to build a house (a temple) for YHWH. Since King David lives in a house (palace), YHWH also should have a house. However, YHWH tells David through the prophet Nathan that YHWH does not want David to build YHWH's house. The reason given has to do with mobility in contrast to fixed location. A tent is mobile; a temple building is not. YHWH has been present with Israel in a tent, as Israel moved about. David has also had a mobile history. YHWH had been with him in his travels. Instead of mobile David, one of David's sons will build the house (temple) for YHWH. What YHWH does promise to David is blessing to David's house (dynasty). This blessing is the promise of YHWH's continued presence forever with David's dynasty in the house Solomon will build for YHWH.

This transition from YHWH's mobile life in a tent to a permanent dwelling place in a temple is also conveyed by the use of the word "rest" (*nûah*). David is "at rest" from his enemies. In its most basic sense, "rest" means literally to settle down, to stop moving. The promise of a House of YHWH to the House of David is a promise of YHWH's continued and everlasting presence in the Land of Israel. With this promise comes the promise of rest from enemies. DLS

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

The virgin birth is not the only thing that flies in the face of human reason. There's a whole list, starting with God. Next come the holy angels. If you can't believe in God, you certainly can't connect with the messengers.

If the messengers aren't credible, neither are the messages they bring. And if you are terribly opposed to unwed, teen-aged mothers, you definitely will have major problems with this text. The crowning thorn is barren old Elizabeth, dry and crusty, suddenly oozing with body fluids, sensuality, and new life.

It's a stretch, all right. Along with the stretch of the abdomen comes the stretch of imagination and childlike amazement. Every woman who has carried the seed of love within herself, knows about God and the angels. Given that God created all life by calling it into being with a Word (and here is where faith gives evidence), then why not understand that God could specify a womb and generate life there, without benefit of a man? It is this same Word that Mary acknowledges when she says, "let it be to me according to your word." The angel, messenger, brings the Word: origin of Life. Mary and the Holy Spirit: what a combination! A spark of energy ignited into human flesh, protected and nurtured into existence by a poor, young woman who rejoiced and received.

I have carried and birthed three babies; each a miracle. I know that though they entered through me, I am not their origin. I know that though I want to call them mine, they are separate from me and must find their own path to return to God's arms, not mine. Mary models this feminine nature which infused her son's life with humanness. She also had to release him to fulfill his own destiny: to return to God's loving arms.

The angel was no figment of her mind. Neither was the seed that grew inside her. Linked to cosmic power, she was transformed into a conduit for God's passionate love. She walked beyond the scandal and the shame into the Light that was coming into the world through her. Now, isn't that somethin'? It's so inconceivable, nobody but God could have thought it up! JEN

The Nativity of Our Lord December 25, 1993

Psalm 97
Isaiah 52:7-10
Hebrews 1:1-9
John 1:1-14

FIRST READING

The Isaiah 52 pericope has a number of similarities to Isaiah 40. Both announce the good news of the return of YHWH as King. The role of king which is emphasized here is that of warrior who protects his people from their enemies. One of the significant themes of the Book of Isaiah is the warfare of YHWH against the nations of the earth. The people of Israel are in exile because of the effects of warfare against Judah by Babylon. When YHWH returns to become King in Israel, YHWH is also triumphing over the nations who have taken the people into captivity. YHWH is not only King of Judah but King of the whole earth.

The messenger is to announce the good news of peace and salvation. The most basic meaning of these terms here is actual peace from warfare and the deliverance from the power of Israel's enemies. The language of YHWH's holy arm is a frequent metaphor for God's great power, used especially for God's military triumph over Israel's enemies.

In this pericope, person and gender of those addressed are not obvious in English. The messenger here is masculine singular. In contrast to Isaiah 40 where Zion/Jerusalem are personified as the messengers of the good news, here the announcement is made *to* Zion/Jerusalem. The statement "Your God reigns" is explicit. "Your" refers to Zion. Here, Zion's sentinels see the return of YHWH to Zion. The personified ruins of Jerusalem are told to sing, because YHWH has redeemed Jerusalem.

It is the nature of poetry to have multiple meanings. This is especially true with the kind of metaphorical poetry of Isaiah. Although most commentators equate Zion/Jerusalem with the people in exile, such immediate identification misses an important dimension of spatial reality. Jerusalem and Zion are real places where YHWH has chosen to reign. They are also real places which were devastated by the Babylonian warfare against them. The language of the pericope is spatial language, referring to mountains, Zion, Jerusalem, waste places, and the ends of the earth. The issue for the exilic prophet of Isaiah is return from the place of Babylon to the places of Judah. The possibility of return is itself evidence of YHWH's triumph over Israel's enemies. DLS

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

A theological and pastoral reflection on the Gospel of Luke—a communion hymn for Christmas:

"Now the Star is Shining"

Tune: French Carol (*LBW* 148)
Text: June Nilssen

Now the star is shining over the stable dim;
Mary holds the infant, softly adoring him.
Love lives again that prophets had foretold,
Love is come again, like radiant, shining gold.

Silently the child sleeps on his mother's lap.
We, rejoicing, find him in his swaddling wrap.
Fields in our hearts that dead and bare have been
Bloom with petals fragrant, Love is born again.

Shepherds hear the singing of the choirs above;
Human voices ringing join their song of love.
Waken, my soul, forgiveness opens wide,
Surely life and goodness in this Child abide.

Here, my Lord, I see you, here I feel your mirth:
Festal bread from heaven, wine from vines
of earth.
Enter our hearts, become our Center, Peace;
Love is born again like grain that rises green.

First Sunday after Christmas December 26, 1993

Psalm 111
Isaiah 45:22-25
Colossians 3:12-17
Luke 2:25-40

FIRST READING

In Isaiah 45, the range of vision extends beyond Israel in exile, and the promise extends beyond deliverance of Israel from Babylonian exile. The address here is to all the ends of the earth. One of the dominant themes of the Book of Isaiah is the plan of YHWH to conduct warfare against the whole earth. Just as Israel was brought under judgment, YHWH's warfare extends to Babylon and all the peoples of earth. The rhetorical function of this pericope gives assurance to the implied community that YHWH will triumph over Babylon and over all the other peoples of the earth.

In the lines immediately before the pericope, the survivors of the nations are addressed. They are summoned to a trial and commanded to make their case after consulting with one another. YHWH says that everything which has happened has been under the plan and control of YHWH. The survivors of the nations are invited to come and receive YHWH's salvation. When all nations are brought under judgment, there will be world peace.

The theme of "word of YHWH" is also significant in the Book of Isaiah. The word has already gone forth in the past. In contrast to the transience of human life, the word of YHWH stands forever (Isa 40:5-8). This word is YHWH's plan to wage war against the whole earth until all the peoples of the earth confess that YHWH alone is God. DLS

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

They fool you, these old people. Leather-skinned and sharp-eyed, their voices crack and their knees tremble. They look and smell like death. The truth is, they are closer to birth than anyone else in the temple. Anna. Simeon. Not worth a thing to anybody but God. They knew it, too. All the people swarming about conducting the important matters of the day, probably never heard them. Anna hung there day and night, like a fixture on the wall, blending to the place of invisibility.

After all, she was an old woman. Her gender and her age both diminished her significance. Her announcement about the coming of the Messiah could not have carried much credibility. (Like the Marys coming from the tomb on Easter morning!) The writer gives all the good lines to Simeon. Isn't that always the way? Old Anna never leaves, keeps the prayers going, fasts continually, and holds her place with all the pigeons fluttering about, dropping you-know-what all over her! I'm surprised that Anna is even in the script.

Simeon enters, one foot in the grave, is handed the Nunc Dimittus, and is forever and ever quoted in liturgy upon liturgy. He even gets to take Jesus in his arms. This tender, soft-skinned little Rose is lifted to the scratch of whiskers. A portent of the thorns to come, perhaps?

Like I said: these old people fool you. What we think is incoherent babble may well be language from another realm. What we see as the last stages of life may well be a transition into a life beyond our awareness. We are so entrenched in the matters of survival in this life, we cannot incorporate the coming of the next. It is not so much that they are dying as being reborn to a different consciousness. They begin to detach, move through, leave us behind. We think they cannot understand us. We fail to see that we can no longer follow them. They are on their way. They see something we are not yet ready or able to see. Unless of course, we do what Simeon did: gaze directly into the face of this Jesus child. JEN

Second Sunday after Christmas January 2, 1994

Psalm 147:13-21
Isaiah 61:10–62:3
Ephesians 1:3-6, 15-18
John 1:1-18

FIRST READING

Isaiah 60-62 proclaim the restoration of Zion. The scene is no longer exilic Babylon but post-exilic Judah. It is that time and place of transition between exile and restoration, between reality and dreams, between what is and what might be. Those who left Babylon for the return to Judah expected the glorious "new thing" promised by the exilic prophet Isaiah. The actual conditions of post-exilic Judah were cold water in the face of such dreams. The temple and cities still lay ruined, and the community was deeply divided. The prophet speaks to the reality of disappointed expectations.

This pericope overlaps with that for the Third Sunday in Advent. It also combines fragments from two chapters, each addressing a particular facet of this situation of despair. Chapter 61 gives comfort to those who mourn the present reality. The implied question is, How much longer before God acts to restore Zion? Chapter 62 demands that God act. The implied question is, Why is God still silent? Throughout, the focus is on the restoration of Zion/Jerusalem. The "you" of these chapters is in almost every case a reference to Zion/Jerusalem. (The only exceptions are 61:5-7; 62:6b.)

Isaiah 61:10-11 is an exclamation of rejoicing. This praise is a contrast to the earlier expression of mourning. The prophet contrasts the garments of mourning with the garments of praise. In answer to the mourners' implied question, How much longer?, the prophet uses the image of a garden and the language of growth. The transformation is a process which grows gradually the way a garden grows. Because the prophet has been clothed with YHWH's salvation and righteousness, he demands that YHWH act on behalf of Zion/Jerusalem.

Verses 1-3 of chapter 62 are part of the prophet's charge against God. The prophet will not be silent until YHWH restores (vindicates) Zion/Jerusalem. With this vindication, Zion/Jerusalem will be renamed. In contrast to names of abandonment, the new names will convey the presence of YHWH.

There is also a concern for the nations. Throughout Isaiah, the vindication of YHWH as King of Israel is an important theme. YHWH is not only the King of Israel, but of the whole world. The concern about the vindication of Zion/Jerusalem before the nations is also a vindication of YHWH as the ruler of the whole earth. DLS

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

There is amazing power in language. It well may be the major component of the *imago dei*. In the beginning was the Word. The Word said. All things were made. The Word pronounced existence. Before matter and form, there was the Word. The Word became flesh; became available to our senses. The invisible became visible.

To put it another way: it occurs to me that television was in the Garden of Eden, but no one had evolved to understand how the air waves could be conducted to transmit sound and image. The capacity was always available. We were not advanced enough to unlock the energies and technology required until the 20th century. The mystery is explained with electronic jargon, as though we ourselves invented the process. We do that so often: claim our genius without recognizing the Word, who from the beginning called all existence into form. The light was in the world, but we knew it not. Gradually, as the light dawned, we called ourselves "enlightened." The more we call ourselves "enlightened," the darker becomes our true Light.

Angels are born of Light. Angels are messengers of Light. They appear over and over in the scriptures, both Old and New, yet we skip over them, almost embarrassed that they appear. Mystical presence is beyond our comprehension. If we cannot describe a Being according to our sensory, rational, earthbound experience, we dis-

count or ignore that part. We address ourselves in physical terms. We devote our attention to the "comforts" of life, pretending we will continue to continue in this present form. Somewhere deep inside ourselves we are linked to the Word; the infinitesimal frequency that vibrates beneath the flesh; breath, electrical conduits transmitting signals from brain, through nerve, to every part of the anatomy and spirit. A magnetic attraction that brings shocks of recognition between the saints and their Creator. The intuitive linkage that stirs imagination, healing, balance, and creativity. All things come to fruition through the Word. Eye has not seen. Ear has not heard. No one has yet received the full manifestation of that Word. It becomes us only in flashes, glimmers. We sense it. Now and then, the angel voices whisper something in our dreams or startle us to awareness. It is not visions of sugarplums that dance in our heads, but a vision of Light, and Truth, and Grace. A baby. It makes no earthly sense! Were we to utter our ecstasy in public, we would be pronounced out of balance. Eccentric, at least. You know, peculiar... off center. But there is, after all, nothing ordinary about this life in Christ. We should not behave as through there were. The Word made flesh dwells now within each believer. We are given the power to become the children of God, a little lower than the angels. In material terms, that's unbelievable. JEN

The Baptism of Our Lord January 9, 1994

Psalm 45:7-9
Isaiah 42-1-7
Acts 10:34-38
Mark 1:4-11

FIRST READING

The season of Epiphany is perhaps the most subtle season of the church's year. Sandwiched between Advent-Christmas and Lent-Easter, it can easily become neglected as a pause in the festival celebrations of God's great revelations in Christ's birth and death/resurrection. But as those festivals announce God's dramatic revelations, Epiphany honors the subtle appearances of the hidden God, the manifestations of God in symbolic events, sublime images, and visions of transformation. The texts for the Epiphany season focus on the act of God by which human life is transformatively chosen, called, consecrated, commissioned, or empowered to fulfill the sacred purpose. They collectively testify that God's hidden (even secret) promises are manifest in the lives of those who seek to maintain the integrity of God's subtle appearances.

The Baptism of Our Lord initiates the season with the establishment of the transformative event of God in the image of the heralding servant. That servant, John the Baptizer, "appeared in the wilderness" with Isaiah's image of the suffering servant. With the proclamation of John, the historical image of Isaiah, however, becomes the eschatological promise: God's promised servant of Isaiah becomes both Mark's image of John the Baptizer and John's image of the one who "is coming after me." This replication of the thematic image is suggested in the initial presentation of both John and Jesus (in the temptation narrative) in the wilderness. (The wilderness is no doubt a theological symbol for the human context out of which reappears a proclamation of promise for God's chosen people—Exodus, Post-exilic prophecy, John the Baptizer, the temptation of Jesus, even the resurrection.)

The servant song which is the Old Testament lesson introduces the image of the servant as one who is chosen by God ("anointed" in Psalm 45:7; the "Beloved" [in this context, not so much a term of endearment as a term of election] of Mark 1:11). God's spirit will be upon him, as it is upon Jesus. Mark distinguishes the ministry of Jesus from that of John by insisting that Jesus alone is the agent of the Holy Spirit. Isaiah's servant will be marked by his humility, his gentleness, his righteousness. These qualities of the servant will legitimize the servant's sacred purpose, namely to bring forth justice on the earth, enlighten the blinded, and liberate the prisoner.

In Matthew's narration of the baptism of Jesus, that baptism takes place against the protest of John that it is unnecessary. In Matthew, Jesus insists that his baptism is a proper fulfillment of righteousness. This theme of righteousness, the basis for the enthronement of the king in Psalm 45, the identity of the servant of Isaiah, becomes the central criterion for the inclusive extension of God's acceptance in Peter's sermon of Acts 10. Those who fear God and pursue righteousness enjoy the extension of God's message from Galilee, throughout Judea, to every nation. Those whom God declares righteous become epiphanic replications of the central biblical τύπος of those who bear not only God's benediction but also God's promise. ELO

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

The actual feast of Epiphany falls on Thursday. I urge the preacher to weave Isaiah 60:1-2 ("Arise, shine, for your light has come...) into the Sunday liturgy. It marks the season as the season of God's light.

Jesus ministry began in his baptism. A celebration or renewal of baptismal vows could provide a useful structure to this morning's gathering. Children could be urged to bring their baptismal candles, and light them during the children's time.

After sitting in the dark so long, the light brings us hope. After sitting in the dark of Advent, the dark of winter, the dark of the pain in our lives, Christ is the light which no darkness can overcome. Isaiah 42 gives us the themes of creator, covenant, and justice.

What a wonderful opportunity to review that in the covenant of our baptism, we are expected to be people of justice, the justice described here, of compassion, dignity, and faithfulness. Justice now often means "revenge." In the Old Testament, "covenant" describes a relationship of love by the Creator and our responsibility to care for the outcast, alien, widow, orphan, imprisoned, and oppressed.

Now the preacher must describe our responsibility as a community of justice. What are the small steps for your congregation, your prayer and faith community, as baptized ones, to bring that dignity and compassion God has promised to your hometown? What would high school students say? What would people with chronic illness say? What would their care-givers say? What would the abused say?

Acts 10 capsulizes the day's theme, emphasizing the Holy Spirit and healing by Jesus. We are anointed for ministry in our baptisms. Perhaps the question for the preacher is how to break open the concept of ministry in daily life for the congregation.

Mark 1 tells the story of John the Baptist and Jesus' baptism in the river. The phrase, "This is my beloved Son..." also occurs in the transfiguration text at the end of this season. They form a bracket. Luther has asked us to be "little Christs" to one another. What would it mean to be "little John the Baptists"? What would it mean to witness to the Christ, as one who is counter-cultural? Isn't that exactly what Christians are? Counter-cultural? Do we believe that God treasures us as well? Or are we ashamed? Can God forgive that shame and set us free to a hopeful future? SMK

Second Sunday after the Epiphany
January 16, 1994

Psalm 67
1 Samuel 3:1-10
1 Corinthians 6:12-20
John 1:43-51

FIRST READING

The texts for this Sunday continue the themes of the epiphany of God, the manifestations of the hidden God in the transformative call of God to those who would follow with integrity. The psalmist sets the theme: that God might be gracious, bless and manifest God's face upon us so that God's way might be known upon the earth, a saving power among all nations. As the chosen community is illuminated by God's act of grace and blessing, the nations of the earth will be gladdened, guided, and responsive with praise and reverence. Whatever compromises the integrity or clarity of this manifestation of God within the community must not be permitted, so that God's glory might become manifest in those whom God has chosen.

The call of Samuel is set in contrast to God's judgment upon the sons of Eli who had violated the integrity of the priestly office to which they would otherwise become heirs. Hannah, Samuel's mother, in a narrative reminiscent of Sarah's experience, dedicates her first-born son to God in the service of Eli. In a day when visions were not widespread, when the Word of God was rare, when even Eli's vision was dimming, Samuel is stirred from his rest by God's calling of his name. Having repeatedly mistaken the voice of the call for Eli's, Samuel finally acknowledges it as God's voice and responds, "Speak, for your servant is listening." It is noteworthy that Samuel's identity is established by his mother's song of thanksgiving (2:1-10) in parallel images with the themes of Mary's Magnificat (Lk 1:46-55). These mothers' prayers not only glorify God for the gracious epiphany of God in their pregnancy, they also mark the subsequent ministries of their sons.

Paul's Corinthian letter addresses situations in that congregation which threaten to compromise the integrity of Christ. As God's temple, the people in whom God's spirit dwells, the community is servant of Christ and steward of God's mysteries. Stewards must be found trustworthy. Those ethical violations which Paul cites in chapters 5 through 8 compromise the stewardship of God's epiphany among God's chosen people. Food which is sacrificed to idols must not be eaten by Christians, nor may Christians engage in prostitution or other fornications. Any such activity defiles the body, both of the person and of the community, thereby violating the Holy Spirit which occupies that body. God's purpose is that the body of God's chosen people be an agent of God's glory.

John's narrative of Jesus' establishment of his community of disciples focuses on the person of Nathaniel. Having called Andrew, Peter, and (in the text which is ours for today) Philip, the jaded Nathaniel is recognized by Christ as truly an Israelite, a person in whom there is no deceit (one in whom there is nothing false). Because of Jesus' prescience of Nathaniel, Nathaniel confesses him as the Son of God, the King of Israel. But Jesus turns this confession into a promise of the eschatological realm of heaven's apocalyptic Son of Man. ELO

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

"Call" is the theme for today. The call of Samuel and the calling of Jesus' disciples all focus the light on our calls. Yes, we are called through our baptism, but few of us today have felt so direct and tangible a call as Samuel or the disciples.

This could be a day to talk about discernment. How do we as a community or disciple discern God's call? The Samuel reading provides a wonderful story for the preacher to use, identifying the components of Samuel's experience and comparing them to ours. Eager to respond, Samuel was confused by Eli's crankiness but later with Eli's coaching responded, "Speak Lord, for your servant hears."

Samuel and Eli were also in the temple. Discernment occurs within a certain structure, of community, prayer, and study. Discernment oc-

curs when we as disciples feel our way along in the context of baptism, communion, prayer, and hearing the Word. Discernment is a step-by-step process of unfolding. Discernment for the individual can be different than the community's discernment. As disciples we follow Christ. As disciples we want to follow carefully, we want to discern.

Samuel's response, "Speak, lord, your servant hears," is remarkable for its openness. It can be our prayer. And it can shape us to be alert, observant disciples. Is God interrupting our sleep? Are we in the temple? Do we know the Lord, that is, can we know the Lord through the disciplines of worship, prayer, receiving the sacraments, and studying the Word? Do we listen? Does God need to surprise us to get our attention? Where does God want to shine light in our lives?

The Corinthians reading emphasizes how we are called, body and mind, to follow Jesus Christ, and how as disciples we behave a certain way, not as the Corinthians did! This is a knotty text. Perhaps it is an opportunity for the preacher to talk about sexuality from the pulpit, how God has given us a powerful gift of unity that can also powerfully destroy.

The reading from John assures us that Jesus, in calling his disciples, even called outspoken ones! Guile is an old-fashioned word meaning deceit or cunning. For Jesus to say that Nathaniel was an Israelite with no guile, meant that Nathaniel was absolutely direct! These disciples, that we all know, can be a burden and a blessing. Sometimes we nice disciples need help in being honest. Sometimes we wince with the shock of the candor. Jesus calls all sorts of disciples, even ones we might not, because we all have ministry in God's reign. The crucial factor is not whether we are warm and cozy together, but that we unite around the Word and sacraments to follow Jesus. SMK

Third Sunday after the Epiphany
January 23, 1994

Psalm 62:6-14
Jonah 3:1-5, 10
1 Corinthians 7:29-31
Mark 1:14-20

FIRST READING

The Galilean ministry of Jesus begins with his bold announcement, "The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." The good news of Jesus Christ (1:1) is now self-proclaimed. Although it is the good news of God, it has become the kerygma of the Christ. The kairos of God has become completed, finished, filled up. Like a pregnancy, the kairos moment marks both the deliverance of that for which the body has awaited and the promised life that now emerges; Jesus announces the completion of God which is the beginning of the realm of God. At the moment of the kerygma of Christ, protology and eschatology converge; Jesus epitomizes all that has gone before and all that is yet to come; history and promise meet at the single apex of this moment of the immediacy of the realm of God.

In Mark's treatment of the calling of Jesus' disciple community, there is no description of a disciple's precondition of confession or character (as in John's narrative of last week's lesson); there is simply a seemingly random imperative addressed to Simon, Andrew, James, and John: "Follow me!" Immediately (a word which is repeatedly interjected into the narrative of Jesus' fast-paced movement throughout Mark's Gospel) the disciples follow. It would seem that the mention of Simon and Andrew as fishermen and James and John as sons of Zebedee is made only to emphasize their immediate departure from occupation and family. Furthermore, it would appear that Mark's initial example of Jesus' kerygmatic command to "repent and believe in the good news" is fulfilled in the immediacy of the disciples' response to his call. Repentance is not

here conceived as a cognitive process of life's amendment, nor is faith based on a discernment of the truth; both are immediate and irresistible impulses that are prompted by the immediacy of the realm of God in the kerygma of the Christ.

The irresistibility of God's call is reinforced by the text from Jonah. Jonah's previous attempt to thwart God's call proves futile as Jonah is spewed upon the dry land. So Jonah obeys, proclaims God's message to Nineveh, and the people believe God through Jonah's words. The text closes with an interesting irony: the human being is not free in the face of God's decisive call, but God remains free for a change of mind. An interesting correlation between Jonah and the disciples of Jesus is that, while they remain uncomprehending of God's purposes, arrogant and judgmental in their perceptions of others, they are nonetheless chosen agents of God's deliverance.

Paul's summary to his instructions regarding whether to marry, whether to seek circumcision, whether to emancipate from slavery, is that the Christian community lives in the eschatological moment of immediacy. The kairos of God has arrived; decisions regarding the future are of little consequence in the light of the impact of the promised new age. The community of the new age cannot define itself by what has been or by what it may yet attain. Its only definition comes from that immediacy of the realm of God which has been established in the kerygma of the good news. ELO

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

Today's theme is the fullness of God's time and it is time for us to respond. The epiphany light tells us what time it is.

The Jonah reading neatly bypasses the two chapters of Jonah's attempted escape from God's call to go to Nineveh and preach repentance. We pick up the story at Jonah's performance, quite effectively, to preach to this enormous city and call them to repentance, to literally "turn around," turn back to their relationship with God. God in turn turns back to them. The statement of God changing God's mind has tantalized many. What do you think is the main point in this story? That God calls prophets to call us back into right relationship with God? That prophets burn with God's word and must speak? That all prophets and disciples are not happy ones?

The Corinthians text again emphasizes the fullness of time: God's reign is close at hand, and we must be prepared.

The Mark reading continues the calling of more disciples, prefaced with the words that Jesus was preaching the gospel and announcing that the dominion of God was close at hand.

Look back at the sequence of themes so far to gain momentum for this sermon. We have gone from the magi and the star far off on the horizon to Jesus' baptism and the beginning of his ministry, to the theme of call and discernment. Today we continue the call theme and realize that the call of God is urgent. The epiphany light shows us what time it is. All those depressing statistics about teenage pregnancy and abortion, homelessness, people with AIDS, hunger, harassment, divorce, poverty, abuse, and addiction tell us what time it is too. Now the epiphany light is beginning to show us things about ourselves and our world we would rather deny. And that is God's urgency, that we have compassion for those broken in spirit by the above list, and ones you can add as well.

How do faithful disciples respond to Nineveh-sized wounds? We commit ourselves to the long term, and we take one step at a time. For some parishes, child care is the obvious choice, for other parishes it is prison ministry. For all of us, we must listen first, and learn the difference between "fixing"—which won't last—and "transformation" through God, which will. SMK

Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany
January 30, 1994

Psalm 1
Deuteronomy 18:15-20
1 Corinthians 8:1-13
Mark 1:21-28

FIRST READING

The Old Testament lesson for this Sunday is the concluding description of the Deuteronomist regarding the integrity of the levitical priest. The priest shall have no inherited proprietary stature, the priest shall not take the choice cuts of the sacrifices offered to the Lord, nor shall the priest engage in superstitious practices of divination. These are practices that are common among those nations who are not called by the Lord, abhorrent in God's sight, and they constitute the reason those nations will be destroyed. But a new prophet will arise after the image of Moses himself, one whose integrity to the word validates the word. Using the image of the psalmist, the legitimate priest of God is one whose life is so rooted in the law of God (the Torah) that the verdancy and the fruit of the priest evidences the nurture God alone provides.

The test of the true prophet is that the prophecy will become recognized as God's purpose (Jeremiah 28). The persons who presume to know God's law will bear fruit. God's word will become epiphanically evident in the lives of those who legitimately bear it. Paul's focus in 1 Corinthians is that the bearer of the Word must constantly gauge the effect the bearer has on even the weakest of those who observe the behavior of the bearer. If the faith of those who are weak is jeopardized by the behaviors of those who claim the knowledge (discernment) of God, the so-called wise have become foolish and have sinned against Christ. It's easy to moralize this counsel, to say that Christian behavior must be blameless and beyond reproach, that Christian leaders should lead God's people by their example "in faithful service and holy living." But the issue of the text is not ethics as much as it is evangelism: the bearer of the epiphany of the good news must not compromise that good news in a life which invalidates its message.

The initial public appearance of Jesus in Mark's Gospel, in the synagogue at Capernaum, presents the apparent authority of Jesus' teaching as self-validating. The president of the synagogue would be validated by the community itself, the scribe would be validated by a demonstrated textual acumen, but Jesus would be validated by a new teaching, bearing both the acclaim of the people and the authenticity of the teaching. Yet Mark injects an exorcism into the issue of authority to suggest that the self-validating authority of Jesus is derived from his power in a cosmic drama. The people of the synagogue recognize the legitimacy and authority of Jesus, but not his identity. Jesus commands the unclean spirits to be silent about his identity as the Holy One of God, to observe the Markan messianic secret until it is revealed by God. The appearance of God in Jesus as God's messianic agent and the recognition of this moment are to be subtly derived from his new teaching about the fulfillment of time and the immediacy of the realm of God.
ELO

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

The theme for today is the ministry and authority of the prophet. The epiphany light shows us the power of the word of God.

The Deuteronomy lesson describes the role of the prophet, which is to speak God's word. Heschel describes the prophets as burning with God's word. They must speak it. And Moses' words here underscore this. "I will put my words in his mouth, to speak all that I command." Severe punishment is due prophets who lie.

The Corinthian lesson is our old friend, where Paul teaches us to care for the weak in our communities by acting in ways which do not cause others to stumble. He uses the arena of food offered for sacrifice to other gods in Corinth and then sold in the market. For some this would be tainted meat, for others it would not be. Paul is most concerned about building up the body of Christ, so he implores us to act in a way most helpful to others. Our actions count.

The Mark passage shows Jesus engaged in his ministry, particularly teaching and exorcising. Jesus is called one who teaches with authority. Now there is a concept to preach about: authority, and particularly authority that a disciple can trust! We have so many idols in our world that we invest with authority: appearance, cars, restaurants, football games, money, fat-free diets, technology, quality time. We follow the rules to achieve the promised reward. Until we discover that the promised reward isn't fulfilling, we will depend on that authority for meaning in our lives. And when we are vulnerable, we hold even more tightly to the hope that the external authority is correct. For example, peers are usually thought to be much wiser than parents to junior high school students. We all go through that in our lives many times.

How can we as disciples of Christ trust his authority in our ministry? How do we respond to Christ's confrontation with God's word? Is he telling the truth?

The truth of Jesus is a paschal truth. His journey led him to Jerusalem, the cross and the resurrection. By our baptism, our participation in the Eucharist, our prayer and listening to the Word, we are part of that same paschal truth. God resurrects meaning and life from our deaths. That is a hard truth—especially when we know the agony of Good Friday.

Perhaps the exorcism of Jesus now is the exorcism of false meaning and false authority in our culture. He opens our eyes to the truth. SMK

Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany
February 6, 1994

Psalm 147:1-13
Job 7:1-7
1 Corinthians 9:16-23
Mark 1:29-39

FIRST READING

Eliphaz the Temanite responds to the anguish of Job with the hesitation that his words might offend Job. For he attributes Job's suffering to the judgment of God for Job's sins, and he counsels Job to delight in God's reproof, to be assured by the promises of God's deliverance. His counsel throws Job into even deeper despair. The emptiness, the misery, the unremitting suffering of this condition will not be trivialized by simplistic formulas of guilt and deliverance. There is an ontic reality to the human condition that must be acknowledged. One cannot delight in the ontic anguish of one's plight; one cannot hope when one is aware of the brevity of life and the finality of death. Is there no meaning to suffering?

The psalmist responds with words not unlike those of Eliphaz. God's graciousness is established in the course of creation itself: gathering the clouds to nurture the earth, to make the grass grow, the animals to be fed. God's delight is in those who fear God, who hope in the steadfast love of God. The outcasts will be gathered, the brokenhearted will be healed, the downtrodden will be lifted up.

Yet Mark would have the community of the new age know that Job was right in his perception of the cosmic, ontic nature of the human condition, but wrong in his despair. The psalmist has captured the cosmic evidences of God's graciousness but neglected the powers which hold the cosmos captive. Mark acknowledges both the intractable powers which hold human life in suffering and bondage and the kerygma that provides the immediacy of hope. Jesus Christ proclaims a message about the nearness of the realm of God and casts out demons of illness (Peter's mother-in-law's fever). The proclamation and the exor-

cism are not, however, separate activities. Both the proclamation and the exorcism bring the reign of God into human experience.

Paul's Corinthian text adds yet another dimension to Mark's understanding of the kerygma. Granted, the kerygma heals the sick, frees the slave, liberates those who live under the law, wins those who live outside the law, and gains those who are weak. But one cannot proclaim the gospel from a posture of health, freedom, and victory. One must, for evangelical reasons, participate in the human condition in order to engage its powers. This is a matter of obligation for the sake of the gospel, not arrogance. One engages in the old order, bearing fully the marks and pains of the old order, for the sake of the gospel itself. One's free participation in human suffering is thus a manifestation of the immediacy of God. The fever of Peter's mother-in-law, those who were sick or possessed with demons, the deserted place where Jesus is found resolving to go on to the neighboring towns—all are evangelical opportunities, occasions for the kerygma. ELO

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

The theme for today is healing. The epiphany light illuminates our despair. (The readings for Epiphany 6, 7, and 8, not used this year, are all about healing. This is a fundamental aspect of Jesus' ministry.)

Job's words today are a graphic description of despair. Alone, abandoned, sick, weary, unable to rest, and with no hope, he says, "my eye will never see good again." Despair requires hope, but not in the form of a band-aid or a Bible verse prayer. Despair requires acknowledgment. Despair requires compassion. Hope dawns for people caught in despair when they see they are not alone. I would urge the preacher to ask advice from those in the congregation who are shut in, chronically ill, or grieving. They can give you words about despair, and they can give you words about what it would mean to be healed.

To be healed, as described in Mark's Gospel, does not mean we go back to being exactly like we were before we were ill. To be healed means that health returns, yes, but much more. It means we are changed, and have internalized our new understandings, even blessings.

For example, coronary care units in this country all have people with "hot hearts," the medical staff's shorthand for people whose hearts are on the brink of suffering a crisis, or those who have been ill for some time and are desperate for a transplant. When those people have made the long journey through recovery, they are changed. Their foundations were shaken when their heart wasn't working as they expected. They were helpless, near death, and endured surgery and physical healing. Then came diets, exercise, and finally, hopeful vigor. They know about long nights. Their loved ones know about the see-saw of adjusting to an ill, cranky, dependent, angry, independent, scared loved one.

Speak with your nurses, physicians, and therapists about healing. Ask them about how their faith contributes to their vocations. Those I have spoken with talk about how essential touching is. Jesus touched and healed many. Jesus sounds exhausted with his healing. We can be, too.

And hidden in the Mark lesson is the rhythm of solitude with ministry. Jesus was with the crowds; he also was alone to pray. If we are to heal, if we are to help others heal, if we are ready to face the despair that the epiphany star illuminates, then we must be deeply rooted in Jesus, and God, so that we can withstand the strain. SMK

The Transfiguration of Our Lord February 13, 1994

Psalm 50:1-6
2 Kings 2:1-12a
2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2
Mark 9:2-9

FIRST READING

The Transfiguration of Our Lord is a much neglected Christian festival. In primitive Christianity, it was probably more widely celebrated; at

least the Gospels' narratives of the transfiguration were more frequently cited, especially in material that spoke of the image of the Christian person or the Christian community in the world. In that material, the transfiguration was presented as prototype of what God is accomplishing in and through the Christian person and community. Just as Jesus appeared transfigured in his earthly flesh, accompanied by the ancient origins out of which he was revealed as God's chosen one, so also the Christian is constantly engaged in the same transfigurative work of God. Parallels were often drawn to the baptism of Jesus, at which moment, in Mark's Gospel, the voice from God declares, "You are my Son, the Beloved..." and to the transfiguration, at which moment the voice of God introduces Christ with "This is my Son, the Beloved...." The baptism of the Christian is a transformative declaration of the identity of the person. The transfiguration of the Christian is likewise a transformative presentation of that person to the world.

Mark's Gospel appears to be structurally designed to reintroduce the Christ at the transfiguration. Once Peter's confession (formerly only the confession of the demonic powers) takes place (8:29), Jesus introduces the predictions of his imminent suffering, death, and resurrection, together with his command that those who follow him will likewise take up a cross (not just "follow me" as in the calling of the disciples which follows his baptism, but *take up the cross* and follow). The transfiguration follows with a subsequent course set towards the crucifixion.

Paul certainly has this meaning of the transfiguration in mind when he speaks of "all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror... being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another." The Odes of Solomon develop this image: "Behold, the Lord is our mirror. Open your eyes and see them in him, and learn the manner of your own face" (Ode 13). The transfiguration is a vision of the Christ in which we behold who we really are. It is a moment in which our lives assume a christological definition. This is not only the turning point of Mark's Gospel, it is the appropriate conclusion to the season of Epiphany: God is manifest in the people of God. ELO

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

My senior year in seminary we discovered that all the students in our Luther Seminar were preaching the coming Sunday on these texts. Dr. Bob Goeser put aside his prepared lecture and we spent three hours working through these texts. We came in confused, and we left with insight!

Jesus is transfigured, gloriously, on the mountain top. So were the disciples, and so, finally, are we.

This vision allows us to begin the Lenten part of our journey with the experience of God's voice announcing that Jesus is God's beloved.

The transfiguration, the illumination of Jesus on the mountain top, where the children of Israel had sought God before, profoundly affected—transfigured—the disciples. While we as preachers wrestle with this mystical text and try to domesticate it for congregational consumption, the power in the text is that this vision, this light, this star that was afar off now encompassing Jesus, maybe even coming from him, shows us his glory before we experience his cross.

This is Lutheran bedrock. Yes, we know the glory of Christ, and we know that his glory is at the cross, the place of death and resurrection. Jesus Christ is not only a God of glory as so many would want to believe. Jesus Christ knows the prophet's ache to speak God's word. He knows the despair of those who are sick. He knows about community, ministry, discipleship, and the hard places in each of those lives.

He calls us to the mount of transfiguration so that in our discipleship we might be assured that he is God's beloved, as we walk now day to day and seek his presence in our broken world. The mount of transfiguration helps us to see differently.

The economy of God's reign is often upside down to the world's economy of profit. God delights in life, forgiveness, relationship, servanthood, and prayer. The world delights in fame, image, and greed. As disciples we see God in our daily world, if only we would look. SMK

A Fine and Fitting Ending: The Concluding Event of LSTC's 25th Anniversary Year

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

The program cover by Siegfried Reinhardt depicted the old rugged cross, complete with nails and crown of thorns. But piercing out in each direction were spike-like rays from the cross that sent a vast variety of musical notes and symbols tumbling over the page. It was the right visual depiction for the spirited concert that was to come. In the Director's Notes on the back of the program, Mark Bangert explained that in the planning process for the 25th Anniversary it was decided that one worthy musical way of marking this year would be to frame the year with two settings of the *Te Deum*. In the Spring of 1992, at the start of the Anniversary season, the LSTC Chorus presented the *Dettingen Te Deum* of George Frederick Handel. The second *Te Deum*, at the end of the Anniversary period "seemed to call," writes Professor Bangert, "for a contemporary work which expresses the multicultural mission of the seminary."

In between the two *Te Deums* were a variety of celebrative events centering on the February Professional Leadership Conference. Gunnar Staalsett of the Lutheran World Federation preached at a Festival Eucharist; members of the LSTC faculty reflected on how the disciplines of theology study have changed and are changing; and twelve seminaries of the Association of Chicago Theological Schools (ACTS) gathered in convocation to jointly celebrate the 25th Anniversaries of LSTC and the Catholic Theological Union, with George Lindbeck and Richard McBrien reflecting on theological education in the 21st century.

Now, at the end, there was one more time to shout out "*Te Deum Laudamus*, We praise you God!" Again, Professor Bangert writes, "With commission resources from Pilgrim Benefaction Fund, a search for a composer ended happily with Daniel Kallman, whose creation far exceeds the hopes and dreams which have generated this presentation." Composer Kallman, of Northfield, Minnesota, follows in his introductory notes by saying, ". . . I was immediately excited and challenged to compose a work which would encompass a variety of

musical styles. The centuries-old Latin hymn of praise provides an ideal opportunity to explore some of the many different ways we've been given to praise God."

And so it did. This Anniversary *Te Deum* mixed and matched current choral writing with Hispanic melodies and Gospel hymns, all placed within an orchestral framework of jazz transitions from one section of the classic *Te Deum* to the next. The congregation was rapt in close attention and anticipation to hear how each new part of this great hymn of praise would be rendered. Then the last signal was given, the congregation stood and together with choirs, orchestra, and organ, sang confidently:

Come, Lord, Your people save,
Help us to know your grace amazing,
And bring us with your saints
to glory everlasting.
And now we sing your praise
to tell the peace of Jesus' story,
And with loud voices raise
the endless wonders of your glory.

The Anniversary *Te Deum* captured in a remarkable way for us the joy, variety and fullness of the church which we confess as one, holy, catholic, and apostolic throughout the world. It was a fine and fitting anniversary ending for a seminary dedication to this vision of the church.

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