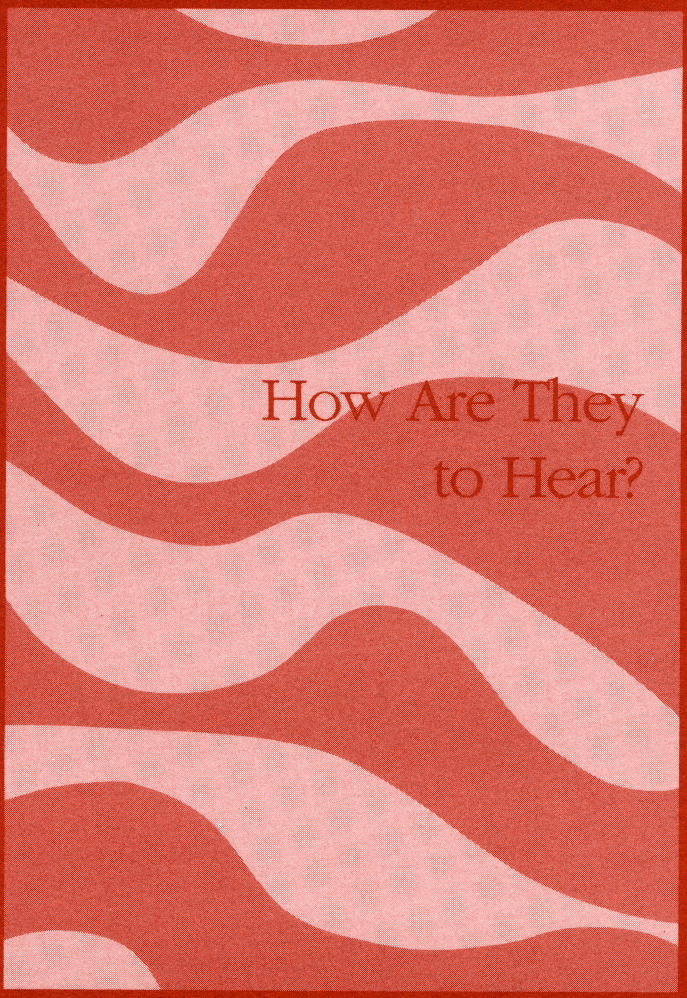
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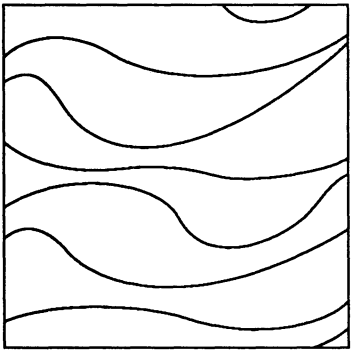
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Series A
Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost—Thanksgiving Day

How Are They to Hear?

Despite the importance of pastoral care, liturgy, and social justice, we are known finally as preachers, and with good reason. For 12-20 minutes on a Sunday morning we have the undivided attention of the faithful and the seekers, and we are supported by music, stained glass windows, hymns, and prayers. How does *the* story interpret their story? What does it mean that God says Yes and not No? In a confusing, perplexing, sometimes terrifying world, eyes and ears turn to us.

Narrative preaching, liturgical preaching, doctrinal preaching, and evangelistic preaching all have their place. But our main focus in this issue is on preaching Christ through the Old Testament. A couple years ago, Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary had a convocation on this theme. The results lie just beyond this editorial.

Patrick D. Miller, Jr. sees the Old Testament as the ground for Christian preaching and teaching. The OT shows that the work and purpose of God encompasses all of time and space, and it is the necessary context for our Christology. Our ancient sisters and brothers did not see in this world an end to suffering, but they knew that God is against it, is fully present in our fear and suffering, and is at work to overcome it. Psalm 19 hails the law, which convicts us of sin (as Lutherans insist) and guides us to a righteous life (as the Reformed contend). Jesus is God's identification with humankind in its glory and in all its suffering and tragedy (cf. Psalm 8). Perhaps the motif of the divine warrior cannot be preached, but it must be taught. After all, God is the creator and guarantor of order and governance. He governs the world mightily, in behalf of just rule.

Thomas E. Ridenhour detects four attitudes toward the Old Testament in the church. For some it is unfit to be used as Christian scripture while others are uncomfortable with the discontinuities

between the testaments. Still others view it as part of the historical procession from Israel to Christ. Some see in it the holy and infallible scripture. Five positive approaches to the Old Testament are also common: christological, typological, dialectical, existentialist, and promise-fulfillment oriented approaches. We need to explore a promise-fulfillment-promise schema. The New Testament fulfills the Old, but it adds an expectation. We await the coming of our God and Savior when the rule of God will be established in all its fullness. As we bring the three circles of reality together—OT, NT, our world—we begin to hear a word of God that can become a lively word to proclaim to people today.

John Nordin reflects on Psalm 8 and thinks of the infinity of the world, the smallness of humans, and the infinite size of the shadow cast by a single human being. We are free to exercise power and constrained to do so, mindful that all we own has been given to us by God so that we might rule as God would. Amid all this vast universe and the amazing power given to humans, God reaches out to the weakest of humans to display God's own power. A meditation on this psalm should lead us to praise God not just for the benefits of nature, but for the creation is all its complexity, beauty, and wonder. Psalm 8 can move us to see the awful power God has delegated to us, and it can inspire us to use this power as God intended.

Phyllis Anderson preached at the PLTS conference during Easter week on Ecclesiastes 11:3-6. The ancient "preacher" did not raise unrealistic expectations in a world that had a growing level of cynicism. Despite all appearances to the contrary, the ancient preacher knew and the modern preacher proclaims that God is reweaving the web of life. Our work is part of the work God is accomplishing in the universe—secretly, quietly, and surely. So we do all we can, not knowing finally whether any of it is the right thing. The outcome of our activity is finally not in our control. It is the trustworthy word from the outside, the word that brings Life at Easter, that makes life bearable and livable.

Thomas W. Strieter moves on to another theme and seeks to spell out a specifically Lutheran method of interpreting scripture and to demonstrate how that method can inform our understanding of the gospel

in relation to homosexuality and our ministry to gays and lesbians. His article creates a dialogue between scripture, tradition, our experience, and the insight of the sciences. After reviewing the biblical passages often invoked in this discussion, the author turns to Luther, for whom the message of forgiveness in Christ was what made the Bible the Word of God. Luther insisted that to hold Moses' law as a universally valid divine command undermines the gospel of Christ. He urges the church to make an about-face and welcome lesbian and gay sisters and brothers as fellow human beings created in the image of God and members with all of us in the body of Christ.

Bradley Hanson suggests that Lutherans do not teach much about prayer because they do not understand it. Prayer is speaking to and listening to God; it requires sensitivity to the presence of God and a vision of the corporate dimension of our relationship to God. Lutherans have sometimes prayed poorly because they worried about works righteousness or feared the mystics. Prayer is fundamentally God speaking to us and we responding with our own words. Doing theology is not as important as singing God's praises, meditating on the works of God, proclaiming those works, and caring for the needy. We should reorder our priorities so that training in prayer and other first order activities of faith receive the appropriate resources.

Prayer, meditation, and trial make one a good theologian—and a great preacher. Prayer and meditation are at once gifts of God and spiritual disciplines to which we need to commit ourselves. Trials will come all by themselves if we live long enough. The pity is that we often waste our trials in self pity and ego-centered pain. But if we make our trials occasions for prayer, for meditation on the possibilities and tragedies of God's world, for renewed hope that promise leads to fulfillment and more promise, and for connecting Life with our life, then our preaching will be 12-20 magical minutes that will enable the people to hear—even from the Old Testament.

Ralph W. Klein
Editor

The Old Testament and Christian Faith

Patrick D. Miller, Jr.
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What to do with the Old Testament is a question that the church has been wrestling with for a long time, indeed from the very beginning, if the Book of Acts is a reliable indicator. No teacher of the Old Testament could deny that the question continues in lively fashion and often receives a response of perplexity or a functional dismissal of the Old Testament as the powerful word of God for Christian faith. What is clear from those earliest accounts, however, is that while the early church struggled with, for example, how to relate the laws of the Old Testament to Christian life, they had no question that what we call the Old Testament was indeed scripture and the key to understanding the meaning and significance of the Christ event. Today we are less sure about that and so less certain about how the Old Testament grounds Christian faith. It is that question I wish to address, first in a broader way to think about the Old Testament as the ground of Christian theology, and then to speak somewhat more specifically about the Old Testament as the ground of Christian preaching and teaching.

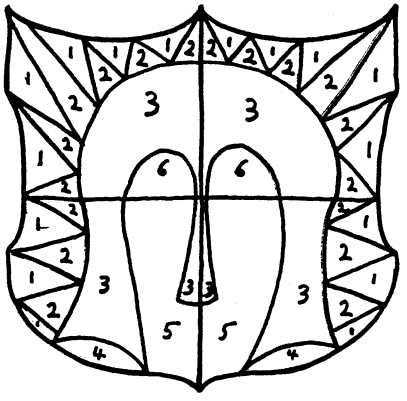
The Old Testament as the ground of Christian theology

Let me make two claims at this level.

1. In the Old Testament, Christian theology finds that its primary subject matter is God and that the work and purpose of God encompasses all of time and space and is rooted in but not confined to the realities and contingencies of human life in this world. The Old Testament as the story of God deals with family history and family stories, with tribal history, monarchical regimes, and court intrigue. Its narratives concern minority groups, oppressed peoples, and survival communities. It is more concerned with how to make it in this world than with how to make it to the next one. Its laws have to do with community governance, fences between neighbors, and environmental protection in the midst of war. The God to whom the Old Testament bears witness has to do with the religions of the world and the outer limits of the cosmos. Israel knows of other redemptive stories of this God than its own. The Old Testament

includes within the circle of faith those who trust in God and obey without knowing anything much about God (Qohelet).

The strangeness and distance of these Scriptures can not conceal the way in which they do in fact deal with and in this world in which we live, where nations are at war,



where tribalism leads to destruction of neighbors, where human beings experience the deepest pain and cry for help not knowing whether their cry will ever be heard, where the life and death of families and nations are the context in which the providence of God is wrought out, where goodness and blessing are God's intention for all of humankind. Both body and soul are objects of concern for the God of Israel. There may be a lot of angels around in the Old Testament, but there is an earthiness to it that always seems to resonate with the earthiness of this dust and clay that comprise our being. When the Old Testament dares to say that God is with us and God will help us, it does so clearly aware of all there is in human life that calls that into question. Indeed all the questions you can think to ask in doubt or pain have come from the lips of ancient Israel. And what the Old Testament says is that whatever they are or were, whatever human experience they attest to, their end is not nihilistic, but doxological.

The Psalter is a particular testimony to what I am suggesting here. In its introduction in the first and second psalms, the reader is told that these prayers of plea and praise will deal with the human ways of individuals in the paths of right and wrong, living in a world where the wicked are surely present but will not endure. We are also told that these psalms have to do with the conflicts of people and nations, with the political governance of human societies, with justice and righteousness as the responsibility of human rulers. And so it turns out to be in the Psalter. The scornful and arrogant and wicked roam through these prayers, and the pain and prayer of the suffering victims are everywhere apparent. The sound of destroying armies and of those they have defeated is heard. God's righteous rule in behalf of the weak and the needy is declared. And in the end all of creation gives praise for the wonderful deeds of the one who hears the cries of suffering individuals and oppressed peoples and comes to deliver.

2. It is precisely at that point that I would make my second claim about the Old Testament as the ground of Christian theology: The Old Testament is the necessary context and primary interpretive clue for our Christology. It is the Old Testament that gives us the definition and understanding of the gospel, that piece of good news in a fallen world. When those in distress and suffering, in sickness or under oppression cried out in their fear and pain to God, time and again they received the word of assurance, the oracle of salvation: You do not have to be afraid; for I am with you, I will help you and deliver you. The fathers and mothers of Israel heard that word in their

moments of fear. Oppressed Hebrew slaves heard it and were delivered by the God whose enigmatic and mysterious name *ehyeh* is given only one clear definition in the revelation of the name to Moses: *ehyeh immak*, "I am with you," "I will be with you." In their conflicts in the settlement of the land, when overwhelmed by more powerful forces, the Israelites heard this word of assurance. A beleaguered Jeremiah, whose pain was unceasing (Jer 15:18) cried out to God and was given the divine assurance that "they shall not prevail over you, for I am with you, to save you and deliver you" (Jer 15:20). Weary and despairing exiles heard the Lord's assuring and saving word afresh in Babylon: Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be afraid, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you" (Isa 41:10).

The New Testament begins with the birth of a baby whose coming is announced with the assuring word to the poor of the earth (shepherds), "Do not be afraid, for see I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people. To you is born this day... a Savior" (Lk 2:10-11). It is no happenstance that this child is given the two names Immanuel and Yeshua, "God is with us" and "He will save." For in those names one hears incarnate the primary reasons for not being afraid set forth in the divine oracle of salvation echoing through the story of Israel and the pages of the Old Testament: I am with you. I will deliver you. The name the child bears is the name that God bears and manifests. Jesus is who God has always been. Jesus does what God has always done. We learn no new thing about the way God is in the New Testament, only— and this is everything— the identity of the one through whom God's companioning, assuring, and delivering presence is manifest.

And we learn something of the depths to which the God of the universe will go to be present with and redeem the pain and hurt and sin of the world. In the passion narratives of the Gospels, the psalms (especially Psalm 22) are offered to the reader as the chief interpretive clue for understanding the meaning of the suffering and death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. As this psalm is a representative prayer of those who suffer and cry out to God in their pain and hurt, Jesus' appropriation of the psalm as his own and the New Testament affirmation that this psalm is about Jesus means that in his praying it, he identified with all human beings who go through suffering of this sort and in their trust and in their despair cry out to God for help. The incarnation is a declaration of God's oneness with us and our condition. But the full reality of that is not completely understood until we see the dying Jesus and hear his terrible roaring cry of complaint and trust that is at the heart of the Old Testament prayers for help, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" To view the incarnation and death of Jesus through the prism of this psalm is to know that Jesus in his death became one with all those innocent/righteous/faithful sufferers who have experienced the pain of human existence, the terrible absence and silence of God, oppression, torment, and reproach. In his death on the cross, the crucified God took up all that suffering and became one with it. It is now in the very heart and being of God. The death of Jesus gives an unbelievable reality to the claim that God knows our suffering. That is, whoever experiences what this psalm speaks about knows now that the pain and hurt and Godforsakenness of which it speaks are a reality that is known also to God.

At least one fundamental meaning of the death and resurrection of Jesus, therefore, and one that is too often overlooked because of our failure to take seriously the way in which Psalm 22 is meant to shape

our understanding of this event, is that that death and resurrection are God's way of dealing with and overcoming human suffering. No more than we can explain atonement can we understand from human eyes how this is so. But the Gospel writers saw Jesus as taking up the lament of those who suffer and entering into that suffering. Psalm 22 lets us know that Jesus Christ died for human hurt as well as human sin. The resurrection is God's response to the cry of the sufferer, the vindication of life over death, the demonstration of God's presence in suffering and God's power over it. It is the final oracle of salvation *eph hapax*, once for all, the response of God to the fear of humanity. We do not see here an end to suffering, but we know that God is set over against it, fully present in our fear and suffering, and at work to overcome it.

The Old Testament as the ground of Christian preaching and teaching

Let me turn now to the more specific matter of the Old Testament as the ground of Christian preaching and teaching. Here I want to be more illustrative than comprehensive. The illustrations fall into two categories. The first has to do with the interaction between Old Testament and New Testament in the hearing and appropriation of Old Testament texts. That interaction is an important and often problematic issue in the church's preaching of the Old Testament. We are too often hung up on particular presuppositions that by their rigidity can stultify the dynamic of both the Old Testament and its proclamation.

At one extreme, there is the claim that the Old Testament can not be preached without explicit reference to the gospel and the New Testament, a claim that ignores the fact that the Old Testament is always being preached in the midst of a Christian community that lives under the lordship of Jesus Christ and hears every word in relation to that. In this case, the insistence on a kind of mechanical and necessary connection in preaching hides a subtle devaluing of the power of the Old Testament as *Christian* scripture. It is only with an explicit New Testament association that we can hear it as the word of life.

At the other extreme, there is the claim that the Old Testament needs to be heard in its own right without reference to the New Testament lest we misread it by imposing a New Testament framework upon it. Within this perspective one finds an implicit, if not often explicit, canonical dichotomy. It comes to obvious expression when we move to speak of this part of the canon as "Hebrew Scriptures" rather than the Old Testament. The unity of the scriptures as a single if diverse pointer to the redemptive purposes of God for human life and history is distorted and the intrinsic connection between the testaments is loosened. The widespread shift within the Christian community from "Old Testament" to "Hebrew Scriptures" is one with large theological implications that I believe have not been thought through sufficiently.

We tend to worship too easily at the shrine of our Reformation precursors, but there is in both Calvin and Luther a marvelous freedom in the preaching of the Old Testament that lets the resonances with the New Testament come forth but also assumes that that Old Testament word is itself always a Christian word. So as one reads Calvin's commentary on the psalms, some speak in a kind of straightforward or direct way to the community of faith while others point so insistently to the work of God in Jesus Christ that one cannot miss that interaction. It is just such freedom both to hear

Psalm 22 lets us know that Jesus Christ died for human hurt as well as human sin. The resurrection is God's response to the cry of the sufferer...

the resonances with the new and also not to insist upon them that belongs to good and authentic preaching of the Old Testament.

There is no set or fixed way in which the Old Testament word and text interact with the New. Systematizing that interaction in a single particular framework, such as typology or law and gospel or promise and fulfillment, simply ignores the vitality, diversity, and power of the conversation between the testaments and so produces a kind of interpretive reductionism that is inconsistent with the richness of the word of scripture. Let me illustrate some different ways that Old Testament texts resonate with the New.

Psalm 19 sets before us one of the clearest statements in scripture about the place of the law, the torah, the instruction of God for human life. As it speaks of the perfect law of the Lord, reviving the soul, of the clear commandment enlightening the eyes, of the upright precepts of the Lord rejoicing the heart, and of the ordinances of the Lord true and righteous altogether, the psalm testifies to the perfection and reliability of God's instruction—God's law—and the good it accomplishes. Thus one is presented with a very positive understanding of the value and benefits of the law, more desirable than gold, sweeter than honey. Psalm 19 goes on, however, to suggest that in the law one also finds warning, that it is capable of uncovering our sins, and that even with the law, there is need for God to help keep us from unwitting sins, from hidden faults, and the danger of being controlled and misled by the insolent or presumptuous who disdain the law of God. So the psalm ends in prayer both that God would help keep the one who prays from the errors and the temptations of others and would forgive and not hold against us the "unperceived guilt" (*tanakh*).

So the psalm joins with that large strain in the Old Testament that exalts the law and knows its benefits for directing and keeping life in obedience to God. At the same time, Psalm 19 signals the way in which Paul knew that "if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin" (Rom 7:7), that the law exposes our transgressions (Gal 3:19). But it remains in a lively tension with Paul who did not find in the law the enlivening power of which Psalm 19 speaks. Here the Old Testament makes a claim about God's instruction that is muffled in the New Testament but also anticipates what Paul saw so radically. Both the second convicting "use" of the law, so dear to Lutherans, and the third "guiding" use of the law, so dear to Calvinists, find a resonance with the nineteenth psalm.

In the Old Testament, one hears the anthropological question, What is a human being? most clearly put in the eighth psalm. Out of that psalm, Christian theology and preaching are able to develop a high anthropology that affirms the glory of human existence as given by God, the divine attention to the human creature, and the responsibility for the rule of the creation that is

placed in human hands. Not only does such an understanding set before us human beings a large moral responsibility, but it stands as a powerful alternative to other views of the nature of the human that one may find in the perspectives of a Freud, or a Darwin, or a Marx.[1] But that same fundamental question: "What are human beings that you regard them, or mortals that you think of them?" is raised in two other places in the Old Testament where it is answered quite differently, once in Psalm 144 where the answer is that we are like a breath, our days like a passing shadow, and once in Job 7:17 where Job regards the divine attention to human beings as not worth a bucket of warm spit, which is a rather free paraphrase of Job's response but I think catches his feelings. Such attention one does not need if this is where we end up.

Such radically different answers, each of which has its truthfulness evidenced in our human experience, may find their resolution, their non-contradictoriness in the claim of the letter to the Hebrews, as it interprets Psalm 8, that we do not see everything in subjection, but we do see Jesus, in whom our humanity is crowned with glory and honor but a glory and honor that is "because of the suffering of death" suffered in our behalf. The extent to which God is mindful of us and pays attention to us, as the psalmist says, is only fully and truly seen in the humanity that is manifest in Jesus Christ, who is God's identification with humankind in its glory and in all its suffering and tragedy.[2] At one and the same time the Old Testament makes a large contribution to Christian theology and confronts us with a large contradiction, one that is transformed into gospel by the New Testament.

It may be, however, that in some instances such resolution is not to be sought, that Old Testament and New Testament word, for example, may stand in a kind of enduring tension. I have suggested that is the case with the tension between Jesus' words to would-be disciples to let the dead bury the dead, that whoever puts hand to plow and looks back is not fit for the kingdom of God (Lk 9:60-61), and their very different Old Testament antecedent in Elijah's permission to Elisha to go back and say goodbye to his family before joining him as his disciple (I Kgs 19:19-21.

It is customary to see in the New Testament text a more radical call that supersedes the Old Testament word and in some sense nullifies the commandment to honor mother and father. I suggest, however, that the tension of the texts is one in which we live—and properly so. We are set as human beings in a complex network of human relationships that matter to us and for which we are responsible and should not treat lightly even when called to discipleship, as was Elisha. But the call of Christ also places upon us an *ultimate* claim within which all truly good, necessary, and penultimate claims are to be set. Those relationships that cannot be set aside lightly also cannot serve as barriers of resistance to doing God's will in the world, to living as citizens of a kingdom that is not the same as the present political order, to being members of a household and family that only begins with those nearest and dearest to us.[3] The New Testament does not fulfill or nullify, or supersede the Old Testament word.

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[1]See James L. Mays, "'What is Man...?' Reflections on Psalm 8," *From Faith to Faith*, ed. D. Hadidian (Pittsburgh: Pickwick Press, 1979).

[2]See Brevard Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970), 151-63. Cf. P.D. Miller, "The Glory of God and Human Glory," *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 8 (1987), 66-72.

[3]P.D. Miller, "When Christ Calls," *Princeton Seminary Bulletin*, 11 (1990),146.

It creates a tension that is reflected in our own experience.

My last two illustrations belong to a different category. They are not examples of Old Testament texts that interact in different ways with the New Testament in our preaching. On the contrary, they are examples from the Old Testament of the difficulties in preaching it that set before us necessary and important matters for *teaching*. I know of the difficulties here because both my examples are of Old Testament themes or texts that were the subject of failed sermons on my part. That, of course, does not mean that these would produce failed sermons by others. But I really do think there are some inherent problems in the material that are not easily handled in preaching.

In one case, now many years ago, having finished a dissertation on the divine warrior in ancient Israel, I chose to preach my sermon before presbytery to qualify for ordination on the topic "God the Warrior." You may not be surprised to hear that the presbytery found it utterly mystifying that I had chosen such a topic, and while what I preached was not wrong or bad, it missed the mark as an occasion of Christian proclamation. On a later occasion and to the small congregation I served in South Carolina, I preached a sermon on Psalm 82, that thoroughly mythological psalm set in the divine assembly and in which the God of Israel, Elohim, stands up in the court and condemns all the other gods to death for their failure to insure justice on the earth. A friend and fellow pastor was there and remarked to me afterwards that while that text is very interesting, the sermon seemed in effect to stay completely in heaven, in the world of the gods.

Presumably better sermons can be preached in each instance. But my point is to question whether either of these, God the warrior or Psalm 82, should be preached. The picture of God the warrior is so fundamentally at odds with our understanding of the gospel of God's redeeming love in Jesus Christ that it is exceedingly difficult to turn

The New Testament does not fulfill or nullify, or supersede the Old Testament word. It creates a tension that is reflected in our own experience.

that image into gospel. The 82nd psalm is so thoroughly a mythopoeic text, assuming the world of the gods as an operative image, that it is very difficult to translate the claims of the psalm into the language of proclamation. The setting is intimately what it is about. It resists demythologization. A sermon about the divine warrior or one about the assembly of the gods may be possible, but there are inherent obstacles to either one as the subject of preaching.

But that is not the last word about either of these matters. And here is the danger of our confining our thinking about the Old Testament to the preaching enterprise. For what is a difficulty for preaching becomes an opportunity for teaching. Both of these subjects, the imagery and theology of God as warrior and the condemnation of the gods of the nations by the Lord of Israel

because of their injustice, are central concerns of the Old Testament and important matters for Christian faith to deal with. Let me say briefly why that is so.

While the imagery of God as warrior has a problematic dimension of which all of us are aware, that image and the notion of God as judge, which is central to Psalm 82, together with the picture of God as king or monarch are not just interesting ways of imagining God. They are controlling symbols that ground the biblical claim for the sovereignty of God over the affairs of individuals and nations. That one whom we worship in the name of Jesus Christ is, as the Great King, *the creator and guarantor of order and governance* in the universe and as the divine warrior is also one whose *power* in and over the affairs of heaven and earth is able to *effect* that governance. What *Psalm 82* makes radically clear and unequivocal is that such power is in behalf of *just* rule, that the divine world, indeed the whole cosmos stands or falls over the maintenance of justice for the weak and poor of the earth. The claim to deity is in effect a claim that the universe has a moral character to it, that God is the righteous ground of history and its end. It is from the Old Testament that Christian faith comes to know that and — even more important — to depend upon it.[4]

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[4]P.D. Miller, "The Sovereignty of God," *The Hermeneutical Quest: Essays in Honor of James Luther Mays on his Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. D.G. Miller (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1986), 129-44.

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The Old Testament and Preaching

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Concord, North Carolina, was my home town. I was baptized, confirmed, and ordained in the building that houses St. James Lutheran Church. I used the *Common Service Book*, the *Service Book and Hymnal*, and now the *Lutheran Book of Worship*. In the *Common Service Book* there were no appointed lessons from the Old Testament in the lectionary. So the introduction of the *Service Book and Hymnal* produced at least one major change in my experience: we heard read almost every Sunday a text from the Old Testament. As I was growing up in St. James Church I can count on my fingers the number of sermons that I heard preached from Old Testament texts. Half or more of those sermons were preached by Dr. Harold Creager, Professor of Old Testament at the Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary, when he supplied periodically during pastoral vacancies. But even with the introduction of the *Service Book and Hymnal* and an explicit appointment of Old Testament lessons in the lectionary, there was not a significant expansion of the sermons preached from the Old Testament.

In 1969 I moved to Greensboro, North Carolina, to become pastor of the Lutheran Church of the Resurrection. There I became re-acquainted with a pastor friend of mine who was co-pastor at the First Lutheran Church in Greensboro. Paul Morgan unabashedly told me that whenever they had Holy Communion or needed to shorten the liturgy, the first item that was dropped or cut out was the reading of the first lesson (the Old Testament lesson appointed for the day). Paul also confessed that he would never preach from an Old Testament text. Whenever I was asked to preach at First Lutheran in Greensboro and it was possible for me to do so, I would always elect to preach from an Old Testament text.

The Lutheran tradition consistently has said that the Old Testament is part of the church's canon of scripture.

> We believe, teach and confess that the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments are the only rule and norm according to which all doctrines and teachers alike must be appraised and judged.... Holy Scrip-

> ture remains the only judge, rule and norm according to which as the only touchstone all doctrines shall and must be understood and judged as good or evil, right or wrong.[1]
>
> We pledge ourselves to the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments as the pure and clear fountain of Israel, which is the only true norm according to which all teachers and teachings are to be judged and evaluated.[2]
>
> The canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the written Word of God. Inspired by God's Spirit speaking through the authors, they record and announce God's revelation centering in Jesus Christ. Through them God's Spirit speaks to us to create and sustain Christian faith and fellowship for service in the world.[3]
>
> This church accepts the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the inspired Word of God and the authoritative source and norm of its proclamation, faith and life.[4]

While not willing to trumpet publicly Adolf von Harnack's view of the Old Testament's place in the life of the church and preaching, many have in fact practically done so. In 1924 Harnack wrote in his study of Marcion:

> To have cast aside the Old Testament in the second century was an error which the church rightly rejected; to have retained it in the 16th century was a fate which the Reformation was not yet able to avoid; but still to keep it after the 19th century as a canonical document within Protestantism results from a religious and ecclesiastical paralysis.[5]

Growing up in the Lutheran Church in the southeast I would have to say that in terms of preaching, the Old Testament was a closed book in my experience.

And yet, the scripture for the church which produced the New Testament was the Old Testament. As the post-Easter church sought to make sense of who Jesus of Nazareth was, the Bible they appealed to was the Old Testament. The Hebrew Scriptures were the Word of God with which the early church wrestled as it sought to bear witness to God's new and continuing revelatory behavior.

> The New Testament's recourse to the Old Testament documents is not only practiced with frequency but it even appears to be basically indispensable.... Without the Old Testament, who Jesus is apparently remains completely hidden. The same is true for what is given in him as gift and, also, for the knowledge of how [humanity] is to be rightly related to (Jesus).[6]

Up to some fifty years or so ago there seemed to have been four prevalent attitudes towards the place of the Old Testament in the church.

1. *The Old Testament is quite unfit to be used as Christian scripture.* Early in the

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[1] Epitome of the Formula of Concord, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. and ed. Theodore G. Tappert, et. al (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), 464-65.

[2] Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord, *The Book of Concord*, 503-4.

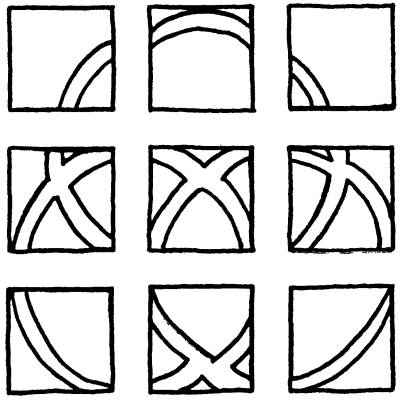
[3] *Constitution of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*, chapter 2, section 2c.

[4] *Constitution of the ELCA*, chapter 2, section 3.

[5] Adolph von Harnack, *Marcion, Das Evangelium vom fremden Gott*. 2nd ed. (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs Verlag, 1924; reprinted, Darmstadt: Wissenshaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1960), 217; quoted in John Bright, *The Authority of the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1967), 65.

[6] Hans Walter Wolff, "The Kerygma of the Yahwist," *Interpretation* XX (1969):131-32.

life of the church there were those who saw the God revealed in the Old Testament as a God of wrath and much inferior to the God revealed in the New Testament. The direct earthiness violated the spiritual and otherworldly view of God so that the Old Testament was excised from the canon. Marcion's name is often connected with this position or attitude, but some today would claim that Marcion may not have been treated fairly in this regard. Certainly some Gnostic views also held this position, and a virulent anti-Semitism has led some to reject the Old Testament because it is the Bible for our Jewish sisters and brothers.



2. *The Old Testament must be retained as Christian scripture, even if it is uncomfortable to do so, because it was used by our Lord and the early church.* In this view the Old Testament is still considered an embarrassment. There are many things in the Old Testament that are discontinuous with the New Testament witness: Holy War, polygamy, cultic rites and laws, food customs, the harsh realities of God's terrible judgment visited upon people, even infants and children, etc. The discontinuities between the two testaments get full play in this view. If it was good enough for Jesus and for Paul and Silas, then it is good enough for us—even if we don't like it!

3. *The Old Testament is important because it stands in the historical procession from Israel to Christ.* The History of Religions school argued that you cannot understand the final act in the historical drama of God's redemptive work without the preceding one. If God is a God who acts in history, then you need to have the whole witness of that historical action in order to make sense of it all, especially the Christ event.

4. *The Old Testament has to be retained simply because it is holy and infallible scripture.* Since God inspired scripture and scripture is the infallible Word of God, all of it must be kept, including the Old Testament. There is no choice in the matter, even if it is not always clear what one should do with the Old Testament.

In this century there has been a lot of thinking and wrestling with the question of how Christians and the church are to approach the Old Testament and how the Old Testament is to relate to the New Testament and the task of preaching and ministry.

1. *The christological approach.* In his *Church Dogmatics* Karl Barth articulated the view that the Old Testament is a witness to the reality of Christ and is no whit inferior to the New Testament. The witness to Christ by the Old Testament is witness to Christ before the Incarnation. The preexistence of Christ is the foundational factor of the unity of the two testaments. There is a fundamental identity of the two testaments but the Old Testament is always seen in term of the New Testament. Christ is found everywhere in the Bible, and we are to read the whole of scripture christologically. This approach does not take seriously the historical rootedness of the Old Testament in its own time and place and in its own

witness to God. There is a tendency to move to Jesus too quickly. Dietrich Bonhoeffer said that the person who desires to think and feel in terms of the New Testament too quickly when working on an Old Testament text for preaching is no Christian.

2. *The typological approach.* This approach does not deny the historicity of Old Testament texts, but the Old Testament is seen primarily as a "type" of Christ. Only as we see the Old Testament prefiguring the New Testament can the Old Testament have any meaning for us today. When we preach from an Old Testament text, we need to pair the Old Testament text with a New Testament text so that the "type" and the "fulfillment" can be seen. Gerhard von Rad used this approach to the biblical tradition in his *Old Testament Theology.*[7] Elizabeth Achtemeier[8] also advocates this typological approach in her work on preaching from the Old Testament. I have difficulty in seeing how the typological approach does not finally deny the significance of the Old Testament text in its own context.

3. *The relation of opposites approach.* Should we retain the Old Testament only as it acts as a foil for the New Testament? The New Testament, then, is the annihilation of the Old Testament, and there is no Word of God for us in the Old Testament. The coming of Christ radically overturns the Old Testament, and so it should, for the Old Testament accentuates the negative. The Old Testament is law and the New Testament is grace. Emmanuel Hirsch is one proponent of this approach. The relation of opposites has been a very strong part of some Lutheran perspectives.

4. *The existentialist approach.* Rudolf Bultmann[9] claimed that the Old Testament cannot be for the Christian revelation in the same sense as the New Testament. The Old Testament contains a history of shattering failures, a history that miscarries at every point, that wrought nothing but the disappointment of hopes as Israel had conceived it. The one who reads the Old Testament merely comes to understand the contradiction that belongs to human existence. In Israel's history we see the reflection of our own dilemma and the failure of our own false hopes, and thus we are driven to penitence and the acceptance of justification through faith alone. The Old Testament serves as a propaedeutic to the gospel and has a pedagogical function only. Such an approach is very attractive for some Lutherans and others who rely on the law-gospel dialectic.

5. *The promise-fulfillment approach.* This is the approach that I use in my own preaching from the Old Testament, as do Foster McCurley, Jr.[10] and Walther

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[7] Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, Vol. II, trans. D. M. G. Stalker (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1965). See also Gerhard von Rad, "Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament," trans. John Bright, *Essays in Old Testament Hermeneutics*, ed. Claus Westermann, English trans. ed. James Luther Mays (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1963), 17-39.

[8] Elizabeth Achtemeier, *Preaching from the Old Testament* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989). Also see her *The Old Testament and the Proclamation of the Gospel* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1973).

[9] Rudolf Bultmann, "The Significance of the Old Testament for the Christian Faith," trans. Bernard W. Anderson, *The Old Testament and Christian Faith*, ed. Bernard W. Anderson (London: SCM Press LTD, 1964), 1-35, and "Prophecy and Fulfillment," *Essays on Old Testament Hermeneutics*, 50-75.

[10] Foster R. McCurley, Jr., *Proclaiming the Promise: Christian Preaching from the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974).

Zimmerli.[11] While I am indebted to both McCurley and Zimmerli, what now follows is my own attempt to work out a method by which one can preach from the Old Testament as a Christian and in the church.

The Old Testament contains a promise of the messiah of God who is to come. The Old Testament ends without that promise being fulfilled. The New Testament claims that the messiah of God has come and the messiah's name is Jesus in whom all God's promises are yea and amen. The New Testament closes the Old Testament since the promise of the messiah and of God's salvation is fulfilled today.

Let's look a little closer at this issue. In the Old Testament there are a number of promises made by God, and many of those promises are fulfilled by God in the Old Testament itself. There is the promise to the ancestors of the land that God will give, a promise fulfilled with the conquest. There is the promise to the ancestors of a great and populous nation, and that promise is fulfilled in the David-Solomonic Empire. There is God's promise to David that a descendant of David would sit upon the throne in Jerusalem in perpetuity, and that promise is fulfilled at the end of the Succession Narrative when Solomon is named king of Israel. There is the promise made to bring the people out of exile in Babylon back to the land promised to the ancestors, and that promise is fulfilled.

Yet there is also a strand in the Old Testament of a promise of the coming of God's anointed one, the messiah, who will come to rule over God's people. That promise is not fulfilled in the Old Testament. The Old Testament then is an open-ended book that looks forward to God's future action to fulfill the promise of the messiah. In the Old Testament scheme of promise-fulfillment-promise, each fulfillment is left to God's creative and surprising way of acting so that when a promise is fulfilled such fulfillment does not close down God's relation to Israel. There is always a continuing towards the future now re-shaped and re-defined by God's activity.

In the Old Testament scheme of promise-fulfillment-promise, each fulfillment is left to God's creative and surprising way of acting.

The New Testament can be understood as a book of fulfillment. The messiah of God has come in Jesus of Nazareth. God's freedom and surprise are evidenced in the fulfillment of the promise, and a new covenant is established in and by the blood of Jesus. But there is also in the New Testament a promise. Jesus, the messiah of God, will come again at the parousia as the Lord of lords, who will be manifest as the ruler of the whole cosmos. The church lives in the power of the salvation God has brought in Jesus the Christ, but we also await the coming of our great God and Savior when the rule of God will be established in its final fullness.

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11 Walther Zimmerli, "Promise and Fulfillment," *Essays on Old Testament Hermeneutics*, 89-122.

I see the Old Testament and the New Testament related to the future action of God that is not yet completed in its finality in either testament. Both testaments bear witness to a God who makes promises and keeps promises so that the people trust in and wait for God's final fulfillment of the divine promise.

In preaching from the Old Testament I believe we are called to take the Old Testament text with utmost seriousness in its own context and on its own turf. The Word of God is always addressed to a concrete, specific situation and to a particular people. We seek to discover the intent of the text for its own day and its own audience. But that Old Testament text is also part of a book of promise-fulfillment-promise.

Then, what do we believe concerning Jesus? How does the event of the Christ speak to, address, and illumine the human situation revealed in the Old Testament text? How is the action of God in Christ that is both fulfillment and promise addressing and illumining the situation in the world of the text and in our own?

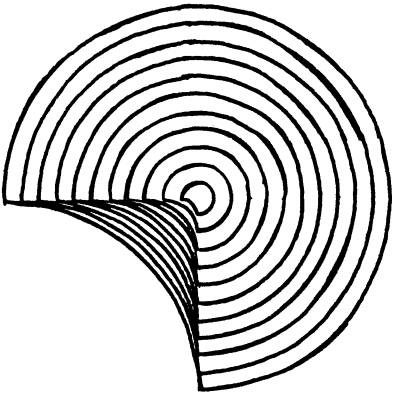
What is the human situation that we must address in a sermon? How are we experiencing the realities in the text? If God's promise in Jesus is true, how does the Old Testament text help us to see that promise and activity of God in Christ more clearly? What does the God revealed and borne witness to in the Old Testament text and in Christ look like for us today? It seems to me that as we bring these three circles of reality together—Old Testament, New Testament, and our world—we can begin to hear a Word of God that can become a lively word to proclaim to people today.

The Old Testament is an exciting and evocative portion of the church's canon. I love to wrestle with the Old Testament as I seek to listen and hear, interpret and make sense of the witness of ancient Israel to God and God's activity in their life and world and in our life and world so that by God's grace I might become the bearer and proclaimer of a lively, enlivening, and promising Word to God's people today. I hope that I might have excited you and invited you to join me in the playground of the Old Testament, where God's Word meets and challenges and refreshes us and remakes us to be faithful people of God as we expect and hope for God's fulfillment of the promise to bring to completion all the tattered and tortured strands of history.

Preaching Psalm 8

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Ecology has become a hot topic again, and thus preachers may be reading the Bible for texts to speak to this issue. After examining Psalm 8, we might decide to pass it by; it seems to authorize and even celebrate ideas we cannot accept: human domination and thus human plunder of nature. Not only does the psalm contain the dreaded word "dominion," it seems to have a hierarchical view of the world: God over humans, humans over animals. So much political incorrectness might either be passed over in silence, or finessed, by reading only the first part of the psalm on retreats, stopping after verse 4 to contemplate the night sky.



This would be a mistake. The psalm is a powerful prayer, guiding us to the deep mystery of how God has created the human situation and giving us words to speak our awe and praise of God.

The human situation of the psalm

As we begin to construct a sermon on this text, we should try to understand the exact human situation of the text.

Two dimensions of being human. Verse 4 is a profound question, asked in a mode of awe and wonder: "What are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?" The author is awed at the infinity of the world against which a single human seems nothing (vv. 1-3), and also awed at the infinite size of the shadow a single human casts in the world by virtue of the power God grants to humans (v. 5-8). Verse 4 refers to both parts of the psalm, despite the habit of translators of grouping verses 3 and 4 into one paragraph.

However, the psalm demands reading verses 5-8 as part of what provokes the question. First, some versions (NRSV, NJB, Weiser[1]) begin verse 5 by translating the "adversative waw"[2] as "Yet," making the connection of verses 4 and 5 clearer. More significant is the flow of ideas from verse 4 to 5. God is "mindful" of humans and "cares" for them, and verse 5 begins the exposition of the amazing acts of God that testify to this care: creating humans almost like God, giving them glory and honor and entrusting them with dominion over even the works of God.

Standing between two infinites. The aptness of these two dimensions as a description of the human situation is a remarkable feature of the psalm. Written millennia ago, the psalm expresses a basic dilemma that grows sharper with every year. The "infinite spaces" that "frightened" Pascal[3] hundreds of years ago were orders of magnitude smaller than what we contemplate. At the other extreme, the infinitely small is now further away than ever. Not only space, but the vastness of time humbles us, as our perceived universe has grown in age to billions of years.

Likewise, our sense of infinite power has also grown. We can change the course of rivers, destroy species, mutate others, edit our own genetic inheritance, bring the temperature of the sun to earth in atomic explosions, terminate life itself. And we are hovering on the brink of space, poised to carry ourselves and our power to other planets. And yet, we can still feel powerless against the large structures of economics or politics. We see with Pascal how humans are "A nothing in comparison with the infinite, an All in comparison with the nothing."[4]

The real awe and power of verse 4 comes only with awareness of both of these dimensions; to somehow balance both the infinity "above" us and the infinity "beneath" our feet. A sermon on this text should properly situate and develop this profound awe.

Words of judgment: our imbalance

When we hold human life up against this psalm the precise word of judgment is not "you have destroyed the environment," but "you are living without awe." Let me illustrate by two examples.

The modern person, enmeshed in bureaucracy, in mega-corporations, asks the

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[1] Artur Weiser, *The Psalms.* Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962).

[2] Bernhard Anderson, "Human Dominion over Nature," in *Biblical Studies in Contemporary Thought*, ed. Miriam Ward, 35.

[3] Blaise Pascal, *Pensees*, 205.

[4] Pascal, *Pensees*, 72.

human question without seeing the larger dimension. Literally, we live without seeing the night sky, outshone by our artificial lighting, fogged by city smog. We can go through life without conscious awareness of natural beauty, as our lives compress down to what we can see from our cars, and as the works of God are constrained to what we can see from our office desk. In these contexts, the human question returns a small answer. What God has made humans for is reduced to what is profitable, what will win the championship, what is good for me.

This limited perspective can lead to domination of the earth because the higher dimensions of our existence are eliminated and we seem alone at the top of the pyramid, master of all we survey, but it may also lead to despair as the human enterprise is stripped of purpose.

However, verses 5-8 are also part of the psalm. And failing to live with consideration of them also leads to a word of judgment.

Consider the human in a situation of oppression or poverty. Here it is the human's own power that is being denied, as the poor have little control over their immediate environment. Living in shanty towns, or homeless, they lack the dominion over the natural world that is part of true human destiny. Nor is this limited to the third world. Residents of our cities who must bar their windows and retreat from the streets are denied the dominion over their physical environment that should be theirs. Women lived for centuries as property, or as domesticated pets, without the rights of dominion over their own lives. Still more cruelly, they were called "queen of the household," as mocking compensation for not being sovereign over their own bodies, time, and souls.

To justify these sorts of denial of human destiny, one hears: "they're happy, they don't know anything else." This psalm tells us otherwise; even if one is from generations of poverty, or generations of patriarchy, that person, created in the image of God, was destined for other things. A seldom remarked piece of the ecological tragedy is the smashing of the human species.

Words of grace: regaining our balance

Describing our misuse of power is easy, but remember that the psalm itself spends not one word attacking misuse, but describes a deeper truth. Thus, our sermons on it should not be the traditional "fifteen minutes of law and thirty seconds of gospel," but should be oriented to strengthening our image of being human. This is also a challenge to those who are prone to preach as if Jesus was the only good thing God ever did. Can we develop graceful words from this text?

What God gave us: dominion or domination.[5] We have spoken of the power God has granted humans. The first words of grace come from a clear understanding of what that power is.

The psalm terms the human role "dominion" (NRSV, Weiser, Kraus[6]: "appointed him ruler," NJB: "made him lord") rather than "domination."

Understanding the meaning of "dominion" seems inextricably tied to understanding the meaning of humans being cre-

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[5] In this section I am particularly indebted to the insights of Robert J. Russell, director of the Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences, Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, California.

[6] Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms: A Commentary*. Trans. Hilton C. Oswald. 2 vols. (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988).

ated in the "image of God" (Gen 1:26-28).[7] The Genesis text moves directly from "image of God" to granting "dominion." Also instructive is the parallel of Ecclesiasticus 17:2-4: "...[God] granted [humans] authority over everything on the earth. He endowed them with strength like his own, and made them in his own image. He put the fear of them in all living beings, and gave them dominion over beasts and birds."

The gift of dominion is a delegation of God's authority, not an outright grant of ownership for plunder.

Without making too sweeping a claim in this thorny area of exegesis, we may advance two conclusions. First, the gift of dominion is a delegation of God's authority, not an outright grant of ownership for plunder. Second, human power over nature is not merely a consequence of a *fallen* human nature; it is part of the inherent purpose of humans. As Phil Hefner writes, the human is "created with a destiny," a "created co-creator."[8]

Imagining the balance. Suppose you have just been put in charge of some complex, extensive organization. Without training or background, you are now in charge of a large farm, commander of an aircraft carrier, president of a corporation, or leader of a nation. As you walk into your new office, large and unfamiliar, as your assistants hasten to serve you, what is the feeling?

Is it not being both large and small? You know you can summon and people will come, you can issue an order and action will happen, you feel the largeness of your power. But you feel small, you don't know how everything fits together, your orders have unintended side effects, you feel humble amid the vastness of what you must administer.

There are many opportunities to go astray. But, lets not spend time describing how to fail. Try instead to describe that moment of balance. You keep restoring yourself by remembering both that all you have was given to you, and that it *has* been given to you and you alone. When the power threatens to pervert you, you remember that you are acting in trust for another. When power threatens to immobilize you, you remember that you were ordered to exercise it. Is not living with this dual awareness a boundless source of energy and freedom?

In the arena of the environment, a person aware of human destiny is both free and constrained: free to exercise dominion with all the ingenuity and power available, and constrained to do so constantly mindful that all we have has been given by God to us, to rule as God would. This is the Christian situation: both free and bound.

Against false grace. The words of grace in this psalm need to be distinguished

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[7] See Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 147ff.

[8] Philip Hefner, "Fourth Locus: The Creation," 323ff. in *Christian Dogmatics*, ed. Carl Braaten and Robert Jenson, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984).

from a false grace. We are often told that ecological salvation resides in a return to "harmony" with nature. We should merely follow nature's rhythms.

But the psalm tells us that the true human situation is inescapable, and inescapably hard. This power to affect and change the world is something inherent in humanity: even in debating yielding of power, we reveal that we have the power to decide our role. This is our destiny.

Job found the lot of humans too hard and hurled these words back at God: "What are human beings, that you make so much of them.... Will you not look away from me for a while?" (7:17-9). Now we seem tempted to repeat Job's words in global despair. "God, I can't stand being human, I don't want to be your delegate, to be in your image!" But God has given us a different destiny; to reject it is rejecting God.

Yes, we should be cautious. We have arrived late to the created world, and our destructive power has grown beyond the pace of evolution of our consciences. The psalm directs us to avoid idolatry of nature, or a patronizing view of native people as living without facing human choices. Rather we are directed to respect the awesome gift of God to humans. As we consider affecting nature, we should do so mindful that God has created it. As we learn from native peoples, what we should learn is how they choose as humans to exercise the power of dominion.

God can use the powerless. Verse 2 has been a thorny point of translation, full of problems of both text and meaning, but a certain consensus seems to exist, as reflected in Kraus, Weiser, and the NRSV which significantly revises the RSV. At first this verse is puzzling: "Out of the mouth of babes and infants you have founded a bulwark...." Kraus follows Gunkel in arguing that this verse has roughly the same thrust as I Corinthians 1 and 2: God uses the weak to reveal the glory of God all the more clearly. This is also how Matthew uses the verse (21:16). This verse adds a crucial twist to the psalm. The dimension of awe is now multiplied: amid all this vast universe and the amazing power given to humans, God may reach to the weakest of humans to display God's own power.

All humans have this God-given power, not only privileged humans, or the wise, or the rich "movers and shakers" who should exercise power while the common herd follow. How quickly we assume that human power to shape the earth was an authorization for land-owners to do whatever they want at the expense of the poor. The psalm says that God may use anyone to work God's will.

The shape of the sermon

Words of prayer. A psalm does make theological points, but in a particular way: it is a prayer, or liturgy, or both, words to be spoken by us, and in address to God. So, notice the tone and style of the words the psalm puts in our lips. A sermon should be faithful to the text in this way also.

How majestic is your name.... The psalm is framed at the beginning and end by words of praise to God: "how majestic is your name in all the earth." Weiser cites 1 Cor 1:31 as comment on the psalm: "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

A sermon on this text should strive to expand and deepen our ability to praise God for the specific things we have been discussing.

First, let us praise God for the contents of verses 1 to 3. By looking at each piece of the world and saying, "God created this," we help change what we see when we look

at the world. No longer do we see "nature" but "creation."

Let us develop our praise of God for the world. We praise God regularly for Jesus, and for random benefits of nature such as rain when needed and good weather for church picnics, but a meditation on the psalm should lead us to praise God not just for a list of benefits from nature, but for the creation in all its complexity, beauty, and wonder.

Praising God in this way may lead us to see environmental damage as a form of sacrilege, an attack on God's glory. Polluting a stream is like polluting the host of the mass; using the products of the earth to kill is like painting swastikas on a synagogue. Nature is precious because it was created by God to reflect God's glory.

... *your name in all the earth.* And now let us praise God for verses 5-8. While generations of believers treasure the moving experience of standing beneath the "vault of heaven" on a clear night and praying these words in awe and mystery, I wonder if this still preserves the illusion that God's creations are "out there" and that the works of humans are distant and unrelated to God.

To be faithful to the psalm, we should pray it "in all the earth." A preacher can help the congregation to say these words everywhere. When you see the Golden Gate bridge, the Taj Mahal, a cathedral, or any scene where human work has created beauty, say this text with awe and wonder. Pray the words and praise God that God's delegates on earth have such power to create.

Pray this text also as we contemplate the image on TV showing pieces of the earth that could have been plowshares but have been beaten into swords. Say this text while standing on a garbage dump, while driving on a smoggy freeway. And do not be surprised if you become aware of a feeling of pain.

...*what are human beings that you are mindful of them?* Finally, praise God at the combination of these two dimensions. Praise God for the deepest and most mysterious aspects of being human in a created universe. Our questioning, our desire to know, our desire to build, to create, our joy at beauty, even our visceral repugnance at the earth despoiled—for these things we should praise God.

This text gently calls us to a specific type of praise. Psalm 8 can move us to see the awful power God has delegated to us, and it can inspire us to use this power as God intended. We might paraphrase our Lutheran confessions to describe this text: The psalm not only talks of good works, it shows how they may be done.

Credible Promises: Ecclesiastes 11:3-6

Phyllis Anderson
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Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

When the clouds are full,
they pour out rain upon the earth.
Whether a tree falls to the south or to the north,
wherever it falls, there shall it lie.
One who pays heed to the wind will not sow,
and one who watches the clouds will never reap.
Just as you know not how the breath of life
fashions the human frame in the mother's womb,
So you know not the work of God
which he is accomplishing in the universe.
In the morning sow your seed,
and at evening let not your hand be idle;
For you know not which of the two will be successful,
Or whether both alike will turn out well.

Whether it is the times of my life or the times in which we live, I find I have to look longer and longer for greeting cards for those I love, that do not promise more than I can deliver.

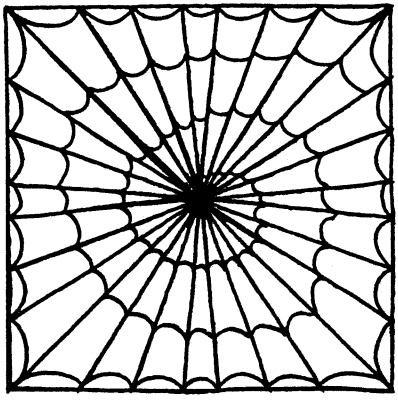
It took me several days of searching the scriptures to find this text. I am comforted by the credible claims and humble affirmations of the Preacher of Ecclesiastes. It does not raise unrealistic expectation. It is a fair representation of the truth to say to the people of this parched state, "When the clouds are full, they rain upon the earth."

If I am a little gun-shy of grandiose visions, I am not alone. We live in an increasingly cynical age. It is hard even for true believers not to be infected by the spirit of our times. These are hard times in which to make commitments: to marry, to accept a call, to choose a career, to believe in the future, to believe in God. These are hard times in which to start a brave new church, to exercise ecclesiastical leadership, to make universal truth claims.

There is a growing body of literature about the growing level of cynicism in

America. Three key ingredients seem to contribute to the development of the cynical outlook:

1. Unrealistically high expectations—of oneself and/or of other people, which generalize to expectations of society, institutions, authorities, and the future;



2. The experience of disappointment, in oneself and in others, and consequent feelings of frustration and defeat;

3. Disillusion, the sense of being let down or of letting oneself down, and more darkly, the sense of being deceived, betrayed, or used by others.

Finally cynicism sets in. Cynics fear that they might be seen as naive or taken for suckers... so they do not trust again.

The level of cynicism is higher among younger Americans. Mark is thirty-two years old and has not finished college. He is a little surprised to be alive, a little surprised that the world has not blown up yet. He is not prepared to be an adult. Adulthood has not been for him all that it is cracked up to be. The American dream of upwardly spiraling prosperity is bankrupt. Many young people cannot count on having a higher standard of living than their parents. When friends talk about their empty nest, Mark's parents describe their son as circling the nest, moving in for periods of time, stopping by to enjoy the air conditioner or the VCR which he cannot afford.

We had dinner with a couple the other night—a pastor and a nurse—who said that they had watched the news every night for thirty years of marriage. Sometime during the Gulf War they just stopped turning it on. They were not going to be taken in.

The church has made some pretty incredible promises. It has presumed to possess the truth and goodness that properly belong to Christ alone. Even if the church does not presume, people will project their own visions of community and justice and truth onto a fallible, human institution. They have expected happiness and health, and they have been disappointed.

Sometime along the way too many Christians just stop going to church, just stop showing up at chapel, just stop listening to the pastor or the bishop, just stop reading the newsletters and brochures that come in the mail, just turn off the hype. They hang on to their own private experience of God, if they hang on to faith at all... but it is not reinforced or held accountable by a believing and trustworthy community.

I need that trustworthy word from the outside. You need it. We need to be able to offer it to one another and to those who have yet to believe.

For today—for these times—the Preacher says it softly, humbly, simply, without claiming to know more than can be known, without promising more than can be delivered.

I have no secret key to success to offer you, he says. You cannot figure all the angles. The rain comes according to its own timetable. The wind blows one way or the other. You cannot know which way it will

topple over the tree in your field. If you wait around to plant your seed until you can anticipate all the eventualities, you will never make anything grow.

If he were speaking to us, he might say: bad things happen. Bad things happen to good people. Some of your best efforts will fail. Heroes turn out to be less than they seemed. Earthquakes and floods are no respecters of persons. Don't count on your faith to protect you or even to help you understand what happened or why. Some things we just don't know.

What you can believe is that God is accomplishing God's work in the universe. God's will is being done as mysteriously, secretly, precariously, and quietly as the breath of life fashions the human frame in the mother's womb. Despite all the appearances to the contrary, despite all the broken promises, whether you know it or not, God is reweaving the web of life. And you are part of the material of the new creation. Your life with all its disappointments and struggles and false starts has its place in that larger fabric.

Life is full of risks, even for believers. You finally have to take your chances, go on the information you have, and make your mistakes. Dare to trust, even though you are going to get hurt. Do the best you can; use all the resources at your disposal. Try every which way you can to plant your seed, to make your contribution, to participate fully in the struggle of life. "In the morning sow your seed, and at evening let not your hand be idle." Do something. Do all that you can, not knowing finally whether any of it is the right thing, not knowing whether your faithfulness will meet with success, will make a difference. The outcome of your activity is finally not in your control.

But your work is part of the work God is accomplishing in the universe, quietly, secretly, "like a green blade rising." We

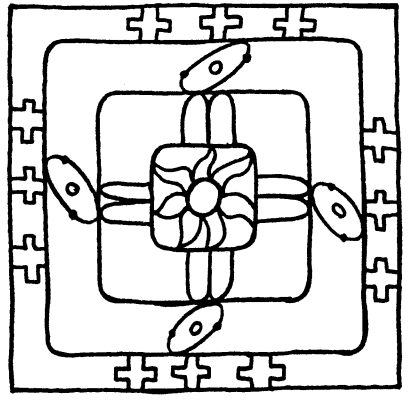
Despite all the appearances to the contrary, whether you know it or not, God is reweaving the web of life. And you are part of the material of the new creation.

cannot say exactly what that new creation will be, but it will follow the pattern of Easter, of Jesus Christ risen from the dead, the first fruit of the resurrection of all those who have fallen asleep.

In this world of death and taxes, of change and decay, of broken promises and unmet expectations, *the* last word has been spoken. The last word is Life.

Theological Reflections on Pastoral Care for Gay and Lesbians

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This essay was first presented at a Workshop for Professional Leaders of the Metropolitan Chicago Synod, ELCA, May 21, 1992.

It is my purpose to address the overall theme of pastoral care in relation to gays and lesbians in the church. Although I will allude to various subjects, my major intent is to spell out a specifically Lutheran approach to, and method of, interpreting scripture, and show how that can inform us in our understanding of the gospel in relation to homosexuality and our ministry to gays and lesbians.

As pastors and theologians, we must grapple with how to go about the task of doing theology in dialogue with experience and the sciences. The heart of my essay will address our theological task in light of scripture and the Reformation hermeneutic, that is, the method by which Lutherans interpret scripture. Finally, I will draw some conclusions as to how this applies to the church's ministry to gays and lesbians.

The theological task: an overview

David Tracy points out that the theological task involves a great deal more than merely explicating biblical texts or reconstructing what later tradition says. The main assignment is to relate the gospel in such a way that it speaks to today. To do this properly involves dialogue between our tradition and our experience, including the insights and discoveries of the sciences.

Tradition involves scripture and the way the church has interpreted the biblical proclamation through the years. Tradition is always in dialogue with our experience: our personal experience, the communal experience of the church, and the experience of our social-cultural context.

This dialectical process is reciprocal. Tradition not only responds to our experience and the sciences, but experience and the sciences also have an impact on our understanding of the tradition. Within this dialectic, then, our faith tradition is called to remain faithful to its roots even as it experiences growth and transformation in its dialogue with the world.

The study of the history of dogma shows that the church has always been involved in this task of dialogue, debate, and disputation in light of its contemporary context, particularly the Greco-Roman world of thought.

Experience

I will begin with my own experience, specifically my pastoral experience. I have been in the ministry for over 35 years. In that time I have been involved in pastoral care and counselling with a number of homophiles who were grappling in anguish with their own personhood.

I have learned that the word "gay" can be a misnomer. Until gays and lesbians have worked through the process of affirming their own sexual identity, there can be great personal struggle. There is little that is gay about the high suicide rate among those who are coming to grips with the realization that their sexual orientation differs from what is considered the norm. Some experts feel that as many as 30% of teenage suicide attempts are due to this homosexual anguish.

There is little that is gay about the high suicide rate among gays and lesbians.

I have found many homophiles to be persons of deep piety, with signs of the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives. They love the Lord Jesus and yearn to be fed in Word and Meal and to share in Christian community.

Five to ten percent of people are same-sex oriented. That means that many of us know and love family, friends, and congregational members who are gay or lesbian. This experience takes the matter out of the realm of the theoretical. We are dealing with real, hurting, sensitive and loving people. Some people reject family members when they "come out." Some family members, moved by faith and humanity, embrace them, sometimes with grieved bewilderment, but often with understanding and acceptance.

In the process of "coming out" to the family, there are usually tears and a good deal of hugging and mutual expressions of love and concern. That family member is the same dear and wonderful person he or she has always been, but now the family understands his/her humanity and vulnerability with greater depth and insight.

In an intimate conversation with a person who had recently "come out," I asked at what time in her life she first realized that she was... and she interjected, "different?" She answered, "I was probably about five."

I asked what her feelings were when she made this discovery, and she responded, "I thought I'd get over it." But she didn't.

And this doesn't change the fact that she is totally loved and accepted by family and friends. Such experiences take this whole issue of same-sex orientation out of the realm of the clinical and abstract. All of the old pejorative judgments sound unacceptable and inhumane when we are dealing with the beloved "bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh."

Dialogue with the sciences

Scientific research in the past few years gives dramatic support to the idea that sexual orientation is shaped by innate physiological factors, and that one is homosexual "by nature."

Richard Green and others have found that 70% of effeminate boys who were studied grew up to be gay. The neuroscientist, Simon LeVay, reported that a tiny part of the hypothalamus, which governs sex drive, is smaller in homosexual men than in heterosexual men. In 1990 a Dutch researcher found that the portion of the brain that governs diurnal (i.e. daylight) rhythms is twice the size in homosexual males than in heterosexual males.

In a study of 161 homosexual men and their brothers, J. Michael Bailey and Richard C. Pillard found that 52% of identical twins of these homosexual men were also homosexual, while only 22% of fraternal twins were homosexual. 9.2% of the biological brothers of these homosexual men who were not twins and 11% of their adopted brothers were homosexual. The latter two percentages correspond to the percentage of gay men in society as a whole.[1]

Pillard and Bailey have now completed a study of lesbians and their sisters which corroborates a similar pattern. In the *Chicago Tribune* (Friday, March 12, 1993, Section 2, page 2) Dr. Bailey is quoted: "This study suggests that genetic factors are as important in determining lesbianism as they are in influencing male homosexuality." The article continues, "According to the study, 48 percent of identical twin sisters of lesbians were also lesbian, compared to 16 percent of 37 non-identical twin sisters and six percent of 35 adoptive sisters."

The *New York Times* of August 1, 1992, reports:

> A cord of nerve fibers that allows the two halves of the brain to communicate with one another is larger in homosexual men than it is in either heterosexual men or in women, scientists have reported.
>
> The brain structure, called the anterior commissure, is not thought to influence sexual behavior directly, but the researchers believe the finding supports the idea that the brains of homosexuals differ in many subtle ways from those of heterosexuals, and that sexual orientation has a deep biological basis.

Thus, the evidence is mounting that homosexual orientation is the way that God creates a significant portion of the human race. And homosexuality is also prevalent in higher forms of animal life.

Tradition

1. Scripture. Doesn't the Bible say that homosexuality is a sin? Can we be faithful to the Bible and also be supportive of gays and lesbians?

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[1] Charles-Gene McDaniel, "Biology = Destiny?" in the Chicago newspaper *Outlines*, January 1992.

The evidence is mounting that homosexual orientation is the way that God creates a significant portion of the human race.

You may be surprised to learn that there are only six or seven passages in the entire Bible that directly address homosexuality.[2]

I am not questioning that the biblical writers see life heterosexually. But the Bible is also a book in which women are subordinated, and slavery is tacitly condoned. That was the cultural context in which much of the Bible was written. The cases for the subordination of women and slavery have been reinforced through the ages with Bible passages and arguments that these oppressed states correspond to the natural order of things.

Although racism and sexism are still deeply ingrained in church and society, many religious traditions, including our own, have declared that subordination of women and the enslavement or oppression of other races is contrary to the gospel, no matter how many Bible passages one can muster to prove otherwise.

Certainly, the principle of St. Augustine applies here that if the scripture seems to conflict with "clear and certain reasoning," it needs reinterpretation.

It is beyond the purview of my essay to address all the individual scripture passages which deal with homosexuality, but a few general comments are in order.

The recovery of the precise meaning of ancient words can be very difficult and at times impossible. When an issue is controversial, such as with homosexuality, people frequently read their own views and biases into ancient texts. Thus, translations can represent *eisegesis*, reading into the text, rather than *exegesis*, extracting the meaning from the text itself.

I offer just one example. The most influential Old Testament account which is seen as condemning homosexuality is that of Sodom in Genesis 19. A purely homosexual interpretation, however, is relatively recent. Many scholars conclude that the sin of Sodom was its outrageous inhospitality to strangers by attempted homosexual rape.

There is evidence from ancient Egypt and Assyria that homosexual rape was practiced by conquerors to brutalize, degrade, and control the vanquished. This is the

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[2] In regard to passages which actually or apparently refer to homosexuality, I refer you to the exegesis of *A Study of Issues Concerning Homosexuality* (Lutheran Church in America, 1986, ELCA Distribution service); *Human Sexuality and the Christian Faith*, A Study for the Church's Reflection and Deliberation (Division for Church and Society, ELCA, 1991, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America); Dr. James Nelson, *Embodiment* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1978), 181-88; *Human Sexuality: New Directions in American Catholic Thought*, 186-96; John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (University of Chicago Press, 1980); Richard B. Hays, "Relations Natural and Unnatural: A Response to John Boswell's Exegesis of Romans I" in *Journal of Religious Ethics* 14:1 (1986), 184-215; ELCA Bishop Herbert Chilstrom's pastoral letter on the subject, reissued in March, 1988; and Verlyn O. Smith, "Inclusiveness, Gay and Lesbian Ministry in the ELCA," *Entree*, October 1988.

There are no sayings of Jesus which bear any relation to homosexuality.

same role that homosexual rape plays in our prisons today.

Interestingly enough, not once does the Bible refer to the sin of Sodom as homosexuality per se. Isaiah says Sodom's sin was lack of justice (1:10; 3:9). Jeremiah accuses Sodom of adultery, lying, and unrepentance (23:14). Ezekiel says Sodom's sin was pride, gluttony, and prosperous ease (16:49). Jesus refers to Sodom in the context of possible inhospitality to his disciples, whom he is sending on a mission tour, and says that it will be better for Sodom in the day of judgment than for those who turn their backs on Jesus' disciples (Mt 10:14-15; Lk 10:10-12).[3]

There are three passages in Pauline and deutero-Pauline literature which refer to homosexual acts. Careful word studies have shown that the deutero-Pauline references use terminology which suggests condemnation of pederasty and the trafficking in children for sexual purposes.

I do, however, want to make some comments on the best known of these passages, Rom 1:26-27, in which Paul decries same-sex activity in Roman culture. The point of the passage has to be seen in its context, in which Paul is condemning the Gentiles for their idolatry. He says that monotheism was known to the Romans, but they rejected it (Rom 1:19-20). Paul argues that when we forsake the true God for idols, our whole life becomes idolatrous.

Paul stresses that *all* humanity is under the judgment of God, including those who stand in judgment of homosexual conduct! Paul's argument culminates in Romans 2, when he says that when we self-righteously stand in judgment against others, we are appropriating the role of God as judge, and by taking the place of God, we, too, are idolaters! "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God," Paul says, and "the wages of sin is death."

St. Paul was repulsed by the degeneracy of his time. His abhorrence of homosexual conduct is only one example of a whole catalogue of actions which he perceives as under God's wrath. Paul assumes that all people are by nature heterosexual. Therefore he considers homosexuality to be against the natural order of things.

Human Sexuality: New Dimensions in American Catholic Thought makes wise observations: "The question needs to be raised at this point, however: Can St. Paul's references to homosexuality simply be applied without qualification to all homosexual activity, particularly in the light of what we know today about [the innate genetic factors involved]?" Obviously, Paul knew nothing of modern studies of the nature of homosexual orientation "either as an inherited trait or a condition fixed in childhood." Homosexuality "as a constitutional condition is a phenomenon which lies totally outside the biblical perspective and consideration."[4]

Jesus' sayings on sexual mores are extremely few compared to his words of

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[3]Cf. Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, 92 ff.

[4]*Human Sexuality and the Christian Faith* (ELCA study), 194-96 passim.

condemnation on wealth and oppression. There are no sayings of Jesus which bear any relation to homosexuality. I know that arguments from silence are never conclusive. Still, one might think that there would be at least one saying addressed to what so many consider such a heinous sin. The only sexual issues of importance to Jesus appear to have been monogamy and fidelity. He clearly thought sexuality should be expressed within a permanent and monogamous relationship. I see no inherent reason why unions between persons of the same sex could not have met Jesus' moral criteria.[5]

2. *The Lutheran Hermeneutic.* How did Luther and the Reformation understand the scriptures, and how did that affect their interpretation of the text?

Let us understand up front that Luther, as Paul, considered humanity naturally heterosexual and, therefore, condemned homosexuality in his commentaries on Romans and Genesis.

The Bible was authoritative for Luther because, as he said, it is the cradle of the Christ-child. It is the gospel of Jesus Christ which gives scripture its authority. Therefore Luther at times criticized various canonical books when he felt they did not measure up to the standards of the gospel. For Luther, the message of forgiveness in Christ is what makes the Bible the Word of God.[6]

Listen to Luther's own words: "For the gospel teaches nothing else but Christ, so the Scripture knows nothing other than Christ." He says that without the gospel principle before our eyes, scripture simply becomes a book of laws, many of which are not relevant for contemporary society.[7]

In "How Christians Should Regard Moses," Luther argued against a proposal to substitute the more humane laws of the Old Testament for the current Saxon laws. Luther opposed this use of scripture, for it could easily distort the meaning of God's Word.

Luther insisted that to hold Moses' law as a universally divine command undermines the gospel of Christ. It is because this law is natural law—based on conscience and sound reason—that makes it binding upon us. "Moses is dead," said Luther. His "rule ended when Christ came. He is of no further service."

Is Moses, then, not the Word of God at all? Yes, according to Luther, but it may not always be the word of God *for us.* Luther says we should not regard Moses as our lawgiver unless he agrees both with the New Testament and natural law.

Then what word of scripture does apply to me? Luther answers: the *gospel*, for we are people under the gospel. "Therefore tell this to Moses: Leave Moses and his

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[5]Cf. Boswell, 117. The book of Jude condemns Sodom for "going after strange flesh." Boswell points out that this is a reference to the Book of Jubilees, which refers to the passage in Gen 6:1-4, that the sons of God had intercourse with the daughters of men and there were giants in the earth. The Book of Jubilees says that this story refers to Sodom, where angels and Sodom's *women* had intercourse.

[6]Thomas W. Strieter, *Luther's Statements on the Bible from 1519 to 1525 as a Problem in the Quest for Authority* (unpublished S.T.M. Thesis, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, 1969), 34f.

[7]Strieter, *Luther's Statements*, 84 ("Drei Koenige," WA X, I, 1, p. 628, 2).

[8]Strieter, *Luther's Statements*, 86ff. ("How Christians Should Regard Moses," 1525, W 35, p. 165). It was the reformed tradition, and not Reformation Lutheranism, which differentiated between moral, ceremonial, and political law in the Old Testament, with the moral law still being binding.

people together; they had their day and do not pertain to me. I listen to that word which applies to me. We have the gospel."[8]

Here, of course, Luther could be accused of antinomianism. This is the very thing that he later charged John Agricola with doing. Indeed, after the antinomian controversy, Luther became more circumspect in his dismissal of the law. But Luther early on consciously reflected the outcome of the Apostolic Council in Jerusalem, where it was concluded that Gentile Christians need not follow the strictures of levitical law.

Worldviews can change, but it is the gospel which is crucial to our understanding of our world.

Luther fully understood, with Paul, that Christians are not free from the moral law which represents God's good and gracious will for us. Luther also reflected Pauline thought both in terms of natural law ("The gentiles who have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law"), as well as Paul's denial of the law as means of salvation and his rejection of at least the levitical legal requirements ("Christ is the end of the law for righteousness").

Luther's biblical principle is not biblicism. Rather it is the gospel principle, which is radical in its implications for biblical understanding. Luther insisted that we must differentiate between the theological kernel and the cultural husk when interpreting scripture.

Luther's Prefaces to the New Testament of 1522 are a further witness to his dynamic view of scripture, which focuses around the glowing core of justification by grace through faith for Christ's sake. He says that the New Testament must be seen as gospel proclamation, not as a legal or doctrinal textbook. "See to it, therefore, that you do not make a Moses out of Christ, or a book of laws or doctrines out of the gospel, as has been done heretofore."[9]

Werner Elert stresses that the doctrine of justification is the key to Luther's scriptural principle, giving it its truly reformational character. The gospel was and remained the only valid standard of biblical interpretation.[10]

Worldviews can change, but it is the gospel which is crucial to our understanding of our world. The gospel takes precedence over any world picture, and that includes the biblical world picture.

For instance, for Luther the doctrine of Holy Communion demands that "heaven" as "God's place" is not a place in a spatial sense, as was widely held in his time. Rather, God and the exalted Christ are ubiquitous—everywhere. Luther insisted on this to defend Christ's real presence, including his human nature, in the sacrament. Reformed theologians railed against this as heresy, but Luther stood firm. The gospel demanded it.

The Catholic church of Luther's time was hostile to the newly-published heliocentric theory of Copernicus because it dis-

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[9]Strieter, *Luther's Statements*, 95 ("Prefaces to the New Testament," 1522, LW 35, p. 235).

[10]Werner Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1962), 190f.

placed the earth and humankind as the central focus of creation. What is more, it went against the literal interpretation of scripture (e.g. Joshua's sun "standing still," Psalms 45 and 78:69, and Eccl 1:4).

Nevertheless, many Lutheran scholars actively espoused Copernicanism because the scientific evidence was convincing and because it did not negate the Lutheran center of the authority of the gospel at any point.

The mathematician Joachim Rhaeticus, who taught at the University of Wittenberg with Luther, was an outspoken proponent of Copernicus, as was Erasmus Reinhold, who later became the rector of the University. The Lutheran theologian, Andreas Osiander, published Copernicus's chief work in the Lutheran city of Nürnberg and wrote the preface to the work. Luther never used his tremendous influence to suppress the Catholic Copernicus' teachings.

Although Luther himself remained uncertain about Copernicanism, at the University of Wittenberg one could embrace the insights of scientific investigation without fear of ecclesiastical censorship. As earth-shaking as Copernicus's novel theory was, to Lutherans it did not compromise the gospel even though it called for a new understanding of scriptural passages.

Application to homosexuality

I believe that Luther's hermeneutic specifically addresses the issue at hand since science is enlightening us on the nature of sexual orientation. Now all of the Bible passages used to reject homosexuals must be filtered through the Lutheran gospel principle. And that is being Lutheran! Justification by grace through faith is not only our means of salvation, but it is the key to our scriptural interpretation. This gives us the freedom—even the obligation—to separate the theological kernel from the legal and cultural husk.

Again, here St. Augustine's dictum applies that if scripture seems to conflict with clear and certain reasoning, we must reinterpret the scripture. Have we not done just this in regard to the heliocentric theory, a three-story universe, the age of the world, the emancipation of slaves and women, divorce, the ordination of women, and many other issues?

We must be faithful to the gospel, but we need not cling to the biblical cultural milieu in order to be faithful to the gospel in today's culture. The Lutheran gospel hermeneutic frees us from the necessity of being fundamentalists or replicating the first century world picture.

If—as scientists are concluding more and more—sexual orientation is shaped by innate physiological processes, then we are not talking about perversion or sin when we speak of the homosexual state of being. We are talking about the doctrine of creation.

Many denominations, including the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, are struggling with the issues of sexuality. Many of the criticisms directed at the ELCA's agonizing reappraisal are un-Lutheran. On this issue we must return to the heart of the Lutheran hermeneutic.

If justification by grace through faith for Christ's sake and the Reformation gospel hermeneutic are still central marks of our Lutheran tradition, then we must respond to these critics on the basis of the gospel itself. Christ is the key to the scripture.

We have all heard arguments that homosexuality is perversion, when mounting evidence indicates it is innate. Others insist that homosexuality is a product of the Fall, an aberration in creation, something like the genetic proclivity to cancer and diabetes.

But God is still the Creator, and in the Lutheran understanding, God continually creates that which is good.

Others say that homosexuals must remain celibate in the church. But scripture tells us that celibacy is a unique gift, and that "it is not good for man—or woman—to be alone." God made us for personal and communal relationships.

Ultimately, we must struggle through the issue of homosexuality in light of the gospel. Only the gospel can rescue and save us—heterosexual and homosexual alike.

Ultimately, we must struggle through the issue of homosexuality in light of the gospel. Only the gospel can rescue and save us—heterosexual and homosexual alike. For the judgment of the law is but a prelude in Romans to the sweet gospel that "all have been justified freely by his grace," and "All who have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ," heterosexual and homosexual alike. Any attitudes we have and any pastoral approaches we apply must be informed by the fact that in baptism we are dealing with sisters and brothers whom Christ has redeemed.

If sexual orientation is biologically innate, then we are dealing with what the Catholic tradition has called "natural law," and what the Lutheran tradition has called "orders of creation." How can homosexuality be against "natural law" or the "orders of creation" if it is inherent in the creational process? We have to come to grips with the reality that God's way is infinitely more dynamic—and surprising—than our own static definitions and mind-sets. Homosexuality is in the nature of things, and "nature's way is God's way."

Lutheran hermeneutics do not see scripture as a law book, but as gospel proclamation. And if a biblical passage seems contrary to the gospel, then it is critiqued by the gospel itself. As Luther said of his opponents, "If you will quote me Scripture against Christ, then I will quote Christ against the Scripture."

As Elert points out, if the sciences establish something that seems contrary to a clear text of scripture, then, insofar as they do not deny the gospel, we see the text of scripture in light of the new scientific data.

It would seem to me, then, that the passage which applies to the issue at hand is the word from God to Peter in Acts 10: "What I have called clean, call not thou unclean."

Stanley Olson, a retired Lutheran bishop, writes in an open letter—and I quote portions of it:

> The ELCA will eventually change its teachings on the subject of homosexuality.... It will come too late.... Our homosexual members are required to pull a mask over their true selves and to hide, as best they can, the person God created them to be....
>
> We demand celibacy as the only option... Why do we prefer them to model their lives after the gay bar crowd rather than the church crowd? Our demand for celibacy legislates against the

possibility of a caring, covenant relationship sustaining the lives of lesbian and gay members. We are thereby encouraging one night stands, multiple partners and the increased possibility of contracting AIDS or other diseases....

If six to ten percent of the population has a predominant homosexual orientation, then the ELCA should have from 300,000 to 500,000 homosexual members (if we haven't already driven them out).

How can our Lutheran Church change? Surely not by expecting those who have suffered to be the only voices calling for change. We who have been silent, we who have been timid, we who have allowed this suffering to go unchallenged, we who are afraid of controversy must be the people willing to speak out.

I add my voice to this Christian call to repentance. There is no place for rejecting gays and lesbians in the church. As our Lutheran Confessions say, our judgmentalism is self-justification, which hinders us from accepting for ourselves the gospel of free grace. We must make an about-face and, with joy and open arms, welcome our lesbian and gay sisters and brothers as fellow humans created in the image of God, and fellow members of the body of Christ.

Ever mindful of human frailty and the need for forgiveness—first of all for ourselves—we are called to lift up the ideal of monogamous, covenantal, and life-long marital relationships, no matter what one's sexual orientation. And this should be done with the good counsel and consecrating blessing of pastors and the whole church.

I am convinced that this acceptance should also apply to those people who feel the call to enter the ministry, and are otherwise qualified, whatever their sexual orientation.

If Christ has broken down all the dividing walls, then for Christ's sake, for the sake of our brothers and sisters of same-sex orientation, and for our own sake, let us be Christian—and truly inclusive. For there is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female—heterosexual or homosexual; we are all one in Christ.

Lutherans and Prayer

Bradley Hanson
Luther College
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The spirituality of Lutherans in America has some signs of health and vigor, yet it is weak in prayer. This should not surprise us, for Lutherans are not good at teaching one another to pray. We make efforts to teach one another about the Bible, theology, liturgy, and music, but we seldom focus on prayer. I believe there are three main reasons why Lutherans pay so little attention to prayer. I will discuss those three reasons and in each case propose a remedy.

The first and most important reason why Lutherans pay so little attention to teaching prayer is that we have not understood the nature of prayer. Because we have had an inadequate understanding of prayer, we have assigned prayer a relatively low priority. Various people have different ways of talking about prayer; I'll present my own.

I see prayer as an activity with four dimensions. The one dimension of prayer that we most easily recognize is *speaking to God.* In our Sunday church bulletins those parts of the worship service designated as prayer are the times when we speak to God. Also whenever we say, "Let us pray" before a meal or a meeting, we address God. In the bedtime prayers that we teach our children and do ourselves, we also talk to God. Now, speaking to God is definitely a part of prayer, but I'm afraid that most Lutherans think that is *all* there is to prayer.

The second dimension of prayer is *listening to God.* Although I list this second, it is really the first and most fundamental aspect of prayer. Listening to God is paying attention to the Word of God as it comes to us through scripture, preaching, sacramental actions, hymns, the liturgy, the witness of other people's words and lives, and our own memory that has stored up the biblical stories and images. Listening is more fundamental than our speaking to God, because our speaking to God in faith is always a response to God addressing us. Another word for this listening to God is meditation. Meditation is listening to God and listening for God. To listen is to pay attention, to seek to hear. Watching is the comparable visual term; to watch is to look, to try to see. So meditation involves observant waiting, a receptive striving to understand the ways of the Lord, an openness to God.

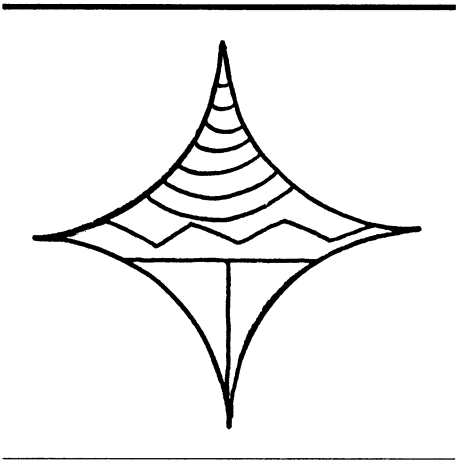
Some of our meditating happens spontaneously; for instance, during the day for a few moments we may simply call to mind God's gracious dealings with us. That is spontaneous listening to God. But meditation may also come about by design. If we attend worship in faith, part of what we intend to do is listen to God. If we read the Bible devotionally either with others or alone, much of what we intend to do is listen to God. These are forms of planned meditation. There are many particular types of

planned meditation which hosts of Christians have found beneficial, but most Lutherans are not aware of them. A great deal of what we can learn and teach one another about prayer has to do just with this dimension of listening to God, the aspect of prayer which is most fundamental.

The third dimension of prayer is *paying attention to the presence of God.* God is indeed present with us at all times in some way, but by far most of the time we are not attentive to that presence. In prayer we pay attention to God's presence. We may not feel that God is present; in fact, we may sometimes feel as though God is far off. But in any case, we are *seeking* that presence. Prayer in which the dominant element is either seeking the presence of God or acknowledging that presence is what is known as *contemplative prayer.* In contemplative prayer not much is said or heard. Words are few. There is much, much to be learned about contemplative prayer.

The fourth dimension of prayer is the *corporate dimension.* In prayer we are supported by other people and we support them. Genuine Christian prayer is never an individualistic act. We learn to pray with the help of other people. As children we probably were schooled to pray by parents and other adults who taught us simple prayers and took us to church. Throughout our life we may continue to grow in prayer through praying with others, sharing concerns with one another, and reading the insights of authors both in scripture and other spiritual writings. Even when we pray all alone, prayer is a corporate action, for our prayer draws upon the faith and wisdom of others and often reaches out to others. And at those times when we find it impossible to pray, we are upheld by the prayers of others.

When we understand through experience the four dimensions of prayer, we can see the tremendous riches and meaning in



prayer. Some of the virtues of prayer were documented in the book *Varieties of Prayer* by the pollster George Gallup, Jr. and a sociologist Margaret Poloma.[1] Poloma and Gallup distinguish four different types of prayer: ritual, conversational, petitionary, and meditative prayer. Ritual prayer is saying a written or memorized prayer such as the Lord's Prayer. Conversational prayer is talking to God in one's own words, and petitionary prayer means asking God for some material thing. In their poll those who practiced meditative prayer answered "yes" to the following four questions: Do you spend time quietly thinking about God? Do you spend time just feeling God's presence? Do you spend time worshiping and adoring God? Do you try to listen to God speak to you? What Poloma and Gallup call meditative prayer consists mostly of what I called the second and third dimensions of prayer—listening to God and attending to God's presence. In the study by Poloma and

[1] Margaret M. Poloma and George H. Gallup, Jr., *Varieties of Prayer* (Philadelphia: Trinity, 1991).

Gallup 52% of those who prayed, answered yes to all four questions. They practiced meditative prayer. Poloma and Gallup found that those who practiced meditative prayer were more likely than other prayers to report that they feel close to God. They also discovered another significant correlation: those who practiced meditative prayer were much more likely to forgive someone who has wronged them. There was no correlation between church attendance and readiness to forgive, but there was a significant link between meditative prayer and forgiving. These findings are not at all surprising when one understands the nature of Christian prayer, that prayer is not merely our speaking to God.

When we appreciate the nature of prayer, we can also see what a marvelous opportunity it is for Christian ministry and evangelism to have someone seek guidance in prayer. When we're dealing with prayer, we're dealing with the heart of the faith relationship with God. So when someone comes to us seeking to learn more about prayer, the basic thing to do is to help them listen to the Word of God and to let God's presence work in their lives. What a golden opportunity! Yet it is an opportunity that we may miss, if we are not prepared. Since Lutherans have commonly viewed prayer as only speaking to God and have not given much attention to prayer's other dimensions, we may be missing some wonderful chances for ministry and witness.

The second reason why we Lutherans have been slow to learn and teach one another about prayer is our persistent worry about works righteousness. While our positive concern has been to proclaim justification by grace through faith alone, we have also been watchdogs against efforts to earn God's approval. We have been especially wary of certain religious practices.

When we think of prayer chiefly as *our* speaking to God, then prayer seems to be simply a human activity.

We can see one effect of the Lutheran fear of works righteousness in regard to the religious practice of fasting. Lutherans were so concerned about making fasting a genuinely free act of devotion that for quite some years now hardly any Lutherans observe a religious fast, except recently for the annual world hunger fast. Many Lutherans fast to control their weight or for other health reasons, but we have just about lost the meaning of a religious fast. Not for a moment do I think it necessary for Christians to fast; not at all. But I use this as an example of how our worry about *misusing* fasting as a way of climbing to heaven has led us to outdo Jesus' caution about fasting. We have gone a step further than Jesus and thrown out the baby with the dirty bath water.

We have not gone so far with prayer. But our anxiety about works righteousness has caused many Lutherans to be extremely wary of such things as giving instruction in prayer. In fact, the very use of the term "spirituality" often comes under attack. There are certainly good reasons for caution, for there are all sorts of spiritualities in the world trying to win points with God. A Christ-centered spirituality is essential. Our Lutheran tradition has served us well by

having its signposts on the spiritual path point toward Christ.

Nevertheless, the opportunities for works righteousness abound and are by no means limited to such religious practices as prayer, spiritual direction, and fasting. Attending church, doing the liturgy, singing a hymn, preaching a sermon, visiting the sick, counseling the troubled, publishing a theological article, speaking to a conference—all these religious activities and many more are susceptible to the misuse of works righteousness. Any or all of them can be used to win God's approval.

So why have prayer and instruction in prayer been singled out for especially strong warnings? The trouble lies again in our inadequate understanding of the nature of prayer. When we think of prayer chiefly as *our* speaking to God, then prayer seems to be simply a human activity. When one operates with such a limited notion of prayer, it seems sensible to be anxious about its religious misuse. Ignorance about prayer feeds the worry about works righteousness, and that worry in turn prevents us from dispelling our ignorance of prayer through inquiry and knowledge. There is a lesson in this for us all: we should combine caution about works righteousness with knowledge and understanding. Then we can sift the wheat from the chaff, rather than throwing away the whole grain.

When I was in seminary, the neo-Orthodox theologians of the day frequently warned us against Christian mysticism as an attempt to build a ladder to heaven. I never read any Christian mystics. I never even considered reading them. After all, I "knew" they were bad, because I had been told that. Now surely there is much to be cautious about in many of the Christian mystics. But it is also the case that many of them are on to something central to the Christian faith, namely, that intimate relationship with God in Christ, that profound sense of God's gracious presence in our life that brings us to our knees in gratitude. Paul knew that. Martin Luther knew it. But in my seminary student wisdom, which was really ignorance, I did not bother to sift the wheat from the chaff; I cast it all aside.

Our inadequate understanding of prayer and our worry about works righteousness have combined to make most Lutherans ill prepared to learn and teach one another about prayer. I have a proposal that would raise our estimation of prayer to its appropriate status and relieve some of our anxiety about works righteousness with prayer. The proposal is this: we should consider prayer one of the means of grace.

It is common to recognize two means of grace—the Word of God and the sacraments. In practice, Lutherans put primary emphasis on the Word and less on the sacraments, while the Roman Catholics do just the reverse. But in any case, Word and sacrament are recognized as the essential means by which the Holy Spirit creates faith and the community of faith, the church. Certainly there are human elements in Word and sacrament, for it is humans who write the words of scripture or speak the words of a sermon and it is humans who enact the sacraments. Nonetheless, we are commanded by Christ to proclaim the gospel, to baptize, and to remember him in the eucharist, and we have a divine promise that God will work in and through those human words and actions to create and nurture faith.

In regard to prayer, Jesus includes both command and promise in the saying, "Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you" (Mt. 7:7). What is more important than quoting a proof text from scripture, though, is to recognize that prayer is not merely *our* activity, nor even *primarily* our activity. Prayer is fundamentally God speaking to us

and we responding with our words, it is God's active presence coming to us and we acknowledging that presence. To realize the real character of prayer is, in effect, to view prayer as a means of grace. What I am proposing is that we Lutherans give explicit recognition to Christian prayer as a means of grace.

Prayer is fundamentally God speaking to us and we responding with our words, it is God's active presence coming to us and we acknowledging that presence.

There are precedents for this in the Lutheran tradition. On several occasions when Melanchthon and Luther discussed the regular means through which God accomplishes works of grace, they mention prayer. Melanchthon does this in the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* (1531) while discussing the number of sacraments. Rather than requiring a physical element for a sacrament, Melanchthon defines sacraments as "rites which have the command of God and to which the promise of grace has been added." On this basis Melanchthon counts baptism, the Lord's Supper, and absolution among the sacraments and is willing to consider ordination a sacrament. Then Melanchthon adds, "Ultimately, if we should list as sacraments all the things that have God's command and a promise added to them then why not prayer, which can most truly be called a sacrament? It has both the command of God and many promises. If it were placed among the sacraments and thus given, so to speak, a more exalted position, this would move men to pray."[2]

In the *Smalcald Articles* (1537) Luther identifies five means of grace: the spoken word, baptism, Lord's Supper, absolution, and "the mutual conversation and consolation of sisters and brothers. Matthew 18:20, 'Where two or three are gathered,' etc."[3] It is uncertain what is covered by mutual conversation and consolation, but the scripture passage Luther quotes is in a context speaking of prayer. "Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Mt 18:19-20).

In his 1539 treatise "On the Councils and the Church," Luther gives an extended discussion of the church as the assembly of holy Christian people. He identifies seven signs by which the church can be recognized and through which the Holy Spirit gives people faith in Christ and thus sanctifies them. The seven signs/means of grace are: the word of God, baptism, Lord's Supper, absolution, the ministry which is necessary to the functioning of the preceding meanings of grace, "prayer, public praise, and thanksgiving to God," and finally bear-

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[2] Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article XIII, in *The Book of Concord*, tr. and ed. by Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), 213. I am indebted to Ralph Quere for pinpointing these passages in the Reformers.

[3] Smalcald Articles, Part III, Article IV, in *The Book of Concord*, 310.

ing the cross or affliction. Thus like Melanchthon Luther does not consider prayer simply a human work, but a work of the Holy Spirit. Luther says, "For prayer, too, is one of the precious holy possessions whereby everything is sanctified."[4]

More recently Gustaf Aulen in *The Faith of the Christian Church* has recognized three means of grace: the word of God, the sacraments (baptism and Lord's Supper), and prayer. Aulen does not call the Christian ministry a means of grace, although like Luther he considers it a "constitutive factor" of the church. Aulen says the main hindrance to considering prayer as a means of grace is that prayer has been interpreted as an exclusively human act. He says, "It is quite evident, however, that this argumentation is not very cogent, since prayer is not only our turning to God, but also God's approach to us, and a mode through which God accomplishes his loving will. It is therefore a means of grace."[5] Aulen also observes, "The various means of grace, to which previous reference has been made, are indissolubly connected with prayer and become effective means of grace only in this connection."[6] As I noted above, there is no sharp distinction between prayer and worship, for a sermon or eucharistic action nourishes our faith when we meditate on them.

I agree with Aulen that along with Word and sacraments we should regard prayer as the third means of grace through which God works. If we were to do this, we would make provision in our churches and seminaries for teaching prayer just as we make provision for proclaiming the Word and administering the sacraments.

I said I would identify three reasons *why* we Lutherans have been slow in teaching one another about prayer. The first is that we have not understood the nature of prayer. The second is our worry about slipping into works righteousness. The combination of these two reasons has caused us to be very leery of prayer disciplines. Now we come to the third reason, which is that we tend to get our priorities somewhat out of order. To be more specific, Lutherans often forget that living the faith comes first and theology comes second. Or to put it another way, we tend to overlook that fact that walking the Christian path is the first order act and theology is a second order act. Theology is reflection on faith, theology comes second.

Unlike the Anglicans for whom the *Book of Common Prayer* is more significant than doctrine, and unlike the Methodists for whom hymnody is probably of higher value than theological teachings, Lutheran tradition has regarded theology and doctrine as very important. In my own opinion, doctrine is indeed very important. It articulates the solid substance in our tradition and gives us a critical perspective on the cultural trends that come along. Lutherans have made theology such a high priority that we have marshalled considerable human and financial resources to insure that theology is taught and taught well. At the same time, we reveal the value we place on the first order practice of praying by the meager human and financial resources we devote to instruction in prayer.

The oddity of this prioritizing has been partly concealed by the fact that we get distracted by the numerous theological con-

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[4] "On the Councils and the Church," in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, ed. Timothy F. Lull (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 561.

[5] Gustaf Aulen, *The Faith of the Christian Church*, tr. Eric H. Wahlstrom and G. Everett Arden (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1948), 356.

[6] Aulen,401.

troversies in our tradition. There is always some dispute to get excited about. This attraction to theological controversy has been aided in our tradition by the tendency to paint a very narrow white line and attack everyone who strays just a little from it. What I have in mind is this. I'm told that when the highway patrol stop a driver whom they suspect has had too much to drink, they may make the driver walk along the white line that borders most highways. I suppose on most highways that white line is about four inches wide. I'm suggesting that many Lutherans are continually testing one another's theological sobriety by seeing whether we walk a straight white line. I'm also suggesting that many of us Lutherans paint a very narrow white line to be used as the standard. Rather than a line that's four inches wide, we paint one with a half-inch artist's brush.

Now, I'm not an ELCA theologian taking a pot shot at Missouri or Wisconsin Lutherans. All you have to do is read some of our ELCA neo-Lutheran theologians and you can often find a very narrow white line. For instance, some Lutherans like to say that the doctrine of justification by faith is the doctrine by which the church stands or falls. Yet if one reads on, one often finds that very few folks even in the Lutheran tradition have taught the proper doctrine of justification. Those in Lutheran Orthodoxy did not get it right, and the Pietists certainly did not. The Formula of Concord also has the doctrine a bit skewed. Melanchthon is the Lutheran reformer second only to Luther, yet Melanchthon's stock today in our tradition is amazingly low, because later in his life he also did not formulate a pure doctrine of justification. And then when we come to Martin Luther himself, there is a tendency to see the purest articulation of justification by faith in the *early* Luther. Mind you, *this* is the doctrine by which the church stands or falls. By this judgment, though, it would appear that the Lutheran church, which has at least been *trying* to walk the white line, has in fact been wandering drunkenly all over the place.

When we look at other things beside theological formulation, however, we often find that down through these centuries of inadequate theological formulation God has continued to bring people to faith in Jesus Christ. In spite of our many theological shortcomings, the Holy Spirit has been active. There are limits, as Luther recognized in the Smalcald Articles, Part II, Article I, for when there is no witness to Jesus Christ, the faith dies out. Yet the Lord seems able to work in spite of less than perfect theological articulation. We all know persons who are theologically "unsophisticated" and totally unaware of the current controversies in academic theology, yet their trust in the Lord and their compassion for others puts us theologically trained folks to shame.

I do not say that theology is unimportant. I think it is indeed important. Yet doing theology and engaging in theological debates are not *as* important as such first order things as singing God's praises, meditating on the works of God, proclaiming those works of God, caring for the needy, and loving one another.

Of course, there is not a sharp division between these first order activities of faith and the second order activity of theology. Lutherans have been right to emphasize that how we do theology influences how we pray, but we have frequently minimized what the early church stressed: how we pray (and do not pray) influences how we do theology. The influences flow in both directions between prayer and theology. My point is that we should modify our priorities by placing a higher value on fundamental practices of the faith such as prayer and put a somewhat lower value on theol-

ogy and its controversies. Furthermore, this shift in priorities should be reflected in how we allocate human and financial resources in the Lutheran churches.

I have made three recommendations regarding Lutherans and prayer: 1) that we come to a fuller understanding of prayer, 2) that we recognize prayer as a means of grace through which God works and so realize that the risks of misusing prayer should not prevent us from emphasizing its great value, 3) that we reorder our priorities, so that training in prayer and other first order activities of faith receive the appropriate resources.

If we Lutherans were to take this advice seriously, I believe it would make our spirituality more Christ-centered. The major direction signs on the pathway of Lutheran spirituality do indeed point toward Jesus Christ. That's as it should be. However, we have been far less successful in helping people actually get from here to there, less successful in helping people gain access to God's healing grace. For example, not long ago I led a prayer retreat at a rural church in Iowa. One middle aged woman on that retreat expressed to the group her persistent feelings of guilt over having been a poor mother to her oldest son when he was young. She was a regular churchgoer who had been baptized, heard many sermons on forgiveness, and had often received Holy Communion, but God's Word of forgiveness had not really reached that part of her life. Certain forms of prayer in which memories are held up before the Lord and offered for healing might be helpful to her. Another person at the same retreat said she was so busy with the dual responsibilities of job and home that she found it difficult to sense Christ's presence in her life. It is not helpful to merely say that she hear more sermons and take Communion frequently. What she needs is advice on prayer such as, when possible, pausing just a couple minutes to take a few deep breaths and maybe use the Jesus prayer to remind her that Christ is indeed present with her in the midst of the hubbub.

> The influences flow in both directions between prayer and theology.

Arguments over works righteousness and theological fine points are not at the top of the agenda in such real life situations. What is at stake is helping people live day by day in the presence and strength of Jesus Christ, and for that we need prayer.

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Book Reviews

For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences Documents from 1970 to 1991. Edited by Gaudencio Rosales, D.D. and D. G. Areval, S.J. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, and Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian Publications, 1992. 356 pages. $39.95.

The continent of Asia is home to 60% of the world's population and the birthplace of all the world's great historical religions. Yet Asia's Christian population, roughly divided between Catholics and non-Catholics, accounts for only eight percent of the total population of Asia, in contrast to Africa (48% Christian) and Latin America (94% Christian). The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), created after Vatican II in 1970 during the Pontificate of Pope Paul VI out of national episcopal conferences, serves as a vehicle for mutual solidarity, prayer, joint study and reflection, toward the goal of a greater community of vision, discernment, and decision making among local Asian churches. Its orientation has been described as one of ongoing dialogue in three inter-related spheres: "Asian religions, Asian cultures, and the immense multitude of the poor" (xxv).

For All the Peoples contains the texts, with introductions, of forty FABC-sponsored meetings held in various Asian cities between 1970 and 1991, one of them the report of an international congress (Manila, 1979), the others being reports of Asian bishops' meetings or special institutes. Nearly a third deal with "interreligious affairs" or the "theology of dialogue," the others relating to "social action," the "lay apostolate," and the task of evangelization. Underlying all these statements is the new reality of the Catholic church in Asia, freed from centralized control, finding its new identity as local churches in a multiplicity of Asian contexts, and reaching out in mission and evangelization in response to the challenge of Asian religions, cultures, and people who are poor and oppressed. While covering the same ground over and over with maddening repetition, these statements from FABC conferences serve to underscore the crucial issues in common witness faced by all Christian communities in Asia today.

James A. Scherer
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A History of Christianity in Asia. Vol. I: Beginnings to 1500. By Samuel H. Moffett. New York: HarperCollins, 1992. 560 pages. $45.00.

This first volume of an anticipated two-volume work comprehensively covers the spread of Christianity eastward into Asia from Jerusalem and Antioch up to but not including the time of the Spanish and Portuguese explorations. Trained in the historical school of Kenneth Scott Latourette before embarking on his own missionary career in China and Korea, Moffett displays the same dedication and indefatigability of his teacher in telling the story of the march of early Christianity across Syria and Persia to India and China with a perspective and a connectedness which past fragmentary accounts have lacked. Moffett wants to remind us that Christianity is an Asian phenomenon, and that its earliest centers and some of its greatest successes—but also failures—were Asian. Written by the former Henry Luce Professor of Mission and Ecumenics at Princeton Seminary while a fellow of the Princeton Center for Theological Inquiry, Moffett's work offers remedial reading for historians heretofore almost exclusively preoccupied with Christianity's westward expansion into the Mediterranean and Europe.

Moffett makes no pretense of doing original research on the subject of early Christianity in Asia, but he brilliantly synthesizes the scattered and often contradictory accounts of Nestorian and Syrian missionary activity—

often reported as legendary and undocumented stories—into a plausible retelling of the Asian story. While offering a primarily descriptive account, he is obliged to sift chaff from wheat and evaluate mixed sources. The present work stops short of telling the very different story of western Christian expansion into Asia that begins with the age of European exploration and imperialism. Given the fact that Asia in the late twentieth century seems destined to become the dynamic center for many new Christian communities, Moffett's two volume work will likely provide Asian Christians with a deeper and more satisfying sense of their origins and destiny. Western Christians seeking a more adequate understanding of the sources of global Christianity will find Moffett's work indispensable for enlarging their worldview.

James A. Scherer

Confessing the One Faith: An Ecumenical Explication of the Apostolic Faith as it is Confessed in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (381). Faith and Order Paper No. 153. Geneva: WCC Publications, World Council of Churches, 1991.

No time or space should be wasted in getting to the point: this is an excellent book! *Confessing the One Faith* should be on the reading list of every pastor and concerned layperson, and at the *top* of the reading list for every denominational officer and bishop. This book is the direction that the thinking of the church must take if the future of the church is to be one of renewal in ecumenical unity, mission, and evangelization, and not the further disintegration of denominationalism.

Confessing the One Faith is something of a companion piece to the 1981 Faith and Order Paper, *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*, and together these two documents provide the outlines of a genuine ecumenical catholicity in both the confessing of the faith and the faithful ordering of the church that has the potential to give the church a renewed sense of identity, purpose, and zeal. It is brief (104 pages of text) and written in a clear, largely non-technical style (with a handy glossary of terms in the back that is itself worth the price of the book), summarizing in understandable ways the ancient and modern tangle of debates that form so much of the history of the origins and interpretations of the Nicene Creed, and spending most of its effort on a modern ecumenical "explication" of the meaning of the Creed for the unity in faith and doctrine of the ecumenical church today. As such, *Confessing the One Faith* is an excellent teaching tool for pastors to use with adult study groups, and at the same time is an energizing and creative discussion-piece for the local ecumenical ministerium.

Much of the quality of *Confessing the One Faith* is due to the high quality of its editorial drafting committee. Three of the world's best ecumenists produced the final form of this document: Wolfhart Pannenberg, J. M. R. Tillard, and Mary Tanner. But these three also served as editors and reporters for a much larger number of ecumenical theologians from around the world working in Faith and Order meetings from 1981 to 1990 (all dutifully listed in Appendix IV, 125-39). Of particular importance for the formation of this document was the broad and extensive representation of theologians from the Orthodox communion, and the noticeably large number of Lutheran theologians contributing to the task. While not implying that the other theologians involved made no significant contribution, the orientation and conclusion of *Confessing the One Faith* show the clear marks of the Orthodox interpretation of the doctrine of the Trinity and the Lutheran interpretation of the doctrine of grace. The ecumenical consensus seems to be forming around these two poles. The centrifugal force toward this center in ecumenical theology is as exciting for its possibilities of uniting East and West as it is for ironing out the schism that divides the Western Catholic tradition. What we Lutherans might see in this document is weighty evidence that Lutheranism works best as an ecumenical proposal for unity, which may inspire us to rethink how we shape and present ourselves and our identity.

Confessing the One Faith is divided into chapters on each of the three articles of the Nicene Creed. In each chapter, the historical and dogmatic issues involved define the discussion; then a statement of modern challenges to the creedal affirmation, a summary of biblical ex-

egesis that lies behind and supports the creedal affirmation (uniformly well done), and a contemporary interpretation of the meaning of the creedal affirmation follow. This method presents an important model of theological inquiry that *begins with* the received text and its traditional teaching as normative, to which biblical exegesis and modern theology enter into dialogue in answer to secular criticism. What this method produces is theology that is both critical and faithful, that preserves the tradition and argues for its contemporary value and truth.

The actual contents of *Confessing the One Faith* are a theological miracle for our day and age. Among its more miraculous positions are:

—a firm insistence that the one true God is the Triune God of Father, Son and Holy Spirit;

—an equally firm insistence that the *name* of the Christian God is *exclusively* "Father, Son and Holy Spirit" and a firm denial of the Holy Spirit as a "feminine principle" in God;

—The Fatherhood of God defended as revelation from Jesus Christ and not as anthropological metaphor;

—Salvation founded in the incarnation, passion, crucifixion and resurrection of the historical Jesus;

—The church as grounded in the Trinity as an indispensable, divinely ordained, integral part of the Triune action of redemption and salvation;

—Baptism and Eucharist as the divine actions that define the being and mission of the church.

Confessing the One Faith also takes a very important position on ecclesiology. It forthrightly endorses what is called "communio" or "koinonia" ecclesiology: the church as a *communion of communions*. The fundamental thesis of communio-ecclesiology is that the root understanding of the church in the New Testament is that it is the Body of Christ. This is the root definition because it is *not a metaphor, but literal*: by the power of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the church is *in fact* the continuing bodily presence of Christ in the world giving glory to God the Father. The church, then, is the *koinonia in Christ* that is made real and effective in the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist, which form an intimate, organic fellowship or communion (*koinonia*) between the Risen Lord Jesus Christ and his faithful people in the gift of the Spirit as the new children of God the Father.

Communio-ecclesiology seems to be another piece of the center towards which ecumenism is moving in consensus today. It is an ecclesiology that puts great stock in the *visible unity* of the church: just as there is only one Lord, one Spirit, one Baptism, one faith, so there can only be one church—a church united as one in word and sacrament, in ministry, in creed and liturgy, in prayer and mission, while remaining broadly open to the diversity of human existence that can and must shape this basic communion in each local place. Communio-ecclesiology is what gives to the ecumenical movement the definition of its goal of "full communion." It is this ecclesiology that *Confessing One Faith* presents as what the Nicene Creed means when it confesses faith in "the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church."

The centrality of the sacrament of baptism is also a significant feature of this document. Baptism is where faith begins. Baptism is the ineradicable incorporation into the saving *koinonia* of the church. Repentance, confession and absolution are the daily return to and reappropriation of baptism. Baptism is that real participation in the death and resurrection of Christ by which Christians are justified and set free from slavery to sin. And it is in the context of the discussion of baptism that the document can make this remarkable statement: "in the light of common listening to the Holy Scriptures... we are today confessing with one another that we are justified without merit by faith alone, that the grace of God also transforms the human being and that Christian life is without credibility if there is no kind of renewal" (95).

The book is not without its flaws, all of which are typical of the ecumenical movement today. For one, it is a bit disconcerting that the document could get its Christology so entirely right and its soteriology so muddled. The soteriology of the document is shaped throughout by broad concessions to Liberation Theology, and where this is not the case, the work of salvation is psychologized into a relief of feelings of guilt and inadequacy. On balance, though, the document does also confess that Christ frees *all people* from sin, death, and the power of the devil

and sacrifices himself in obedience to the Father to reconcile the world to the Father. But it is in the section on soteriology that the claim of the tradition and the interpretation for the modern world do not hang together well.

A second instance: the document categorically rejects the *filioque*. The concern expressed is that the Spirit might appear to be subordinate to the Son, should the procession of the Spirit include the operation of the Son and not the Father alone. The text is quick to insist on "the communion and unity of the Spirit with Christ in the economy of salvation" (78). But the point of the *filioque* is not the economy of salvation or the economic Trinity (both East and West have always agreed that in the economy of salvation the Spirit acts as the Spirit of Christ, the Son, not apart from the Son), but is rather the *immanent* Trinity, and the concern of the West that the economic Trinity and the immanent Trinity are in fact the same; the Triune God does not act in one way in the economy of salvation while in fact existing in quite a different way in the interiority of his Being. The *filioque* guards against both tri-theism and any ontological split between God in himself and God as he appears in history. These concerns receive no notice in the document, and its trinitarian theology is weaker because of it.

A third example illustrates this weakness. The document is rightly lauded for denying that the Holy Spirit is some "feminine principle" in God just because the Hebrew word for "spirit" happens to be feminine in gender. But the argument is made, not on the trinitarian grounds—that the Spirit is precisely the Spirit of the man Jesus, the Son of God—for to make that argument requires that one holds to the *filioque* doctrine: that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and also from the Son, i.e., the Spirit is the Spirit of the Father *and* of the son, both in the immanent existence and the economic activity of the Triune God. Unable to say outright that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus the Son both in God himself and in God's activity in history, the argument is made instead on the much weaker grounds of preferring to stick with the Bible's "symbolic analogy and use of metaphorical language" which uses masculine or neuter (sic!) gender pronouns for the Spirit. In this, the document seems to concede a point it had argued against earlier in its discussion of the Triune name.

These theological problems notwithstanding, however, *Confessing the One Faith* is still a triumph of ecumenical theology. This is the sort of thinking that theology must be about today. Those who wish to follow the church and its confession of faith into its future, and not remain mired in her past, are well advised to take up this little book to read and ponder it.

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Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity: Towards a Christian Empire. By Peter Brown. University of Wisconsin Press, 1992. x and 182 pages. Paper. $12.95.

Power and Persuasion is an appropriate title for this work. Brown provides us with a rich, nuanced picture of social relations in the Eastern Empire between 300 and 450 C.E. He traces the important yet subtle shifts and transformation of relationships, status, and power that took place within this century and a half.

Power and Persuasion grew out of three lectures delivered at the 1988 Curti Lectures of the University of Wisconsin–Madison. The book is divided into four chapters. In the first chapter Brown lays out the rules that governed the relations between representatives of the emperor's power, the governors, and the provincial notables. The provincial notables were the upper class who held local power within the cities of the Roman Empire. The reality of the situation in the early fourth century Empire was that the governors and the local upper class had a fragile but necessary relationship. Brown's point is that the relationship between the two groups was governed by certain rules of dealing with each other. In the eyes of the upper class the effective governor was the one who remained open to persuasion and who was likewise capable of persuading others.

Chapter two explores the content of the rules governing the social relationships between

the governor and the upper class. The key to understanding the rules of conduct, speech and the art of persuasion is embedded in the concept of *paideia. Paideia* was the system of grooming and education where all upper class men learned the art of rhetoric and conduct. Both governors and the local upper class leaders went through the same educational system and, in a sense, spoke the same language. Throughout chapter two Brown unpacks the main tenets and implications of *paideia.*

In chapter three Brown observes a transition that takes place in the cities. Increasingly, the upper class shared local power and authority with Christian bishops and clergy. Christian bishops, clergy, and Christian congregations began to reorganize local politics as Christian bishops became more prominent in local politics and in the exercising of authority. In essence, Christians and their bishops altered the social order of *paideia.*

One way the bishop gained prominence was through the care of the poor. One of the implicit responsibilities of upper class leaders was to control the populace of the cities and countryside. This control was administered in a variety of ways. One way was through benefactions or gifts to people of the city. Gifts were given either annually or on certain occasions, but they were almost never given on a consistent, daily basis. Bishops challenged the upper class' ability to placate the populace, precisely because church structures became a major place of convergence for the poor. At the church, the poor were given gifts of food, clothing, etc. on a daily basis. As a result of such activities the bishop became the symbolic "lover of the poor" and was simultaneously perceived as the "controller of the crowds." Bishops were perceived to have the power to keep the peace and steer the crowds from possible rioting. When the bishop was perceived as a controller of the crowds, he became a rival authority to both the local upper class and the Roman government. Hence, the upper class were forced to collaborate with the bishop in local politics. The emperor began to look to the bishop as the spokesperson on behalf of the city.

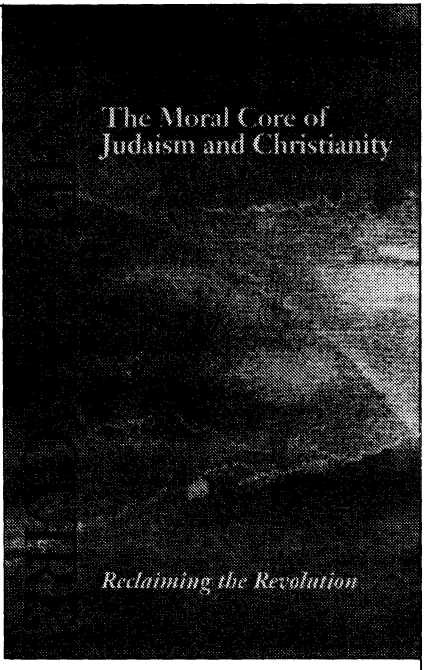
In chapter four Brown puts the Christian bishops in context. While the bishop may have risen in status and power, there were certain things in which the emperor did not allow the bishops to interfere. One example was taxation. The bishop was not allowed to speak on behalf of the city regarding taxes, nor was the church structure allowed to become a sanctuary or safe haven for those seeking to avoid taxes or punishment. Brown tells the story of how imperial soldiers came into Bishop Ambrose's church during a worship service to arrest an offender.

Brown wants this book to be user-friendly. He intentionally cites passages from works of authors for which translations and commentaries in English or French already exist. Brown uses the most up-to-date secondary scholarship available. His use of primary sources is impressive. He uses a wide variety of sources in order to paint as clear a picture of this nuanced and complicated society as possible. Primary sources include archaeological finds (mosaics and inscriptions), official and personal letters (including the newly discovered letters of Augustine), and Christian and non-Christian histories ranging from Bishop Theodoret to Libanius. The one drawback to this book is the lack of a bibliography. All bibliographic references are imbedded in the footnotes. Fortunately, the book does contain a thorough index.

Brown's intention is to present a picture of the societal transformations taking place as Christianity rises in the fourth and fifth centuries. Brown succeeds with his intention and offers clarity and insight into a very complicated process. I highly recommend this book.

Jeffrey S. Zell
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A moral creed for the next millennium



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by DANIEL C. MAGUIRE, Professor of Ethics, Marquette University

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God's Power: Traditional Understandings and Contemporary Challenges. By Anna Case-Winters. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990. 276 pages. $19.95.

This book is a well written, clearly defined, straightforward reassessment of the "traditional" doctrine of divine omnipotence. Process thought and feminism are combined by Case-Winters in order to provide the metaphysical, sociological, and theological punch behind her sweeping critique of the "classical" theodicy dilemma (the justification of God's goodness and omnipotence in view of the experience of evil). Her entire assessment turns on the theological and social ramifications of affirming the existence of an omnipotent God in the face of pervasive evil. By shifting the focus of "power" on the basis of Process thought from "the scope of God's power" to "the meaning of power" and from male metaphors to female ones (without claiming that female metaphors are any more accurate), Case-Winters hopes to present an intellectually viable proposal for comprehending divine power which can resolve the theodicy problem and the negative consequences within the realm of human affairs that it has created. In the end, however, one is left wondering whether the theodicy problem has been so effectively resolved by Case-Winters' *metaphysical* re-evaluation of the "Mother's" power as to effectively eliminate any need for the biblical picture of this "Mother's" *historical* Son.

But what was the problem in "classical" thought in regard to the understanding and use of God's power which Case-Winters finds so objectionable? Calvin and Barth are critiqued in detail as good examples of all the classical modes of the "catholic tradition." Case-Winters writes: "At a bare minimum, these convictions include the belief that God's power is expressed in creating the world, governing it, and bringing it to its 'proper end.' It is assumed that God is able (has the requisite power) to realize divine purposes in the world process.... It will be argued that this way of thinking presupposes a meaning for divine power which can be characterized as power in the mode of domination and control." Indeed, it is this aspect of "the tradition" that Case-Winters finds the most objectionable theologically and socially: that is, the classical tradition's notion of God's power, consistently expressed in male imagery, which is always understood and practiced under the dual notion of domination and control.

So, does Case-Winters present a viable contemporary option for understanding and experiencing God's power? One's response to this question will probably hinge on how one reacts to her methodology and her picture of God. First, does Process thought provide a viable metaphysical foundation for a Christian doctrine of God? Or more to the point, does the Christian doctrine of God depend on any metaphysical system for its justification? Second, does a feminist critique of the Christian metaphor of God's power get at the heart of the scriptural message of God's saving power in Christ?

God's Power raises in an articulate way salient points concerning a growing consensus among many theologians that certain concepts of God can no longer be maintained as Christian: that God is static, impassible, immovable, removed from the world, and that "He" has a male psychological profile. Nevertheless, it is likewise recognized by many that these very concepts of God were never fundamentally Christian but were religious and philosophical "extra baggage" carried over from the surrounding cultures in which Christianity grew and prospered. It is being affirmed by many today "within the tradition" that the classical understanding of God's power can be more effectively critiqued and cleansed of alien elements through its own foundations in the Trinity, scripture, the creeds, and "the Protestant principle of justification" than by overthrowing the system and reconstructing from scratch based upon the building blocks of metaphysical principles and social analyses.

Nonetheless, if Anna Case-Winters can find a gracious, all powerful, "life-giving," "world-generating," *saving* God who is viable for contemporary culture within the realm of the first person of Trinity—a, so to speak, Unitarianism of the Mother—without the other two "classical" persons, then more *power* to her.

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Knowing the Truth: A Sociological Approach to New Testament Interpretation. By Howard Clark Kee. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989. vii and 120 pages. Paper. $9.95.

In this short but technical book Kee introduces the application of sociological theory to New Testament exegesis. He deliberately performs this study in a wide ranging manner. "The task of this volume will be to examine the social nature of human knowledge, since the fundamental question of how knowledge occurs is an issue... for [both] students of religion... [and] the whole range of intellectual inquiry." Kee introduces, and concisely discusses, a broad spectrum of contemporary intellectuals and the movements they spawned: Thomas Kuhn, Max Weber, Peter Berger, Mary Douglas, Claude Levi-Strauss, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and others. The first two chapters are devoted to this introduction to epistemology and sociology. The last two begin to apply the methods of such thinkers to the exegesis of the New Testament.

This is not a "quick and dirty" or "Cliff's Notes" introduction to the sociology of the New Testament. Beyond examining New Testament texts in light of sociology, Kee forces us to ask many questions about "knowing how we know." He seems to parallel George Lindbeck in understanding knowledge, values systems, and communication as essentially communitarian. Since there are many communities, both present and past, the entire concept of knowledge depends upon the values, structures, and communication systems of those communities. When applied to exegesis Kee wants the exegete to understand each text—seemingly the canonical or finally redacted text *a la* Brevard Childs—on its own terms while utilizing sociological models and data from empirical, or social description, analysis of ancient societies.

In making the above claims, Kee makes several cautionary statements; he wishes to avoid forcing the New Testament data to fit any given model. He rightly criticizes much German scholarship (Harnack, Bultmann, Conzelmann) for forcing the New Testament to fit their prescribed twentieth century philosophical program. He makes a similar criticism of the structuralist interpretations of Levi-Strauss and Daniel Patte. Kee also implicitly criticizes liberationist exegetes—or more appropriately liberationist hermeneutes—and others (Marxists, capitalist evangelicals) who practice reductionism, by accounting "for the appeal of Christianity by identifying its dynamic primarily or even exclusively with economic or political factors."

As with any human endeavor "this side of heaven," Kee's argument has its faults. First, he seems to make light of the social description of the first and second century world. He rightly takes many exegetes to task for uncritical use of the late rabbinical materials to interpret first century Judaism, for assuming that all of the Pauline materials (Acts, the genuine letters, the deutero-Paulines, and Pastoral letters) provide accurate, and equally valid, insight into the Pauline churches, the outdated Procrustean use of Hegel's historical schema to interpret data about first century churches, and similar scholarly *faux pas*. However, he fails to note the *absolute* significance of archaeology, epigraphy, and numismatics for his concern for the application of social science models. Without concrete data from both the text and physical remains, how can one apply a model? For example, how can one define or sociologically model sex roles in a New Testament community without using the epigraphic data on first-century women newly provided by Ross Kraemer and Bernadette Brootten?

Secondly, Kee would have exegetes burden themselves with the technical apparatus and jargon of sociolinguistics. He especially commends the work of Eugene Nida and the *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*. Kee seems to imply that the interpreter must bring the intellectual apparatus of Ludwig Wittgenstein, Hans Gadamer, and Anthony Thiselton to each text. His prime example is that only, or the implication that only, such a complex method will enable us to differentiate between the Pauline and Matthean usages of the word "righteousness." Surely, "classical exegesis" permits both Paul and Matthew to speak with different voices. The chronological and etymological approaches of the *TDNT* or the *BAGD* and the intelligent use of genre criticism and redaction criticism would certainly make the interpreter conclude that these two

different authors used δικαιοσυνη differently. Is it really necessary to approach the text with an armentarium complete with the sociology of knowledge and sociolinguistics in order to understand the text? Is there not the danger of making the text too abstract, too translatable into twentieth century jargon? Are not the questions that Kee would have interpreters ask of the text (group boundaries, lines of authority, rituals, literary genre, understanding of time, etc.), questions that can be answered with social description and the historical-critical method?

Thirdly, Kee's seeming emphasis on the final form of the text ignores problems directly relevant to exegesis. Can we not discuss the sociology of Q? Can sociological constructs shed new light on the evolution of the Johannine material? If indeed the "new paradigm" in both the natural and social sciences views knowledge as knowledge of the group or community, can not the exegete analyze constituent source documents and forms in terms of the community knowledge of the source community?

These criticisms and questions are only this reader's dialog with Kee. He has written a remarkable concise and very fine introduction to one complex aspect of New Testament exegesis. The book is clearly written, though often abstract. It should be a required text for those wishing to understand social science criticism of the New Testament at the advanced level. It can also serve as a guide to the manner in which contemporary intellectual movements can affect an exegete's interpretive presuppositions and pre-understandings of the text.

Systematicians and exegetes can also benefit from this book, in their inter-disciplinary dialog, by asking each other the same questions about knowledge and interpretation that Kee asks of the text. If the sociology of knowledge and sociolinguistics can bring both systematicians and exegetes together in appropriating the biblical message, so much the better for all of us in the community of faith.

Lynn Allan Kauppi
Tempe, Arizona

How To Read Karl Barth. The Shape of His Theology. By George Hunsinger. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991. 298 pages. Paper. $14.95.

One of the leading Barth-interpreters of the United States has done a great service to both friends and adversaries of Karl Barth's theology, and especially to those not yet familiar with Barth's mature theology, the 13-volume *Church Dogmatics*. Yet one *caveat* needs to be expressed for those looking for a "quick" delivery in form of some easily digestible fast food: this book is not a substitute for Barth's own work, i.e. it is no "Barth reader," nor is it a quick summary-guide through the elaborate architecture of the *Church Dogmatics*. Rather, Hunsinger's study resembles an outstanding map to be used while traveling through a complex and relatively foreign territory. It precisely is a guide for how to read, in which way to approach and understand the argumentative movement of Barth's mature theology.

Hunsinger achieves this task by a novel and very helpful approach, namely by organizing his map around six key motifs, which—in similarity to a symphony—constitute in various combinations with some of them in the foreground and others in the background the intricate web of the *Church Dogmatics*. In the first part of the book, Hunsinger introduces all six motifs; in the second part, the center of the study, he shows how these motifs play themselves out in Barth's concept of truth: truth as revelation, truth as salvation, truth as encounter. In a lengthy epilogue Hunsinger unfolds Barth's understanding of secular parables of the truth, in other words, Barth's rudimentary theology of culture. One of the important peaks of the book is Hunsinger's treatment of Barth's chalcedonian understanding of God's and human agency, which allows Barth to do full justice to both God's and human freedom, a chapter which nicely undercuts the widespread, yet uninformed assumption that in Bath's theology human agency is swamped by divine action. In regard to the overall composition of the book it is unfortunate that the secular parables of the truth are only discussed as an epilogue and not as a more integrated and concretely developed element of the overall argument.

Hunsinger identifies six key motifs in the "symphony" of the *Church Dogmatics*: actualism, particularism, objectivism, personalism, realism, and rationalism. They are not to be understood as "-isms" in their own right, as independent principles, but rather as interrelated moves of thought and argumentation, interpreting in their unique and irreplaceable ways their common center: "Jesus Christ is the center of the motifs. They are all descriptive of him. With him in mind they are meant to be instructive and thought-provoking. Without him they are meant to be nothing. They are of no interest in and of themselves, but only as they point to him" (229). A more intentional beginning with the christological center and a more constant relating back of each motif to this center in the first part of the book, might have made this map an even stronger one that it already is. That way it also would have prevented the danger of taking the six motifs and running with them in separation of their christological center.

Yet these critical remarks should not detract from the fact that this study presently is by far the best guide to an informed reading of the *Church Dogmatics*. By his close and conceptually sophisticated reading of Barth, Hunsinger not only invalidates a host of interpretive shortcuts and misunderstandings, but also introduces his readers in the art of reading and understanding a complex masterpiece of Christian theology. And that a map fully reflects the complexity of the terrain is not a sign of its faultiness, but of its precision. This book should accompany any serious reading of Karl Barth's theology and needs to be taken into full consideration in any future interpretative ventures into the *Church Dogmatics*.

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Secret Sayings of the Savior: The Extrabiblical Logion Attributed to Jesus. By Jackson Snyder. Privately published in Franklin, GA, 1992. $10.00.

Snyder is an M.Div. student at Emory University's Candler School of Theology who is supporting his education by writing Christian software.

This DOS-based software excerpts noncanonical Jesus sayings from the apocryphal gospels, the Nag Hammadi materials, the church fathers, and other sources using paraphrastic translations in contemporary English. Each sayings collection is prefaced by a short paragraph of commentary about the contents of the collection, its discovery, and date of composition. A table of contents and a brief bibliography are also included.

The software is extremely easy to use. First time computer users may require minimal assistance in copying it to their hard drives. Once installed, the user is presented with a table of contents and a very easy menu. Single keystrokes easily move one around and through the material. The material may also be printed.

Snyder does not intend the software for scholarly use but as a conveniently accessible introduction to the noncanonical Jesus logia. I recommend the software to those interested in having a "feel" for the apocryphal materials without devoting themselves to scholarly research. *Secret Sayings* would be useful for pastors, adult classes, and students.

My criticisms are minor. The white lettering on black screen is difficult to read and the DOS CLS, "clear screen," command is necessary after exiting the program. It would also be useful to include sayings numberings, chapter references, etc. in order to cross check with the standard translations. These criticisms could be easily rectified in any future update of the software.

The software is advertised on various computer bulletin boards, e.g. the PRODIGY on line service, and is also available from Snyder directly.

Lynn Allan Kauppi

The Promise and Practice of Biblical Theology. Edited by John Reumann. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991. x and 214 pages. Paper. $12.95.

Biblical Theology is a discipline that many think is in crisis. The stress on variety in the biblical books suggests that the writing of biblical theology is an exercise in futility. This collection of essays implies otherwise, as editor John Reumann says in his introduction to the volume.

The first five essays were lectures on "The Promise of Biblical Theology: Some Current and New Perspectives" as part of the 125th anniversary of The Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia. Georg Strecker discusses the law in the Sermon on the Mount as an example of critical biblical theology, while Phyllis Trible raises the question of a feminist biblical theology. The two pages on "Contours and Context" for such a theology are among the most creative in the volume. D. J. Harrington surveys the recent stress on the Jewishness of Jesus as a resource for contemporary Jewish-Christian relationships. I found this in some ways the least illuminating essay in the book, while J. A. Sander's revisiting of "Canon as Shape and Function" is provocative and full of insight. Finally, Ulrich Mauser's "Historical Criticism: Liberator or Foe of Biblical Theology?" contrasts Greek *historia* with biblical *tôledôt* and *dabar*, critical investigation with the telling of a story as a participant. Here I think Mauser falls prey, as so many do, to a misreading of Greek antiquity. Herodotus is anything but a critical investigator, as his schema of *koros, hybris, atê* makes clear. There is here, I fear, too much Nachklang or Plato and too little reading of later historians and historical essayists, such as Plutarch. (There is one typo on p. 103, where *Phaedus* should be *Phaedrus*.)

In Part II, "The Practice of Biblical Theology: Biblical Theology as Practical Theology," five members of the Philadelphia faculty respond to some of the themes in the invited lectures. Robert Bornemann seeks a unity for biblical theology in the commitment of the interpreter to God, while Robert Robinson argues that narrative theology is a method in line with the Reformation to rescue the Bible from a professional elite and restore it to the laity. Robert Hughes follows a similar line of reasoning in his use of the parables in preaching. Robert Kysar suggests that proclamation which exegetes modern community and ancient text may provide a key for homiletical method that respects the integrity of the biblical text. Finally, Margaret Krych correlates biblical theology with the teaching task of the church. All these essays have valuable notes which refer one to other discussions and engage in some debate with alternative positions.

John Reumann's "Introduction: Whither Biblical Theology?" and "Afterword: Putting the Promise Into Practice" provide the unity and cohesion that the book would otherwise lack. He traces the history of biblical theology, gives a morphology of current approaches, and finally offers his own personal assessment. Readers will do well to read both before tackling the essays. As usual, Reumann's notes are a veritable bibliography of recent research. Careful appropriation of this volume will do much to illumine present day biblical studies—and aid in recovering their utility for the life of the church.

Edgar Krentz
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

The Ethics of Authenticity. By Charles Taylor. Cambridge, MA/London: Harvard University Press, 1991. 142 pages. Cloth. $17.95.

What is the culture of modernity doing to the life of the churches and to the Christian vocation? How should we as Christians evaluate our existence under the conditions of modernity? Are the current developments of modernity a boon or a bane for Christianity in America? A lively debate is raging on this question in the churches and among theologians, often drawing on the thought of various influential intellectuals, be they the "knockers" or the "boosters" of the project of modernity. Here we have another voice, worth being taken into serious consideration.

This interesting little book was originally published in Canada under the title *The Malaise of Modernity*. The Canadian title points to the

problem, the US American title into the direction of the solution for a predicament we all presently share in the western world, namely, the slide of western culture into increasingly pervasive forms of relativism and nihilism. According to Taylor, a Canadian philosopher and political thinker of high prominence and quality, the "boosters" welcome this trend as a liberating sort of progress while the "knockers" dismiss the whole culture of modernity in its entirety. While Taylor shares in the analysis of the present predicament to a large degree with the "knockers," he does not agree with their conclusions. Rather, he invites his readers to join him in an enterprise of retrieval, namely the full retrieval of the ideal of authenticity, on which the culture of modernity is based. By unfolding the implications of this ideal, he is able to develop a criterion that allows him to distinguish between the good and valuable in modern culture from the socially and politically perilous. Thus he challenges modernity's self-understanding on grounds of its key ideal to overcome the flat and shallow forms of individualism by showing that "authenticity," self-fulfillment, requires us to be embedded in normative moral horizons which encompass us together with others and which put distinct claims on us. Only in the light of these claims do we become fully self-responsible, fully "authentic."

Both Taylor's analysis and constructive proposal are worth being considered, especially since we all feel in our individual lives both the force of the ideal of authenticity and the ambiguity of the situation it has created. Yet while the constructive direction of struggling for the full implementation of the "ideal of authenticity" in our modern societies is worth considering, it is not fully convincing. The reason is that according to Taylor, unending struggle in the public realm will be the only remedy to overcome the dangers of modernity, which are the dominance of instrumental reason and an increasingly bureaucratic and technological society, rendering individuals increasingly passive in matters political and moral. He assumes that the ideal of authenticity as common moral source of modernity will be enough of a resource for this unending struggle of preventing modern societies from sliding further and further into relativism, individualism, and political passivity. Here his proposed solution remains too weak. He is way too optimistic about the resources of reason and common political action based on the moral source of authenticity for overcoming the moral and political challenges of the era.

Nevertheless the book is worth reading for seminarians, pastors, and theologians since it helps us understand the complex predicament we find ourselves in and the tensions and confusions which run right through our congregations and church bodies.

Reinhard Hütter

The Lord's Prayer. By Jan Milic Lochman. Trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990. x and 180 pages. Paper. $12.95.

Why write another book on the Lord's Prayer? Aren't there enough already? Lochman focuses on the Lord's Prayer because it is truly ecumenical. "If there is a single text which binds all ecumenical Christianity together, and which is recalled not merely occasionally but unanimously in almost all services in all churches, it is the Lord's Prayer" (x).

Lochman uses the introduction as a springboard to speak about prayer in general as he asks, "What is the nature of responsible Christian prayer?" (12). He asks the question fully aware of the historical and contemporary difficulties surrounding a discussion on prayer. In its proper context, prayer is the vehicle for a continual renewal of faith that provides the opportunity for a deeper understanding of the relationship between God and humanity. Lochman recognizes the paradox of prayer. On the one hand, much of prayer is beyond verbal articulation. On the other hand, in order for prayer to be prayer it must be articulated. Biblically, the three forms of articulation are petition, intercession, and thanksgiving, which provide the basic structure of prayer and are encapsulated within the Lord's Prayer.

Lochman devotes a chapter to each clause of the Lord's Prayer. His intention is to provide a contemporary interpretation and application. He assesses the world situation and addresses

the experiences and concerns that have led to the development of feminist and liberation theologies. In the first chapter, "Our Father in Heaven," he deals with the feminist concern of addressing God as Father. The clause "Thy Kingdom Come" is a declaration that both the present and the future belong to God, offering hope for the future while granting daily living rooted in God's righteousness, peace, and joy. In the chapter, "Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread," Lochman recognizes the interweaving connection between bread, justice, and freedom, and explores the aspects of spiritual bread, physical bread, and the politics that make both attainable. In the chapter, "But Deliver Us From Evil," Lochman discusses the different ways the Eastern and Western churches have described and identified evil, but instead of perpetuating the distinctions that divide, Lochman remains committed to an ecumenical interpretation and focuses on the cross of Jesus Christ which is ultimately victorious over evil.

Why read another book on the Lord's Prayer? This is not just another book! Throughout the exposition, Lochman demonstrates his familiarity with the exegetical research on the Lord's Prayer and the Christian tradition. He is conversant with many historical and modern figures including Origen, Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Barth, Bonhoeffer, Sölle, and Jeremias. Lochman offers a contemporary interpretation of the Lord's Prayer that interacts with the Christian tradition. This book is a solid, reflective, and readable resource that is at home both in the classroom and the parish.

Jeffrey S. Zell

Just War Theory. Edited by Jean Bethke Elshtain. Washington Square: New York University Press, 1992. 336 pages. Paper. $17.50.

War in the Twentieth Century. Sources in Theological Ethics. Edited by Richard B. Miller. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992. 469 pages. Paper. $21.99.

Interpretations of Conflict, Ethics, Pacifism, and the Just-War-Tradition. By Richard B. Miller. Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1991. 294 pages. Paper. $17.95.

Political theorist Elshtain has put together a reader that reflects the more or less classic positions in Just War theory in the post WWII discussion in the U.S.A. Elshtain has selected key chapters and individual essays by noted ethicists (Ramsey, Hauerwas, Johnson, O'Brien), political theorists (Walzer, Howard, Elshtain), and philosophers (Toulmin, Holmes). The volume's focus on nuclear war, is—fortunately—somewhat outdated, history has moved quicker than editors in the last couple of years, but nevertheless highly worthwhile to remember and consider since we are not yet beyond the nuclear threat.

Miller's reader is different from Elshtain's in its scope and length. It also focuses much more on essays of theological ethicists, G. E. M. Anscombe and J. B. Elshtain being the only exceptions in a group of Protestant and Roman Catholic ethicists. With few exceptions this collection reflects the USAmerican Christian debate on war starting with the famous exchange between the Niebuhr brothers in view of the Manchurian crisis. The other chapters pertain to WWII, Vietnam, nuclear war, the limits of Just War criteria, and the war against Iraq. Miller offers short introductions to each chapter situating the various texts in a helpful way. The essays of this book are very well chosen and provide a fascinating panorama of Christian debate about war in the 20th century. Together with the Elshtain volume (there is almost no overlap) this collection provides an extremely helpful resource.

In his densely argued study *Interpretations of Conflict*, Miller brings pacifism and the Just War tradition into a dialogue on a common set of

values, problems, and interests which will force both sides to refine and fine-tune their arguments. This book might be best read parallel to Miller's collection of essays, since it represents the theoretical reflection on this debate, a reflection that includes more voices than the collection of essays. In light of these actual debates the book unfolds its full theoretical force.

Reinhard Hütter

Niebuhr and His Age: Reinhold Niebuhr's Prophetic Role in the Twentieth Century. By Charles C. Brown. Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992. 317 pages. Cloth. $34.95.

Professor Reinhold Niebuhr: A Mentor to the Twentieth Century. By Ronald H. Stone. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992. 284 pages. Paper. $21.99.

Niebuhr and His Age is a very well researched and highly readable study of both Niebuhr's life and thought. It has to be appreciated as a corrective to Richard Fox's biography (1985) that set a standard of interpretation, which Brown now seriously challenges. In difference to Fox, Brown emphasizes Niebuhr's significance and impact as a theologian and social philosopher which is a highly laudable and necessary enterprise. Even for those who remain critical of Niebuhr, Brown's intellectual biography, which gives him the best reading possible, is an important account to take into consideration.

Stone's unique book is the work of Niebuhr's last graduate assistant at Union Seminary. This homage to a professor locates Niebuhr in the context of his vocation as seminary professor of Protestant social ethics. Based on Niebuhr's published works, on various Niebuhr archives, on Niebuhr's FBI file, and on Stone's personal collection of letters and manuscripts, this study provides a unique insight into Niebuhr's development as a theological and political thinker.

Read together, Brown's and Stone's biographies provide a picture of Niebuhr that makes us understand his crucial role in 20th century American Protestantism.

Reinhard Hütter

Love and Justice: Selections from the Shorter Writings of Reinhold Niebuhr. Edited by D. B. Robertson. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992. 320 pages. Paper. $13.99.

A Reinhold Niebuhr Reader: Selected Essays, Articles, and Book Reviews. Edited by Charles C. Brown. Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992. 173 pages. Paper. $18.95.

The editors of the series *Library of Theological Ethics* (Robin Lovin, Douglas F. Ottati, and William Schweiker) are to be applauded for making a classic collection of shorter texts by Reinhold Niebuhr available again for a younger audience and as textbook for college and seminary classes. Originally published in 1957, the *Love and Justice* collection contains famous shorter pieces Niebuhr wrote for a whole range of religious and secular journals, among others for *The Atlantic Monthly, Christian Century, Christianity and Crisis, The Nation,* and *The Progressive.* The political essays range from "Catholicism and Anarchism in Spain" and "The Hitler-Stalin Pact" to "The Atomic Bomb" and "The Hydrogen Bomb." Major sections of the volume are on race relations and the pacifist issue, on economic issues, and on international relationships—all discussed from a strict theological perspective. It is an important volume for students of Niebuhr, whether we agree or disagree with him.

Quite a different selection of shorter pieces is presented in the smaller, very readable volume by Brown. Only a few short essays on political issues overlap with *Love and Justice.* Essays on theology, social philosophy, current political issues of the day, and some outstanding book reviews make for interesting reading and provoke our own critical theological thinking on a broad range of issues. It makes a nice companion to *Love and Justice.*

Reinhard Hütter

Paganism and Christianity 100-425 C.E.: A Sourcebook. Edited by Ramsay MacMullen and Eugene N. Lane. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1992. 224 pages. Paper. $14.95.

There are many anthologies of readings for the study of early church history, but this book does not simply repeat what is available already elsewhere. The twenty-two sections present about 175 documents that cover religion(s) of the Roman Empire in depth (magic, dreams, superstition, temple management, hymns, cult groups, imperial cult, religious attitudes, Hermeticism and Gnosticism, etc.), illustrate Greco-Roman perceptions of Judaism and Christianity, and provide insight into early Christian apologists and persecutions (with a special section on North Africa).

The editors give a brief introduction to each selection, with a bibliographical reference to the modern source on which they have drawn. They cite a great number of inscriptions, evidence usually not well known to church historians. The section on hymns illustrates well their familiarity with the sources. They cite a hymn to Isis from the Oxyrhynchus, the well known epigraphic aretalogy of Isis from Cyme, a text of Karpokrates, a hymn to Tyche discovered on a papyrus fragment, selections from the Orphic hymns, an epigraphic hymn from Epidaurus, a hymn to earth from the Anthologia Latina, a prose hymn to Dionysus (a papyrus text), the description of how to write prose hymns from Menander Rhetor (an obscure, little known text), and a hymn to Zeus from Pseudo-Aristotle, *De Mundo*. The ten texts are a good introduction to an aspect of ancient religion that deserves attention by church historians, liturgiologists, and New Testament students.

There is an index of names and topics, but it omits many things that should be added in a second edition, e.g. freedman, evil eye, dance, purity, sacrificial tables, loose hair, slaves of gods, savior, etc. Theological students with little Greek and no Latin should bless the two editors, both classicists of repute.

Edgar Krentz

The Quest for the Original Text of the New Testament. By Philip Wesley Comfort. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992. 200 pages. Paper. $11.95.

The discovery of New Testament manuscripts on papyrus in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries makes a significant resource available for reconstructing an early text of the New Testament. The question is, "How early?" Philip Wesley Comfort argues that using the papyrus manuscripts, which antedate the Diocletian persecution, enables one to recover the original text of the New Testament, that is, "the text in its final edited form as released for circulation in the Christian community."

He seeks to establish his case by paleographic dating. He dates $\mathfrak{P}^{46}$ in the *first century* [sic!], 13 fragmentary papyri and one vellum fragment in the second century, and 27 papyri and 4 fragmentary vellum codexes into the third century. Comfort claims that these texts, all Egyptian, represent the NT text for all Christianity of this early period—an assumption many will not share. He devotes chapters to the "Oxyrhynchus New Testament" (36 fragmentary manuscripts, some found in two "classical libraries"), to "Papyri Hidden in Jars": the Chester Beatty Papyri ($\mathfrak{P}^{45}$, $\mathfrak{P}^{46}$, $\mathfrak{P}^{47}$) and the Coptos papyri ($\mathfrak{P}^{4}$, $\mathfrak{P}^{64}$, $\mathfrak{P}^{67}$), and to "Papyri From a Monastery Library" (Bodmer Biblical Papyri ($\mathfrak{P}^{66}$, $\mathfrak{P}^{72}$, $\mathfrak{P}^{75}$). He argues for their accuracy, sometimes, in a circular fashion: "$\mathfrak{P}^{75}$ is eminently recognized as an extremely accurate copy." ... "It should not surprise us that another accurate manuscript, Codex Vaticanus (B), is quite close to $\mathfrak{P}^{75}$." That is circular reasoning in spades. Chapters 8 to 10 analyze the textual history of each book; here Comfort's diagrams suggest that the surprising variety in the text of the papyri, variety similar to that of the early vellum codexes. After a short chapter criticizing the eclecticism of the Nestle-Aland 26th edition (i.e., not enough priority given to the papyri), Comfort offers a table to enable reconstructing this early text from the papyri, suggesting that its lacunae be filled in from other papyri, or codexes B and ℵ.

This is a provocative book that should stimulate discussion of its daring theories and interest

all those fascinated by the recovery of ancient texts. Comfort succeeds in underscoring the importance of the papyrus fragments of the New Testament for reconstructing an early text, but he does not persuade the reader that this is "the text in its final edited form as released for circulation in the Christian community." That leap of faith from papyri to publication theory is quite unpersuasive, relying more on selective citations from modern scholars than an argument from ancient texts about the publication of works of literature. We are left still with a local, Egyptian text dated to approximately the year 200 C.E., an amazingly early text nonetheless.

Edgar Krentz

The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium. Edited by Alexander P. Kazhdan *et al.* Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1991. 3 Vols., 2,232 pages. Cloth. $275.00.

Like all Oxford dictionaries, this reference work will be a valuable and welcome addition to every institutional library. As the only comprehensive treatment of Byzantium, it will tempt the personal budgets of social, cultural, and political historians, but of few theologians. There are some five thousand compact entries, all with good brief bibliographies up to 1989, and all signed by the contributors (over a hundred of them, from seventeen countries).

The dominant community of scholars, headed by editor Kazhdan, is Harvard University's Dumbarton Oaks in Washington, D.C., which sponsored the project and secured funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities and other American foundations. Thus, this work signals Byzantine studies come of age in the United States, especially at Dumbarton Oaks and its wide network of loyal beneficiaries.

The entries are interdisciplinary in scope, clear in style, and thorough in cross-references. The treatment of all things liturgical, led by Robert Taft, is particularly well done. Kazhdan himself has provided countless entries, all marked by his own vast knowledge. There are modest maps and illustrations, none in color, and no indices at all. The editors claim and provide a special depth in "fiscal terms, urban life, and rural economy," as well as the family, diet, emotions and daily life (Preface). This can be fascinating, but the theologian will find no more on "Chalcedon" or "chalice" than on "soap" or "sports."

Paul Rorem
Princeton, New Jersey

A Noble Death: Suicide and Martyrdom among Christians and Jews in Antiquity. By Arthur J. Droge and James D. Tabor. San Francisco: Harper, 1992. xii and 203 pages. Cloth. $25.00.

Today medical science can prolong life in the face of disease in a way unimaginable even a generation ago; one result is that suicide and doctor-assisted suicide, appearing frequently in the public press, have raised the question of the right to die. Is one morally obligated, for example, to seek all medical aid and undergo all possible treatment or surgery in the face of almost certain death, or may one chose to refuse treatment to die? The discussion frequently refers to the obligation to prolong life in the Hippocratic Oath and the assumption that the Judaeo-Christian tradition forbids all suicide or seeking of death.

This situation led Arthur J. Droge and James D. Tabor to investigate the ancient Jewish and Christian literature on this subject. They first survey the attitude to voluntary death in Homer, Plato, Aristotle, and Hellenistic-Roman philosophy (Cynics, Epicureans, Stoics and Neoplatonists). While none absolutely condemned voluntary death, Platonists and Pythagoreans were most reticent in approval, Epicureans and Cynics most favorable, with Stoics taking a middle of the road position (Were there no opinions among Skeptics?).

The Old Testament records six instances of "voluntary death": Abimelech, Saul, Samson, Ahithophel, Zimri, and Jonah. None are explicitly condemned. Enoch, Elijah, Aaron, and Moses have "forced retirements," possibly deaths. But it is in the second century B.C. that "Jews who choose death rather than submit to a violation or prohibition of religious faith or practice" be-

come ideals: the three in the fiery furnace, Taxo in the *Assumption of Moses,* and the heroes under torture in 1, 2 and 4 Maccabees become models of action. Josephus has many references to voluntary death, e.g. Phasael, the citizens of Gadara, and Eleazar at Masada. Later rabbinic halachah concluded that one could die voluntarily only to avoid idolatry, murder or sexual immorality.

In the New Testament the only case of self-killing is Judas; yet the Bible, per se, never explicitly condemns suicide. Even the case of Jesus is ambiguous: "Was it the legal execution of a criminal, an example of heroic martyrdom, or a case of suicide?" (p. 114) The New Testament texts clearly present it as voluntary, as John 19:30 stresses. Later Paul is fascinated with death and desires to escape from life (Phil 1:21-26). Paul's position is close to the Stoic, as Ambrose and John Donne later saw.

Under persecution voluntary martyrdom was glorified and sought, e.g. Ignatius of Antioch, Polycarp, and many others recorded in the *Acta Martyrorum* and Eusebius. Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and Origen provided theological rationales for such voluntary, at times self-inflicted, death on the basis of Jesus' own voluntary death. It is finally Augustine who sets the definitive Christian interpretation of suicide as always evil. He writes after official persecution was no longer a threat. Augustine discusses suicide in *Adversus Gaudentium* and *De Civitate Dei* 1. In the Gothic sack of Rome some women killed themselves rather than suffer rape or out of shame at rape. Augustine regarded them as pagan, non-Christian. Christian women, even if raped, remain virginal in their minds. He argues from the lack of a biblical command or permission to inflect death to avoid or escape any evil—and sets the pattern for the next 1500 years of western theology.

Socrates and Jesus are the models for voluntary death. Augustine rejects voluntary death to separate orthodox Christians from the Donatists and the non-Christian women who committed suicide rather than suffer rape. Before him voluntary or self-inflicted death was considered "a *noble* choice, provided there was *sufficient justification*" (187). The authors suggest that voluntary death has not been discussed as a moral or religious problem in the last century, but a medical problem. They suggest that it has only recently reemerged as a moral problem—a development they welcome. Their conclusions will surprise most readers and shock many of them, but should lead readers to reexamine biblical texts, formulate the moral and religious issues involved, and then engage in serious theological reflection on the question of voluntary death. The conclusions are by no means determined by their discussion. The parameters of the discussion are widened—though the modern debate considers questions of prolongation of life, of quality of life, and of medical capabilities that go far beyond the ancient debates. This is a stimulating, welcome, if disturbing book that many ought to ponder.

Edgar Krentz

The Isaiah Vision: An Ecumenical Strategy for Congregational Evangelism. By Raymond Fung. Risk Series Book No. 52. Geneva: WCC Publications, 1992. 55 pages. $4.95.

Not A Solitary Way: Evangelism Stories from Around the World. Edited by Raymond Fung and George Lemopoulos. WCC Mission Series. Geneva: WCC Publications, 1992. 80 pages. $6.96.

Raymond Fung, a gifted Hongkong industrial evangelist, served the WCC as a special consultant for evangelism from 1981 to 1991 with the aim of bringing new life to ecumenical efforts of evangelism. He now works with the Hongkong Christian Institute. In *The Isaiah Vision* Fung shares his recipe for an ecumenical evangelistic strategy which is local and contextual and grows out of the life of a local congregation. In simple terms, the "Isaiah agenda" (Isa 65:20-23) is that of a community where "children do not die, old people live in dignity, those who build houses live in them, and those who plant vineyards eat the fruit." The Isaiah agenda seeks to "make sense of Christianity to those who are not interested in Jesus Christ" by communicating the following message to the church's neighbors: "The God we believe in is one who protects the children, empowers the elderly, and works with working men and women" (2). Through wor-

ship the congregation exposes its neighbors to an experience of Christian community and invites them to join in. As opportunity presents itself, the congregation communicates the challenge to become followers of Jesus Christ and members of the community of faith. Partnership, worship, and discipleship are seen by Fung as three indispensable elements in an ecumenical evangelistic strategy.

Not A Solitary Way, edited and collected by two WCC staff members with responsibilities for mission and evangelism, consists of fourteen evangelism stories from around the world, each with a unique character. An old Maasai man in Kenya named Jehoshaphat wanders off the bush path to share the gospel with some illiterate women and cripples. A well-to-do Chinese Buddhist merchant hears the gospel from some younger employees and begins reading the Bible. A middle-aged Ghanaian woman trained as a computer operator named Edith Larbi hears a call to evangelize and begins a ministry among suspicious peasant farmers. A middle-aged Sinhalese Buddhist man who is blind visits a Christian healing center, seeking recovery of sight but without changing his religion. On being healed he remains a Buddhist but testifies to the healing power of Jesus Christ. The gospel is shared by committed lay people in everyday settings without reference to agencies, strategies, or campaigns. Lemopolous is struck by the "perennial freshness of the word of God, its unique value in all ages and historical contexts" (71). This word has power to transform human lives, both those of the evangelizers and the evangelized. The stories speak of love and compassion as much as of faith; of joy and of suffering. "Evangelism is not a solitary way; it is walking the narrow path with fellow Christians, enduring with them the thorns, the rocks, the heat—even the mud and manure of life—yet joining with them in the joy of service, sharing with them the tasks of everyday life, singing with them a song of praise for the water of life, freely offered by our Lord Jesus Christ" (78).

James A. Scherer

Encyclopedia of the Early Church. Edited by Angelo Di Berardino. Translated from Italian by Adrian Walford. Foreword and bibliographic amendments by W. H. C. Frend. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992. xxv and 1130 pages in 2 volumes. Cloth. $175.00.

This translation of the Italian *Dizionario Patristico e di Antichità Cristiane* from the Augustinian Patristic Institute in Rome is initially impressive in its sheer numbers: 2,300 signed articles by 167 scholars, 44 maps and 320 illustrations. Some of the contributors are the international leaders in their fields, such as Bianchi, Crouzel, Dalmais, Dassmann, Frend, Kannengiesser, Lilla, Nautin, Rordorf, Siniscalco, Spidlik, Stead, Studer, and Yarnold. But the overall span of authorship is not fully international; most of the authors are associated with patristic studies in Rome, and only a handful are German or American. The large appendix of illustrations is also deceptive. There are many interesting diagrams of church floor plans, with hundreds of photographs of sites, liturgical articles, and iconography. Many are in color, which might have been worth the expense if the quality had been higher. Too many are poorly chosen, inadequately reproduced, or related only vaguely to the entries.

There are notable strengths, especially the broad coverage of chronology, biography, and philosophy. The work covers the first seven centuries of Christianity, until Bede in the West and John of Damascus in the East, with considerable attention also given to Syria, Egypt, Armenia, and Ethiopia. A synoptic chronological chart provides more detail than do most tools of this type; it covers thirty pages, curiously uncredited and unpaginated. (The Italian original credits the chronological chart, the maps, and the index, as well as several prefatory comments here deleted, to General Editor Angelo Di Berardino, who has almost disappeared from the English edition.) There are entries for every conceivable person in the first four centuries, even the very minor characters who left only negligible traces. Finally, and most substantively, the philosophical schools and ideas of the ancient world, and their relationships to Chris-

tian thought, are covered quite carefully. Particularly thorough and original are the articles by Salvatore Lilla on Aristotelianism, Platonism and the Fathers, Neoplatonism, and various pertinent individuals.

The original Italian edition (1983-88) has already found a secure place in the reference section of theological libraries around the world. The problem with this English rendition is not so much in the translation or the judicious bibliographical updates, which are both serviceable enough. The basic fault is in the production. Let the buyer beware: this is not one of the British Oxford Dictionaries, famed for contents and format, but an American distribution of a James Clarke and Co. project, printed in Hong Kong. Some of the photographs are too dark to be useful. The more serious flaw is that the typeface throughout is extremely small, crowded, and light. Perhaps the decision to reduce the three original volumes to these two required such economies, but the resulting product is just plain hard to read. All theology libraries should own it, and diligent researchers with good eyesight should consult it, especially in the noted areas of strength. But the personal investment choice is still E. Ferguson's one-volume *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity* (Garland), at least for now, since there are more such tools on the way.

Paul Rorem

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Briefly Noted

Clinton E. Arnold's Edinburgh dissertation, **Ephesians: Power and Magic: The Concept of Power in Ephesians in Light of Its Historical Setting**, was published in the expensive monograph series of the Society for New Testament Studies (Cambridge, 1989). Its publication as an inexpensive paperback (Baker, $14.95) should delight everyone interested in either Ephesians or the demonology of the New Testament. Arnold argues that magical practices, the Artemis cult, Phrygian mysteries, and a variety of astrological beliefs flourished in Ephesus—and provide the social framework for understanding the necessity of Paul's letter (authentic Paul). Paul stresses that Christianity gives a new means of access to the superior power of God through Christ that enables Christians to reject magic and the powers that surround them and conquer them in spiritual warfare. The mystery revealed in Christ implies their ultimate defeat. A welcome addition to the literature on Ephesians.

Edgar Krentz

Herman Strack's **Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash**, published in English in 1931, was long the standard introduction to Jewish literature written in the formative stage of Judaism. It is a joy to welcome it in a new, updated revision by Günter Stemberger, Englished by Markus Bockmuehl (Fortress, $21.95). After a general introduction on the historical framework, the rabbinical school system, oral and written tradition, and the method appropriate to reading early Jewish texts, two major sections discuss Talmudic literature (Mishnah, Tosefta, the two Talmuds, and extracanonical literature) and Midrashim (divided into comprehensible subdivisions). Each chapter describes the particular literary form, surveys the content, and includes bibliog-

raphies of editions in the original language, translations, and modern interpretations. Jacob Neusner's "Foreword" calls attention to the significance of Jewish and Roman Catholic and Orthodox entry into the academy's study of the formative texts of Judaism and Christianity, and suggests why scholarship needs to pay attention to Stemberger's revision, which makes the "new Strack" the authoritative guide to Talmud and Mishnah for the next generation.

Edgar Krentz

Joseph Barber Lightfoot's massive five-volume edition of the Apostolic Fathers (Clement of Rome, Ignatius, the Didache, and Polycarp) was a landmark of nineteenth century scholarship; its commentary changed the course of the critical debate on the dating of John's Gospel and set a standard of critical historical scholarship still worthy of emulation. After Lightfoot's death his student J. R. Harmer published the Greek text and translation in 1891, supplementing it with texts and translations of Barnabas, the Shepherd of Hermas, and the Epistle to Diognetus. Michael Holmes published a revision of Marmer's translation in 1989, including the fragments of Papias. Now, in **The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations of Their Writings** (Baker, $34.95), he gives a second edition of the translation and a revised Greek text, both supplied with useful critical notes. Holmes has revised the general introduction and the introductions to the individual works and provided up to date, helpful basic bibliographies. In brief, this useful, one-volume edition now becomes a fundamental text for the library of scholars of the New Testament and the early church and should give Lightfoot a new and, one hopes, an extended life. It is a welcome publication.

Edgar Krentz

David Black encourages pastors to use their Greek as a resource for NT interpretation in **Using New Testament Greek in Ministry** (Baker), an elementary guide for conservative, evangelical clergy. It avoids all critical questions and therefore is worth a quick read, but not much more.

Edgar Krentz

But Was It Just? Reflections on the Morality of the Persian Gulf War: Jean Bethke Elshtain, Stanley Hauerwas, Sari Nusseibeh, Michael Walzer, George Weigel. Edited by David E. Decosse (Doubleday, $15). This volume contains an excellent selection of outstanding essays on the Gulf War. The pros and cons, and especially the underlying and related theological and political implications are argued in a straightforward and succinct way. It is a selection that will force the reader to think hard and to make up his or her mind on some central questions. An additional gem of the volume is the translation of a Jesuit editorial, "Modern War and the Christian Conscience," originally published in an Italian Jesuit magazine that attempts to only publish viewpoints in concord with the Holy See. A very encouraging and thought-provoking voice coming from Rome's corner!

Reinhard Hütter

Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage. Edited by David J. O'Brien and Thomas A. Shannon (Orbis, $24.95). Marking the centenary of Roman Catholic social teaching, O'Brien and Shannon have put together the most comprehensive available collection of official statements of the Roman Catholic church on social issues and world peace. The volume ranges from Leo XIII's famous *Rerum Novarum* (1891) to John Paul's very recent *Centesimus Annus* (1991). The volume also includes the U.S. bishops' statements *The Challenge of Peace* (1983) and *Economic Justice for All* (1986). An introductory essay, an index, and short introductions to each document make this volume a most useful resource for everyone concerned with the official statements of the Roman Catholic church on social issues and on world peace.

Reinhard Hütter

Just Peacemaking: Transforming Initiatives for Justice and Peace. By Glen H. Stassen (Westminster/John Knox, $16.95). Baptist ethicist and peace activist Stassen presents a political hermeneutics that mediates between pacifism and the Just War tradition. The book emerges out of the author's rich experiences in the American and European peace movement, draws strongly upon the New Testament tradi-

tion and broadens the perspective to a comprehensive social and political understanding of "just peace" by making concrete suggestions in a variety of particular areas. Questions for further thought at the end of each chapter and a very accessible and engaging style commend the book to a broad audience in congregations and among college students. Reinhard Hütter

Passion for Justice: Retrieving the Legacies of Walter Rauschenbusch, John A. Ryan, and Reinhold Niebuhr. By Harlan Beckley (Westminster/John Knox, $27). This very impressive and thoroughly researched study presents the lives and thought of three of America's foremost Christian ethicists in regard to the central issue of justice, especially economic justice. Both Rauschenbusch and Niebuhr were decisive voices shaping the Protestant discourse on justice in this century; the same is true for John A. Ryan in Roman Catholicism. Beckley brings them together in a comprehensive analysis of their concepts of justice, their respective theological groundings and political applications. While the study might raise a variety of questions and objections in regard to its analysis and construal, it represents a landmark study in the discourse on justice in this country and a must reading for all serious theological students of issues pertaining to economic and political justice.

Reinhard Hütter

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Preaching Helps

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost—Thanksgiving Day, Series A

Pentecost without End

Hockey is a strange sport, dividing the periods of play not into halves or quarters as reasonable sports do, but into thirds, the way "Preaching Helps" divides up the Pentecost season. We are entering the last period of play now, and yet we should never speak of "the end of Pentecost." That would be an oxymoron. It's okay to talk about the end of a hockey game, but Pentecost does not end.

One indication that the Spirit is restless and still wanders the earth stirring things up is the simple fact that so many spiritual gifts keep cropping up.

It's easy enough to see that we live our lives in the midst of bad news, but it also requires only minuscule effort to discern God's gifts at work in all kinds of people.

It would be ungrateful, untrue, and unLutheran (it would probably also be fattening) to imagine that only AIMs and clergy are touched by the Spirit and gifted. Nevertheless I must for a moment celebrate the rich gifts given by the Spirit to the pastors of Central Lutheran Church in Minneapolis, through whom we are given gifts in this issue:

Trained in the sublime Lutheran choral tradition and appreciative of tasteful liturgy, Senior Pastor Steve Cornils enjoys an occasional dab of country music (just a pinch between cheek and gum!). His voice can be heard as Lutheran Preacher on the Protestant Hour.

Pastor Richard Beckmen has served at Central for eleven years with emphasis on evangelism, world missions, healing, and spiritual direction. His newest book, *Time for Us: Spiritual Intimacy for Couples*, is just off the press.

Pastor Nancy Connor during a recent sabbatical traveled around the world, visiting mission sites as diverse as ministry to AIDS patients in New York City and ministry to orphans in rural India.

Shawn Mai joined Central as Associate Pastor for Pastoral Care and Caring Ministries one year ago, after graduating from LNTS and completing a C.P.E. residency.

Bill Miller has spent 35 years in ordained ministry (four at Central), most of them in a clinical setting as director of chaplaincy at Fairview Riverside Medical Center in Minneapolis. He is author of several books and an international lecturer.

Cherian Puthiyottil is a Syrian Orthodox priest and an ordained Lutheran minister. In his ten years at Central he has pioneered an innovative refugee resettlement program and oversees the spectrum of community ministries that Central provides.

Thanks to these pastors of Central Lutheran Church and to the Spirit who freely dispenses gifts to all of God's people.

And I wish all of you, "No end of Pentecost!"

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

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost
October 3, 1993

Psalm 27:1-13
Isaiah 55:6-9
Philippians 1:1-5 (6-11), 19-27
Matthew 20:1-16

FIRST READING

I can see them all lined up, rubbing their hands, eager to be paid, as they watched the owner of the vineyard pay out a full denarius to those latecomers who had worked only a single hour. "If they get a denarius, I'll get ten—enough to feed my family for a month!"

But their bubble burst when their turn came. The owner gave them all just one coin. The fact that they had agreed to work for the standard wage of one coin for one day's work didn't help. They had their eye on the injustice of the owner's arithmetic.

As in every other parable, Jesus uses exaggeration and surprising twists in the plot, catching us off guard and compelling us to rethink our assumptions. The evangelist helps us by prefacing and concluding the parable with the same phrase: "The first shall be last and the last first." That saying looks like a follow-up to Peter's question back in 19:13-15. Rather selfishly (even pathetically but oh, so humanly) Peter asked Jesus, "What will we [your wonderful disciples!] have as reward for tossing everything over and following you?" Peter may even have been thinking what he as the "prince of apostles" would get.

When we hear Jesus talking about the workers in the vineyard, are we supposed to think of Peter and the eleven? Are they portrayed as starting to drool, like the whole-day workers when they saw what latecomers were being paid?

The parable of Matthew 20 sounds like the gospel for last week with all of its talk about 60 million denarii versus 100 denarii. Why are we so quick to count, to keep score, to calculate? The parables of Matthew 18 and 20 picture God as involved in a strange arithmetic, indifferent to all our ordinary human need to stay even with others.

The parable looks forward as well as back, forward to the third passion prediction (20:17-19). There's something here much stranger than paying all workers a living wage, no matter how long they have worked. God's Son, the one whom God calls "beloved," will give up his life as a ransom for many. That is really strange. By that self-giving, the last really become first. RHS

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

Grace is God's extravagant goodness. It runs over and spills out upon all who are called into the kingdom of heaven, those early and those late, those righteous by the law's standard and those unrighteous by the law's standard.

Clearly Jesus is answering the criticism he received for being so inclusive. He ate with sinners, healed lepers and beggars, counted prostitutes among his followers, welcomed children with respect and honor. He excluded no one.

The challenge of this text is to allow the fullness of God's grace to be expressed in the context of every community's tendency to create outsiders, Johnnys-come-lately to the kingdom. This parable provides the occasion to speak clearly of God's abundant grace offered to all. Where are the outcasts of your community? Are there eleventh hour workers in your church, newcomers who don't fit the old mold?

The undeserved, extravagant gift of God's grace elicits some interesting responses. Certain recipients of God's grace begrudge others receiving grace. Or, if others receive grace, then they desire something more: grace plus. There is real struggle here for many, especially those who have been really good, the hard-working laborers of many years in the church. How can newcomers, especially if they are not as good or as faithful, expect to stand on the same level? Isn't there something more for us who have labored long and hard in the kingdom and have been faithful? Maybe a bonus? A title? A special plaque? A special place? Grace plus?

Grace is a problem for many Christians. I remember well a woman who thought she hon-

estly deserved more from God because she had served fourteen years as president of the women's organization. In fact, if I was not willing to admit that, she was going to leave the church. She was one person I know for sure who left the church for the right reason. She could not accept grace for others equal to what she expected for herself.

Long term practitioners of Christianity need to be careful that what began in grace in their own lives does not get lost over the years with infatuation over their works. There is no higher gift or rank than one who is saved by grace through faith in Christ Jesus. Richard Beckmen

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Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost
October 10, 1993

Psalm 25:1-9
Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32
Philippians 2:1-5 (6-11)
Matthew 21:28-32

FIRST READING

Matthew's story of the father with two sons is both like and unlike Luke's more famous parable (Lk 15:11-32). Luke's story of the Prodigal Son is a parade example of Luke's theology of grace. God's movement into the world in the ministry of Jesus is a mind-blowing act of divine generosity. The "waiting father" in Luke's Gospel acts graciously toward the younger son and speaks tenderly to the elder. He loves them both and wants to embrace both in one deep and passionate love.

In Matthew's parable the focus is not on the father's love but on the differing responses of the sons. And those responses are odd, but understandable. The father says to each: "Go to work in the vineyard today." One says "no" but then "repents" and goes forth, doing what his father wanted. The other speaks a quick "yes" but then changes his mind and actually disobeys his father.

One son had the right words, "Yes, sir!" The other was a cantankerous nay-sayer. Jesus did not ask, "Which son is likeable?" Instead he asked, "Which one of these two did the will of the father?"

Here's where commentaries usually go astray. Too often they begin at this point to describe how ancient Israel said "yes" but then acted out a rebellious "no," how that ancient community in the time of Jesus was far better at words than deeds, more pious in appearances than in actuality, like the famous fig tree (Mt 21:18-22).

Everywhere in Matthew's Gospel Jesus teaches the importance of deeds. It is a dangerous hypocrisy merely to hear his words or praise his words. His words are meant to be performed (7:24-27).

With that accent on deeds of righteousness and love, the Matthean Jesus was addressing not ancient Jews but ancient Christians. And through them, modern Christians. Where are we readers and hearers located in the story of the father with two sons? RHS

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

In today's gospel lesson we sail a precarious course between Scylla and Charybdis. We must with the finesse of Ulysses chart our course so as not to end up "on the rocks" of works righteousness or in the "whirlpool" of lip service with this text.

The question is, "Who did the will of the father?" The first son responds to the father's request of service by rebelling against the father's request and says "no," but after some consideration he does the father's will. The superficial message seems to be, "It doesn't matter what you say, as long as your actions are good."

The second son says, "I go, sir." But he becomes distracted by other demands in his life and doesn't get around to doing the father's will. The superficial message seems to be, "It doesn't matter what you do, as long as your intentions are good."

A quick reading of this parable would seem to suggest that the first response is the best: It

doesn't matter what you say or believe as long as you do what is right. If we follow that path, we will lead ourselves to classic "works righteousness."

We have no idea what kind of internal, moral conversation went on in the mind of the first son between his saying "no" and his decision to go and do his father's will. However, as a child of my parents, my guess is that his love of the father got the best of him. He thought about his love for his father and then decided that his love demanded him to "go."

The second son was perhaps sincere, yet he became distracted with the demands of daily life and did other things always with the intention of doing the father's will.

Love! That is the key to steering the course between works righteousness and lip service in this text. We all know people who strive to keep the "externals" of the law and think themselves "saved" just because of that fact.

On the other hand we know those who say, "Lord, Lord," but do not exhibit a Christ-like life. St. Paul is the true pilot on this dangerous course we travel when he suggests: "Be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.... Let the same mind be in you that was in Jesus Christ."

When our hearts and minds are fixed not on the things of this world but on those things which really matter, then the course of our life will be straight and true. Nancy Connor

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost
October 17, 1993

Psalm 80:7-14
Isaiah 5:1-7
Philippians 3:12-21
Matthew 21:33-43

FIRST READING

The gospel for this Sunday speaks once again of plain obligations, and once more it is unfortunately true that interpreters have too often managed to see only "the Jews" or "the Pharisees" as the ones who have trampled obligation underfoot. But, as with the gospel last week, the words of Jesus are aimed at the church's heart.

For many centuries before Christ, Israel had been described as God's vineyard: "The vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the people of Judah are God's pleasant planting" (Isa 5:7). But Isaiah used that image in order to raise the question of "fruitfulness." And Jesus does the same.

He tells a shocking story of breach of contract. It turns really ugly and culminates in the murder of the owner's son.

Jesus asks, "So, what do you think those murderous tenant-farmers deserve?" His ancient audience knew the answer: Evil people deserve to come to an evil end, and the vineyard then will be granted to other farmers, who in the owner's opinion will deliver his share regularly and on time.

Again, consciously or unconsciously using this parable in an anti-Israel fashion is easy and may even seem to be justified exegetically. But this parable is the second in a series of three, and all three are read in church in sequence this year.

Next week's gospel concludes the series, and its final paragraph (22:11-14) must not be omitted, because it is the real climax. And it makes unmistakably clear that Matthew has the Christian church in view with all these warnings of Jesus.

These parables are not designed to answer the question, "Why was Jerusalem destroyed in the year 70?" Rather they raise the vital question, "What yield do we give to God for all the gifts of body and spirit so bountifully poured out upon us?" RHS

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

Country music is one of the most fruitful fields from which to harvest seven grain insights about real life. I've made homiletical hay from the Judd's lyrics, "I'm just a John Deere tractor in a half an acre field, tryin' to plow a furrow where the soil is made of steel." That will preach.

A perennial favorite on the Country charts is a twangy ballad entitled, "Friends in Low Places." Low places is where Paul in his letter to the Philippians suggests some have become too friendly. "Enemies of the cross of Christ" is how Paul describes those who "glory in their shame."

According to Jesus in today's gospel, the tenants refused to welcome emissaries from the giver of life; they refused to trade on their heavenly citizenship. Instead they made an unfortunate friendship with the lower nature of life which Paul describes as "earthly things," the fruit of which are envy, greed, mayhem, and murder. This is Shakespeare's "world gone mad."

Satan is flexible. Life with friends in low places comes with many options. In his essay, "Of True Religion," Saint Augustine provides an inventory of all the preferences people choose in place of God. The evil one doesn't care which option or obsession we choose as long as we renounce our citizenship in heaven and say "no" to the initiatives of God.

Finally our hope rests in the assurance that Jesus becomes our friend in low places. He does not reject us when we hit bottom. Instead, as Paul reminds us, "He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory...." Now that's a friend.

Stephen Cornils

Twenty-First Sunday after Pentecost October 24, 1993

Psalm 23
Isaiah 25:6-9
Philippians 4:4-13
Matthew 22:1-10 (11-14)

FIRST READING

In seminary classes this week's gospel is regularly contrasted with the parable of the supper in Luke (Lk 14:16-24), and students are warned of the evils of allegorizing. Nevertheless an even greater evil somehow lingers in students' minds, and that is the impression that Matthew is bitterly anti-Semitic.

Matthew seems to be working with a series of equations: King = God; king's son = Jesus; wedding feast = messianic ministry of Jesus; king's slaves = the prophets and John the Baptist; the burning of their city = the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans; filling the banquet hall with the good and the evil = successful missions among the Gentiles.

It would be a disaster to exercise the option, offered by the lectionary, of reading in church only up through 22:10. Whatever Matthew may have felt about the destruction of Jerusalem, what really interests him is using the story of Jerusalem as a cautionary tale inside the Christian community. Are we doing any better than God's ancient people? How does our performance stack up? Can we even see ourselves in those killers of the slaves of God, those despisers of the king's invitation?

It is easy to get tangled up in asking, What did the fellow without a wedding garment ever do that was wrong? Wasn't the king being unreasonable? He's the one who said to fill up the banquet hall with "anyone you can find, both the good and the evil" (22:10). What did he expect? And how is the poor guy supposed to find a wedding garment in a city that was just burned to the ground?

The parable is loaded with little puzzles, and the key is to keep from getting bogged down in the tantalizing small questions so that we can face the very large clear question: "Dear guests at the Lord's table, how are we dressed? By our dress, our actual behavior, our manner of life, are we honoring or insulting our God?" Clearly our deeds are not what get us in. But once we are in, how do we live? RHS

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

Time. More than ever it seems as though people struggle with having enough time to do the things they need to do. We have more and more time-saving appliances and gadgets, and yet it seems we have less and less time to do the things we think we need to do. The parable in the twenty-second chapter of Matthew seems to reflect that time was also an issue in the first century.

In the parable Jesus compares the kingdom of God to a wedding feast. The servants invite the guests to the feast, but they refuse to come, explaining they have more important things to do. They don't have time. Asked again, the one man chooses to visit his farm in the country. Another claims his business interests take his attention. Others, annoyed by the repeated invitations from the king, kill his servants. The king becomes very angry with those who ignore his "time after time" invitations. He "sent his soldiers and killed those murderers and burned their city." If they had no time for the king, he had no time for them.

The parable continues with the king's servants inviting people from the highways and byways of life. Many respond. However, one such person does not bother to dress properly for this important occasion. Instead of taking the time to put on his good suit, he appears in a shabby outfit. The king has him tossed out with the order: "Tie him up hand and foot, and throw him outside in the dark; there he will cry and gnash his teeth." He has no time for those who do not take the time to be ready.

God calls us to the banquet of life. He invites us to spend our time in his presence, but we are distracted by other voices. We end up unhappy and we feel helpless to change our unhappiness.

Many people, when they reach middle age, feel as though time has run out for them. That isn't surprising in a society that is geared toward a younger generation. Life is valuable as long as you are young, healthy, and strong.

A 92 year-old member of my congregation insists that ageism is a great problem, and she is devoted to changing the perception that older adults don't have much to offer their world. At the root of her continued vibrant and full life is her faith that her time is valuable because it is a gift in Christ. She senses a call to use her time as a servant to God and her fellow human beings.

Through Christ's death on the cross God broke the "time barrier." In his time all is redeemed, and all is given incredible worth and love. All of life is the feast. We are heartily invited to join it and celebrate with the king.

Shawn Mai

Reformation Sunday
October 31, 1993

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

FIRST READING

The words of Jeremiah on the new covenant sum up his entire message and are quoted in key passages of the New Testament (Lk 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25; Heb 8:8-12). The finger of God will write the new covenant not on slabs of stone (Ex 31:18) but on human hearts. People will then know God in the depths of their being. No longer will scribes and teachers have to wear themselves out with scolding or repeating the admonition, "Know the Lord! Know the Lord!" The promise is that "they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest."

This promised knowledge does not come from reading books or adding up columns of figures or peering into a microscope. This knowledge is the deep experience one personal being has of another. This kind of knowledge is more like love than science. It has to do with fundamental relationships, not with mastery of facts and figures.

In John 8, Jesus does not use the word "knowledge" but speaks of "truth" and contrasts it to "the lie." God and truth stand on one side, the devil and the lie on the other. God and truth mean life, the devil and the lie lead to death. Welling up from the heart of God is a stream of liberating truth, pouring forth into the center of human life in the person of Jesus Christ.

The truth incarnate in Jesus has the power to set us free from the bondage of sin. In the Fourth Gospel "sin" is not a moral condition like being addicted to gossip or being a thief or a cheat. "Sin" is a spiritual condition. It means having a distorted view of reality, a mistaken perspective on self and world and God. It means viewing self and world without regard for the God of infinite love dwelling in light unapproachable at the heart of the universe.

The liberating truth was not simply spoken by Jesus in some sermon or parable. The freeing truth, the truth that breaks our chains and removes the blinders from our eyes, was enacted on the cross when he breathed out his spirit, granting it freely. The cross of Jesus Christ is the true book of knowledge. RHS

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

Sola fide! Faith alone! Still the hallmark of the Reformation, and still the greatest stumbling block to whole-hearted commitment to Christianity!

Why is it that we human beings seem to be driven to hold on to some form of the belief that we must do something to get right with God? Why is it that no matter how pristinely clear the scriptures are, convincing us that God has done it all, has made us right with himself through Jesus' sacrifice, we still feel compelled somehow to "earn" our soul's salvation? Why is it that we stubbornly want to cling to some, to any, semblance of control over the dispensation of this most wonderful of all gifts, life everlasting in the presence of God?

Maybe it's our skeptical nature that seems to grow in size and power once we depart the innocence of childhood. Maybe it is the supposed "wise old man/woman" deep in our psyches who delights in reminding us that "there is no free lunch; you never get something for nothing." Maybe it is the sophistication of our egos that cries out at the absurdity of such a proposition and consistently relegates it to the realm of mythology and the fairy tale. Maybe it is the devil himself whispering regularly in our ears (as he did in the ancient Garden of Eden), "Did God *really* say that? Perhaps you misheard."

Yes, God really *did* say that; and no, we have not misheard. The assigned readings for this Reformation Sunday, each in their own style and imagery, announce this indisputable truth: By grace we are saved through faith. Aside from the Bible itself, the *Augsburg Confession* declares this profound truth more clearly and succinctly than any other attempt: "People cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits or words, but are freely justified for Christ's sake through faith when they believe that they are received into favor and their sins are forgiven on account of Christ, who by his death made satisfaction for our sins."

Perhaps on this Reformation Sunday it would be helpful for us to flash back to our attitudes on Good Friday afternoon, when we stood on Golgotha at the foot of Jesus' cross, and beheld "the very dying form of him who suffered there *for me*." And how through burning tears of penitence we saw "the wonder of his glorious love" and felt our own "unworthiness." Maybe that would help us in our constant struggle with egos that want to thwart surrender to the mercy and grace of a loving God. Maybe that would remind us of the truth of God's word: "I will forgive your iniquity, and I will remember your sin no more." William A. Miller

Twenty-Third Sunday after Pentecost

All Saints
November 7, 1993

Psalm 1
Leviticus 19:1-2, 15-18
1 Thessalonians 1:5b-10
Matthew 22:34-40 (41-46)

FIRST READING

What did they mean by the "great" commandment? Aren't they all great and equally important? The one that counts as "great" is the one that stands in the center the way a hub is the point from which all the spokes radiate outwards. Or the way planets and asteroids revolve around the sun. Asking about the great commandment is asking about the pulse, the throb, the beating heart at the center of a life.

"Love God," said Jesus, and do it not piecemeal or partially but with every particle of your being. Having said that, it would seem that he had said everything, but not quite.

In addition to the great commandment, he announced a "second" commandment, "like it." "Like it" the way a child is "like" its parent, bone of bone and flesh of flesh. "Of one substance, made of the same stuff." "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Jesus will not allow us to divide life into the religious and the secular, the vertical and the horizontal. He calls us to hold heaven and earth in a single embrace, praising and loving God in and with and under our living of daily life in the midst of our neighbors.

We have the custom of numbering the commandments. Ten, we say, and then we sometimes divide them into three dealing with God and a second 'table' (slab) dealing with the neighbor. One ancient Jewish scheme spoke of 613 commandments of God: 365 negative commands (Thou shalt not!), one for every day of the year, and 248 positive commands (Thou shalt!), one for every bone in the body. The idea behind the scheme seems to be to remind people that all our days (365) and all our actions (articulated by our 248 bones) should be in accord with the commands of God. In his own way Jesus is declaring that at the heart of all the commands, whether we count 10 or 248 or 365 or 613, is the summons to make God the beating heart of our lives, and God can never be divorced from our neighbor.

These words of Jesus are not all thundering command. They describe his own path. In all his movements through all his days he yielded up his heart and strength and soul in love to God to his "neighbors," the people of the world. He loved to the uttermost (Jn 13:1), all the way to the cross.

His life of love moves us and moves in us to yield an answering love. RHS

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

Today's gospel teaches us secrets of sainthood. The young scholar approaches Jesus to get from him some clue to become a living saint. He saw that Jesus silenced Sadducees but dared to ask his question: "which commandment in the law is the greatest?"

His question has been asked by many through the centuries. No one could give a straight answer because they feared that they would be condemned or criticized if they negated sacred laws of the Jewish religion.

In his reply, Jesus offers valuable material for our All Saints Day reflection. How can we become a "Saint"? Answer: "Love your God with all your heart, mind, and soul, and love your neighbor as yourself."

The whole Christian church is indebted to this young man for asking this question of Jesus. Here is the magna carta of Christianity. Here is a definition of life according to the kingdom of heaven.

But can we love God with all our heart, mind, and soul? It depends on how much our heart, mind, and soul are engaged or associated with other affinities. It is possible that we worship many different idols in our life, attempting to love God and our idols. But Christ tells us to love God and our neighbor.

How can anyone love neighbor as self while we live in a world of competition? Is it possible to love our neighbor as ourselves when we struggle to attain all our dreams in life? Society teaches us the need to be strong, to be individuals, to take care of ourselves first.

Christian love surpasses all these theories. The Christian kingdom does not belong to the list of this world's concepts. It is based on the acceptance that my brother's and sister's happiness is my happiness. Their sorrow is my sorrow. When all the children of one father are happy, then the father will be very pleased. Then all the children of God will rally around him with angels and sing glory to him. That is the saintly life.

Cherian C. Puthiyottil

Twenty-Fourth Sunday after Pentecost November 14, 1993

Psalm 63:1-8
Amos 5:18-24
1 Thessalonians 4:13-14 (15-18)
Matthew 25:1-13

FIRST READING

But what is watchfulness? By means of the parable of the five wise and five foolish bridesmaids Jesus informs us that not being ready, not practicing watchfulness, is foolish to the nth degree and could lead to our exclusion on that day when the bridegroom delays no longer and suddenly appears. But how shall we be ready? Should we try to interpret the meaning of lamps and meditate on the hidden significance of oil? I remember a preacher declaring confidently that having a lamp means being on the church's roster. Lacking oil means not going to church, not participating in the life of the congregation, not receiving the bread and wine of the eucharist regularly.

These kinds of questions (and accompanying bad answers) only occur because of our practice of reading the Gospels one paragraph at a time, in isolation from the context. This gospel lesson is one in a series of Matthean paragraphs calling readers to readiness. Then the climactic paragraph, the gospel for next Sunday (25:31-46), offers us Jesus' own interpretation of the life of preparedness. But that's for next week.

This week perhaps the thing to do is concentrate on Amos 5. The prophet complains of people who think they themselves are ready, while they imagine other people to be foolishly unprepared. They think that for themselves the Day of the Lord will be sweetness and light, while that Day will fall on others as darkness and gloom "with no brightness in it."

In 5:21-23 Amos names traditional acts of spiritual readiness: feasts, solemn assemblies, burnt offerings. But instead of all that he calls for "justice" and "righteousness." Let them "roll down like waters" in a rushing torrent and "an ever-flowing stream."

In Matthew's Gospel, "righteousness" is both gift and call. God in Christ lays healing hands on the universe and makes it "all right." And through Jesus Christ we are called to live lives of "all rightness." That's readiness. RHS

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

A summary thought: disciplined following of Jesus Christ sustains faith lived out in justice and righteousness and finds fulfillment in eternal life.

In the gospel lesson both the wise and foolish maidens are aware of the bridegroom and await his coming. However, there is a difference in their waiting. This difference is noted as being wise or foolish. The character of the wise maidens is akin to what we would call maturity of faith. They take responsibility for themselves and their preparations. They are prepared for the long wait and think beyond the moment. They are not caught short when the bridegroom comes and are therefore ready to enter into the wedding party.

However, the foolish maidens exhibit quite different behavior. They have not taken responsibility for themselves in terms of preparation for

the whole journey. They are unprepared and caught short.

At the close of the Sermon on the Mount we find a similar description of discipleship in terms of being wise or foolish. There the image is building a house on rock or sand. Christian discipleship, as described in the Sermon on the Mount, enables faith to be sustained in the midst of struggle.

Each person carries a responsibility for his or her own life, his or her own discipleship. Many adults have not moved on to what might be called an adult or mature faith. Their believing and doing of the Christian life may be subsumed under the umbrella of another person; i. e., a spouse, parent, or friend.

Each Christian is called to the disciplines of scripture study, sacrament, prayer, and just acts so that all are prepared for the day of reckoning. Nurturing to maturity the relationship we have with Christ brings wonderful acknowledgment that we belong to him. Richard Beckmen

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Christ the King
November 21, 1993

Psalm 95:1-7a
Ezekiel 34:11-16, 23-24
1 Corinthians 15:20-28
Matthew 25:31-46

FIRST READING

In this great vision of the end of history Jesus pictures himself as the Judge of the universe. All nations will be gathered before him, and he will divide them as a shepherd divides the flock each night.

Matthew recalls several judgment scenes (e.g. 7:21-23; 18:23-35; 22:11-14), and they are both powerful and dangerous. Dangerous if we uproot them from their context of mercy. The presupposition of everything Matthew writes is the mercy of God in Jesus Christ whose very name "Jesus" means "God's gift of salvation." He comes with healing, with forgiveness, with that awesome proclamation of "blessing" (5:3-12). All that stands first.

But Matthew's Gospel specializes in remembering words in which Jesus describes the blessed or healed life. Those judgment scenes define the kind of life that Jesus praises. They describe the kind of people Jesus deeply desires us to be.

It is not unimportant to note that this vision of sheep and goats is the last and final public teaching of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew. This is climactic material, bring to conclusion Matthew's presentation of "all his teachings" (26:2)

Jesus climaxes his ministry of teaching and healing by declaring that he takes with utmost seriousness how his people treat the hungry, thirsty, stranger, naked, sick, and imprisoned. These six descriptive words are repeated four times in the vision. They are like drum beats pounded into our heads.

Ezekiel 34 reminds us, as Matthew 25 also does, that God (or Christ) is the Great Shepherd of the sheep. The universe is full of nastiness and evil (hunger, thirst, nakedness, and all the rest). But history has not slipped out of God's control. History will end not in chaos and nothingness but at the feet of Jesus. In all these days before the end, Jesus encourages us to bind up the broken and reach out in healing. By such acts we will mirror God's and Christ's own caring, and we will anticipate the life of the new heavens and new earth, where righteousness will be fully at home (2 Pet 3:13). RHS

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

"Then the King shall say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed, inherit the kingdom. As you did it to one of the least of these members of my family, you did it to me.'"

A few years ago I was captured by a movie titled "Saving Grace." The story line was very simple but intriguing. Pope Leo XIV (played by Tom Conti) escapes the pompous demands of the

Papal court and visits incognito a small quarantined village, where he inspires and rallies the people to bring hope, help, and comfort. That mirrors the journey of Jesus.

Through his earthly ministry, our king Jesus never forgot the "least of these who are members of God's family." From the bride and groom at the wedding at Cana to Lazarus who was dead three days, Jesus was determined that life and joy would win out over despair and death.

This king was like no other. He did not rely on earthly power and was not known for his great wealth and riches. He was wrapped in swaddling cloths at birth, and at his death his one robe was used as the prize in the casting of lots. By worldly standards this king appeared to have nothing, and yet he gave an inheritance of eternal life to us all.

Our king is "Emmanuel," which means "God with us." He does not sit high on a throne, far from the concerns of his people. He is present in our sufferings.

It is this king Jesus who speaks to us in this text calling us to follow his example and reach out with our lives to the least, the lost, and the last. In showing love for those who are in need we are showing our love for our king. Nancy Connor

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Thanksgiving Day
November 25, 1993

Psalm 65
Deuteronomy 8:1-10
Philippians 4:6-20
or 1 Timothy 2:1-4
Luke 17:11-19

Baptist preacher Joel Gregory preached a Thanksgiving Day sermon entitled, "The Unlikely Thanker," based on the Thanksgiving Day gospel account of Jesus healing the ten lepers. Gregory points out that it was the Samaritan, the most unlikely thanker, who returned to give God thanks. It often remains a lamentable fact that those who have the most for which to give thanks, give thanks least of all.

At the same time we are erecting more elaborate "towers of baubles" (we call ours the Mega-Mall), our pillars of faith in the economy are crashing about us. We are discovering that we cannot, as we had once supposed, create prosperity at will. It may be that the present climate of economic uncertainty will result in an opening for the preacher to offer a thank-ology for the 90s.

Gregory suggests three elements in such a thank-ology which I find flow richly from the text and can result in a river of insight for our people which will complement the rivers of brown gravy on the potatoes.

Thanksgiving begins with *perception.* In verse 15 the one came back to say thanks because he really perceived what God had done for him.

It continues with *proclamation.* When the leper saw he was healed, he came back praising God. Someone has said the thankful person tastes joys twice: once when they happen and again when we give God gratitude for them. We need not only to think thankful thoughts but to proclaim thanks as well.

A thank-ology for the 90s ends with *prostration*: worshipping at the feet of Jesus. The leper threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. The Masai tribe in West Africa have an unusual way of saying, "I thank you." They say literally, "My head is in the dirt." When the Masai express thanks, they put their forehead down on the ground. They want to acknowledge gratitude with humility.

I hope the Thanksgiving Day preacher will be as thankful as I am for Joel Gregory's three-part outline. Just add some flesh to the skeleton, a poem for dessert, and spend the moments you have saved giving thanks. We're at our best when we are thankful. Stephen Cornils

I Was A Stranger and You Welcomed Me

Ralph W. Klein
Editor

I came to Berlin five weeks ago to work for six months on a commentary on the books of Ezra and Nehemiah for the *New Interpreter's Bible*. Each day I sit before my laptop computer in the Altes Testament Seminar at the Kirchliche Hochschule—in wonder.

Wonder over this amazing city, four years after Die Wende, renewing itself. The Berlin Cathedral will reopen this summer for the first time since the war, and everywhere construction cranes stretch their necks over high rises that are reaching for the sky. Last week I spent a day in a small theological library in a side tower of that cathedral, and when I went to lunch I heard the roar of the mighty cathedral organ, singing God's praises for the first time in 48 years.

Wonder over the riches of biblical studies in our century and of the vitality of the Humboldt University and the two Berlin Hochschulen, now being combined into one institution in the reunited city. I occasionally steal away to hear a lecture, but one class I dare not miss: Israel and its Neighbors in the Mirror of the Berlin Museums. Eighty years ago German archaeologists dragged back everything that wasn't nailed down—and much that was—and stored it on their museum island. The riches of those museums is also a reminder of inhospitality in a different age.

But most of all I wonder over what it means to be a stranger in a foreign land. My life in Chicago is a constant whirl of meetings and discussions where I am at home, where I have the information that others need, where I answer questions or put out fires.

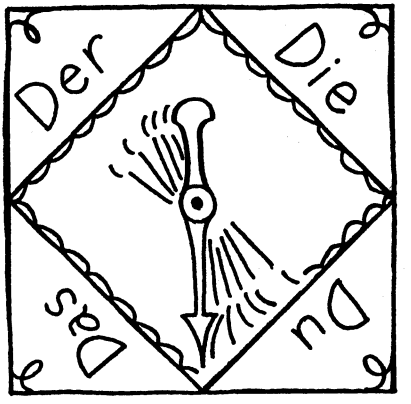
But here, even though I read German easily and understand pretty well the spoken word, I struggle to express myself, constantly mix up Der, Die, and Das, and, on being introduced to a bishop recently, slipped and addressed him as Du. Nuances of expression escape me. German jokes don't seem funny. That's not the fault of the jokes; I'm still an outsider, ein Fremde.

I think back to the 40 international graduate students at LSTC for whom English is a second, third, or even fourth language. I empathize with the thousands of immigrants from Central America in Chicago, most of whom have not had the advantages I have experienced in education and who are often imperiled economically. I pray for the ELCA's efforts to become a more inclusive church. I ponder those fringe groups in Berlin, many of whom are Arbeitslos and Obdachlos—unemployed and homeless—and who fear and even hate the foreigner.

And then I went to the opening session of the Berlin Brandenburg Synod and heard

a stirring sermon on Matthew 25 in old St. Jacobi Church in Kreuzberg. That's a ragtag part of town, that escaped the post-war economic miracle. When they reconstructed the church after the war they cut many corners. The walls are made of cheap brick, the windows are plain glass, the picture of Jesus on the rear chancel wall is cracked. In that context the preacher, who is fighting to keep Germany a place of asylum for all refugees, opened up all the wonder of Matthew 25:35: I was a stranger and you welcomed me.

I thought of the people who found housing for my wife and me here, for those generous friends who invited us to Abendbrot and who helped us feel at home, of colleagues who made sure that I knew how to use the library and who didn't laugh at my funny German. I thought of colleagues back in Chicago—especially Peggy, Kathleen, and Ed—who picked up extra work so that I could go on sabbatical. They allowed me to become a part-time, short term stranger.



Welcoming the stranger is what our parishes are all about, or at least what they are about at their best. The church is a tiny island of safety in the traffic of life, where the mercy and generosity of God are celebrated and shared. And where people know my baptismal name and yours.

And so each day I sit and write—in wonder.

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