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Entertaining Angels Unawares

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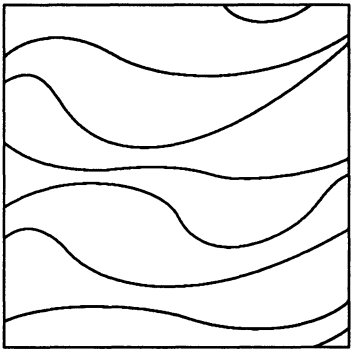
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Entertaining Angels Unawares

"Unawares" strikes as today as awkward, much more awkward than in 1611 when it popped up in the KJV of Heb 13:2. The NRSV puts it more clearly, if less memorably: "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it."

It was not awkward for Sarah and Abraham when they pulled the fatted calf out of the freezer and popped it into the semi-nomadic microwave. Their hospitality to strangers in Genesis 18 stands in polar opposition to the violent demands of the dirty old men of Sodom a chapter later. Our ancestors' hospitality issued in—or flowed from?—a robust prayer life: Surely the Judge of all the earth would not destroy Sodom for the sake of fifty (make that ten!) righteous.

But "unawares" also tells us much about true hospitality. Guests with wings will always get royal treatment. When you don't know that the strangers are angels, they can be categorized as strangers and dismissed. True hospitality happens unawares. The question is not, Jesus reminded us, "Who is my neighbor?" but "To whom should I be neighbor?"

Kosuke Koyama affirms that the quality of religion is determined by its attitude towards strangers: Jesus was crucified because he extended hospitality to strangers so completely. Our hospitality is tested today in inter-religious dialogue. One of the reasons we hate people of other religions is because we see, to our embarrassment, in those people

undesirable parts of ourselves. Greed and self-righteousness are destroying the shalom of human life upon the earth. Buddhism is centered on the problem of greed; Christianity on the problem of self-righteousness. Greed and self-righteousness reveal the presence of idolatry. In repentance, we can truly extend hospitality to the strangers of other faiths. This is the spirit of stranger-centered missiology.

Carol J. Schlueter examines the lectionaries of LBW and the Revised Common Lectionary to see how hospitable they are to women. The lectionaries leave out stories in which women are central exemplary figures, symbols for contemporary women, or feminine images of the Divine (Jesus is like a mother hen; God is a bakerwoman). What reality are we creating in our selection of texts? Until the next lectionary revision arrives, pastors might use some of the texts that have been omitted, focus on women rather than men in some present lectionary texts (emphasize Anna instead of Simeon), or try role reversal: Martha had been dead for several days and Lazarus was reproaching Jesus for not having been there sooner....

Winston D. Persaud remembers the incredible hospitality of his Hindu mother and his Muslim "uncle" and then ponders the relationship between faithfulness to the gospel and the degree of parity one ascribes to other religions. He reviews the works of Stanley J. Samartha, who wants to get rid of the exclusive claims for Christianity, and of David J. Krieger, who offers philosophical foundations for a global theology. His own conclusion: There is no liberating Christian *gospel for all*, if the decisiveness and uniqueness of Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ, crucified and risen, is confessed and proclaimed as God's way, truth and life *for Christians only* while other "revealed ways" are considered equally decisive and ultimately liberating for those who faithfully follow those "revealed ways."

Philip Hefner notes that the eucharistic liturgy insists that nature does indeed carry the blessing of God. Nature is the ordinary vehicle for God's gracious promise. Without the promise, nature is not nature; without nature, the promise is not real. Our sin—also in respect to environmental concerns—is our forcibly trying to tear nature away from

its in-breathed word of promise. Our sanctification enables us to see our own purpose in the world—to be sacraments of God's grace unto the rest of nature, to all that we encounter. We will never come closer to nature's essential character than when we eat this bread, drink this wine, and accept the promise God has placed within them.

Ned Wisnefske calls into question the thesis of the recent book *Culture Wars*. The inhospitable fight between progressivists and orthodox encompasses less than half the population and is largely confined to the well off. The most worrisome enemies of American culture and its ideals are hunger, poverty, poor education, racial disharmony, and street violence. It is not, pace *Culture Wars*, our identities which are ultimately at stake, but rather the needs and welfare of our neighbors.

In a concluding sermon, **Kosuke Koyama** identifies the mourning minority in aggressor nations as the salt of the earth and the light of the world. His interpretation of Matthew 5:4: Blessed are those who are marginal or forsaken because God will be with them, thus raising up the true prophets. By raising true prophets God is ever beginning a new history in which violence is rejected.

The brie or munchies we place on the coffee table welcome guests into our homes. The way we share the faith and the way we listen to "their" faith define evangelical hospitality. The gospel is for all and for everything; it honors women and it treasures nature.



What if our guests would be angels? What if we would be lucky enough not to know it?

Ralph W. Klein
Editor

"Extend Hospitality to Strangers"

A Missiology of *Theologia Crucis*

Kosuke Koyama
Union Theological Seminary, New York

This article was first delivered at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago on November 4, 1992, as the first lecture on mission sponsored by the Eleanor and Arnold Scherer Endowment Fund.

The possibility of a stranger-centered theology

The theme for this lecture, "extend hospitality to strangers," is taken from St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans 12:13. The New Testament word for "hospitality" is *philoxenia*, to love strangers. One of the most remarkable stories in the Bible is Abraham's hospitality to the traveling "three persons" at Mamre (Gen 18:1-8). The New Testament comments:

> Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it (Heb 13:2).

The incident of Abraham has been immortalized by the 15th century great icon of the Holy Trinity painted by Rublev for the monastery of the Trinity and St. Sergius of the Russian Orthodox Church. The biblical tradition strongly urges "extending hospitality to strangers." In these pages I will suggest a stranger-centered theology. Theology to be authentic must be constantly challenged, disturbed, and stirred up by the presence of strangers.

When I say this I feel immediately an acutely embarrassing gap between the theme of this paper and our everyday life. The Union Theological Seminary Community Handbook of 1992 opens with a chapter on "community security" which says, "Never open a door to someone you don't recognize." "Even if your door is self-locking, your apartment will not be secure unless you use the key to turn the deadbolt." How do we reconcile the biblical exhortation, "extend hospitality to strangers," with our life which in nearly every aspect is so well symbolized by the ubiquitous deadbolts?

The seminary community's response to this challenge is to invite "every person connected with the institution—staff, stu-

dents, alums, administration, faculty, board members, partners—to participate in a carefully planned immersion into a local community of citizens actively involved in changing their social, economic, religious or political environments." The 1993 academic calendar has been adjusted to allocate time to do this. Eight concrete immersion themes have been advertised to the whole community: (1) Wall Street, (2) Korean/African American Race Issues, (3) Public Schools, (4) Health Care/Power Issues, (5) Harlem Initiatives Community Organizing, (6) Housing/Homelessness and AIDS related issues, (7) Action for Community Empowerment, and (8) Manhattan Borough President's Office. I trust that there will be an increasing number of M.Div. theses related to these themes of local immersion. The decision of the seminary, an educational institution, to invest time and resources in this undertaking is a demonstration of its response to the painful gap it feels in its soul.

"Stranger" (*xenos*) means someone who is "foreign," "alien," "appearing strange," and "creating distaste." Do you feel distaste when you hear English spoken with accent? The stranger is considered as enemy (Isa 29:5). Paradoxically, however, the stranger can become the guest if we can overcome the fear of the hostile alien by way of making friendship. Thus, the stranger carries a possibility of future reciprocal hospitality. The stranger is not welcome but fascinating. This is "the magical power of what is foreign."[1] Do you feel fascinated when you hear English spoken with accent? According to *The Odyssey* of Homer, the quality of civilization can be decided by its attitude towards strangers (Bk. 9:175). The quality of religion is also determined by its attitude towards strangers.

I am not advocating a condescending ethics of the bourgeois mentality or a sentimental moral perfectionism. It is patently not easy to invite to your dinner party "the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind" instead of "your friends or your brothers, or your relatives or rich neighbors" (Lk 14:12-14). The way of extending hospitality to the stranger may even become the way towards martyrdom (Phil 2:8). Jesus was crucified because he extended hospitality to strangers so completely. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Martin Luther King Jr., Steve Biko, and Oscar Romero suffered martyrdom following the way of Christ's extending hospitality to strangers. Martyrdom suffered because of extending hospitality to strangers is profoundly Christ-like. That is why this lecture is titled "Missiology of *Theologia Crucis*."

In truth, the apostolic instruction is prefaced by these solemn words:

> I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship (Rom 12:1).

Our "extending hospitality to strangers" happens "by the mercies of God," and when this happens our life becomes a "living sacrifice" which is "holy and acceptable to God," and it is an essential part of our "spiritual worship." There is a living connection between "extending hospitality to strangers" and "loving your God and loving your neighbor" (Mk 12:28-34) of which Christ says "there is no other commandment greater than these" (see Lk 14:12-14). And his directive to love enemies (Mt 5:44) is the ultimate of extending hospitality to strangers.

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[1]*Theological Dictionary of The New Testament*, Vol. 5, ed. Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 3.

Theology to be authentic must be constantly challenged, disturbed, and stirred up by the presence of strangers.

There is a striking suggestion in the New Testament that Jesus himself is a Stranger. In the 53rd chapter of The Rule of St. Benedict (written in 540) we read: "All guests who present themselves are to be welcomed as Christ, for he himself will say: I was a stranger and you welcomed me (Mt 25:35)." When Christ himself is presented as the stranger "who needs to be fed, clothed and visited," the gospel suggests a revolutionary displacement of "the center."

Christ the center-person comes to us in the true form of a periphery-person. "For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate" (Nicene Creed). This is the fundamental element of the gospel which St. Paul calls "scandalous" (1 Cor 1:23). It is scandalous because it exposes and challenges the human sense of power-structure and prestige system (Col 2:15). Christ is "scandalous" because he, the physician, came "to call not the righteous but sinners" (Mk 2:15-17). It is this scandalous Christ who has the power to destroy our self-idolatrous center-complex. The gospel radically disturbs our hierarchical distribution of power and prestige. A "hierarchy-in-reverse" is consonant with the mind of Christ (Phil 2: 5-11).

> The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you, rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves. (Lk 22:25)

This is the basic orientation of *theologia crucis*. The key insight of Luther's *theologia crucis* is that the true knowledge of God comes from the knowledge of the suffering of Jesus Christ. This happened concretely when Christ loved strangers and gave his life for them (Rom 5:6-8). The "form of Christ" (Gal 4:19) is the form of "extending hospitality to strangers." This form is the essence of the Christian gospel. It is the vision of ecumenism. It is that which inspires Christian mission. Mission is "extending hospitality to strangers."

The faith of Israel said it this way:

> You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. You shall not abuse any widow or orphan. If you do abuse them, when they cry out to me, I will surely heed their cry, my wrath will burn, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children orphans. (Ex 22:21-24)

This extraordinary thought cultivates and expands the horizon of the human soul. It is derived from a theologically informed experience of conversion (*metanoia*). It reveals the truth about the creation and maintenance of shalom (wholesomeness, well-being, integrity) in human community. "You shall not oppress a resident alien," a socially marginal people. This command has remained relevant throughout the history of human civilization, and it is becoming even more significant in our own day as the number of uprooted people from political and racial oppression, inhuman poverty and ethnic conflict, civil war and natural disaster has been steadily increasing.

The ecumenical movement is a movement towards a fuller conciliar communion as an expression of the apostolic *koinonia*.

For the *theologia crucis* the Exodus text cited is important (see also Lev 19:34, Deut 10:19). The passage is related to the great story of the crossing of the Red Sea in which the salvation of the helpless Israelites was achieved by a miraculous intervention of God, the experience Emil Fackenheim calls in his *God's Presence in History*,[2] "the root experience." According to him, the crossing was "an historic event affecting decisively all future Jewish generations" (p. 10). Perhaps Egyptians did not "extend hospitality to the stranger (resident alien) Israel." Israel cried to God (Ex 3:7). God's wrath burned and destroyed the army of Egypt, the soldiers' wives became widows, and their children orphans.

But the *theologia crucis*, inspired by the thought that "[Christ] saved others; he cannot save himself" (Mk 15:31) cannot end with the song, "I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has thrown into the sea" (Ex 15: 1). Ancient Israel, meditating upon the resident aliens living among them in the light of its own previous experience of having been resident aliens in Egypt, strikes me with a spiritual force more meaningful and universal than the root experience Fackenheim named.

Israel reaches a higher plane in the moving words of Ex 23:9:

> You shall not oppress a resident alien. You know the heart of an alien for you were aliens in the land of Egypt.

This is in line with the Servant Songs in the Book of Isaiah and the words of the prophet Micah urging Israel, in the name of God, "to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with you God" (6:8). Israel's contemplation on their relationship with the stranger offers us a relevant evangelical counsel. It is an ancient vision of "extending hospitality to strangers." It is the beginning of mission and ecumenism.

After five thousand years of throwing each other "into the sea," the *consensus hominum* (unanimous human opinion) is that this must come to end. "You shall not kill" (Ex 20:13). The story of the Passover night in which all the first born of the Egyptians, even the domestic animals, were destroyed by the hand of God disturbs us when we think of Fackenheim's "root experience." This story of genocide presents an agonizing ecumenical and theological problem. Was it necessary and justifiable? Wasn't it overkill? (Ex 12:29-30). How are we to interpret this massacre? Is not Ex 23:9 more in line with the passage in the gospel, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" (Jn 1:36) than the story of the Passover night? Speaking from his African soul, Steve Biko writes:

> We do not believe that God can create people only to punish them eternally after a short period on earth.[3]

Theologia crucis agrees with this deep African theological emotion. It is the theology

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[2]Emil Fackenheim, *God's Presence in History* (HarperTorch Books, 1970).

[3]Steve Biko, *I Write What I Like* (Harper & Row, 1978), 44.

of "extending hospitality to strangers" as the Lamb of God did. It rejects the language of threat. It proclaims the ultimate power of self-giving love (*hesed, agape*).

The only way open to us to stop the violence of genocide in our world is by "extending hospitality to strangers" as the Lamb of God did. Humanity has been aware of this, with or without the biblical instruction. The great documents in the history of the human soul, such as Magna Carta (1215), Bill of Rights (1689), Declaration of Independence (1776), Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), and Earth Covenant (1992) express the spirit of the Exodus text on the treatment of the stranger. "Ex-Egypt" is a possibility, but "Ex-Earth" is not. Humanity must now learn to live together since there is no other way (Gal 5:15).

The stranger-centered theology expresses the spirit of the biblical faith and it is rooted in the church's understanding of the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Missiology of *theologia crucis*

The aim of mission is the creation of community centered by the peripheralized Christ for all people. Christ creates the "*koinonia*" (communion, contribution, fellowship, partnership, sharing, participation). In the mind of St. Paul, *koinonia* is based on the suffering of Christ. "The bread that we break, is it not a sharing (*koinonia*) in the body of Christ? (1 Cor 10:16). In *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (Faith and Order Paper No. 111, World Council of Churches, 1982) we read:

> The eucharist embraces all aspects of life. It is a representative act of thanksgiving and offering on behalf of the whole world.

In the eucharistic *koinonia* the community of faith is representing the whole world. Christ's way of extending hospitality to strangers must be the way for the whole world. In the *koinonia* of the self-giving Christ there is no struggle between unity and diversity. Both unity and diversity are signs of the blessing of God as manifested in the Body of Christ. "...we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one body" (v. 17). The missiology of *theologia crucis* aims to create the *koinonia* of the whole creation.

The Seventh Assembly of the World Council of Churches (Canberra in February 1991) expanded the theological orientation of the *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* document:

> The unity of the church to which we are called is a koinonia given and expressed in the common confession of the apostolic faith; a common sacramental life entered by the one baptism and celebrated together in one eucharistic fellowship; a common life in which members and ministries are mutually recognized and reconciled; and a common mission witnessing to the gospel of God's grace to all people and serving the whole of creation.[4]

The ecumenical movement is a movement towards a fuller conciliar communion as an expression of the apostolic *koinonia*. In *koinonia* theology, theologies of "extending hospitality to strangers" and of "sharing in the body of Christ" are inseparable. Both nourish Christian missiology. But how can we speak about "sharing in the body of Christ" without first "extending hospitality to the stranger"? (Isa 52:7, Rom 10:14f.)

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[4] *Signs of the Spirit* (WCC Publications, 1991), 173. See also Aram Keshishian, *Conciliar Fellowship* (WCC Publications, 1992), xv. 81.

Minority theologies extend hospitality to strangers. People of economic, racial and political minorities are themselves strangers. Blacks, Womanists, Feminists, Native Americans, and Latin American Liberationists are resident aliens. They have brought into the theological discussion the voices of those who have been ignored for centuries. Black theology is a stranger-centered theology. It brings the life experience of the most marginal population to the center of their theological concern. For too long the church had not extended hospitality to strangers' theologies, including even women's experience and expression of the Christian faith. Aylward Shorter, the Catholic missionary theologian in Africa, writes:

> For nearly sixteen centuries, from late Roman times until our own, a monocultural view of the world held sway among bishops, theologians and thinkers of the Catholic Church.... When classical Graeco-Roman philosophy came to be applied to the truths of revelation during the high Middle Ages, the immutability of the Christian cultural ideal was sealed.[5]

In our time, after 1600 years, both the "bottle" (cultural container) and the "wine" (substance of the gospel itself) are seriously examined by those who want to extend hospitality to strangers. Minority theologies are challenging theological interpretations, formulations, symbolization, and liturgies of the dominant groups which have long been colonially and monoculturally presented and accepted. Their critical studies probe to the essence of the biblical faith itself.

Thus, the horizon of theology has been suddenly expanded. But the church is still not entirely sure whether it should extend hospitality to these theological resident aliens when they dare to attack "the immutability of the Christian cultural ideal." It has not fed and clothed these theological resident aliens when they were hungry and naked.

I have suggested that the stranger is a crucial key to the understanding of the gospel. *Philoxenia*—friendship to strangers—is the way of *theologia crucis*. Christian theology will remain meaningful only as long as it takes the stranger seriously. Now, let us focus on what it means to "extend hospitality to strangers" in the inter-religious context. This will give us an important example for our stranger-centered theology. I realize that this subject is by itself overwhelming. What I am intending to do is only to sketch how the apostolic exhortation may be brought into the discussions we have as we live in a religiously plural world.

Stranger-centered theology in the inter-religious context

The religions have been a persistent element in the conscious separation of groups from one another. 1.8 billion Christians in the world today are strangers to 950 million Muslims who, in turn, are strangers to 300 million Buddhists. There is a sense of mutual alienation among peoples of different religions. Intra-religion divisions are plentiful also. We hear a familiar confession: "I was brought up as a Presbyterian who tended to regard Catholics as ignorant, dirty, dishonest and often drunken!"[6] Within "one" religion, there are many religions. Intra-religious differences are as complex as inter-religious differences. So far I am thinking of the world religions, the youngest of which is Islam.

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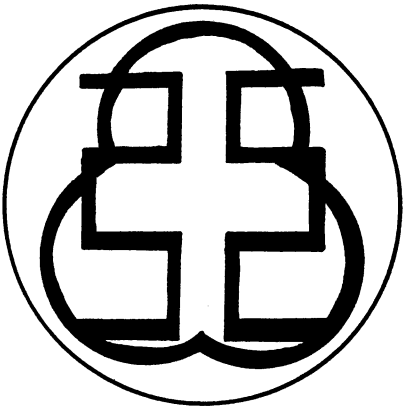
[5]Aylward Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation* (Orbis, 1989), 18.

[6]*New Religious Movements and the Churches*, ed. A. R. Brockway and J. P. Rajashekar (WCC Publications, 1987), 13.

We should add what the 1986 conference sponsored by the Lutheran World Federation and World Council of Church calls "New Religious Movements." Harold Turner, dean of a world-wide study of new religious movements, noting the amazing prolification of these movements in our days, writes: "the world has never seen more religious innovation and creativity than in the second half of the present century."[7]

Let me list some of the new religious movements: Theosophical Society, Transcendental Meditation (TM), Divine Light Mission of Maharaj-ji, Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh Society, International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), Erhard Seminars Training (EST), Soka Gakkai, Unification Church, Rastafarians, The Vodou, New Age Movement, Scientology, Jehovah's Witnesses, The Latter-Day Saints, The Worldwide Church of God, the Christian Science, The Baha'i, and so on. I am simply calling to your attention that the religious life of humanity today is far more varied and chaotic than a scholarly paper on the concept of the Buddhist nirvana compared with that of the Christian Kingdom of God based on the critical study of the respective texts.

Living in the "Rush Hour of the Gods" (MacFarland), how should Christians hear the apostolic exhortation to "extend hospitality to the stranger"? Does it mean to be open to all kinds of religious teachings and experiences of salvation? It is reported that Mircea Eliade, in one of the last interviews he gave before his death, called for our openness to recognize the sacred wherever it appears: "It is quite possible that some day we will see absurd, strange things appearing which may well be new expressions of the experience of the sacred."[8] Harold Turner suspects that human history would have been considerably different if Christians had taken new religious movements, such as that of Muhammad in Arabia in the 7th century, and the Taiping Revolution in China in the 19th century, more positively (p. 9). He also observes that "from secular historical, phenomenological and sociological points of view the Christian church was another religious movement" (p. 4).



Must we extend our hospitality to the followers of these "strange" religions? If the aim of mission is the creation of the *koinonia* of the whole of humanity centered by the peripheralized Christ, what should be our attitude towards people of other faiths? Christians are generally hostile to the followers of other world faiths and particularly to those of the new religious movements which are still pejoratively called "sects," "cults," "heresies," or "deviations."

Hence, one Christian response would be: "Do not extend hospitality to the people of sects, cults, heresies, and deviation." After all, false teachers, pseudo-prophets and other mendicants abused the hospitality of Christians (*Didache* 12). One may go

[7] *New Religious Movements*, 8.
[8] *New Religious Movements*, 66f.

back to the Nehemiah tradition that demands the separation of the people of God from strangers. Some of us may quote the words of St. Paul:

> I do not want you to be partners with demons.... You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. (1 Cor 10:20f.)

But the demons here are the spirit of idolatry. There are the table of the Lord and the table of idolatry. The apostle urges that Christians must be keenly aware of the perils of idolatry. "Flee from the worship of idols" (1 Cor 10:14). If you reject idolatry, then, you can truly "extend hospitality to strangers." This connection is missiologically important. Our attention should not be so much with condemnation of the Unification Church or Krishna Consciousness, but with "fleeing from the worship of idols." Idolatry can take place in Christian life as easily as in the life of the followers of Muhammad or of Christian Science. Before we speak against the people of the Krishna Consciousness, we should tell ourselves to "flee from the worship of idols."

Should not Christians extend hospitality only to Christians or "good people" who are not deviates? This position would imply that 64 percent of the world population of 5.3 billion are at the table of the demons while "Christians" are not! Scholars tell us that the world population will be 6.35 billion in 2000, and 30 billion by the end of the 21st century. In *The Devastation of the Indies* by Bartolome De Las Casas we read:

> Their reason for killing and destroying such an infinite number of souls is that the Christians have an ultimate aim, which is to acquire gold, and to swell themselves with riches in a very brief time and thus rise to a high estate disproportionate to their merits. It should be kept in mind that their insatiable greed and ambition, the greatest ever seen in the world, is the cause of their villainies.[9]

The self-idolatry of "insatiable greed and ambition, the greatest ever seen in the world" distorts and destroys the gospel of the Christ to whom people came "from every quarter," who ate "with sinners and tax collectors" and who was crucified between two thieves (Mk 1:45, 2:16, 15:27). Commenting on the parable of the unforgiving servant (Mt 18:23-35) Reinhold Niebuhr writes:

> Forgiving love is a possibility only for those who know that they are not good, who feel themselves in need of divine mercy, who live in a dimension deeper and higher than that of moral idealism, feel themselves as well as their fellow men convicted of sin by a holy God and know that the differences between the good man and the bad man are insignificant in his sight.[10]

Theologia crucis remembers that what is important in our sight can be "insignificant in his sight" (see 1 Sam 16:7). Encouraged by Bartolome De Las Casas and Reinhold Niebuhr, I am ready to make a methodological suggestion. In the context of "extending hospitality to the people of different religious persuasions," we must primarily look at our human reality, both personal and collective, and not at the doctrinal or institutional aspects of the religions.

The human reality of Buddhist people who feel jealousy should be the primary point of concern, not some abstract Buddhism which cannot be troubled by jealousy. Muslims, who think, speak, eat, sleep,

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[9]Bartolome De Las Casas, *The Devastation of the Indies* (1552), tr. Herma Briffault, 31.

[10]Reinhold Niebuhr, *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics* (Crossroad, 1935), 139.

meditate, marry, divorce, laugh, cry, complain, pray, and fast, are the central reality, not Islam. Christians, who can be people of "insatiable greed and ambition," should be taken up as the primary reality, not some doctrinal or institutional formulation of Christianity, such as the Two Natures of Christ or the Papacy or Presbyterian polity. I would suggest that we should apply the same methodology to the people of new religious movements. Our primary interest should be with the human reality of Transcendental Meditators, not the doctrinal and ideological message of Transcendental Meditation.

Still, a difficult problem persists. What, precisely, is the relationship between Buddhism and Buddhist, and Islam and Muslims, and so on? The answer does not come easily. Buddhism is a body of moral and religious teaching. It has expressed itself through its elaborate system of symbols and institutions, and it has created one of the great civilizations of humanity. The same thing could be said about Christianity and Islam.

Obviously there would be no Buddhists apart from Buddhism. There would be no Catholic faithful apart from the papacy. Yet it is not Buddhism but Buddhists who make Buddhist culture and civilization. There is no such possibility as "Buddhism by itself" or "the Papacy by itself." Buddhism cannot speak to Christianity, but Buddhists can. Inter-religious dialogue is between Buddhists and Christians, not between Buddhism and Christianity. Not for the sake of Christianity, but "for our sake" Christ gave his life. The concept of a world of plural religious truths is a theoretical construction, one step distanced from humanity's religious life. Apart from the concreteness of the people whose lives demonstrate plural religious truths, it would be pure abstraction.

Seen from the angle of this methodology, we find ourselves, whatever our religious commitments, to be much alike. I am saying that human beings who call themselves Buddhists or Hindus or Christians or Transcendental Meditators are alike, for instance, in their greediness or in their self-righteousness. To say that Buddhists are less greedy or self-righteous than Christians, or to suggest the opposite, would plainly contradict what we experience. In the people of other religions, we see, to our embarrassment, undesirable parts of ourselves. This may be one of the reasons why we hate other religions.

Inter-religious dialogue is between Buddhists and Christians, not between Buddhism and Christianity.

Though Christians passionately recite "terrible things" of other religions, the human reality of greed and self-righteousness is indisputably there across the board.

> ...in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same things. (Rom 2:1, and see Mt 7:3.)

Thus for Christians, the need for repentance (*metanoia*) appears in the context of inter-religious dialogue. We must renounce our centuries-old "teacher's complex." The

proclamation of the gospel and teacher's complex do not go together. In *metanoia* we accept Jesus' words, "Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye?" (Mt 7:3). In 1934 Reinhold Niebuhr wrote:

> There is no deeper pathos in the spiritual life of man than the cruelty of righteous people. If any one idea dominates the teachings of Jesus, it is his opposition to the self-righteousness of the righteous.[11]

Christians' understanding of the people of other religions, then, begins with Christians' own repentance. Only when we repent, can we truly "extend hospitality to strangers." In *metanoia* we will see the universal sin of greed and self-righteousness in ourselves as well as in others. We must not simply be against Vodou or Scientology, but against greed and self-righteousness that are found in all human religious realities including Vodou and Scientology. Christian criticism of greed and self-righteousness comes from the venerable tradition of Israel and the church at the center of which stands the crucified Christ. Paul Tillich will help us to understand how Christ stands here:

> ...he accepts the title "Christ" when Peter offers it to him. He accepts it under the one condition that he has to go to Jerusalem to suffer and to die, which means to deny the idolatrous tendency even with respect to himself. This is at the same time the criterion of all other symbols, and it is the criterion to which every Christian church should subject itself.[12]

I would suggest that this should become the criterion of the symbols of all religions. This is a scandalous criterion because it is a crucified criterion, a criterion of radical self-denial. It is the criterion that *theologia crucis* upholds. In the light of this criterion, I am bold to examine the truth about the visit of the Japanese emperor Akihito to China (October, 1992) when he expressed only sadness but not an apology to the Chinese people for the wartime atrocities in which 20 million were injured or killed. In the absence of genuine repentance it is difficult to restore a healthy international relationship.

Still a number of questions persist. Will not the *theologia crucis* orientation encourage the syncretism of religions? Does it have a strong evangelism thrust? Is it not too "romantic" about inter-religious realities? Must we not decisively reject the way of salvation by religions other than Christianity? What is the position of the stranger-centered theology on the kidnapping and deprogramming of the captives of the Moonies? When Bhagwan Rajneesh says that Christianity is "death oriented"; when the Japanese True Light Religion (Mahikari) says that it was Jesus' brother, not Jesus himself, who was crucified; when the Unification Church claims that it is re-populating the world with a new sinless humanity by way of mass weddings, should Christians remain silent? How are we to respond to the financial and moral messes involving a number of religious bodies?

It is imperative for Christians to publicly state what they believe. This is an essential part of "extending hospitality to strangers." Missiology of *theologia crucis* must make it clear how the teaching of Buddhism or that of Scientology differs from the Christian proclamation. Thus the study of Christian theology becomes a constant responsibility of every Christian. The *theologia crucis* inspires the Christian act

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[11]Niebuhr, *An Interpretation*, 138.

[12]Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture* (Oxford University Press, 1959), 67.

of clarification which safeguards Christianity from becoming indiscriminately confused with different doctrines.

But still we have uneasy stirrings within us. Is it not a part of evangelism to attack and even anathematize other religious teachings? "Woe to you, the Taoists, Muslims and Moonies..."! Does not evangelism require some negative campaigning? How can we speak positively about our own faith unless we speak negatively of others? Isn't it essential in our evangelism to expose all of their unclean spirits, and promote our own clean spirits ? Does not biblical theology support this? Hasn't such missionary activity been precious Christian tradition practiced from ancient times, and with a particular boldness throughout the whole world since the event of Columbus in 1492? Do we not evangelize the world because there is no other name than that of Jesus Christ through which the world can find its salvation? Exactly 200 years ago, in what might be called his "Oversea Mission Manifesto," the great Baptist missionary William Carey based his missiology on the understanding that

> Before the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ the whole world were either heathens, or Jews; and both, as to the body of them, were enemies to the gospel.[13]

This is a clear and powerful position. Does it represent our missiology today? Is this where we stand after the painful and confusing history of the West's expansive colonialism in Asia and Africa, after the event of the Parliament of World Religions held in Chicago 100 years ago, after Hiroshima and the Jewish Holocaust 50 years ago, after the two World Wars in this century, after the gigantic population explosion, and the ecological crisis we find ourselves in today? Does our dedication to mission and evangelism derive from the theology that those who are not Christians are "enemies of the gospel"?

And how can we appeal to Christian congregations for support of "oversea mission/evangelism work" if we do not tell them that "people over there" are living in darkness, and need their help?

It is, according to the apostolic faith, the Spirit of Christ that energizes our evangelistic proclamation. I doubt strongly whether the idea that "people over there are enemies of God" is central to the Spirit of Christ. The Spirit of Christ does not support the spirit of greed to conquer others and self-righteousness to demonstrate our own superior piety. The gospel-message is not a human creation (Gal 1:1f). The message is that in Jesus Christ God extended hospitality to strangers to an unimaginable extent and to an unsearchable depth (Rom 11:33). This must be the Spirit of Christ today as well as 2000 years ago. Our appeal to congregations for support of mission/evangelism work must be presented in terms of the theology of "extending hospitality to strangers" which is the essence of the gospel, and not in terms of the damnation of the heathen who are seen as the "enemies to the gospel."

How does the missiology of "extending hospitality to strangers" understand the 18th Article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights?

> Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

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[13]William Carey, *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians, to use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens* (1792), 14.

The 18th Article which expresses the Western liberal Enlightenment spirit is, in fact, being violated every moment. Religious passion cannot be tamed by these cool rational words. How do the spirit of the European Enlightenment and the Christian theology of repentance intersect? This is a challenging problem particularly for those who live in the United States whose political philosophy was much influenced by Enlightenment thought.

The 18th Article protects the "freedom to change," for instance, from Islam to Christianity, and vice versa. Change of religion takes place only as a result of complex factors—cultural, social, political, psychological, racial, and so on. Conversion to any religion is of little substance unless it brings some liberation from greed and self-righteousness to the life of the convert.

Christians may insist that the change which is crucial is the change from the allegiance to Muhammad to Christ. But what is the substance of allegiance to Christ? Does not Christ emancipate humanity from the power of greed and self-righteousness? Or shall we draw a sharp line between Christian faith and greed/self-righteousness, and declare that they have nothing to do with each other? While it is true that the gospel is the power that saves us in spite of our greed and self-righteousness, the fruit of our salvation will be seen in the evidence of the destruction of greed and self-righteousness in our lives. This must be true if we insist on the historicity of the Christian faith. The destruction of greed and self-righteousness must be historically demonstrated.

Greed and self-righteousness are not, of course, the only universal problem that religions recognize. It is true, however, that all of the great world religions take them seriously. Buddhism is centered on the problem of greed, and Christianity on that of self-righteousness. In my view, it is these two factors that are destroying the shalom of human life upon the earth.

If this is true, the primary focus of Christian meditation in the inter-religious discourse must be upon human greed and self-righteousness. Saying this, I do not mean that in every inter-religious situation, we should immediately address these issues. But it is important to know deep in our hearts the seriousness of human disintegration caused by these two forces. In fact these two forces are one force, since wherever there is greed there is self-righteousness, and vice versa. Where there is greed or self-righteousness, there is idolatry. "Flee from the worship of idols."

How difficult it is to "flee from the worship of idols"! It is with the deep sense of repentance that Christians "extend hospitality to strangers." In this context of hospitality, Christian critique of the Christian religion and of other religions can be both sharp and meaningful. "For God shows no partiality" (Rom 2:11). This is the backbone of the missiology of *theologia crucis* in the inter-religious context.

The stranger-centered theology inspires a new ecumenical movement based on the Christian theology of repentance. Repentance (*metanoia*) is a creative moment in which missiology of *theologia crucis* begins. In repentance, we can truly "extend hospitality to strangers." This is the spirit of the stranger-centered missiology.

The Gender Balance of Texts from the Gospels

The *Revised Common Lectionary* and the *Lutheran Book of Worship*

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Stories about women in the Gospels are important for women because they need to have role models of the same gender in order to imagine their own place among the faithful. They are also important for men because the women in the Gospels are men's foremothers and women are men's partners in the Christian church.

Each Sunday people in congregations across the world hear lessons read from the Gospels, readings which have the power to create reality for the people.[1] Mary Ann Tolbert has noted that because of the male perspective in the texts women need to read as men (and hence against themselves) in order to follow the story line.[2] Add to this problem an unbalanced gender selection of pericopes in a lectionary which decides which pericopes are to be read on Sunday, and women are hindered from having their experience mirrored in even the meager number of references to women in the Gospels. Thus, we follow Jesus as Peter, James, John, and Paul, but not as Mary, Elizabeth, Martha, and the many unnamed women.

The neglect of including as many stories from the Gospels about women as possible communicates, perhaps inadvertently, that the stories which are omitted are unimportant. There is a loss of women's history—lost coins—which could urge us to acknowledge women as moral agents.[3] As seriously, a significant part of Christian history is lost. As Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza has noted, "the enslavement of a people becomes total when their history is

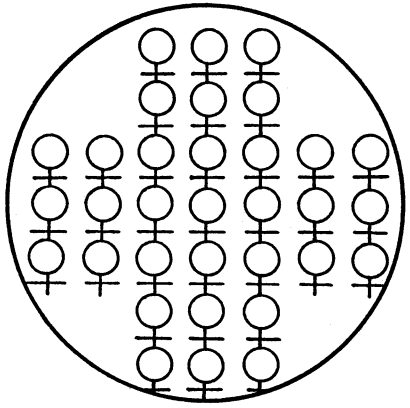
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[1]It is *not* the purpose of this study to discuss the difficulties of what to do with texts that were written from a male viewpoint. See Carol J. Schlueter, "The Bible and Inclusive Language," *Consensus* 14 (1988): 25-34.

[2]Mary Ann Tolbert, "Protestant Feminists and the Bible: On the Horns of a Dilemma," *The Pleasure of Her Text, Feminist Readings of Biblical and Historical Texts*, ed. Alice Bach (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990) 5-23.

[3]*Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Letty M. Russell (London: Basil Blackwell, 1985), 21-29.

destroyed and solidarity with the dead is made impossible."[4] When only a select part of the Christian story is read at worship, there is a loss of solidarity with those early believers, and hence a diminishing of who we are.



One of the merits of the Gospel writers was their attempt to recount a wide variety of responses to Jesus' ministry—faithful men, women, children; a Syro-Phoenician, some Samaritans; and politicians, competitors, and opponents. When lectionaries omit available stories of women's response to Jesus, Christian worshippers cannot be challenged by those stories to observe that the Divine is found in a multiplicity of encounters with people. This point was surely central to the ministry of Jesus who discussed theology with a woman (Jn 4:1-42), ate with tax collectors and sinners, and whose conviction of his mission to Israel alone was stretched by a Syro-Phoenician woman (Mk 7:24-30).[5] The challenge of a plurality of experiences of the Divine was also central to the church in Paul's time in embracing Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free people, men and women. Consequently, an inclusion in our lectionaries of more stories about women will create a reality in which we remember a *prima* Christian faith rich with stories about women and men.

The recently published *Revised Common Lectionary*[6] (*RCL*) promises to address the failure of earlier lectionaries like that in the *Lutheran Book of Worship* (*LBW*) and the *Common Lectionary* to "recognize the significant... role played by the women in the Scriptures."[7]

In this study I shall work along two main lines:

1. I shall examine the lectionaries of the *LBW* and the new *RCL*. My task will be to review some of the stories of women which were omitted from the Gospels in the lectionary from the *LBW* and to ask whether the recently published *RCL* has incorporated these texts. It will turn out that many stories of women which could have been utilized have not been taken into account and are therefore a loss to those who listen to the lectionary. Lectionaries work out a three year cycle with gospel texts being divided among Years A, B, and C and between readings for Sundays and weekdays. Since I am especially interested in what gospel pericopes are heard by congregations, I shall focus upon designations for

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[4]Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984).

[5]See "A Gentile Woman's Story," by Sharon Ringe, in *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, 65-72.

[6]See the *Revised Common Lectionary* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1992). The Lectionary will hereafter be referred to in the text of this essay as *RCL*. I am indebted to Rev. Jim Schellman, from the Consultation on Common Texts, for a copy of the *RCL* before it was published.

[7]*Revised Common Lectionary (1992). A Brief History*, by André Lavergne, ELCIC representative to the Consultation on Common Texts, 2.

Sundays and major festivals like Christmas and Easter.

2. I shall suggest how the addition of these stories would be significant for worshippers and make three suggestions as to what pastors might do while another revision is awaited.

How the lectionaries arose

In 1963 the Second Vatican Council of the Roman Catholic Church decided to facilitate a "warm and living love of Scripture"[8] among its people. This directive resulted in the *Roman Lectionary* of 1969. In 1978 North-American Lutherans produced the *Lutheran Book of Worship* which was an adaptation of the *Roman Lectionary*. In 1983 a *Common Lectionary* was produced by the ecumenical Consultation on Common Texts which made only minor changes as to which gospel units (pericopes) were chosen. The next six years were spent listening to various criticisms of that lectionary which resulted in a call for a revision which would address them. The criticism which interests me bears repeating: the call for more recognition of women's role in scripture. In late 1992 the ecumenical Consultation on Common Texts published the *RCL* which has been endorsed by the English Language Liturgical Consultation as "the most promising version of an international ecumenical lectionary."[9] It is likely to be adopted by Presbyterians and Uniteds, while Anglicans and Lutherans have decided to test it for a few years.

Women's stories: lost and found coins for the lectionary

One way to test the new lectionary is to determine whether the stories about women which were left out of the lectionary of the *LBW* are now included in the *RCL*. In the *LBW*, the percentage of pericopes from the Gospels (selected for Sundays and major festivals) with women as central characters compared to men, were 19%. This calculation counted passages where Jesus appeared with women as important characters as pericopes with women as central characters while in cases where Jesus was speaking in general, the pericope is counted as one with male characters as central.

The gender imbalance is obvious. One can redress this imbalance in a number of ways: (1) by moving daily readings from the Gospels into Sunday readings and (2) by using pericopes which are not currently in the lectionary at all.

Moving daily readings into the Sunday readings. There is a principle of hermeneutics operating for texts which are read on Sundays: some texts are more important than others and therefore need to be brought to the forefront while less essential texts are relegated to weekdays.[10]

Where should we put the healing of Simon Peter's mother-in-law (Mt 8:14-15, Mk 1:29-31, Lk 4:38-39)? In the Gospel of Mark, her healing was the first to point to Jesus as the bearer of salvation. Her response to the healing (salvation) was to "serve," and such service is the central theme in this Gospel, as is made clear in Mk 10:45—the Son of Humanity came not to be served but to serve. Her response is paradigmatic for Christian discipleship, and therefore she can be seen as a central exem-

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[8]Lavergne, *Revised Common Lectionary (1992)*, 2.

[9]Lavergne, 2.

[10]Marjorie Proctor-Smith, "Images of Women in the Lectionary," *Concilium* 182 (1985): 51-62.

Stories of women, babies, rejoicing, and God's presence are important stories for a congregation.

plary figure. As such, she might more appropriately be called "the fevered woman"[11] or "the woman who joined Jesus' way." Although the story was never heard on Sunday in the *LBW*, it is commendable that in the *RCL* it is heard on the fifth Sunday after Epiphany.

The Samaritan woman (Jn 4:1-42) is an example of a woman who discussed theological issues with Jesus. Unfortunately, her story was missing from the Sunday readings of the *LBW* and is still absent from the *RCL*. Similarly, the story of the anointing at Bethany (Jn 12:1-8), which is scheduled in the *RCL* to be read on the Monday of Holy Week in church years ABC, will never be heard by worshippers on Sunday. This story is significantly different from other anointing stories in the gospels (cf. Mt 26:6-13, Mk 14:3-9, and Lk 7:36-50). To include only one of the anointing stories distorts the evidence that such actions occurred more than once. Further, the anointing story in John points to the deep friendship which existed between Mary, Martha, Lazarus, and Jesus.

Using the lost stories and expanding the current ones. Stories of women in the lectionary can be increased by utilizing those pericopes from the Gospels not currently in the lectionary. These stories with women as main characters provide a variety of materials. There are women as (1) central exemplary figures, (2) women who have become symbols for contemporary women, (3) women entangled in intrigue, and (4) feminine images of the Divine.

Exemplary women

Although some pericopes with women as exemplary figures are not in the lectionary (e.g. Lk 4:33-44), they have parallels which are (e.g. Mk 1:29-39). Other pericopes have no parallels and so the results of their omission are heightened. Cases in point are the woman accused of adultery (Jn 8:1-11), the pregnancy of Elizabeth (Lk 1: 24-25, 57-80), the visit of Mary to Elizabeth (Lk 1:39-56), and the parable of the persistent widow (Lk 18:1-8a). The merits of these five stories for inclusion in the lectionary will be discussed below.

The first story concerning Jesus' defense of the woman accused of adultery has been particularly helpful to women who have suffered abuse.[12] Jesus stood up for her against violent men—a rather helpful model for our world. Sadly, this story was not in the *LBW* nor is it in the *RCL*.

The second story, the pregnancy of Elizabeth (Lk 1:24-25), is absent from both the *LBW* and the *RCL*. So is the rejoicing of Elizabeth's neighbors in the birth of John the Baptist (Lk 1:57-80). The salvation

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[11] See *The Forgotten Followers*, ed. Carol J. Schlueter (Winfield, B.C.: Woodlake Press, 1992), 19-21.

[12] See "Every Two Minutes: Battered Women and Feminist Interpretation," by Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite, in *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, 96-107 at 101.

story is one in which ordinary men and women participated, but their names and activities are not recorded.[13] Many remain invisible to us. Nevertheless, these stories of women, babies, rejoicing, and God's presence are important stories for a congregation. They remind us that God is active in the events of women's lives, events like birth and in occasions of support for the challenges of women's lives. I have in mind here more than the biological aspects of women's lives. Sensitive pastors will point to other births in women's lives specifically and in people's lives in general: births like the production of artistic pieces, ideas, choices.

The third story—Mary's pregnancy—is in the *LBW* but was cut short at the annunciation, Lk 1:26-38 (year B, fourth Sunday after Advent), omitting the visit to Elizabeth, her greeting, and the Magnificat. The *RCL* follows the same pattern. In year C, the annunciation (Lk 1:26-38) is not part of the Advent Story at all. Year C (fourth Sunday of Advent) does have Elizabeth's greeting (Lk 1:39-45) with vv. 46-55 (the Magnificat) as optional, while v. 56 which says that Mary stayed with Elizabeth for three months is missing altogether.

These omissions mean that congregations will never hear Luke's version of the birth of Christ in its entirety and that what little we have of women's story has been curtailed. The fact that Mary stayed with Elizabeth for three months reveals women's reliance on each other for support and wisdom which is passed down the generations. That the Magnificat, the prophetic song, is an optional reading is an impoverishment of Luke's theology of God working reversals in society:

> He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts, he has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away (Lk 1:51-53).

The omission of the Magnificat is also an impoverishment of Mary's prophetic role within this Gospel. She is the one who announces this reversal which is so much a part of Luke's gospel story (i.e. the lost are found, Lk 15; the foreigners are righteous, Lk 10:30-37).

Further, Mary is a model for discipleship. She is called blessed because she hears the word of God and obeys it (Lk 1:30-38). Thus, if she is a model for discipleship in the first century, why is her role diminished in the lectionary by curtailing the narrative about her in the Gospels? The birth narratives in Luke celebrate the presence of God in the experiences of women.

The fourth story is from a parable which Jesus told: the persistent widow (Lk 18:1-8a) and the unjust judge. While this story was not in the *LBW*, it is included in the *RCL* (Proper 24 [29], Sunday between October 16 and 22 inclusive). The woman challenges the listener to be an agent for change. Women whose role has been prescribed mostly in terms of compliance, compro-

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[13]Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, "Text and Reality—Reality as Text: The Problem of a Feminist Historical and Social Reconstruction Based on Texts," *Studia Theologica* 43 (1989): 19-34. "Feminist literary studies of the Bible—be they formalist, structuralist, or narratological—in turn carefully delineate how the androcentric text constructs the politics of gender and feminine representation. But they insist that we are no longer able to reconstruct the historical reality of women 'beneath' the text." Fiorenza again: "Yet our experience tells us that women have been historical subjects and have shaped culture and religion although androcentric records do not mention our existence and work" (p. 22).

mise, and self-sacrifice need this woman who is a positive moral agent and works for justice for herself.

A fifth story is about Mary Magdalene, who saw the risen Christ and proclaimed the good news. In the *LBW*, year C, the story of Mary Magdalene at the tomb was submerged in the account of Peter and the other disciple who ran to the tomb (Jn 20:1-9). Verse 10 (that the disciples then went back to their homes) was completely omitted and, sadly, the rest of the story, namely that Jesus spoke Mary's name and talked with her and that Mary subsequently preached to the disciples, was not told. Instead, it was relegated to a lesser festival (St. Mary Magdalene, July 22), which was rarely celebrated. The Consultation on Common Texts is to be commended for restoring the hearing of this essential part of the gospel story to the people on Easter Day in year C. Mary Magdalene's story challenges women to proclaim and men to receive proclamation from women.

These five stories of exemplary women need to be told and retold so that congregations know them as well as they know the stories about the twelve male disciples and St. Paul.

Symbols for contemporary women

The woman in Lk 13:10-17 is not primarily an exemplary woman. I think that she more accurately can be said to have become a symbol for the well-being of all contemporary women who are "bent" and whom Jesus wants to be straightened. While the story was omitted from the *LBW*, it is included in the *RCL* (Year C, Proper 16 [21] Sunday between August 21 and 27 inclusive). This choice is a move in the right direction. The symbolic action of the straightening of the woman in this story is a beautiful account of God's desire for the self-affirmation of women in general, and therefore the narrative is vital for women to hear. It can be that necessary Word of God for women to seek change in an abusive relationship[14] because it is clear from the story that God desires the well-being of women who are bent over with oppression. In the narrative, Jesus seeks her out and heals her in the midst of a teaching session with the disciples. Her well-being takes precedence over teaching, and Jesus stands up for her against those who would put Sabbath observance above her healing. A modern dynamic equivalence may be that Christians are challenged to work for the well-being of women so that they are not bent over from fear of walking alone at night, from fear of rape or violence, or from fear of poverty in old age. The woman in Luke 13 stands for all powerless women who are bent and who wait for others to reach out to them. She will challenge us, now that her story is in the lectionary.

> In terms of complexity, it is important to try to round out all the characters in the Gospels.

[14]For the importance of this story, see Bärbel von Wartenburg-Potter, *We Will Not Hang Our Harps on the Willows*, trans. Fred Kaan (Oak Park, IL: Meyer-Stone Books, 1987), 79-87.

Women entangled in intrigue

A pericope which is missing from the *LBW* lectionary and in which a woman is caught in intrigue is Mk 6:14-29. Herodias' story has now been added to the *RCL.* Her story should be helpful in two ways: (1) to balance the stories of exemplary women and (2) to encourage listeners to think about the complexity of the situation in which she found herself.

In terms of balance, it is well known that it is dangerous to have only a one-sided portrayal of any social group. An example is that of the Pharisees. Their negative portrayal in Matthew 23 led to generations of people believing that the historical Pharisees were like this one-sided view.

In terms of complexity, it is important to try to round out all the characters in the Gospels. Thus, the figure of Herodias may prod us to think beyond the mere details of the narrative to what it may have been like for a woman in her situation in first century Palestine. Was she simply a hateful woman? What was she seeking in her relationship with Herod? What were her options? In Jesus Christ Superstar, the complexity of Judas' character was delineated more than is usual. Perhaps the same needs to be done in the case of Herodias, not to erase the evil she did but to observe her as more than a stick puppet playing a part. Her inclusion in the *RCL* gives us that opportunity.

Women as images of God

Four pericopes feature feminine images of the Divine which do *not* appear in the lectionary of the *LBW*. First is Mt 11:12-24 with its parallel in Lk 7:18-35. It is commendable that the *RCL* has included the Matthean passage (Proper 9[14] Sunday between July 3 and 9 inclusive). However, the Lucan parallel is not used. The saying that "Wisdom is justified by all her children" (the Lucan passage) is particularly noteworthy because "wisdom" here is personified as a woman—a passage reminiscent of images in Proverbs 8—and may well be very early.

The portrayal of Jesus as glutton and drunkard in the context of the passages from the Gospels is not likely to have been created by the early church, nor is it standard within Jewish tradition. Therefore the saying about wisdom personified may go back to Jesus himself. His association with the feminine principle of wisdom is fruitful ground for inquiry.[15] In any case, the weight of reliability, the early dating of the passage, and the feminine personified image is enough to warrant the inclusion of the parallel from Luke in the next revision of the lectionary.

The second image is that of Jesus' gathering the Judaic children (his brothers and sisters) under his wings as a hen gathers her chicks (v. 37). This verse has gone by the wayside, probably because Mt 23:13-39 was thought to have a vitriolic anti-Pharisaic attitude. However, there is no need to excise any of these verses. The pericope can be dealt with in a responsible and creative manner.

The section against the Pharisees requires that Christians face up to anti-Judaic tendencies. It requires an explanation of the type of rhetoric exhibited by Matthew. It belongs with other expressions of the day, like slander and the vituperation of oppo-

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[15]See for example, Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's article, "The Sophia-God of Jesus and the Discipleship of Women" in *Women's Spirituality,* ed. Joann Conn (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), 261-73.

nents.[16] After all, the statement was made by a Jewish Jesus to his own tradition: one insider castigating another and not the rhetoric of one religion against another. As such, Jesus' statement about being like a mother hen to his own people could function as a balance to the harsh statements before and after. The statement is unique because Jesus uses a feminine image of his ministry. The pericope when used in a church service needs a commentary to explain the type of rhetoric. In addition, surely pastors can come up with a dynamic equivalent to place the text within a Christian context, perhaps by pointing to the rhetoric used among contemporary Christians in, say, the abortion debate. I once heard each side of the abortion issue label the other side as Nazis. Labels are negative rhetoric and not accurate descriptions. Jesus' use of this feminine image for himself is noteworthy because it is so rare.

A third feminine image is the parable of the bakerwoman in Mt 13:33, Lk 13:18-21. The Matthean parable was not included in the *LBW* but stands in the *RCL* (Year A, Proper 12 [17] Sunday between July 24 and July 30). However, its significance is diminished when the parable is combined with five other parables (the parable of the mustard seed in Mt 13:31-32, the hidden treasure and the pearl of great worth in Mt 13:44-46, the net in Mt 13:47-50, and the householder in Mt 13:51-52). It is hoped that the next lectionary will give this parable a place of its own.

The parable of the bakerwoman is significant because it envisages God as a woman baking bread and placing yeast in the dough. It is an unusual image of God and serves as a corrective to exclusively masculine images available in the current lectionary. As a rare image, it is essential to include both Matthean and Lucan pericopes in the next lectionary.

A fourth feminine image, found in Jn 16:16-33, is not included in either *LBW* or *RCL*. The passage describes Jesus' concern for his followers in terms of a feminine image. He recognizes that they will mourn for him when he is gone, but he also knows that they will rejoice at his return. To underline his point, Jesus uses an image of a woman who gives birth, pointing out first her travail and then her subsequent joy. The presence of such an image in the text and the opportunity to hear it both acknowledge the divine presence within the life experiences of many women and suggest to men the possibility of using feminine images to describe their own experiences, as Jesus did.

While the preceding passage values women's experience of childbirth, Lk 11:24-28 reminds us that Jesus' view of "blessedness" for women was not circumscribed in the role of mother. It must incorporate a life of obedience which may lead in a different direction from motherhood. What a refreshing reminder for the modern world! Unfortunately, the pericope is not in the *RCL*.

Concluding Remarks

Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza among others has noted that reality lies not behind the text but in front of it. Language is a structuring process,[17] and social and theological reality is being structured when pericopes are read. For us to select fewer readings about women than are available, and to emphasize exemplary figures at the ex-

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[16]See chapters 6-8 in my Ph.D. thesis "1 Thessalonians 2:14-16: Polemical Hyperbole," McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario Canada, 1992.

[17]Schüssler-Fiorenza, "Text and Reality," 21.

pense of ordinary ones (like the neighbors who rejoiced at John's birth) suggests that such celebrations have little to do with the reign of God or that their presence in the text is unimportant or embarrassing and therefore needs to be subverted. So, if the story is not there, the readers cannot find a mirror for all of the ordinary celebratory events of their lives.

Since texts not only reflect reality but also create it, we need to ask ourselves, "What reality are we creating in our selection of texts?"

The reading of scripture in worship functions as an occasion for the community to hear who we are and whose we are. It is therefore important for our congregations to hear stories about both men and women. From these stories we add to our spiritual repertoire additional models of faithfulness.

Within the church today, public office and leadership roles are held by both women and men. They listen to scripture for active spiritual direction. We must acknowledge that a paucity of women's stories has affected women's perceptions of themselves as Christians and how they perceive the significance of women's roles. Are they to be perceived as central to the faithful or ancillary? Are women to be perceived as agents for leadership, theological thinking, and wholeness in the church or only in prescribed roles such as carrying out the decisions of others who are at the center of decision-making?

As this study has shown, the next lectionary needs to redress the imbalance of texts, using people of both genders as central characters by moving some readings from weekdays to Sundays, and by adding stories which were omitted. Although this inclusion will not solve all the problems of the lectionary, it will let worshippers know that in many and various ways women were a significant part of the salvation story. Since texts not only reflect reality but also create it, we need always to ask ourselves, "What reality are we creating in our selection of texts?"

What can pastors do who wish to give more attention to women's stories? I have three suggestions. First, they might decide to use some of the texts which were omitted. The lectionary, after all, is to serve as a guide and not a rule. Thus, they might choose to use a pericope which does not presently stand in the lectionary. Second, they might also focus on the women instead of the men in some pericopes currently in the lectionary. For example, in year A, the sixth Sunday in Lent (Mt 27:11-54), they might preach about Pilate's wife (Mt 27:19) who stood up for the innocent Jesus by speaking to her husband. She is a moral agent to whom we might look as a model. The next time Year B, the First Sunday after Christmas Day (Lk 2:22-40) comes up, they might preach about Anna, the prophetess, instead of Simeon. She is a prophetess who preaches in the temple. Third, they might try role reversal, an approach which Mary Ann Tolbert calls a "hermeneutic of recuperation."[18] The strategy is to encourage a

[18]Tolbert, "Dilemma," 19.

We may not be able to achieve perfect gender balance with biblical pericopes, but we can begin to close the gap.

"re-reading of scripture in the case of some, not all, biblical texts... to retrieve the genuinely liberational ideology which gives to them their basic emotional power."[19]

One example of role reversal must suffice. The pericope about Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead (Jn 11:1-44) could be read as if a woman, for example, Martha, had been dead for several days and Lazarus were reproaching Jesus for not having been there sooner. In one of my classes at Waterloo Lutheran Seminary, where this approach was used, several women said that they, like Lazarus, needed to be released to speak, to claim their personal power. The story became effective when they could identify with Lazarus not "against themselves" but "as themselves." When Lazarus was thought of as a woman, they could identify with her and she became a symbol for all woman whose movements are constricted by visible and invisible bonds and who look to the healing power of Christ to free them.

The *RCL* is a welcome alternative to the lectionary in the *LBW*. It is clear that the committee added some pericopes with women as central characters which had been omitted from the *LBW*. However, the final product is not as balanced as could be desired. There are still more lost coins than found ones.

We may not be able to achieve perfect gender balance with biblical pericopes, but we can begin to close the gap. This study points to how stories of women—those lost coins—can be retrieved for our congregations through being placed in the next lectionary and how pastors can remedy the dilemma in the interim. What we need are more sweepers like the woman in Luke 15, more people who will look for lost stories, call the congregation together, discuss what it means to have more stories of women, and celebrate each found story as a movement toward a church which rejoices in a fuller Christian heritage.

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[19]Tolbert, "Dilemma," 19.

Theological Autobiography: Theologizing in Context

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Introduction: *Sitz im Leben* of the interpreter in narrative form

Over the last three years or so, I have been directing attention to the crucial question of "The contemporary crisis in defining and confessing the gospel." In fact that was the title of my inaugural address on the occasion of my tenureship, in April 1989. Then, as now, I tentatively summed up the crisis thus:

> Increasingly, gospel has become a transcendent historical referent which is a negation of what is considered negating, evil, or dehumanizing. Consequently, there is a pressing necessity (it would appear) to spell out clearly what the gospel is. Where it is spelt out, that, too, falls under the very negation which it intends for another set of prevailing circumstances. The inevitable danger is that our modern usage of 'gospel' will make it devoid of any critical, essential substance and meaning. This essential substance and meaning is necessarily centered in the Triune God, known and revealed in Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. It is not centered in some monarchic or egalitarian theistic referent, a mere human projection, which arises out of interpreted subjective need and which, consequently, has no fundamental, evangelical connection to Jesus the Christ, God the Son who became human, suffered, died and rose again. It may be argued that what we have today is a better and clearer grasp of what the gospel is not than what it is!

It is far easier to find agreement on the fact that we are to be judged by the gospel than on what the gospel is.

I continue to ponder the question of the uniqueness of Christianity, trying to discern whether there is any essential gospel 'kernel.' The gospel cannot come without culture. But gospel and culture are not synonymous. Is it realistic to attempt to separate the gospel 'kernel' from its cultural wrappings? Is there a discrete shell, separate from the gospel, in which the gos-

pel is to be found? Is the relationship between the gospel and culture more like an onion—when you peel it away there is nothing left?

Increasingly, over the years, I have come to realize that some of the basic questions with which I struggle theologically are rooted in the milieu—religious, cultural, social, economic and political—in which I was born and raised in Guyana.

The kindness of non-Christians

I was reared in a Christian-Hindu home (Christianity was overtly dominant), in which my mother, in particular, faithfully saw to it that all her children were brought up as devout Christians. Her faithfulness derived from her Hindu devotion, not Christian commitment to Jesus Christ. She is an individual Hindu believer, but she is also a representative of Hindu devotion. Since my early teen years, one of the primary 'life' questions I have pondered and which gained further refinement even as it has remained simple has been: What in her Hindu mind and devotion has *both prompted and allowed* her unflinching commitment to her children's Christian upbringing? As far as I can understand, she felt that she was being a good Hindu in seeing that we were active in Christian worship and in church activities. I was never taught by the church that faithfulness to Jesus Christ means that I should encourage my mother in her Hindu devotion and spirituality. On the contrary, I understood that my task and responsibility was to try to persuade her and others to believe in Jesus Christ and become Christians.

In the community in which I grew up and to which I later returned to serve as pastor there was a Muslim family. The patriarch in the family was a very good friend of my father's. Our two families were relatively close. In 1974, when it became certain that I would be leaving for Wartburg Seminary for my theological and pastoral preparation, I shared the news with several people both within the congregation and the community. One of the people I spoke with was Uncle Gafoor, this Muslim gentleman. While I expected him to say how pleased he was at the opportunity to further my studies, I was not prepared for his benediction. He said, "Son, I know you will make a good pastor. And I pray that the Almighty will bless you." In 1980, when May and I returned to serve my home congregation (located across the road from where he lived), he was there to welcome us and to keep an eye out for our well-being. Uncle Gafoor did all of those things—benediction and looking out for our well-being—as a faithful Muslim devoted to the will of Allah.

His older grandson, Nizam, and I were the same age and we grew up together. Despite his grandfather's religious strictness against conversion, Zam became an active associate member of the Luther League. I remember that though he remained a Muslim, Zam would speak of the local Lutheran church as 'our church' and was genuinely interested in its well-being. For a while some of us thought that despite his grandfather's opposition he would become a Christian. It was during that time that one of Zam's teenage cousins died unexpectedly. I vividly remember attending the funeral, which was conducted according to Muslim rites, and observing that during the ceremony at the burial ground Zam covered his head with his handkerchief and with the other Muslim believers faced Mecca and prayed. I can still see this incident as if it were yesterday. In the midst of the deep experience of grief, he had

returned to what was of the family. He had prayed to Allah.

In considering the critical question of Hinduism and Islam as religions of authentic responses to authentic divine revelation, I have been pondering upon the texts in Luke about the centurion (7:1-10), and in Acts about Cornelius (10:1-48) and about Paul's sermon in Athens (17:16-31). What was the centurion's religion that prompted the Jewish elders to recommend him to Jesus with: "He is worthy of having you do this for him, for he loves our people, and it is he who built our synagogue for us" (vv. 4b-5)? What was the religion of Cornelius of whom it was said in Acts: "He was a devout man who feared God with all his household; he gave alms generously to the people and prayed constantly to God" (v. 2)? In uncharacteristic fashion Paul declares that the "unknown god" whom the Athenians worshipped was the Creator and Lord of heaven who raised "a man whom God appointed" to judge the world in righteousness (cf. vv. 22-31). Are other religions divinely-given anticipations of the full and decisive revelation in Jesus the Christ? Do these (and other) texts speak to this question?

Reconciliation and liberation

Religious diversity was mixed with ethnic, racial, color and class diversity. While Guyana's motto is "One People, One Nation, One Destiny," we used to boast that we were a land of "Six Peoples" as a way of emphasizing that our ethnic mix was comprised of Amerindians, Africans, East Indians, Whites, Portuguese, and Chinese. It was a milieu in which "white was right and better," a hierarchy of value that dominated (and still, I hope to a lesser degree, dominates) our lives. Ironically, despite the



lower valuation placed on East Indianness, in several ways it has been precisely through my retention and growing appreciation of it that I have found dignity in the face of the elusiveness of wholeness through whiteness. I have observed that relatives and friends who have emigrated to the U.S.A., Canada, and Britain who were Hindu and less Western seem to do better in negotiating racism than others who in becoming Christian rejected their East Indianness. Why is a non-Christian subculture more liberating than the one more akin to Christianity? It is a phenomenon which can be seen as well among African, Asian, and other immigrants.

While there are socio-psychological explanations of this phenomenon, they do not fully explain the phenomenon. It is a phenomenon of meaning which raises the indispensable question of truth. My own interest is in the religious interpretations, how the phenomenon is understood in the Christian doctrine of revelation in other religions and cultures. Is such a phenomenon more correctly interpreted in terms of God's rule under the law in the kingdom on the left? Or, is it more correctly interpreted in terms of God's rule through the gospel?

If we say the latter, is it an interpretation of anticipation and fulfillment? Or is it an interpretation of 'equal uniqueness' and parity among the world religions, including Christianity? That is, God's self-disclosure is universal, and each (world) religion is an

> We need to begin with a theology of alienation and reconciliation that includes liberation.

equally authentic, historically conditioned human response to that revelation? In that case, it is not surprising that it is liberating and salutary to fall back on one's indigenous religio-cultural foundations because they are equally revelatory and liberating. Here, truth and meaning coincide. What is taken as true is also meaningful, and what is meaningful is assumed to be true. Admittedly, the coincidence of truth and meaning is very complex, but the foregoing vignette provides us with a glimpse of the existential reality of many people who carry within themselves more than one dominant religion and culture.

The world of colonial and post-colonial politics is no less complex than the worlds of religions, cultures, gender, race, color, and class. Indeed, these are not separate worlds isolated from one another and insulated from interacting influences among themselves. Nevertheless, I attempt to speak of the world of politics in distinction from those other worlds. By the time of Guyana's independence from Britain (May 26, 1966), the politics of race and ideology was fairly well cemented, and in what was then a democracy the emerging politics was dominated by two and then three parties which were Socialist, Marxist-Leninist, and Marxist. The only alternative to the Co-operative Socialists, who came to power legally through Anglo-American machinations in December, 1964, was further to the left. No other elections since 1964 have been free and fair, but until the last few years successive U.S. governments, whether Republican or Democratic, representing conservative or liberal ideologies, could not countenance any alternative for fear that that alternative would be worse—more to the left. There was no way that the U.S.A. would allow the Guyanese people to change the government through the ballot box, if such change would mean a government of the Marxist-Leninist Party or the Marxist Party or a combination of both. For its part, the government, which had come to power amidst euphoria over defeating both the British colonial oppressors and the local Communists, was not about to let the people choose for themselves.

Where was the church in all of this? The church has had a curious history of both supporting the ruling planter class and of undermining it. The independence struggle was the culmination of the liberation struggle against slavery which began more than three hundred years ago. The church has long been into a form of liberation theology praxis. The contemporary tragedy was that the liberation theology praxis was not continued beyond the dawn of nation-building. The enemy had been defeated and was powerless, and the only enemies of liberation were those who dared to challenge the oppression of the 'once oppressed.' Put differently, for the most part having

uncritically spouted the liberation and anti-Communist rhetoric (some of it borrowed from our overseas solidarity partners), the church was unable to see the need for vigilance against human rights abuses as we set about the more arduous task of nation-building. The politicians ruled the day in defining for the whole society who friends and enemies were. By the time we awoke from the slumber, during which we had become willing and unwilling perpetrators and victims of oppression, we had already surrendered our power to keep alive the vision of the "not yet" of the kingdom of God. The line between allegiance to Caesar and Jesus Christ, while not unambiguous, was in many ways clear. Yet, because of religious commitment, as well as political allegiance, it took a long time for us to realize that our rejoicing (with the U.S.) at our salvation from the Communist demon was simultaneously the undermining of our real freedom to pursue justice and dignity for all our people. In the Guyanese context, having spent our energies fighting other people's demons, we are no longer able to see our own demons, much less fight them.

By early October, 1990, I had received the good news that former President Jimmy Carter, during his twenty-four hour visit to Guyana in September, 1990, had extracted from the Guyana government promises of free and fair elections in the near future, privatization of the economy, re-institution of a free press, etc. But the way in which this good news was conveyed (and I heard it repeated in Guyana during my 1991 visit) was that President Carter had extracted from the Guyana government in twenty-four hours what the Guyanese had been trying to get from the government for the past twenty-six years! Our celebration has got to be at best mixed. No one can feel happy when a government's contempt for its people is so inveterate that it would hear its people's cries only through the channel of that from which we proudly claim we were ineradicably liberated. Don't get me wrong: I rejoice at what President Carter has been able to do, and I welcome the different face the U.S.A. has been getting abroad as a result of his magnificent and untiring efforts at bringing about free and fair elections in many so-called third world countries. But I cannot hide my deep pain and sadness that our own people's efforts at bringing about free elections were arrogantly and contemptuously ignored by our own leaders. (On Monday, October 5, 1992, under the effective scrutiny of an unprecedented number of overseas observers headed by President Carter, free and fair elections, the first since 1964, were held in Guyana, and a new government was elected!)

Theologically we cannot stop at liberation, if by liberation we mean freedom from socio-political oppression. Even saying that such liberation is the necessary first task before we go on to other facets of liberation is dangerous and easily proves demonic in its consequences. We need to begin with a theology of alienation and reconciliation that includes liberation. But that liberation must always be undergirded and accompanied by reconciliation. If we do not work simultaneously for both inward and outward reconciliation, how will enemies be transformed into friends?

What, then, are the theological questions with which I struggle? Here is a sample: Does faithfulness to the gospel of Jesus the Christ necessarily imply parity or non-parity among the religions? If parity, then what do we do with the exclusive claims of the New Testament which is replete with texts and theologies which speak of salvation in and through Jesus Christ alone? If non-parity, then are all other religions, other than Christianity, ways of works-righteousness of varying sophistica-

tion? Is our pursuit of global justice, even when we downplay or outrightly reject the exclusive claims for Christian faith, not in the end yet another form of imperialism? To be candid, when we think in terms of globalization, contextualization, and mission, how come we are that sure that our self-interests are synonymous with global common good when we are separated by such basic factors as religion, culture, race, gender, color, class? Is it legitimate for me to assume that because I am a brown-skinned, middle-class, "third world" chap, living in the U.S.A., I understand what others feel who have one or more of those characteristics? If our culture is one among many, if we really do not know that much about other religions vis-à-vis Christian faith, then in the end we have to find another catholic basis. We say that it is the gospel. The critical question is: What is its content? It is time to examine two theological responses to religious pluralism and Christian exclusiveness.

Theological responses to religious pluralism and Christian exclusiveness

Two recent noteworthy reflections on the meaning of pluralism and its challenge to theological reflection and praxis are given by Stanley J. Samartha (*One Christ—Many Religions: Toward a Revised Christology*) and David J. Krieger (*The New Universalism: Foundations for a Global Theology*).[1] While Samartha suggests the directions of a revised Christology, Krieger offers some philosophical foundations for a global theology. Admittedly, they both dismiss traditional missiologies because of their exclusiveness. But whatever one's theological persuasion, theological, indeed ideological, tit for tat would not be helpful to any serious evangelical quest for faithfulness to the gospel today. Samartha and Krieger should not be dismissed *a priori* without careful examination—not least of all because of their respective sobering analysis of how pluralism calls for a radical reformulation of the exclusive claims of Christianity. It is certainly the latter which poses the dilemma of defining and confessing the gospel of Jesus the Christ today.

Samartha begins by boldly announcing that the underlying conviction of his work "is that, in a religiously plural world, a Christology that is biblically sound, spiritually satisfying, theologically credible, and pastorally helpful is both necessary and possible—without making exclusive claims for Christianity or passing negative judgments on the faiths of our neighbors" (p. ix). Samartha is convinced that in a religiously plural world exclusive claims for Christianity are untenable! Indeed, they are oppressive and do not witness to the truth of the gospel of Jesus the Christ in "an ecumenical setting" which includes "not just Christians but neighbors of other faiths as well in God's *oikoumene*" (p. xi). Cognizant of the pressing need for global justice and convinced that the global community "is the object of God's love and justice" (p. xii), Samartha calls for a revision of the formulations of Christian faith. In his view, his call for a revision of Christianity is not a call for a reformulation of the substance of Christian faith. His call is the necessary consequence of the sanguine acknowledgment

[1] Stanley J. Samartha, *One Christ—Many Religious: Towards a Revised Christology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991); David J. Krieger, *The New Universalism: Foundations for a Global Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991). The discussion of these two works is an appropriately revised version of the book reviews which appeared in *Word & World* (Spring 1992), vol. xii, no. 2, 198ff.

that no culture has normative priority over all others. It is only in the common struggle for justice "with neighbors of other faiths and secular convictions" that Christians make this shattering discovery. In this liberating awakening, Christians discover that there are "liberative streams" in other traditions besides the Bible, which is then placed alongside of, not above, "the ascetic spirituality" of Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, and other Asian religions. It may be surprising to some to learn that Samartha insists that it is possible "to do justice to the values of compassion and justice in the kingdom of God... without in any way compromising or betraying Christian commitment to God in Jesus Christ" (p. xii).

What is at the heart of Samartha's argument? It is the call for a revised Christology which is committed to parity in interreligious relationships, in the recognition that in contemplating "the depth and complexity of Ultimate Reality," religious plurality is inevitable. Consequently, only a plurality of human responses are authentic homage "to the inexhaustibility of the infinite" (p. 4). One human response is inadequate and ultimately unjust. Samartha is convinced that in the religiously plural world in which we live this quest for a revised Christology "is both necessary and possible without making negative judgments on the faiths of our neighbors." Over against any "uncritical acceptance of all religions as they are," this revised Christology is a rejection of "the *a priori* notion that Christ is *against* any religion and that the struggle between truth and falsehood is between Christianity and other religions" (p. 95).

The reader, even the casual reader, cannot but note that Samartha's context is religiously and culturally plural Asia, more particularly India. His own broad and diverse work experiences in both Geneva and India ably qualify him to critically reflect on the encounter between Christian faith as a Western transplant and the world religions of the East. The reader is also deeply aware of Samartha's profound commitment to using the multi-religious heritages available to enhance inter-human justice. The

Samartha insists that a revised Christology is necessary for healing the divisions, oppression, and exploitation in the world.

fragmentation of humankind and the very threat to global survival make it all the more urgent that scholars of different religious traditions pursue in greater depth "the implications of interreligious dialogues for more just human relations in the global community" (p. 42).

In Samartha's revised Christology, the needs of Asia are paramount; and the religious stories of the neighbors of other faiths in Asia, the insights of other religious scriptures, which are considered as equally revelatory as the Christian scriptures, form part of that rich tradition which Asians reflect upon and use in their movement from "self-centeredness to God-centeredness within their own religion" (p. 101). Indeed, one does not have to know Jesus Christ in order to know God as Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer of all humanity. Samartha's christological approach recognizes "that while

there is only one Jesus, there can be many christologies" (p. 103). It is only to Christians that Jesus is decisive and unique. But in a pluralistic world the function of Christology "is not to claim uniqueness for Christ by proving that all others are wrong or false, but to confess, explain, and help Christians live in obedience to the truth manifested to them in Jesus Christ" (p. 104). Samartha insists that a revised Christology is necessary for healing the divisions, oppression, and exploitation in the world which wittingly and unwittingly traditional, exclusive Christologies have promoted and sustained, instead of checking and minimizing their tragic divisive and dehumanizing effects. In Samartha's revised Christology there are multiple avatars, and behind and within these avatars, including Jesus Christ, is God the Ultimate Mystery.

Samartha's revised Christology covers well-rehearsed ground. But it is difficult terrain, and it needs to be covered again and again. Perhaps it is in part because of the difficult terrain that Samartha's proposal contains some critical contradictions. For example, his revision of the formulations of Christian faith reads more like a revision of the substance of Christian faith. Furthermore he does not demonstrate conclusively how one can read the New Testament and not conclude that the uniqueness and decisiveness of Jesus Christ as Savior of all, not just of Christians, is at the heart of the gospel. Finally, his doctrine of God sounds more like ancient modalism—God behind the Trinity (p. 96). These are serious pitfalls. Yet, Samartha's proposal of a revised Christology merits our considered reflection, not least of all because of its provocative insistence on the parity of other religions with Christian faith.

David Krieger asserts that "the task of theology can be seen to be that of a theology of religions only within the horizon of a radical pluralism." Krieger makes this assertion in light of the recognition that cultural relativism is the inevitable consequence of the rise and fall of colonialism, and cultural supremacy of the West is an unquestioned assumption of the past. Unlike "*both* Christian and Secular Humanist thought [which] share the same basic structure, which may be called *apologetic universalism*," Krieger argues that in this new postmodern situation, "truth is many and not one" (pp. 3f.). It was Tillich, Krieger points out, who, in his last public lecture, acknowledged that in this new global situation, "Christian theology can no longer define itself in terms of the apologetic struggle with Secularism, but rather has to open itself in a non-apologetic way to the entire spectrum of the religions of humanity." For this task to be appropriately recognized and expedited, "the theologian must decide to overcome an orthodox-exclusivism which regards all religions other than its own as false," and "one must free oneself from the temptation to see all religions from the universal, but indifferent, standpoint of a secular science of religions which denies the claims of revelation altogether" (p. 9). Krieger rejects both Barth's neo-orthodoxy and "Troeltsch's mediating liberalism" as inadequate solutions, and he summarizes the problem facing Christian theology today thus: "How can the absolute truth and universalism of Christian symbols be understood and expressed in a situation characterized by radical pluralism?" (p. 28). In short, what is called for is a *theology of religions*.

Anything less than a global theology would be inadequate in a world in which every significant problem is a global one. Krieger persuasively argues that in the unprecedented "conflicts of worlds," we have three specific options of response: *jumping-back*, *jumping-over*, and *jumping-in-be-*

tween (p. 35). But neither *jumping-back* out of fear into the culture in which we were originally rooted, nor *jumping-over* one's culture, from which one then becomes cut off, is salutary. For Krieger, the only way forward is *jumping-in-between*, whereby different worldviews are brought into dialogue "by placing them into a horizon of encounter so that they can come into a fruitful and transforming contact with each other" (p. 37).

Krieger finds in Raimundo Panikkar's concept of "diatopical hermeneutics" fruitful, creative, and illuminating potentialities for a theology of religions. In contrast to exclusivism and indifference, diatopical hermeneutics opens up a horizon of encounter in which not one but all parties experience genuine conversion. "Diatopical hermeneutics stands for the thematic consideration of understanding the other without assuming that the other has the same basic self-understanding and understanding as I have. The ultimate human horizon, and not only differing contexts, is at stake here" (p. 49).

In summary, the task of diatopical hermeneutics, Krieger writes,

> is to go through the logos, as mere sign, *towards* the mystery *by means of* the symbol. Insofar as it goes through and beyond the self-understanding which a religion has of itself at any given time, diatopical hermeneutics comes into an area which is truly *between* the various religions and which may therefore be called a *horizon of encounter*. This area between the religions, which is the authentic place of dialogue and mutual understanding, however, can only become accessible when a new myth, or horizon, is disclosed within which religions can meet each other. Diatopical hermeneutics is a movement of discourse *through* given beliefs, through the world-boundaries which systems of belief define *towards* a myth which transforms and unites them. (p. 67)

Anything less than a global theology would be inadequate in a world in which every significant problem is a global one.

In addition to his indebtedness to Tillich and Panikkar, Krieger finds the philosophical groundings for his use of the latter's diatopical hermeneutics in Wittgenstein's "ideal of a universal language," which leads Wittgenstein to posit a "*pragmatic semantics*" (p. 109). Krieger concludes his proposal of "The New Universalism" with an informative discussion of the Gandhian concept of *satyagraha* ("holding on to truth"), which is not to be reduced to nonviolence, for the aim of *satyagraha* "is a *mutual conversion* of all parties involved in a conflict. *Satyagraha*, therefore, is a procedure for what may be called *methodological conversion*" (pp. 159f.).

There is no question that Krieger's work is a valuable contribution to the discussion of genuine global inter-human encounter in a religiously and culturally plural world. He has made some very difficult material available to the scholar who regards faith as legitimate and not inimical to genuine understanding. But there are some shortcomings in his work: there is still too much obfuscation and unclarity in his exposition; the meaning of conversion remains ambiguous; in the end his discussion of *satyagraha*, though creative and suggestive, offers a hermeneutic which is still

essentially extrinsic to the Christian gospel. That is the task—finding a hermeneutic that is intrinsic to the gospel. It is a crucial task which needs to be pursued with no less rigor than Krieger's. In the end, what is stake is the very gospel itself!

Where do I go from here: one gospel of Jesus Christ, or many?

As I ponder this question, I keep the following in mind:

1. Gavin D'Costa is right when he says: "While Christians and Christian history cannot be immune to the charge of racism and imperialism, one may question whether these traits are intrinsic to the gospel."[2] D'Costa's conclusion to his 'essay on the issue of mission' is most timely:

> But ultimately, if the salt is to keep its flavor, the source of these values and the source of eternal salvation must also be proclaimed. If the Christian truly wishes to share with and love the non-Christian then, as with a close friend, one's most treasured beliefs and commitment should also be shared. Proclaiming the risen Christ through one's deeds, thoughts and words is always, and has always been, the central challenge of the gospel.[3]

2. "The gospel does not build structures but relations, and transforms them from the bottom up. The gospel is not a structure."

3. In contrast to theological models in which a reversal of the positions of the powerless and the powerful occurs though revolution, Sallie McFague argues that "models of God as mother, lover, friend, and healer suggest a different vision of existence. It is one of mutuality, nurture, self-sacrifice, fidelity, and care for the oppressed and vulnerable."[4]

4. There is no liberating Christian *gospel for all*, if the decisiveness and uniqueness of Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ, crucified and risen, is confessed and proclaimed as God's way, truth, and life *for Christians only* while other 'revealed ways' are considered equally decisive and ultimately liberating for those who faithfully follow those 'revealed ways.' This is no idle claim, and it should be made in humility, not triumphalistically. At the same time, such a paradoxically exclusive inclusive claim is made in the face of other competing alternatives. I close, then, with the question that best focuses on the center of Christian faith: If not this exclusive inclusive gospel of Jesus the Christ, what *will* ultimately heal, save, liberate, reconcile, unite, and call to global solidarity?

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[2]Gavin D'Costa, "Against Religious Pluralism," in *Different Gospels*, ed. Andrew Walker (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1988), 221.

[3] Walker, *Different Gospels*, 223.

[4] Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), xi.

The Sacramental Paradigm of Nature

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Earth Week gets a lot of attention here in Hyde Park. The focus is on the environmental crisis, from many perspectives: racism, law, treaty rights, war and peace, and the Earth Summit. There is even one group that engaged three very prestigious speakers from science, business, and the media to present "the case *against* environmentalism."

My contribution to this rather mind-boggling range of reflection asks you to ponder for a few moments *what we think this earth, this world of nature, is*, how we image the nature that the planet, and we as citizens of the planet, are made of. This nature, after all, constitutes the environment whose crisis is being surveyed, by some as a challenge for action and by others as a liberal fiction. One can hardly avoid the parallel with those who insist that the Holocaust of World War II is likewise a hoax. Nature is the stuff of the species *Homo sapiens* who has brought us to the edge of the crisis. Nature also forms the substance of all our efforts to find a way out of the crisis. It's all nature—and how do we image it? What do we think it is all about? And what difference would these images make for all of our Earth Week concern and activism?

The place I want to start with our image of nature is at the altar, where we make Eucharist together, share in the Supper of our Lord, bread and wine, body and blood of the Jesus whose resurrection we celebrate at Easter.

We Lutherans have a very definite and much-discussed idea of what a sacrament is. It has three parts: the first is a *natural element*, in this case bread and wine; the second is the *word of God's promise* that is added to the natural element; and the third is that natural element and word of promise are *used* by us in the confidence that God's word will direct that nature to the purposes of grace and redemption. Nature, word of God's promise, and confident use—these define a sacrament in our tradition. And they also set forth an image of nature.

If we look at our basic 16th century documents of faith, we'll gain clarity on this image by noting what we're opposed to. We're basically opposed to three positions:

1. The view that bread and wine are not good enough to bear the promise, that they have to be changed in some way, transubstantiated. This is the idea that nature cannot carry the promise—it's too weak.

2. The second view we reject is that bread and wine are only bread and wine,

carrying no particular promise. This idea squeezes any possibility of promise right out of nature.

3. The third view insists that the presence of Christ in the bread and wine is a spiritual presence, not physical. This is the idea that the promise cannot be contaminated by contact with nature—it has to remain "spiritual" in the sense of being immaterial. We learn a lot about what we believe about nature when we think carefully about these views that we reject.



We hold that in God's sight bread and wine are united to God's word of promise as the human Jesus was related to the divine Christ—a full union of a real human person and the real God. This all happens in a way that we cannot fully comprehend, but we insist that the human person was really human, and that the God was really God, and we reject the idea that Jesus was a freak or the product of a magical trick. This is all our traditional way of saying that nature can carry the blessing of God, and in this Eucharistic liturgy we insist that nature does indeed carry that blessing.

If you want to discover this for yourself—how doggedly we Lutherans believe in this set of images—follow the intricacies of the *communicatio idiomatum* (communication of attributes) in Lutheran orthodoxy, as Heinrich Schmid preserves it in the fine print on a dozen or more big pages in his "user friendly" compendium!

Nature is the prime vessel, the ordinary vehicle for God's gracious promise, that is, nature with the word of promise, used in faith. It is that way in Genesis 1, where the wind or spirit or promise of God brooded over the waters—and we call that particular unity of nature and promise the creation.

In Genesis 2, it's dust, mud, dirt—shaped and brought to life by the breath of God—and we call that two-natured creature Adam.

In the Synoptic Gospels, the Spirit of God comes upon a natural woman who becomes very naturally pregnant, and a natural baby boy comes forth. This boy was crucified before our eyes on Good Friday and resurrected in our presence early Sunday morning. And even though we divided him into two natures at Chalcedon, it was also at Chalcedon that we insisted that the truly human and the truly God are fully united in one Jesus Christ. These are the very images that the Formula of Concord will later employ to argue the unity of the bread and wine with Christ's body and blood.

The resurrection of Jesus that we celebrate is the resurrection of the body—an explicit and powerful repudiation of any notions either that our bodily selves are incapable of becoming more than dead dust or that we must become disembodied before we can receive a spiritual home. The Gospel accounts take great pains to say that a body, recognizable as Jesus of Nazareth, conquered death in the resurrection.

In Saint John's version of Pentecost, in which Jesus breathes the Spirit upon the disciples, Thomas is present as one who

must make contact with the body of Jesus before he can acquiesce to the resurrection. In a marvelous exchange of words and touchings, Jesus seems to say to Thomas, "Now you have seen and touched my body; you know it is the bearer of resurrection promise. But you are the last one so privileged, Thomas; henceforth the promise must be borne by *your* body, if people are to believe in it." John's Gospel clearly believes that in encountering the very natural community of Christians, future generations will meet Christ himself.

Luke's version of Pentecost also transpires in the word of promise attached to the varieties of human nature. The persons who received the spirit of promise were not idealized plaster saints. Rather, they were so human and so diverse that the onlookers could not believe what they saw; *so* earthy and bodily in their rapture that observers could call them drunks.

We could go on and on. What's the point? That in the sacred past and also in the present, God works through nature that has been blessed with a promise, with God's word, with the outpouring of the Spirit of God. Nature is not really nature as God intended it apart from the promise. The promise of the Spirit is not real except it be embodied in a natural element.

One might say that as far as our life in the world is concerned, that's all there is: *Nature existing in unity with the promise or spirit of God.* Without the promise, nature is not nature; without nature, the promise is not real. If we have an image of nature without the promise of the word, we can be sure that is not God's view of nature. If we have an image of spirit or promise without the natural element, we are out of touch with God's way of being present to us.

The promise or Spirit of God tells us what the purpose of nature is—whether it's Genesis 1 or 2 or in Jesus or in our own bodies or in the church. Maybe that's why we deceive ourselves into viewing nature apart from the promise, so that we can pretend that we create the purposes for nature. It is precisely in this context of nature's purpose under God that Saint Paul speaks of natural human bodies in 1 Corinthians 6. "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own?" The Spirit that brooded over the waters at creation makes all of the universe, including this planet, something that we have from God—God's, and not our own. Such a sense brought Gerard Manley Hopkins to write in his sonnet, "God's Grandeur," that however wilful humans might be with the rest of nature,

nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness
deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black
West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink
eastward springs—
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and
with ah! bright wings.

One might ask of all the Earth Week events—the noble as well as the ignoble—whether there is a place for this Christian image of nature as a gift from God, as belonging to God, as a reservoir of freshness that is never spent, and that might indeed live on in the Spirit long after human beings have disappeared from the universe. I say this not in any attempt to inhibit or discourage action in the streets in behalf of the earth, but rather simply as a Christian image of what it is we are going into the streets to save.

What difference would it make if this image of nature, derived from Scripture and the Lutheran understanding of sacraments,

The bread and wine becoming the vessel of promise reveals to us what all of nature, including our own bodies, is designed to be.

were really to claim our hearts and minds? Is this simply imagistic fluff? Is it an escape into symbols when hard actions are what is really needed?

I would hope not. I would hope that we see that in this sacrament-image our calling with respect to nature is defined. We are called as natural beings placed by God in a natural world—and the whole natural process is intended as a vessel of grace. The bread and wine becoming the vessel of promise reveals to us what all of nature, including our own bodies, is designed to be.

I would hope that we see that in this sacrament-image our sin with respect to nature is defined, as well. Our sin is our forcibly trying to tear nature away from its in-breathed word of promise. Technology is not our sin, rather technology separated from the purposes of God's promise is our sin. Using nature is no more sinful than using the sacrament that is spread before us. The sin is using nature in the drunken, lustful manner in which the Corinthians, whom Paul rebuked, used the bread and wine of the agape meal.

We also see our sanctification defined in this sacrament-image. We are sanctified in grace through all of God's natural processes, if we can discern the word of promise that God has added. In God's natural work, there is reconciliation with this beleaguered planet, with our fellow humans, and with our creator. Our sanctification enables us to see our own purpose in this world—to be sacraments of God's grace unto the rest of nature, to all that we encounter.

It's all very consistent with Romans 7 and 8. Nature viewed and used in defiance of the promise that has been breathed into it by God is accusatory law to us—threatening, unyielding, its inexorable demands never satisfied.

Nature accepted and used as the bearer of God's promise is gospel to us: a vessel of grace, an ambience for our obedience, the form of our resurrected new life.

Earth Day, care of the earth, befriending the planet—it all depends on how you look at nature, what you think it's all about. We will never come closer to nature's essential character than when we eat the bread, drink the wine, and accept the promise God has placed within them.

—adapted from a sermon preached Earth Week, 1992, at the LSTC chapel.

Deeper than Culture Wars: America's Real Enemies

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Is our nation in the midst of a "culture war?" The widely read book *Culture Wars* by James Davison Hunter[1] would have us think so. Yet there is reason to question whether this is an accurate way of characterizing the state of our nation's conflicts over such issues as abortion, homosexuality, censorship, and public education. More importantly, there are theological grounds for questioning whether Christians are or should be soldiers engaged in such warfare.

Hunter claims that beneath our nation's social and political struggles (over such issues as the above) is a clash of competing moral visions. It is because these conflicts are at root matters of ultimate importance to us, such as where moral authority finally lies, who has what rights and responsibilities, what is fundamentally right and wrong, and how American ideals are to be realized, that these conflicts are so heatedly and tirelessly fought. What is at stake is the power to define what is good and bad, to lay out how we should live and by what standards, or, in short, to determine what it means to be an American. And at this moment in our history, two opposing moral visions have polarized these debates and sparked the current culture conflicts.

The battle lines are drawn between what Hunter calls progressivists and orthodox. The orthodox are committed to "an external, definable, and transcendent authority" which provides an unvarying standard for moral value. The progressivists, conversely, reshape moral standards according to "prevailing assumptions of moral life." The historical importance of this culture war, thinks Hunter, is that the battle lines are now drawn in such a way that traditional faith divisions—Jewish, Catholic, Protestant, Mormon, etc., are superseded. The orthodox vision, e.g., includes orthodox Jews, conservative Catholics, and evangelical Protestants who oppose progressivists in their own communities of faith.

Now much of Hunter's interpretation seems right. One problem with characterizing this conflict as a culture war, however,

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[1]James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (New York: BasicBooks, 1991).

is that less than half of all Americans identify themselves with either camp; perhaps 20% of Americans (by Hunter's estimates) are on either pole. Most Americans have reservations about both ends and place themselves somewhere in the middle. So we must ask, Is this a full-scale war? What if someone announces a war to define America and less than half of all Americans show up for it? It may be true, as Hunter suggests, that the two camps set the terms and tone of the debate, that all mediating and moderating voices are discounted (perhaps by the media's tendency to turn such debates into conflicts with winners and losers) or are not visible when viewed through the moral field glasses of either side. Still, these statistics indicate that we have many uninspired and disillusioned citizens who are caught in the crossfire, or who are unwilling conscripts in a conflict where they hold allegiance to neither side.

Then there is the unsettling feeling that this culture war is fought principally within the ranks of the well-off. They are the ones, after all, who have the most ready access to the levers of political and economic power; and they are the ones with the will and the resources to mold American law and institutions to fit their moral vision. Perhaps by definition a culture war can only be waged by those who are educationally and economically well to do. But then this conflict is not a full-scale war, but a dispute over mostly 'upscale' issues. It involves, i.e., those who are concerned more over what sexual behavior this society will endorse for its citizens, than whether this society will see to it that there is adequate food, clothing, and shelter for them. It is a conflict for those who worry over what interpretation of American history our schools will teach or what artistic communication our laws will censure, than over whether one can read and communicate effectively at all.

This observation suggests that the most worrisome enemies of American culture and its ideals are hunger, poverty, poor education, racial disharmony, joblessness, and street violence. They are or should be the common foe of both moral visions. Such enemies are self-evident to any moral vision (even two supposedly antithetical or incommensurable ones such as the orthodox and the progressivist) and so they can provide a common basis for discussion over areas of mutual concern. Now the economic and political *tactics* for attacking these enemies of American culture will set off skirmishes between these two moral visions; nevertheless, there need be no fundamental conflict over the recognition that they constitute a common foe. Perhaps if both camps struck at that common foe threatening America's future, they might (at least at some points) join forces and move away from what otherwise seems to be a win/lose conflict over a set of priorities that is less than complete.

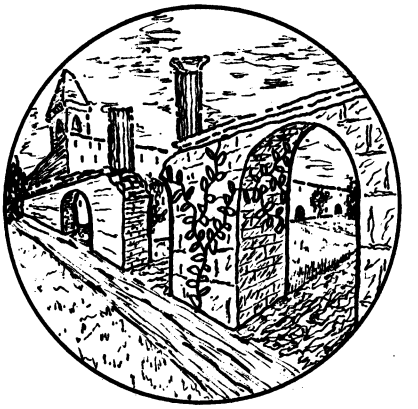
A final reason why we should view the present conflict as something less than a culture *war* (the likes of which we have not seen since the Civil War, according to Hunter) but more of an endless competition between many segments of society to define slippery concepts such as moral authority, responsibility, and virtue, is a theological reason. Hunter is probably right that the two competing moral visions assume the status of ultimacy for their proponents. Understood in that way, this culture war is over beliefs that are religious in nature. Each side holds ideals which are sacred to it; yet these ideals are antithetical to the other side. The zeal of their conflict, accordingly, can be understood in religious terms, and, for that very reason, is subject to theological critique.

We sense a certitude in both camps—Christian soldiers on the one side, the van-

guards of Humanism on the other—characteristic of religious triumphalism. Both sides seem to believe that through their own efforts they are bringing the kingdom of God or the Human Ideal to earth. The theological pronouncement upon such religious triumphalism is that the moral constructions of both sides are subject to God's judgment; that the kingdom (however envisioned) will come according to God's will, not by our own efforts; and that it will most certainly come in ways beyond our expectations—perhaps even through losing a culture war. Does it even occur to either side that *they might be wrong*? The self-righteousness of the combatants, then, should be the subject of theological judgment.

More sympathetically, we might see that such humorless religious zealotry stems from fear. They fight for fear of losing their identities. As Hunter's sub-title reads, this culture war is "the struggle to define America" because people stand to lose the power to define and implement the norms and limits which order their lives. But is this identity which we construct and others deconstruct our real identity? From the theological point of view we must affirm that no one can take our identity because no one can make our identity. That is given to us by God. Our ultimate identity does not depend upon our ability to control the symbols which define public culture. The identities we construct in such moral visions only faintly resemble the identity given to us by God.

Put another way, such culture competition is of penultimate importance. So that from a theological point of view it need not be such a catastrophic thing for Christians to lose a "culture war." We can be losers in such conflicts and not lose our identities, because that is shaped by being part of the Christian church. Moreover, Christian brothers and sisters, as Hunter helps us to see, may well line up on different sides of cultural issues; and, given that their identity is determined from beyond culture, that is as it should be. Christians have nothing to fear from losing out in these culture conflicts; in fact, knowing this, they will participate in the competition to define and order their public life not with a hostile spirit but with a generous heart.



As a sociologist, Hunter believes that soldiers on both sides of this culture war are capable of turning this conflict between moral visions violent. Perhaps the first theological word which needs to be spoken—reassuringly yet commandingly—to avoid escalating the ongoing competition into a full-scale war is "Fear not! This conflict cannot make or destroy who you really are." Our moral consciences bid each of us to engage in the competition to clarify the rules and authorities under which we live in this culture. But it is not our own identities which are ultimately at stake, but rather the needs and welfare of our neighbors. They should be the cause for which we compete. And when we contend with their interests in mind we may find that our moral visions are not as antithetical as we thought they were.

"Blessed Are Those Who Mourn, for They Will Be Comforted"

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In 1923 a great earthquake hit the Tokyo area. When people were agitated and became unstable in their minds because of this sudden disaster, someone started a vicious rumor that the Korean residents in the Tokyo area were attacking Japanese people and poisoning drinking water. The public believed the lie and came out to the streets armed to "protect" themselves. What ensued was a massacre of innocent Korean residents in and about the Tokyo area. The official government report put the figure of the victims at 6,600, but it fact, the figure was much higher. There must have been a great lamentation and mourning among the Korean people that day.

This happened before I was born. But the story stamped the "Korean people" on my memory. Through Japanese intrigue and military force, Korea had been annexed to Japan in 1910. Until 1945, for 35 years, the Korean people suffered the exploitation and barbarism of Japanese colonialism.

In 1984 the Japanese emperor, Hirohito, on behalf of his people, read a prepared statement on the occasion of a state visit of the Korean President Chun Doo Hwan:

> Our two countries were thus bound by deep neighborly relations over the ages. In spite of such relations, however, it is indeed regrettable that there was an unfortunate past between us for a period in this century, and I believe that it should not be repeated again.

The emperor of Japan spoke of Japan's colonial rule as "an unfortunate past" and failed to express a "sincere apology" for the evil Japan had inflicted upon the Korean people. The emperor, "the symbol of the State and of the unity of the people" (Article 1. The Constitution of Japan, 1946) did not "mourn" over what Japan had done. The Japanese people did not "mourn" either.

A few years ago, I visited the Memorial Museum of Massacre in Nanjing, China. I discovered, incidentally, that a large and successful Japanese tour industry in the city will take you everywhere except this museum! In that city, 300,000 civilians were massacred by the Japanese army in December, 1937. I saw a roomful of skulls and of grisly photographs of Japanese atrocities against helpless civilians. Japanese secondary school textbooks approved by the Min-

istry of Education today tell of Japan's "entry" into China but carefully avoid the use of the word "invasion." Of the Rape of Nanjing the textbooks say only that "it has been reported that a massacre had taken place."

Japan did not "mourn" over the appalling cruelty committed by its army. In 1937 I was among hundreds of school children who paraded in the main street of our town celebrating "The Fall of Nanjing." We were completely ignorant of "The Massacre in Nanjing." News was controlled by the government then, as it was with the case of the recent Gulf War. When the new emperor, Akihito, visited China in October, 1992, representing the people of Japan, he said he was sad for the grave suffering his country inflicted upon the Chinese people, but he stopped short of offering an outright apology. The Japanese government speech writers, masters of obscure and ambiguous use of language, prepared his text with superb craftiness.

In Korea and in China there must have been a great mourning over those who were injured, crippled, and killed by the Japanese military. Their mourning is a mighty voice of protest against the injustice and brutality to which they were subjected by the barbarous power. "Your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground" (Gen 4:10). In the Korean culture it is the cry of "han," the cry of bitter accusation that comes from the unpacified souls of the people who were destroyed unjustly. In the Korean literature we read:

> ...han which has been absorbed into the bones and muscles of the people of the country for 5,000 years is still breathing in the roots of the grass which covers the graves of the dead.

In 1923, 6,600 han-ridden souls were added to the millions.

I am presenting "mourning" in two contexts: victims and victimizers. Victims will mourn. But the victimizers, the inflictors of brutality, must mourn also. Japan must mourn over what she has done to Korea and China. Reinhold Niebuhr, however, warns us that it is a romantic dream that nations would readily "repent" for what they have done. They are not open to repentance. The incident of the emperor Akihito confirms the judgment of Niebuhr. But, by the grace of God, a few in a nation might "mourn" and repent.

> Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him." (1 Kgs 19:18)

The tiny section of the Japanese population who "mourned" over their own nation's brutality were accused of being unpatriotic and betrayers of their own nation. The excitement and fascination of war paralyzes our power of observation and reasoning. Yet, the "mourning" minority in the aggressor nations is "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world" (Mt 5:13f). Similarly a minority in this United States today is mourning over the fact that in this nation of great abundance 37 million people have no medical insurance. Globally there are minorities who are mourning over our civilization's destruction of the bio-sphere of our planet. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Steve Biko, and Martin Luther King Jr. "mourned" over political and racial tyranny. In 1946 the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America "mourned" over the use of the atomic bomb in Japan.

> We would begin with an act of contrition. As American Christians, we are deeply penitent for the irresponsible use already made of the atomic bomb. We are agreed that whatever one's judgment of the ethics of war in principle,

> the surprise bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki are morally indefensible.

"Genocide" is the word I would mourningfully use to describe the main characteristic of the 20th century. On the behalf of humanity, the church of Christ must mourn over this tragic fact.

It is difficult to believe that all mourners will be comforted. There must have been and must be millions of instances upon the earth in which the thought of being comforted is simply insulting nonsense or utter impossibility. In this sinful world (aeon), violence is ubiquitous.

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted" is a promise. It is the confession of a prophetic faith. Comfort will come from God who is with us yet beyond us. It is not of our making. It is a gift from God. The New Testament beatitudes point to the coming of the Reign of God. The beatitudes give a glimpse of an extraordinary way of experiencing human life in this world. We must hear the beatitudes in the context of the coming of the Reign of God. "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted." It points to the unexpected structure of the gospel.

> Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets (Lk 6:26).

Divine beatitude begins with the knowledge of "what their ancestors did to the false prophets." Why then is it difficult for us to distinguish between true prophets and false prophets? It ought to be clear that when all speak well of you, you are a false prophet! What a direct and controversial speech! May I reverse the "woe" to the "blessed"? Then it will read,

> Blessed are you when all do not speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the true prophets.

This is the new bold speech in the Reign of God. Such speech is embarrassing and confusing not only to middle class Christians but to the whole human system of moral and religious evaluation. Can any Search Committee work on this basis? The Christian proclamation is scandalous. The speech of the Reign of God is that of impending judgment and hope.

> But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry. Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep. (Lk 6:24f)

Are you "full"? In what way have you gotten that fullness? And what is the contents of that fullness? Are you "laughing"? Why are you laughing? What is it that makes you laugh? Are you sure that in all your "fullness" and "laughing," you are not living the life of false prophets?

Blessed are those who are marginal, peripheral, forsaken, forgotten, and victimized, because God, who is against false prophets of "good public reputation," will be with them, thus raising up the true prophets. The spirit of the true prophets urges Japan to apologize to Korea and China. By raising true prophets God is ever beginning a new history in which violence is rejected instead of apotheosized. "Behold I make all things new" (Rev 21:5). This is the biblical promise to the 5,000-year history of han-ridden souls in Korea.

Book Reviews

A Generation of Seekers: The Spiritual Journeys of the Baby Boom Generation. By Wade Clark Roof, with the assistance of Bruce Greer, Mary Johnson, Andrea Leibson, Karen Loeb, and Elizabeth Souza. New York: HarperSanFrancisco, a division of HarperCollins, 1993. x and 294 pages. Cloth. $20.00.

Buffeted as we are these days with the church growth movement and all its references to the baby boomers, it is helpful to have a sober sociological analysis of the religious trends and seekings of that generation born between 1946 and 1964. Roof and company provide this.

The book begins with the stories of seven people who are vastly different in emotional and spiritual makeup, then moves into the hard data of the study on the basis of and with reference to these profiles.

The people in this generation have come to maturity now as seekers and are looking for ways of mature self-expression. In this generation there are people who, with regard to the church, are "dropouts" and remain so, those who are "loyalists" (who stayed through thick and thin), and those who are "returnees." The loyalists tend to look conservative, politically and economically, in Roof's study. It is the returnees who are, to this reviewer, most fascinating, and in their profile is lodged the data to understand and appeal to dropouts as well.

Roof identifies three primary reasons why people choose to return to churches: family life, with all its attendant problems; the search for personal meaning; and the desire to belong to a community. Lutherans used to believe that the first reason would bring everyone back. It will not, declares Roof, and in fact it is probably the least powerful of the three driving reasons.

Those who return are examined in four key areas: views of the self, views on religious authority, understanding of meaning systems, and spiritual styles. There is a spectrum that runs to extremes when these gauges are put in place; e.g., returnees can run the gamut from thinly veiled hostility against all religious authority to a willingness to accept the leadership, both moral and spiritual, of a church. Spiritual styles range from the excessively eclectic (what Walter Truett Anderson calls, in *Reality Isn't What It Used to Be,* the "magic bazaar") to a willingness to work with the principal doctrines of a particular faith. A key thing to remember here, however, is that in all cases people know that they are voluntarily constructing faith in a particular configuration. Roman Catholics, e.g., seem willing to work with the teachings of the church in spirituality, but pick and choose at will among the moral teachings with little or no feelings of guilt. In other words, the concept of social construction of reality has affected even the conservative members of this generation.

Spirituality, which "gives expression to the being that is in us; it has to do with feelings, with the power that comes from within, with knowing our deepest selves and what is sacred to us" (64) is more important than religion, which is "at the deepest level a 'cultural system' that orders and gives meaning to life" (27), but which is often the hollow shell of traditions and sensibilities lost but preserved institutionally. "Boomers see religion in somewhat different ways than their parents did—with a greater concern for spiritual quest, for connectedness and unity, and for a vision that encompasses body and spirit, the material as well as the immaterial" (26).

Mainline churches are often looked upon by this generation as spiritually bankrupt and, in any case, denominationalism is dying through the changed attitudes of these folks, who seek out churches not on the basis of denominational connection but on the basis of vibrancy and vitality of spiritual life and program.

Four aspects of the boomer generation, to cut to the chase, serve to change the religious landscape of America.

First, there is *the reemergence of spiritual-*

ity and the search for a spirituality which moves beyond the dualisms of the past. At the same time, there is an awareness of a certain equity among spiritual styles. It's not that anything goes, but that people are more willing and, for that matter, able to construct a spirituality which goes beyond the bounds of what the church initially taught them or what they discovered in their experiential searches.

Second, *religious and cultural pluralism* are not issues so much as they are accepted facts to this generation, and their spirituality and tolerance follow this acceptance.

Third, *multilayered belief and practice* is the order of the day. This follows naturally from the first two observations.

Finally, new styles of commitment are emerging which are rooted in the key concept of *transformed selves*. The questions that now emerge are a search for ways to blend personal fulfillment with social responsibility.

Congregations which attract this generation were examined and, while this is not intended as a laundry list, the characteristics of such congregations included: a place where the search for excellence is not bound by tradition but does not completely overlook tradition; the church which calls for responsibility but which respects freedom of conscience and does not impose rules out of fear or guilt; a place that invests in people; a place with a warm heart. Style is as important as substance; in this age, style *is* substance.

There is much to be learned from this book. Highly recommended. JCR

Going to the Root: Nine Proposals for Radical Church Renewal. By Christian Smith. Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1992. 176 pages. Paper. $9.95.

Our author envisions a stripped-down version of the church that will enter the twenty-first century. Though not an Anabaptist himself, Smith expresses his love for that tradition and its radical churchmanship. The nine proposals: build intentional Christian community, do church without clergy, decentralize leadership and decision making, open up worship services (the key word is "edification" of the faithful), overcome the edifice complex, cultivate a grace-ful spirituality of everyday life, practice lifestyle evangelism, work for social justice, and do grass-roots ecumenism. As one who continues to ponder what Bonhoeffer might have had in mind by the church of "religionless Christianity" in a "world come of age," I find Smith's program intriguing. Smith raises theological questions about the shape of the church that are worthy of discussion. At the same time, he seems unable to see the attachment people show to traditional forms and, even, buildings and their potential usefulness for mission. Small parishes that want to tackle the whole issue of survival, using a different vocabulary and a refreshing vision, might read this book as a principal study text, at least an intermediary step before leaping on the church-growth bandwagon. JCR

Shadows of Auschwitz: A Christian Response to the Holocaust. By Harry James Cargas. Foreword by Elie Wiesel. Afterword by Mario Cuomo. New York: Crossroad, 1990. x and 182 pages. Paper. $11.95.

The heart of this book is a sustained meditation upon photographs of victims of the holocaust in a variety of settings, but inside and outside concentration camps. Cargas' notes on each photograph remain in that very narrow space between shrillness and the maudlin, by turning us to the story—or what might have been the story—of these victims.

The book begins with a description of what it means to be a post-Holocaust Roman Catholic and ends with a call for incorporating the Holocaust into our theology and practice to an extent not often pursued. This is a harrowing book, a disturbing book, but we need to hear these words, contemplate these crimes, frame our response.

The narrowness of the issue broadens, in our day, to include Palestinians, Bosnians, Croatians. The book needs a wider frame of reference, but you can provide that. For what it tries to do, namely address the Nazi horror, it is more than adequate. JCR

History and the Triune God: Contributions to Trinitarian Theology. By Jürgen Moltmann. New York: Crossroad, 1992. xix and 204 pages. Cloth. $27.50.

Throughout the last decade Jürgen Moltmann played a critical role in the vigorous revision and renewal of the doctrine of the Trinity that recast the arena of systematic theology. The axiomatic Rahnerian rule about the identity of the economic and immanent Trinity has served as the ground for Moltmann's 'social doctrine of the Trinity,' a pivotal motif also underscoring *History and the Triune God.* This book is a compilation of articles—two of them previously unpublished—written over a span of ten years after the original publication of *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God* (1980).

The articles are grouped into three sections. Part I, "The History of the Trinity," exposes further contributions to the theology of the Trinity proper. The concept of trinitarian unity as fellowship or perichoresis (as opposed to a unity centered in a homogeneous divine substance or subject), the question of gender roles in the Trinity, and the place of the cross as signifying the essential passion of the eternal love of God, compose the three main themes that criss-cross this section. Particularly novel are the two opening articles on the non-patriarchal talk of God and the metaphor of the 'motherly Father.' Moltmann shows that he wrestles seriously with feminist critique, remaining nonetheless uncompromising on the trinitarian nomenclature.

In Part II, "The Trinitarian View of History," Moltmann introduces some of his most important conversation partners—Thomas Aquinas, Joachim of Fiore, Karl Rahner, Karl Barth, Ernst Bloch, and Giordano Bruno. This multifaceted section finds its focus around the theme of the divine dynamic of history and its trinitarian structure. The chapter dedicated to Rahner offers a convincing deconstruction of his hermeneutical presupposition of nature-grace, thus providing eschatological-trinitarian leverage for a criticism of Rahner's concept of 'anonymous christians' and the overinflated anthropology lurking behind his idea of the Incarnation.

Finally, Part III, "My Theological Career," is a sketch describing the author's *Sitz im Leben* and motivations for doing theology, summarizing at the same time his theological development. Moltmann emphasizes here the contextual character of his theology and its pastoral-praxiological orientation.

As a collection of articles and essays, the book often repeats theses and theologoumena already developed in Moltmann's major works. In addition, the scholarly caliber of the chapters differ substantially; some are well developed, others are more tentative and exploratory. Nonetheless, for those who want a first look at Moltmann, Part III can serve as a guidepost to his background, and chapter 8 ("The Inviting Unity of the Triune God") is a good summary of his trinitarian thinking. Those who have already tasted Moltmann's creativity will especially profit from chapter 4 ("I Believe in Jesus Christ, the only Son of God") and the 'conversations' in Part II. On the whole, the essays provide further insights to continue wrestling with a doctrine of the Trinity which is biblically rooted, eschatologically oriented, and politically responsible.

Guillermo Hansen
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

Conciliar Fellowship: A Common Goal. By Aram Keshishian. Geneva: WCC Publications, 1992. 125 pages. $11.50.

Ecumenism in Transition: A Paradigm Shift in the Ecumenical Movement. By Konrad Raiser. Geneva: WCC Publications, 1991. 132 pages. $9.95.

The paired reviewing of these two works on ecumenical theology, the one by Aram Keshishian, newly elected (1991) Moderator of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, the other by Konrad Raiser, newly chosen (1992) General Secretary of the same ecumenical body, is more than a coincidence. A comparison of the two volumes allows the reader to detect some emerging trends and polarities in the changing ecumenical movement.

Keshishian, Armenian Orthodox Primate of Lebanon, and WCC Moderator, wrote his study on *Conciliar Fellowship* as a dissertation while a scholar at the John XXIII Center of

Fordham University and then revised it for publication. He presents "conciliar fellowship" as "the most challenging and promising model for a common vision of unity," analyzing the development of that model from the apostolic council of Jerusalem up to the fifth assembly of the WCC (Nairobi, 1975). Conciliar structures and ecumenical councils were an important expression of the life of the early church, developing along democratic and synodical lines in the East, but increasingly subordinate to the authority of the Bishop of Rome in the West. The Reformation considered church councils to be "a supreme court of appeal in matters of faith and order," subject only to the test of scriptural authority.

The twentieth century has seen a revival of conciliar life, illustrated by the formation of the WCC (not itself a true conciliar body), the pan-Orthodox Conference, Vatican II, and world confessional bodies such as the LWF. The WCC's Nairobi Assembly (1975) statement on "conciliar fellowship" as a description of the "unity we seek"—involving mutual recognition of catholicity and apostolicity, recognition of Baptism, Eucharist, and of other churches' members and ministries—becomes Keshishian's model for ecumenical convergence at the world, national, and local levels. The proposal is clearly in the tradition of "Faith and Order" and represents an approach that has received strong endorsement from Orthodox theologians. It bears a close relationship to the ELCA's ecumenical proposal for "full communion" with "reconciled diversity," and must therefore be taken seriously.

Raiser, a German Lutheran who once served as WCC deputy general secretary under Philip Potter, prepared the original German version of his volume on a "paradigm shift" within the ecumenical movement while teaching ecumenical theology at the University of Bochum, Germany. The WCC published it in English translation a year prior to Raiser's selection as General Secretary. Raiser seeks to diagnose "stagnation" and "resignation" within the ecumenical movement—uncertainty about goals, methods, and relationships—and to explain why the "classical" ecumenical paradigm upon which the WCC was launched in 1947 and which remained dominant until 1961, is no longer applicable. In another chapter he sketches the new challenges facing ecumenism which undermine the older paradigm.

The classical paradigm, grounded in the theology of Karl Barth and developed by the WCC's first General Secretary, Visser t'Hooft, was based on "christocentric universalism": the confession of Jesus Christ as God and Savior, witnessed to in the church's mission "to all nations and to the end of time'; expressed in Faith and Order efforts to overcome differences between churches; and manifested in words and actions pointing to the "kingship of Christ" as the meaning and goal of history. This classical pattern of "christocentric universalism," which gradually attracted the support and participation of Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism as compatible with their own ecumenical views, nevertheless began to unravel under the weight and burden of new challenges during the seventies and eighties.

Theologically speaking, says Raiser, Joseph Sittler's 1961 New Delhi address on "cosmic christology" (Col 1:15-20) opened the door to a new paradigm, while at the practical level the struggle against racism, the debate over development, efforts toward peace in an age of nuclear confrontation, and the new focus on sustainability of life and integrity of creation could simply not be accommodated to the classical paradigm. The debate within the WCC over the goals of its dialogue desk—whether dialogue for understanding had actually become a substitute for mission—was further evidence of disquiet and turmoil within the ecumenical movement, pointing to a likely paradigm shift.

A comparison of the approaches taken in Keshishian's and Raiser's studies highlights a continuing tension within the ecumenical movement between those who espouse a faith and order solution to ecclesiological divisions, grounded in historic church traditions, and pursuing unity through mutual recognition, conciliar fellowship, and "communion in Christ"; and those who believe that the purpose of the ecumenical movement should be to promote justice, peace, and the integrity of creation through the earth along with mutual harmony and reconciliation between conflicting religious

and ethnic groups. Will the ecumenical movement, already in a state of decline, and weakened by loss of church support, be strong enough to maintain both agendas? These are crucial issues about which the Moderator and General Secretary will surely need to talk a good deal if they are to maintain the trust and commitment of the WCC member churches.

James A. Scherer
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The Power of the Word. By John Breck. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1986. 237 pages. Paper. $8.95.

This is an attempt to speak of biblical theology in Orthodox perspective in hopes of gaining a new hearing for biblical studies among the Orthodox, whether lay or clergy. Though now six years old, the study will be of parallel interest as we await the first Orthodox Study Bible from Oakwood Publications, promised in the Spring of 1993.

Breck's thesis is that, according to traditional understanding, the word of scripture and the texts of the historic creeds possess, in their declamation and as we study them, an inherent power to convert and draw people into the life of faith, the holy mysteries of the community known as church. Interesting to a Lutheran reader is the insistence on the unity of word and sacrament and upon the sacramental nature of the word when it is proclaimed; while he scores "Protestants" for reducing the Word to the words of scripture, Lutheran readers will resonate instinctively to Breck's emphasis upon the dynamism of the Word and its necessary mediation through the power of the Holy Spirit. The chapter on *theoria* as hermeneutic gives insight into Orthodox reading and preaching of scripture, for the method is to read the literal-historic text in light of typological models which are then translated into the life of the individual believer. Breck discusses the flaws in the over-emphasized Alexandrian and Antiochene readings that preceded this synthetic form of exegesis and gives helpful clues for our own contemporary reading and preaching.

A collection of essays, the book holds together by its emphasis upon scriptural interpretation, and the final chapter is on paschal iconography as one expression of the Word. JCR

Racing Toward 2001: The Forces Shaping America's Religious Future. By Russell Chandler. San Francisco: Zondervan & HarperSanFrancisco, 1992. 367 pages. $17.95.

I passed this book several times on the book shelf before I bought it. Then I found myself devouring its very readable chapters. Chandler, religion writer of the *Los Angeles Times*, writes in a smooth and compact style. *Racing Towards 2001* is a book that describes the forces within our North American culture that are impacting religious life. It is essential reading for the parish pastor who wants a sound analysis and description of what is happening in and around our congregations.

The book has three main sections. The first section contains series of short chapters that describe the trends in our society. The sections "Technology and Ecology," "Society and the Family," and "The Economy and Government" receive broad yet careful overviews. Those readers seeking a more detailed discussion of these topics may wish to consult the bibliography for further study. However, I thought the author was able to condense an enormous amount of information in order to give the reader a basic understanding of the changes facing our society. Through highlighted points of information, carefully placed quotations from authors, and references to detailed academic works, Chandler is able to communicate effectively and succinctly. I especially appreciated his ability to relate each section to the practical aspects of parish ministry and offer many opportunities for ministry in the 1990s.

Part Two describes the changing shape of denominations, religion and congregations. The forces shaping America's future include the increasing influence of religious traditions such as Islam, Judaism, and the Mormons. Chandler's especially insightful chapters on the new age and cosmological world views may be worth the price of the book alone. He outlines how these world views effect all persons in our culture,

even those sitting in the pew on Sunday morning. A description of the trends among Evangelicals, mainline Protestants, and Roman Catholics is included in this section of the book. He describes the trends we are all familiar with in American Christianity—mainline decline, evangelical rise—but adds some profound insights into future possibilities for our revitalization.

Part Three includes several examples of those possibilities. The first is a chapter called "Goal Setting," which describes both the inclusive goals of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America along with its Mission 90 emphasis on Bible reading and tithing. The remaining eight chapters discuss a wise variety of ministries—from the evangelical baby boomer Willow Creek Community Church to a Brooklyn Spanish Pentecostal church which supports a Sunday school ministry to the very poor and forgotten children of the inner city.

This book is the equivalent of *Future Shock* or *MegaTrends* for the church. My hope is that we will pay attention lest the shock be felt now and the trends be so large we'll be crushed by them. We may not like what we hear being described, but reading and digesting this material will help pastors and leaders find innovative ways to do ministry in the future (and the present, too!).

James E. Hazelwood
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Faith on the Edge: Religion and Marginalized Existence. By Leonardo Boff, O.F.M. Translated by Robert R. Barr. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990. 212 pages. Cloth. $19.95.

This book describes the religious experiences of literally millions of people who today "live on the margins" of our societies, excluded from significant participation in the life and witness of the church and yet making unparalleled contributions to what that church should be about.

In the first part, the author provides an overview of the relationship between the church and oppressed peoples (especially those in Latin America) analyzing the church's social and political alliances throughout history, as well as its more recent "option" for liberation. He describes liberation theology and other important developments in the life of the church (e.g., the Medellín and Puebla Bishop's Conferences). He reviews the role of faith and politics, and later describes a new kind of spirituality that is not afraid of politics but rather intimately related to it.

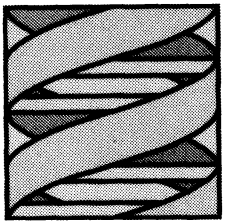
In the second part, Boff describes the two points of departure for theology: faith and social reality. He goes on to look at a Christology of liberation, the historical Jesus in praxis and conversion, and the role of the church in liberation. He concludes with the call of the church to mission, prophetic criticism, and defense of the poor and of human rights.

Boff is a prolific author and a gifted educator. For years he has been deeply involved with facilitating base ecclesial communities all across Latin America and with writing resources at a popular level. He has made a life commitment to the struggle for liberation of the oppressed—to the point of having endured continual harassment from the Vatican for his views, including the now famous "silencing" for a year by Pope John Paul II. More recently, he has found himself marginalized within his own church, and found he had no other option but to resign from the priesthood.

This book is a call to oppressors, especially the church, for their reflection and repentance. It is also an excellent resource as theory and analysis for people in the struggle with a certain level of education. This particular expression of these ideas may not be very useful to the oppressed themselves because of its academic and sometimes exoteric language. Only some people will be able to read and understand clearly its message of justice and faith. Nevertheless, it is deadly accurate in its analysis of oppression and very empowering in its call for true liberation. This book is recommended as a must for any person wishing to study theology.

Raúl Fernández-Calienes
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Making Sense of It All: Pascal and the Meaning of Life. By Thomas V. Morris. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992. 214 pages. Paper. $12.95.

Few religious writers have provided better coordinates for thinking about the religious life than Blaise Pascal. In this book Morris, professor of philosophy at the University of Notre Dame, offers a distillation of his classroom efforts to map out a Pascalian landscape and check its contours.

Rather than a study of Pascal's life or his *Pensées*, this book is a reflection about Pascal as a Christian apologist. It is an appreciative development of his "cartography of the spirit" that is informative, witty, and lively due to Morris' skillful use of personal stories and his illustrations ranging from the ancient Greeks to Tolstoy to Woody Allen.

With the force and finesse of an accomplished teacher, Morris leads the reader through Pascal's struggle to call his contemporaries out of their folly and back to a life of integrity and faith. Because he wants to make Pascal attractive, except for pointing out his sometimes unrealistic demands, Morris almost never deals with objections to his position. Instead, the author enables us to *feel* Pascal's urgency, passion, and zeal for the religious life. Adding his own explanatory commentary, Morris replicates Pascal's perception and wisdom as that might find expression today.

All the major topics of Pascal's thought are here: the wretchedness of human nature, the foolishness of worldly pleasures, the source of true happiness, the nature of God and evidence thereto, the proofs available to faith, the wager argument, where truth is, the place of reason in religion, and the importance of the heart in a life seeking God. Morris explicates, illustrates, and extrapolates the texts of Pascal so they become living words we can hear and understand.

This book exhibits philosophy in its grand mode, probing the profound riddles of life and glimpsing the realm of the eternal. It is engaging and wholesome reading that stimulates and feeds the soul. Morris' Pascalian philosophizing is just what we need in a time of great spiritual emptiness caused by theological and moral bankruptcy. Scholars, students of religion, custodians of the spirit, and Christian professional and lay persons will enjoy this guide to the genuinely good life.

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Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Spoke in the Wheel. By Renate Wind. Trans. John Bowden. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992. Paper. $14.95.

Another book on Bonhoeffer? This was the first thought that crossed my mind. But this book stands out from the crowd as a fresh rereading of the Bonhoeffer corpus. Wind, a pastor living in Heidelberg, teaches at the Dietrich Bonhoeffer School in Weinheim. This experience is reflected in her interpretation of Bonhoeffer which is hagiography of the highest order. Wind reads Bonhoeffer with pastoral sensitivity, paying close attention to the particular social context of his utterances. Several chapter titles are aptly chosen quotations from Bonhoeffer's writings which well represent his mind at a given juncture in his life. Wind develops an intriguing commentary on Bonhoeffer's life-journey with special reference to telling turns in the written record.

Among the most unexpected twists in Wind's account are her interpretation of Bonhoeffer's American experience and her explanation of the social context of his references to religionless Christianity. Whereas a majority of interpreters have stressed Bonhoeffer's negative evaluation of American theology (i.e., "Protestantism without a Reformation"), Wind argues that his experience of the American church, particularly the Black church in Harlem, was a significant factor in stirring Bonhoeffer's social consciousness and political activism. The American social gospel had a far more influential role than is generally acknowledged. Likewise Wind emphasizes the context of imprisonment as crucial for understanding what Bonhoeffer says about religionless Christianity. Bonhoeffer had long devoted attention to the nature of Christian community (e.g., *Communio Sanctorum* and *Life Together*). He searched for an authentic

experience of what it means to be church. Deprived of the conventional forms of church by imprisonment, Bonhoeffer explores what early Christians in another time of persecution meant by "arcane discipline." How is it possible to maintain Christian identity when all of the formal trappings are stripped away? Bonhoeffer's reflections continue to be suggestive for the shape of Christianity in a post-Christian era.

Each chapter portrays Bonhoeffer as a Christian and theologian fully involved in his world. Deeply moving are his reflections on the willingness to enter into "the fellowship of the guilt of men" for the sake of Christ (144). Bonhoeffer's sanctity rested finally on his willingness to "abandon any attempts to make something" of himself (170). Bonhoeffer's God is not one to relieve human beings of responsibility, not a *deus ex machina*. Rather, Bonhoeffer sought to speak of God as a power interpenetrating all of life, both in moments of weakness but especially when things are at their most vital and strong. This is when people rely on themselves rather than recognizing God's hand in life's vitality (167).

The life and writings of Bonhoeffer continue to generate admiration and fascination. There is perhaps no modern theologian who has more to teach about what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. A recent class in our congregation focusing on the Bonhoeffer legacy stimulated us to keen insights into God's grace and Christian responsibility. Wind's book—with its brief chronology, bibliography, and selection of photos—would serve as an excellent text for an adult study in the congregation. Used in conjunction with the video "Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Memories and Perspectives" (Vision Video), Wind's book can serve as a resource to bring Bonhoeffer alive with his challenge to embody contemporary forms of discipleship.

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Step By Step: Meditations on Wisdom and Compassion. By Maha Ghosananda. Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1991. 81 pages. Paper. $9.00.

Buddhism, they say, is more a spirituality than a religion. So we read histories, summaries of doctrines, analyses of concepts. Where then is the spirituality (unless we're ready to settle on to a meditation cushion and start counting breaths)?

The answer, among others, is this wonderful, expressive, delightful book of dharma talks, or casual sermons, by Maha Ghosananda, a Cambodian monk and teacher, head in fact of Cambodian monks today, who first came to the United States in 1980. His language is straightforward and as simple as his great heart. But what makes this a unique collection of short talks, many less than a page, is the opportunity it gives those who are not all that schooled in the labyrinths of Buddhism to tap its spirit directly. Make no mistake about it: these are not Christian essays nor are they written for Christians. There are dragons and bodhisattvas, wisdom and compassion walking together (prayer and action?), the Middle Way, the struggle to overcome opposites like good and evil, impermanence, and the Bodhi Tree.

But what limpid teaching! "When we master the mind, we are free from all suffering. There is no need for any other teaching" (31). "Taking care of others is the same as taking care of myself. When I respect and serve others, I am serving all Buddhas everywhere" (34). "When we say, 'May I be happy,' we are speaking for everyone. The whole world is one. Life is one. We are all of the same Buddha nature" (55).

The book is tiny. Of its 81 pages, over a quarter is consumed by introductions, helpful and well-written ones, to be sure. This is a true taste of the spirituality, the rich and vast heart, the clear mind of Buddhism. But expect to find phrases, read and re-read, creeping into Christian discourse. When we speak of wisdom and compassion, our hearts may indeed speak a common language.

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The Agency of the Apostle: A Dramatistic Analysis of Paul's Responses to Conflict in 2 Corinthians. By Jeffrey A. Crafton. Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 51. Sheffield: JSOT, 1991. 188 pages. Cloth. $35.00.

This volume, a revised version of the author's 1989 dissertation, is intended as "a new way of viewing... a different angle of vision" for interpreting 2 Corinthians. Specifically, Crafton utilizes the critical methodology of "dramatism" as developed by the literary critic Kenneth Burke.

Crafton quickly summarizes dramatism as a critical methodology. He then summarizes the conflict within the Corinthian church that Paul addressed. In this summary, he accepts the hypothesis that 2 Corinthians represents a conflation of four separate letters. The remainder of the monograph is devoted to Crafton's dramatistic analysis of three of the letters and his conclusions. (Chapters 8 and 9 are not treated because they are a letter written after the resolution of the conflict between Paul and the Corinthians.)

Crafton appears up to date on 2 Corinthian scholarship. His writing style is clear. He clearly defines the historical critical consensus that provide the underlying assumptions of the book.

However, when discussing dramatism the writing becomes quite prolix and riddled with jargon. The discussion of dramatism is the weak point of the book. I still do not know, because of the complex explanations and poorly defined jargon, what a dramatistic analysis is.

Crafton's conclusions appear sound. However, I believe that a simpler methodology would have reached almost identical conclusions. Crafton has indeed opened another window into the ancient text. I wonder if there are other windows into the text that are more easily opened.

The book is of interest to 2 Corinthians scholars and specialists in rhetorical criticism.

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The Orthodox Liturgy. By Hugh Wybrew. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1990. xi and 189 pages. Paper. $10.95.

Readers interested in comparative liturgy will find this a welcome addition to their libraries, especially since the only way you will find this information is to work with a number of previous sources. Wybrew, himself an Anglican, has taken a good look at the rise of what Schmemann called "the byzantine synthesis," and shows us step-by-step the development of the liturgy from natural causes as well as from symbolic interpretation. So, e.g., he shows the development of the *prothesis* from the simple act of persons bringing offerings of bread and wine to a separate building, in earlier centuries, though its liturgical formalization in the post-iconoclastic age. If there is a guiding principle beyond the recitation of the history, it seems to be the demonstration that the development of the Orthodox form occurs under impetus of the belief that the whole life of Christ is celebrated in each divine liturgy. This emerges, e.g., in the developments of the eucharistic prayer (anaphora), where more aspects of the faith are included as different issues are solved throughout the centuries, from the celebration of Christ as host at the meal through the inclusion of the sacrificial motif and the invocation of the Spirit. A readable work for the non-scholarly but liturgically aware reader. JCR

Pauline Theology. Ministry and Society. By E. Earle Ellis. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989. 192 pages. Paper. $14.95.

This book grew out of lectures on aspects of Paul's ministry which Ellis presented in the United States and other countries. His well-deserved standing among Evangelicals is obvious in these presentations. The essay is not only historical criticism but is also intended to reveal the implications of Paul's teachings for the church today. This is done at the end of each chapter, even with a doxological conclusion.

Ellis uses the thirteen canonical epistles of Paul as his basis, believing that the rejection of authenticity of some of them is based on miscon-

ceptions concerning the nature of authorship. Further arguments for the authenticity of the Pastoral Epistles are presented in the section on ministry and church order but are not convincing.

In the first section on "Ministry for the Coming Age," Ellis argues that for Paul the world of Adam is subject to decay, that ministry is in and through the church, and that therefore social action is not an aspect or a goal of Christian ministry although the believer has also obligations to society. Is such a distinction really helpful? He rejects liberation theology and the "social gospel."

Christian ministry is an activity of the Holy Spirit. Ellis's listing of four functions of the Holy Spirit is well taken: baptism, fruit, gifts, final regeneration of the believer. However, Ellis rejects a sacramental understanding of Titus 3:5 and endeavors to distinguish between water baptism and the coming of the Spirit. He differentiates between the fruit of the Holy Spirit, which represents the character of Christ, and the gifts as the particular ministries in the body of Christ, the church. Unity and diversity are both present in these ministries.

A chapter is devoted to Paul and the Eschatological Woman. Because of ascribing all thirteen epistles to Paul, Ellis attempts—in my opinion unsuccessfully—to harmonize all the statements concerning the place of women in the church. Thus he says while "in once sense Paul may be the father of some aspects of women's liberation... at the same time he says, 'Wives, subject yourselves to your husbands' and 'Let women be silent in church'" (55). According to Ellis, Paul does not advocate a modern egalitarianism but holds together quite harmoniously an equality of value and diversity in rank (in social aspects as well as in the relationship between men and women). "In Eph 5 particularly he [Paul] implies that the Christian wife, in fulfilling a role of subordination, does not negate but rather manifests her equality with her husband" (61). The sentence speaks for itself. There are some other questionable statements, such as "the single and the married states are prophetic signs of the new age, the single celibate person signifying, according to Christ, the sexual role that all will have in the resurrection life and the married couple signifying, according to Christ's Apostle, the union that exists between Christ and his Church" (63f.). Ellis believes that the commands for women to be silent refer only to married women whose husbands exercise the gifts of leadership or speaking so that there is "no theological objection whatever to the ministry of an independent single woman" (75). "Paul" just did not say this, and it is a vain attempt by Ellis to reconcile the various statements in the Pauline corpus.

In the chapter on "Ministry and Church Order," Ellis argues for the authenticity of the Pastoral Epistles by advocating a rather independent amanuensis and preformed traditions. Paul must have been released from the first Roman imprisonment and sought to establish a church in Gades (Cadiz) in Spain, then he traveled east again. In referring to opponents of the authenticity, Ellis only mentions some minor scholars (103), neglecting the vast majority of commentators and writers of introductions to the New Testament. He believes that the glossalalia in Acts 2 is not essentially different from that in 1 Corinthians 12-14 although in Acts glossalalia results in understanding, in 1 Corinthians in non-understanding.

The final chapter, "Pauline Christianity and the World Order," puts the Pauline epistles into the social and political framework of the Roman Empire. The statements about Roman associations and clubs form the pattern for the early Christian congregations.

Despite many references to theological literature, there are no references to the New Testament theologies of Bultmann, Kümmel, or even Ladd. Perhaps this is due to the character of this book as lectures, but in a printed edition with the title *Pauline Theology* this is hard to accept. If you are convinced that Paul wrote all thirteen epistles in the Pauline corpus and that Acts is historically reliable, you may like the book and its attempts at harmonizing all these sources. But if you are convinced that the historical-critical method is a valid approach, then Ellis' book is difficult to swallow.

Wilhelm C. Linss
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Abraham in Galatians: Epistolary and Rhetorical Context. By G. Walter Hansen. Journal for the Study of the New Testament. JSOT, $37.50.

Galatians fascinates. Paul's emotions run high, his argument and language dazzle, and the subject matter is fundamental to the Christian faith. Those are also the reasons why the letter is difficult to interpret. Abraham dominates Paul's argument from Gal 3:6 through 4:31. This book (Hansen's revised Toronto dissertation) makes a contribution to our understanding.

Hansen divides his work into two major sections. Part 1 (19-93) presents an epistolary and rhetorical analysis of the entire letter. In epistolary genre the letter uses the "rebuke-request" form (rebuke in 1:6, request in 4:12). This makes 4:12-20 a key section in the structure of the letter. Rhetorical analysis (ancient rhetorical theory) suggests a shift from forensic to deliberative rhetoric at 4:12. Both epistolary and rhetorical analysis suggest two different uses of the Abraham material. Recent structural analysis points to the importance of chiasm in Galatians, while the "new rhetoric" underscores the identification of argumentative techniques.

In Part 2 (95-154) Hansen presents an exegesis of the Abraham material in 3:1-29 (related to the rebuke section) and 4:21-31 (related to the request section). His conclusions are significant: Paul used the rebuke-request form common to Hellenistic letters. Rhetorical analysis is more useful for understanding Paul's argument than analysis on the basis of Jewish exegetical principles (though Paul does use them). The Abraham material is bounded by rebuking questions (3:1-5; 4:8-11) and descriptions of the gift of the Spirit (3:1, 5; 4:4-7). Paul's ultimate intention is to reinterpret key terms in the Abraham material to enable the identification of Gentiles as sons of Abraham. The Hagar-Sarah allegory (4:21-31) is used to persuade the Galatians to cast out the trouble-makers! The imperative at 4:30 (following the one in 4:12) links this material to the ethical section. One more broad conclusion is that the argument is directed at Jewish Christians perverting the gospel and Galatian Christians departing from the gospel, not at non-Christian Jewish legalism. Three extended appendices discuss (1) Abraham in the argument of Paul's opponents, (2) in Jewish literature, and (3) Paul and Jewish exegesis. This is a perceptive and informative dissertation, clearly argued and well documented. Its conclusions merit serious consideration.

Edgar Krentz
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Anti-Covenant. Counter-Reading Women's Lives in the Hebrew Bible. Edited by Mieke Bal. Bible and Literature Series 22, ed. David M. Gunn. JSOT Supplement Series vol. 81. Sheffield: Almond Press, 1989. 243 pages. Cloth. $42.50.

The author realizes that biblical stories changed while the culture took shape, and that the readers did as much violence to the stories as the stories did to the culture. This interaction is the focus of the book's papers. The topic of interaction between text and readership centers around the ideologies of gender, an issue which is acutely relevant in the case of a body of texts which has shaped our conceptions of gender to a large extent.

The book deals with not only the problem of the question of literature but also the question of *reading*. Reading is no more than actualizing possibilities in one's own mind, and projecting them upon the object named "text." The author reflects upon the pre-text, and the reader reflects upon the text which is his/her pre-text. *Meaning* is a property of the act of reading. Both, reading and meaning, are influenced by the conventions of every readers' social group and historical period.

No scholarship is void of historical and ideological biases, and of the blindness inherent in privileged positions. Through reading and interpreting biblical texts, women by virtue of their excluded positions can rearrange the texts in such a way that the accounts of women's lives as we find them in the Bible become more instructive, more inspiring than they were read to be so far. In the present book, readings by women are presented explicitly as readings without positivistic claims to truth. The aim of the

papers is not to 'prove' how unequal is the distribution of power in biblical stories about women. Rather, they show a narrative structure which is the result of the authors' ordering of the pre-textual material.

In this volume anthropology as a discipline is an important one, with history, theology, and philology as less central discourses. The authors deal with, for example, the story of Abraham and Isaac's near-sacrifice, Deborah (Judges 4/5), (the) Tamar(s) of Genesis 38 and 2 Samuel 13, virgin daughter sacrifices (Genesis 19; Judges 11 and 19), Delilah, and Judith. Against the tradition the papers made visible the other side of male behavior—the experience of women whose traces are all but read out of the texts. The authors successfully demonstrate the surplus result of feminist scholarship. This stimulating book provokes in a positive manner. Biblical scholars and students, as well as teachers in religion and Christian laypersons, will gain by studying it.

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Christian Doctrine and Modern Culture (since 1700). By Jaroslav Pelikan. Vol. 5 of *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989. xlix and 361 pages. Paper. $13.95.

For a Lutheran, Pelikan has some surprises in the final volume of his *magnum opus.* The Oxford Movement's convert to Roman Catholicism, Cardinal Newman, is presented as the "hero" of modern articulation of the process of doctrinal development; the negative evaluation of tradition and dogma of the Lutheran Harnack is corrected and superseded; moreover, the high point of modern dogmatic definition appears to be the Second Vatican Council. The interplay of continuity and change, present throughout the first four volumes, permeates this volume but with some interesting twists. These shifts are symbolized by the dialectical "and Modern Culture" in the title which differentiates it from previous volumes. Thus Pelikan illustrates Christian tradition by citing from Alexander Campbell, whose Disciples of Christ lived by the watch-words: "No creed but Christ" and "No book but the Bible." The increasing bifurcations of church and state furthered by the rationalism of the Enlightenment complicate the religious scene: Pelikan seems less able to ignore the hostile secularized challenges to the faith than he was the earlier heresies. Thus he prefaces the final volume with a delightful discussion of the lament, "Alas, theology too!" by Goethe's Faust.

The themes from earlier volumes which deal with the supposed patristic consensus (believed by everyone, everywhere, ever, according to Vincent of Lerins) and the role liturgy has in illustrating and even developing church doctrine (the rule of prayer establishing the rule of belief, according to Prosper of Aquitaine) are recapitulated and resolved in this final volume. Modern historiography's critique—begun already in the Renaissance and Reformation—of any simplistic notion of consensus also produces the modern dilemma that "tradition has lost its authority" (8). The modern alternative not only to tradition but to Scripture is experience: experience of the head (Rationalism), heart (Romanticism), and hand (the social action of the social gospel and contemporary liberation movements). Against the rationalists' critique, the church attempted to establish "the objectivity of transcendent revelation" (chap. 2). The romantics' response to the rationalists is discussed under the heading "theology of the heart" (chap. 3) with its shift from objectivity to "the subjective validity of inward experience" (119). The church's reaction to liberalism—a now ambiguous term Pelikan generally avoids—is discussed in the chapter with the puzzling title "Foundations of the Christian World View" (chap. 4, see p. 179). Even more puzzling is the title of the last chapter, "The Sobornost of the Body of Christ." Pelikan never really defines "sobernost," purposely I think, not even in his more recent dictionary, *The Melody of Theology.* Perhaps that is because he is using the term to synthesize his view of the modern church and its historic authority. Such "sobernost" is the best approach he finds to the ongoing "crisis of orthodoxy" (chap. 1). It is a term that implies both a method and a content for "Christian tradition" and it is exemplified in

Vatican II. So I suggest as possible definitions for sobornost "catholic conciliarism" or "conciliar catholicism." Both point to a hope Pelikan sees for the church in modern culture.

This definitive history of doctrine is a must for advanced seminarians, graduate students in all fields, and all pastors.

Ralph W. Quere
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Sociology and the Jesus Movement. By Richard A. Horsley. New York: Crossroad, 1990. vii and 178 pages. $19.95.

The first part of this book is written in debate with G. Theissen's *Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity*. In an objective description of Theissen's work, Horsley demonstrates that Theissen's work belongs to the "structural-functionalist" approach to "early Palestinian Christianity," because it focuses on the interaction of the whole (Judaism) and its component parts (including the Jesus Movement). The second chapter offers a critique: the method is abandoned by sociologists in the United States. Much of the application is anachronistic because the categories are abstract and refer more to an ideal society. There was no middle class but only rich and poor. Theissen would not separate the socio-economic, socio-ecological, socio-political, and socio-cultural factors as he does, for by doing so he becomes reductionist. "Functionalism deals in abstract 'social systems' and not in concrete particular societies" (35), is inattentive to history, and conservative, and therefore threatens to subvert the liberating potential of the Jesus movement. It also overlooks the conflicts and the persecution of the early Christians. The third chapter attacks Theissen's arguments concerning the "wandering charismatics." According to Horsley, the whole construction is based on slim evidence, mainly from silence or absence (e.g. of the disciples when Paul visited Jerusalem). He also believes that Theissen's statements concerning the opposition between country and city, concerning the resistance movement or war party, and concerning Jewish Messianology before and during the life of Jesus, are unfounded (56). Theissen also should not attribute psychological properties to a movement since only individuals can manifest psychological elements.

In the second part Horsley describes the social conditions in Jewish Palestine in the time of Jesus as he sees them. His main point is that there was only one conflict: that between the rulers and the ruled. The rulers were the foreign powers, however, also including the high priesthood, and their servants and retainers, living in cities. The ruled were the large peasant populace living in the countryside, with an unbridgeable gap between the two. There was no middle class. This provided the reason for the principal conflict and for the various rebellions.

The third part deals with the Jesus movement itself. After analyzing the sources (Acts and Paul, Q, Mark and pre-Markan material) and acknowledging their scarcity, Horsley advocates, in contrast to Theissen, the local communities of peasants, including fishermen and craftspeople, as the sociological basis of the Jesus movement. These communities in the country and small towns were opposed to Jerusalem, the temple, and the retainers of the government. A surprising statement is that "there is little or no evidence that Jesus himself ministered to or associated with such people as tax collectors or prostitutes" (121). Horsley does not refute the large amount of evidence for such association, acknowledged even by Bultmann and other critics. According to Horsley, the "kingdom of God" included a new social order of family, egalitarianism, and alleviation of hunger, debt, and other symptoms of poverty (124). Horsley argues that the Jesus movement was in conflict with the rulers and their retainers and rejected the Temple sacrifices. Therefore, there was repressive activity by the priestly rulers. The Jesus movement also did not recognize the authority of teachers, lawyers, and scribes. Basically the conflict was one between local Galilean communities and representatives of the central governing authorities. The Jesus movement has much in common with Qumran, but differently from Qumran, the followers of Jesus were living in openness to and interaction with the world. They were led by charismatic leaders whereby charisma is not an attribute of quality of an individual but involves a social relationship. They stood in the prophetic tradition.

There are three appendixes.

Several observations must be made: little connection is shown between the second and the third parts of Horsley's book. Although Horsley acknowledges the scarcity of sources, he describes the sociology as if the sources were reliable; this seems a frequent feature in such presentations. Can the Pharisees and scribes really be considered as a part of the "retainers"? There is a frequent shifting between the description of Jesus himself and of the Jesus movement; it is difficult to know whether the third or the seventh decade of the first century is in view. There are a number of individual puzzling statements without sufficient confirmation. The difference between Horsley's and Theissen's depiction is not as great as he asserts. The book is not always easy reading and presupposes some knowledge of sociology. Finally a criticism of the publisher: the printing of the notes at the end of each chapter is annoying.

Wilhelm C. Linss

Luther and Liberation. A Latin American Perspective. By Walter Altmann. Trans. Mary M. Solberg. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992. 148 pages. Paper. $10.95.

Altmann's basic methodological point is that one should avoid a "personalizing" (139) or presumably "universal" (142) reading of Luther. Rather, the same perception Luther had of his conditionings and humanity allows us to approach him in *Christian freedom*, taking into account first of all the qualitative changes verified in our socio-historical context, with special emphasis in the Latin American situation. Starting from this fundamental perspective, Altmann deals with the various common traits one can discern in a comparison of Luther's views with the theological work in Latin America today. At the same time, his stress on Luther's rediscovery of the justification by grace through faith and on Luther's affirmation of the autonomous vitality of the gospel allow him to keep critical distance from Luther's *own positions* whenever necessary—or at least to sympathetically understand Luther's human contradictions not as something essential, but as something in great extent derived from his specific cultural and social setting.

Altmann sketches parallelisms between Luther's and Latin American liberation theology, as well as the points of common interest leading to a possible dialogue. According to him, there is a rich set of possibilities here.

A clear example is Luther's emphasis on the people's education (96ff.), deriving mainly from their need to have a first-hand contact with the scriptures. Without a doubt, this can't help but be a theme of utmost relevance for Latin American Christians. Also, one should not forget that the leading role played by a communal reading of the Bible in Latin America—above all in the grassroots communities—is a point of convergence with Luther's stress on the reading of the Bible as an "ongoing effort made by the community" and not as "mechanical repetition of biblical passages" (48), a feature which has stigmatized an often bibliolatrous Protestantism in Latin America.

Even though not as self-evident because of the structural differences between Luther's society and our own, another point of confluence between Luther's ethical-theological proposals and those defended in Latin America today has to do with the perspective with which one approaches economic activity. For Luther, as his texts on trade and usury and his evaluative writing on the common chest to be created in Leipzig so fittingly show, economic activity has a social or communal stress rather than an individualistic, profit-centered one. Luther did not, or could not, perceive the profound transition in which his society was caught—changing from a feudalistic to a capitalistic-mercantilistic mode of production. For Altmann, the basic consequence of this fact is that Luther's critique of incipient capitalism was made more on an individual-moral level than on a social-structural one. Such an outcome does not entail, however, the conclusion that Luther's basic insights on the issue were irrelevant. It rather points to a permanent challenge for us today.

Altmann's book also helps to clarify and reject some misunderstandings of Luther, especially regarding a point which has been problematically baptized his "doctrine of the two king-

doms." Dr. Altmann does not claim originality here, but together with Duchrow he does the right thing by showing us that Luther's way of thinking on church/state and temporal/spiritual relations is infinitely more dynamic than conservative theologians usually cherish to state. On the other hand, like anywhere else in the book, this is not aimed at concealing what the Preface call the "darker sides" (*sic!*) of Luther (ix). For even though one of the keys to understanding Luther consists in perceiving that he doesn't make separations or identifications between temporal and spiritual realism, advancing rather clear *distinctions* between both (118), one cannot deny that not rarely his thought is entangled in a "hierarchical" perspective of society (118, 130). His mind is still basically medieval (128); and his insistence, in times of social convulsion, upon giving primacy to religious reform made him take sides with the princes, as a matter of fact the only historical agents in a position to guarantee that reform. But as the book tells us, not even this stance of Luther would remain unqualified during his life. And even if one gets the final impression that it is necessary to go beyond Luther on the basis of a more comprehensive reading of the gospel, one is also convinced that there aren't insurmountable difficulties for a Lutheran *and* liberationist position once one is free not to worship the figure of the Reformer.

Another view which is refuted is that Luther's theology necessarily leads to ethical passivity. For Altmann, it seems that the challenge posed *particularly for Latin American research on Luther* consists in undermining the view that Luther reduced ethics to a private affair, leaving for the public realm only the option of unconditional obedience to authority. Altmann is categorical when he affirms that, by rediscovering justification in Jesus Christ, Luther rejects all quietism—an insight which unfortunately cannot be very often verified in the life of the Lutheran churches. Accordingly, "Luther's christology"—which is the ultimate presupposition at the root of ethical action—"is eminently combative" (20, 24). In the same fashion, the idea of passivity cannot have a place in the context of inter-human relations: "For Luther, passivity occurred exclusively in the relationship with God" (37). Finally, we are confronted with a rather overwhelming argument: for Altmann, Luther's own life is proof enough for the fact that justification does not imply ethical passivity (37).

Finally, what would be an adequate understanding of conversion, particularly when one is confronted with the challenges posed by Latin American reality? As Altmann points out, for Luther the reality appropriately described as conversion is a dynamic event having its place in the daily dialectics of human life as *simil justus et peccator*. For Luther, conversion is not superfluous in the sense an orthodox-objective interpretation of justification might convey. But neither is conversion properly understood in a pietistic way, i.e., as something dated once for all in the past or happening strictly on the personal subjective level. The point of the conversion made possible in Christ is located in its ability to daily *liberate* men and women *from* slavery *to* serve and not to hinder the fruits of grace in the concreteness of their historical, social, and cultural contexts. This is an understanding which the basically ethnic Lutheranism of many Latin American countries, including Altmann's Brazil, needs to recover over and over again. For to be Lutheran is above all to go on being *evangelical*: "to be Lutheran is an event, not a state of being.... To be Lutheran is something that once acquired should not simply be preserved; it is a permanent task, carried out in continuously renewed fidelity to the gospel" (139).

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New Adam: The Future of Male Spirituality. By Philip Culbertson. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992. vii and 175 pages. Paper. $10.95.

Culbertson, an Episcopal priest who is Professor of Pastoral Theology at the University of the South, Sewanee, Tennessee, says he wrote this book because he cares about the church and its weaknesses, especially its sexism; he cares about men and women; and it gave him an opportunity to deal with issues that have been growing inside him for several years.

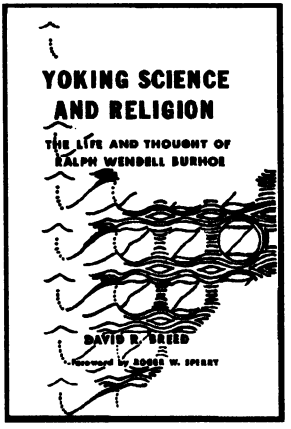
The contents of the book are somewhat disjointed, a fact the author acknowledges. For instance, the reader has to get to chapter seven to find definitions of spirituality and male spirituality. Spirituality he defines as: "the human desire or urge to establish a relationship with that Power or Being that transcends human limitations, without invalidating or destroying those limitations." Culbertson then defines masculine spirituality as "that which is appropriate to those males who have taken seriously the opportunity for their own liberation from gender stereotypes and have in the process begun to seek a new and more sensitive self-understanding in light of the feminist critique." This reviewer fails to see how the two definitions relate to one another since the definition of masculine spirituality makes no reference to the role of the transcendent Power or Being (read: God) included in the definition of spirituality. That illustrates one of the major weaknesses of this book, the lack of a theology that acknowledges the transforming power of God, especially as it is present in the person of Jesus Christ. Where Jesus is named, he is model to be followed, not Savior in whom there is forgiveness and new beginnings.

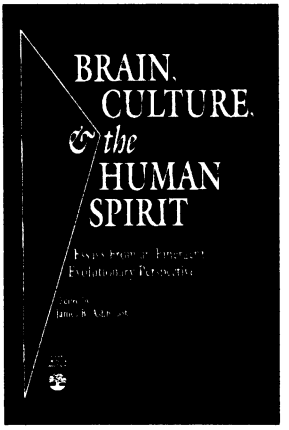
Culbertson does hold up Jesus as the new Adam, but he first deals with the biblical "texts of terror" for men (with acknowledgment to Phyllis Trible and her "texts of terror" for women). The first is the story of David and

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Absalom. It is a text of terror because David is unable to share his emotions with Absalom, Absalom turns out to be like David in his sexism, and David chooses to put the power of the throne over the importance of family relationships. The second text is Abraham and Ishmael, a story of terror because Abraham is unable to give Ishmael his just place in the family and prefers Isaac over Ishmael. The third story is that of David and Jonathan. It is a story of terror because Saul tries to force Jonathan to be warrior and king, Jonathan is loyal to an emotionally ill father, Saul is suspicious about the close relationship of David and Jonathan, and the story makes friendships look dangerous.

Culbertson moves to the New Testament and Jesus as the new Adam, a model for men who want to change. He emphasizes two aspects of Jesus' behavior: (1) the values exhibited in Jesus' life such as compassion, integrity, flexibility, humility, pacifism, patience, fidelity, generosity, cooperativeness, intellectual honesty, and dependence on the community of men; (2) Jesus' bravery in the face of a newness within God's continually unfolding revelation. Change, Culbertson says, is difficult, and Jesus recognized this in his teachings. For the author, Jesus is a model of what sensitive men can be, but he makes no point of Jesus being the power by which men can change.

In Part II, Culbertson deals with masculine stumbling blocks to prayer and the way in which men can begin to change and pray in a group. His twelve stumbling blocks have merit but contain provocative items. The most provocative is the first, the identification in the tradition of God as Father. Many men, the author says, have imperfect fathers, so they project that image on God in a way that does not let God be God. He says that God should also be addressed in terms other than father. The latter suggestion is well taken, but the author does not deal with the biblical and theological aspects of the naming of God as Father. The naming of God cannot be so lightly treated. Culbertson goes on to note that prayer for men is often linear and self-focused. True prayer is circular, untidy, and sensitive to the larger context of human relations. Men can benefit from being in the context of a group of men. The author is critical of the current fad of seeking out a spiritual director and working in isolation, one-on-one. Group spiritual direction is preferred because relationships cannot be ignored or covered up. Culbertson cites the experience he and seven other men had in a group that covenanted to be together each week for a long period of time. That experience taught him how difficult it is for men to be open and vulnerable with one another, but at the same time, how necessary it is.

The book has a strange ending. In the last chapter Culbertson critiques Robert Bly and his use of the myth of "Iron John" from the brothers Grimm. He is critical of Bly's insistence that men need to release their inner "wild man." In the first place, many men don't feel they have an inner "wild man" and secondly, the "wild man" is confrontive and cruel, not something that one wants released and admired. Culbertson cannot resist the temptation to offer another myth from the Grimm collection, "The White Snake." It is the story of a servant who steals the king's covered dish and discovers it is a white snake. When he eats it he becomes sensitive to all of creation. Culbertson says the white snake represents the flaccid adult penis. The young man in the story thus comes to terms with his relaxed and natural masculine identity and gains a sensitive and mature wisdom. This reviewer has two objections to the use of the story. First, the interpretation of the story is suspect because the king from whom the young man stole the white snake shows no sensitivity at all, even though he has been eating the covered dish for some time. Secondly, it hardly seems a commendable story for the church when there is a more powerful story in the person of Jesus Christ. The author could have ended the book with the chapter that speaks of Jesus and his relationship with the disciples. That is the preference of this reviewer, who still recommends the book, despite its faults, as another chapter in the ongoing discussion of male and female relationships within church and society. Someday we may get it right.

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Briefly Noted

Asherah. Goddess of Israel. By Richard J. Pettey (Peter Lang, $41.95). While Asherah is unanimously condemned in the Old Testament (though very infrequently mentioned by the prophets), P. concludes that she must have had quite a following among common people, and that a statue of her existed alongside Yahweh in the Jerusalem temple (inferred from Deut 16:21). This book describes Asherah in her Canaanite setting, discusses all the biblical texts that condemn her, and summarizes relevant archaeological data. For many in Israel, the author believes, Asherah served as a consort of Yahweh. The best evidence for this is the Kuntillet Ajrud inscription. P's reconstructions from the biblical text often do not convince. His final conclusion may be a bit glib: Any religion which overemphasizes either the maleness or femaleness of its deity should expect to be "corrected" by popular practice to the contrary. The bibliography ignores major studies by Day and Maier, and the book lacks indexes. RWK

Roget's Thesaurus of the Bible. By A. Colin Day (HarperSanFrancisco, $28). While a concordance enables one to find verses containing the same word, a thesaurus links together passages with similar meanings. The author has borrowed (and sometimes modified) the 990 headings from Roget's famous thesaurus to record the results of fifteen years spent in creating this new topical concordance. Naturally, some headings from Roget, such as "aircraft" or "refrigerator," cannot be linked to any biblical passage. D. has filed under each heading multiple sub-headings. Look up "vision," for example, and one finds references to passages dealing with sight, God seeing, seeing God, seeing Christ, eyes, dreams, visions, oracles, seers, etc. The entry "gratitude" might give a person new ideas for a thanksgiving sermon. Back-to-back entries on words of opposite meaning—love and hate, fragrance and stench, presence and absence—may prove fruitful. 116 pages of Bible references and 85 pages of subject indexes help the reader to find the proper category. RWK

Interpreting Hebrew Poetry. By David L. Petersen and Kent Harold Richards (Fortress, $6.95). P. and R. review the basics of Hebrew poetry and show the remarkable strides made in understanding this literature during the last decade. They describe the various kinds of parallelism, carefully explain technical terms, such as paradigmatic and syntagmatic relationships, distinguish between meter (which Hebrew does not really have) and rhythm (which it does), and explore the power of similes in Hosea by noting the difference between "tenor" (Samaria's king shall perish) and "vehicle" (like a chip on the face of the waters) and by showing the complex character of many of Hosea's similes. A final chapter gives a contemporary, poetic analysis of Deuteronomy 32, Isaiah 5:1-7, and Psalm 1. One does not need to know Hebrew in order to learn much about Hebrew poetry from this book. RWK

Sources of the Pentateuch. By Antony F. Campbell and Mark A. O'Brien (Fortress). The authors accept the division into sources suggested by Martin Noth and present continuous printings of the Priestly, Yahwist, and Elohist sources, with brief notes indicating gaps, secondary materials, and the like. After identifying passages not assignable to any source, they print out and discuss three composite texts (the flood story, the beginning of the Joseph story, and the crossing of the Reed Sea) where the putative sources have been combined in the present form of the Pentateuch. They do not so much advocate the source hypothesis as provide a clear statement of one classical source division so that readers of the Bible may evaluate the hypothesis for themselves. An introductory chapter states clearly standard characterizations of the sources, as well as the multiple challenges to the source hypothesis in current scholarship. RWK

American Lutheran History in Theological Education: Fourteen Seminary Profiles and a Report. Edited by Richard W. Dishno (Chicago: Lutheran Historical Conference, 1990). This publication represents the Lutheran Historical Conference's (LHC) continuing effort to broaden discussion between the fourteen Lutheran seminaries within the United States concerning the current state of American Lutheran Historical studies. The book consists of a foreword, discussion questions, summary report, and seminary profiles. The profiles address questions about faculty, curriculum, library and other resources, and students. In the report LHC's reaction to the profiles was, on the one hand, to appreciate the diverse forms of studies and creative teaching efforts, and, on the other, to be concerned with the increasing privatization of studies (e.g. each individual or school determining the field's shape). This is important information! Jeff Zell

Donald Juel examines the interpretation of the Old Testament in early Christianity in **Messianic Exegesis: Christological Interpretation of the Old Testament in Early Christianity.** The book was hailed as a major contribution when published in 1988; Juel argued that the confession that Jesus was the King-Messiah of Jewish expectation was the earliest Christian creed and therefore also the starting point for the [re-]interpretation of the Old Testament. The recent reprint (Fortress, $14.95) puts this valuable work into readers' hands at a nominal cost. I hope it sells out rapidly; it deserves to. Juel is Professor of New Testament at Luther-Northwestern Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota. Edgar Krentz

Isaiah 1-12. A Commentary. By Hans Wildberger. Translated by Thomas H. Trapp (Fortress, $39.95). Over a thirty-year period W., who died in 1986, produced a three-volume commentary on First Isaiah for the Biblischer Kommentar. Trapp, who teaches at Concordia College, St. Paul, MN, has committed himself to bringing all three volumes of this standard critical commentary into English dress and has included secondary literature through 1979 in the text. The problems posed for a commentator by Isaiah 1-39 are enormous since many of the texts are very difficult and since these chapters were produced over the course of several centuries. The commentator may not be equally at home in each of these centuries, nor can she or he be certain about which text comes from which century. W.'s work records the best, especially the best European, work of the last century or so, and chooses options which are generally within the mainstream of critical scholarship. Trapp and Fortress merit our hearty thanks. The other alternatives in English either do not provide the wealth of philological and bibliographical data here assembled (Jensen in the Old Testament Message series and Clements in the New Century Bible Commentary) or operate from a perspective on dating that is not widely accepted (Watts). RWK

Nevertheless: Varieties of Religious Pacifism, Revised and Expanded Edition. By John H. Yoder (Herald, $9.95). Herald Press is to be lauded for publishing a revised and expanded edition of Yoder's by now classic typology of the varieties of pacifism originally published in 1971. It is still an indispensable resource for Christians of all persuasions who acknowledge the mandate of peace-making and would like to learn about the rich diversity and almost "Catholic" scope of pacifisms and policy-forms of peace-making and -keeping in the Jewish and Christian tradition. Reinhard Hütter

Option for the Poor: A Hundred Years of Catholic Social Teaching. Revised Edition. by Donald Dorr (Orbis, $16.95). Orbis has issued an updated and expanded version of Donald Dorr's 1983 introduction to Catholic social teaching over the past hundred years, precisely from 1878 to 1992. An extensive bibliography of church documents and secondary sources, summary statements, questions for review and reflection, and suggestions for further study at the end of each chapter make this classic a very valuable guide through the thickets of Roman Catholicism's rich tradition of social teaching and its unswerving commitment to justice and human dignity. A very insightful volume, both for Protestants and Catholics! Reinhard Hütter

The Meaning of Peace: Biblical Studies. Edited by Perry B. Yoder and William M. Swartley (Westminster/John Knox, $19.99). Two Mennonite biblical scholars (Yoder in Old Testament and Swartley in New Testament) edited this very helpful volume of studies on the meaning(s) of peace in the Bible. All the essays published in the volume are relatively recent contributions of German biblical scholars, which were previously unavailable in English. Besides two introductory essays on *shalom* and *eirene* written by the editors the volume contains essays by Claus Westermann, Odil Hannes Steck, Jürgen Kegler, Hans Walter Wolff, Jakob Kremer, Luise Schottroff, Erich Dinkler, Hubert Frankemölle, and Ulrich Luz. An extensive bibliography of biblical studies on *shalom* and *eirene* is a welcome additional resource. An important volume for pastors, seminarians, and theologians in biblical studies, ethics, and systematic theology. Reinhard Hütter

The Transformation of Culture: Christian Social Ethics after H. Richard Niebuhr. By Charles Scriven (Herald, $19.95). Scriven's volume is an important contribution to the ongoing debate about how to conceive ethically the transformation of the US-American society and culture. Scriven develops an important critique of H. Richard Niebuhr's highly influential typology in *Christ and Culture*. Scriven agrees with Niebuhr that the church is an agency of cultural transformation, yet that it is decisively wrong to conceive this transformation in dominant Augustinian-Calvinist conception. As an alternative, Scriven develops an understanding of cultural transformation through the means of the witness of radical discipleship, envisioning the church as "alternative society" and "transformative example." Thus, the book can be read as a continuation of themes originally formulated by John H. Yoder and Stanley Hauerwas. Reinhard Hütter

Do Justice: Linking Christian Faith and Modern Economic Life. By Rebecca M. Blank (United Church Press, $13.95). This timely book emerged out of the UCC's study process on issues of economy and theology. The book starts with thinking about the economy of God's household and biblical perspectives on economy, raises the question of what might constitute a just economy, then moves into the issue of market and global economy, and finally addresses the economic life of the church. In a last section questions of a Christian perspective on public policy are raised. The book is primarily intended for a nonacademic readership. Its suggestions for group discussions, activities, and further readings couple with an accessible style and clear organization to make it an ideal reading for adult forums or study groups in congregations. An appendix contains the texts of two interesting church documents: the UCC Pronouncement of Christian Faith: Economic Life and Justice and a UCC Proposal for Action on Christian Faith: Economic Life and Justice. Reinhard Hütter

Eclipse of Justice: Ethics, Economics, and the Lost Traditions of American Catholicism. By George E. McCarthy and Royal W. Rhodes (Orbis, $24.95). This very interesting study of the U.S. Catholic bishops' pastoral on economic justice is the result of the cooperative effort of a church historian and a sociologist. They provide a cross-disciplinary analysis of the pastoral, its roots in the tradition of Catholic social teaching, and the intense theological and political debates raging around the pastoral from the left and right. It is both an important introduction to a complex, yet urgent debate and an interesting case study of the Christian search for a just political economy in the context of political and economic liberalism. Reinhard Hütter

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Preaching Helps

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost—Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost, Series A



It's Still Pentecost

But Pentecost could never be still, at least not in the sense of serene or business as usual. Certainly not still as in still-born. Not only that first day of Pentecost, 50 days after the resurrection, but many days, stretching into years and decades, were yeasty and noisy. Full of life, full of upset and trouble, full of sound dignifying a great something rather than an empty nothing, and the something had the smell of freshness and vitality in the nostrils of populations tired of the same old dead stuff.

The diverse, upstart communities we call "the church" multiplied and divided and added. Paul Tillich somewhere wrote that the success of the young church in communicating to ancient populations could be chalked up to the fact that the church addressed the ancient anxiety of death with the good news of resurrection. And he said that the Reformation took hold at least in part because it addressed the prevailing late medieval anxiety of guilt. The contemporary church must learn, he thought, to speak to the pervasive modern anxiety of meaninglessness.

How shall we preach Matthew's story of Jesus? How might we re-speak the good old word? The pastoral staff of Central Lutheran Church of Minneapolis has at it once more, offering perspectives on the texts for the middle Sundays of Pentecost.

Central is a large (4,500-4,600 members) and growing congregation, located in the center city and dedicated to serving its neighborhood. Some members walk in and others drive long distances to participate in the life of this congregation, which is now in its 73rd year.

To the pastors of Central we speak a word of thanks for their help in locating what is central here in the center of the Pentecost season.

Still wishing you good preaching,

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

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost
August 1, 1993

Psalm 86:11-17
Isaiah 44:6-8
Romans 8:26-27
Matthew 13:24-30 (36-43)

FIRST READING

According to a widely held scholarly tradition, Matthew is both the most Jewish of our Gospels and the most anti-Jewish, written in the last quarter of the first century (A.D. 75-100), after the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, when Pharisaic leaders in the system of synagogues struggled to redefine and reestablish Judaism. Everything in Matthew is read against the background of a mortal struggle between church and synagogue. "Pharisees," we are told, stands for "leaders of the synagogues," and "disciples" stands for "leaders of the Christian church."

Such a reading makes everything very easy for us, since the Pharisees are painted in dark colors and unflattering terms, while the disciples, for all their faults, are clearly Jesus' friends (far more so than in Mark's Gospel, by the way). It is comfortable to ascribe all enmity against God and Jesus to "others."

A healthier alternative reading of Matthew may well begin with this Sunday's gospel. It makes clear that the church is a mixed body, consisting of weeds as well as wheat. Elsewhere Matthew pictures the community as a mix of good fish and bad (13:47-50), obedient and disobedient sons (21:28-32), properly and improperly attired wedding guests (22:11-14), prepared and unprepared tillers and millers, servants and maidens (24:40-245:30), sheep and goats (25:31-46).

Reading the gospel as a defense of the disciples (read: "church") and an assault on the Pharisees (read: "synagogue") means indulging in self-justification and feeds our need to be right. Isaiah and Paul could not say more clearly that only God is right. Isaiah: "Is there any god besides Me? There is no other rock!" Paul: "We do not know how to pray, but the Spirit intercedes."

Here and everywhere Matthew's Gospel calls us to self-criticism, warns us against the dreary human habit of criticizing others, and summons us to practice the difficult virtue of patience with one another. RHS

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

During the years of my growing up I spent many summers on the family farm in western Kansas. Wheat harvest is the central activity during the summer months on the farm. For ten summers I drove the truck which carried the harvested wheat to the grain elevator. Some years the wheat was extremely weedy. In places it appeared that weeds had completely taken over the wheat, but as the combine plowed through the sea of weeds it would still be able to process out the grains of wheat.

During the time that Matthew was writing his Gospel many problems plagued the early church. The small house churches of the time were experiencing oppression with harassment and killings. Internally, the church endured betrayal and false prophecy As with Kansas wheat fields, so in the early church, wheat and weeds grew up together. Serious Christians were in a quandary. What shall we do?

The parable deals with the issue of how to think about the reality of good and evil in the world and even in the church. Evil is a reality. It is there, and God is aware of its presence. Some in the early church wanted to weed the fields, confident that they themselves were "good." Jesus declares that weeding is not the task of disciples. He is aware of evil, and it will be dealt with and separated out at a later time.

Thinking back on those Kansas wheat fields of my youth, I see that there was little that could be done about the weeds in the field before the harvest. But it was important to know the difference between wheat and weeds, so that we could set the combine accordingly. Likewise it is important for us as Christians to be aware of that which is around us, but the job of separating and dealing with that which isn't good is left to the power of the Almighty. Shawn Mai

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost
August 8, 1993

Psalm 119:129-136
1 Kings 3:5-12
Romans 8:28-30
Matthew 13:44-52

FIRST READING

The first lesson, so familiar and yet still so astonishing (for what politician, offered one wish, would beg for wisdom rather than wealth or glory?) calls to mind an earlier portion of Matthew's Gospel. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus challenges all of us (not kings and politicians only): "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (6:33). (NRSV has "strive for," but "seek" says it very well). Solomon and the Lord talk of "asking," and these two words together ("seek" and "ask") remind us of the other words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount about asking, seeking, and knocking.

What do we seek? What do we chase with all our might and energy and ingenuity? What do we really want? Today's psalm speaks of "longing" for God's commandments. Psalm 27 is the cry of one "seeking the face" of the Lord. In John's Gospel people "seek Jesus" either because they wish to be with him and so be in the divine presence or because they wish to destroy him.

In today's gospel Jesus tells two parables of seeking the kingdom. Two men are surprised by overwhelming wealth. One stumbled on a treasure by accident and the other found a great pearl by careful and intentional searching. Both immediately reordered their lives and in a burst of energy did what was necessary to seize the prize. God's long expected reign, breaking into history in Jesus, should likewise catch us up short with its surpassing value and claim our energy. Jesus utters a third parable which serves as a climax to the entire chapter of parables, underscoring the everlasting seriousness of "seeking the kingdom."

Recently interpreters of the Gospel have been seeing Matthew, the author of the Gospel, in the "scribe trained for the kingdom of heaven." Matthew is a scholarly and thoughtful evangelist, bringing forth out of the Christian treasury what is new and what is old, like a steward or householder digging down into a cash-box to bring out coins both old and new. Matthew does not despise the old law or the old prophecies but connects them with God's fresh acts in Jesus and with the needs of his community. Every pastor and teacher has the same vocation: telling the old story, but always reworking and rewording it so that it speaks forcefully to new situations and new needs. RHS

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

The texts for this Sunday seem to be focused in various ways on what is one of the most significant questions ever—"What is of greatest importance to you in the living of your life?" Solomon settled on godly wisdom as his answer. The apostle Paul saw it as the presence of God moving through the exigencies of life. Jesus identified it as possessing the kingdom of God.

A poll of passers-by on any busy metropolitan street corner in 1993, however, might not yield the same set of replies. People today are more likely to respond in different terms:

Q: "What is of greatest importance to me in the living of my life?"

A: "Job security."

"Economic stability."

"A home in the 'burbs and two cars in the garage."

"Living the *good* life."

"Early retirement on a hefty pension."

Still, in the awesome quiet of our most private thoughts, a worm of dissatisfaction and unfulfillment gnaws at these "values." And many indeed are those who climb to the top of the ladder, only to find they have placed the ladder against the wrong building. "There has to be more than this!" Is that the plaintive wail of too many late-twentieth century achievers?

How many of us have said, "I'd give *any*thing if only... this or that!" "I'd give *any*thing to have... this or that!" Whether we've meant it or only said it out of painful longing, we can own it.

So when Jesus tells of people who "gave everything" to possess their heart's desire, we can identify. This is no stranger to us.

"Seek first the kingdom of God," he said; "then all these things will be yours as well." Look inward and find that image of God within yourself. Let the living out of that image be the highest of your values—the answer to our question—the dimension of most importance to you in the living of your life. Sacrifice all else to possess this one unmatchable prize—to live for Jesus. Throw caution to the winds and sing out, "O Jesus, hear my promise, to serve *you* to the end!"

"That's a tall order," people say; "a lot to ask." Perhaps. But not in the light of the positive consequences such an investment brings. "Well done, good and faithful servant." To hear him say that in the end is worth... *every*thing.

William A. Miller

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost
August 15, 1993

Psalm 104:25-31
Isaiah 55:1-5
Romans 8:35-39
Matthew 14:13-21

FIRST READING

The psalmist turns our eyes to God's lavish and dependable provision of food for all creatures great and small: "You open your hand, Lord, and they are all filled with good things!" That sounds like Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 6:25-32)... or like Jesus in today's gospel.

In Mark and Matthew the feeding of the 5,000 is told immediately after the account of Herod's grisly birthday banquet. Herod is a grim reminder of the realities of secular politics: people, even people the politician respects, get chewed up and spit out when it serves some personal or political end.

Jesus celebrates the politics of heaven in an entirely different mode. He gathers not in a palace but in the wilderness, not with a few wealthy cronies but with great masses of nameless men and women and children.

Herod gave orders that John the Baptist be killed, while Jesus gave order that the crowds be fed. Herod did not wish to lose face and so served up the Baptist's head to Salome and Herodias on a silver platter. Jesus was so little concerned for what he might lose that he later spoke of serving up his own life as bread and wine for yet greater multitudes.

Isaiah 55 reminds us that God is ever the generous giver of gifts, keeping promises, filling the hungry and satisfying the thirsty—with food, with wisdom, with redemption—all without money and without price.

Paul in Romans 8 does not call Jesus "bread" but speaks eloquently and repeatedly of "the love of Christ," "who loved us," "the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." That love ensures that we are more than conquerors in every struggle. It's true. Who was the conqueror: Herod or John the Baptist? John was the unconquered victim-victor, as are all those who feed on the Bread of Life. RHS

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

John the Baptist in his mother Elisabeth's womb leaped with joy when Mary, who was pregnant with Jesus, visited them in their home in the hill country of Judea. At the birth of John, Zachariah, the father of the child, was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied: "And you my Child will be called a prophet of the Most High, for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him."

When John started his ministry the people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Messiah. But John told them, "I baptize you with water, but one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire."

John told his disciples he was preparing the way for the Messiah. He was the trail-blazer, the pathfinder. He foreshadowed Jesus' way not only

in his speech but even in his martyr's death at the hands of Herod!

After burying their master's body the disciples of John went and told Jesus what had happened.

Jesus listened to their talk, and he knew the time for the changing of the guard had come. He needed a little time for himself to gather his thoughts for his ministry. He needed also to grieve for the demise of a cousin whose mother and his mother were very good friends.

"He withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place." Much of Jesus' ministry took place at the border between water and land: his baptism at the river Jordan, his teaching at the shores of the Lake of Galilee, his crossings of the lake by boat. He preferred to use waterways rather than land routes. The environment where he touched the hearts of the people was deliberately chosen. It is very poetic and coolly refreshing. Frequently he withdrew to lonely shores to spend time with his Father and to be refreshed himself.

John the Baptist told the people who were waiting for the Messiah to deliver them: "Jesus will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and water. His winnowing fork is in his hands to clear his threshing floor and so gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." How would Jesus fulfill these mighty prophecies and the longings of the people?

Isaiah as a young man was caught in a similar situation. The eighth century B.C. society was almost identical to the society in which John and Jesus worked. Isaiah went up into the temple of God to get directions. Besides witnessing the glory of God, Isaiah got strength from the living God, was touched at his lips and accepted his calling, saying, "Here am I, send me," to the people who are "ever hearing and never understanding, ever seeing but never perceiving, calloused-hearted with dull ears and blind eyes."

But when the people approached Jesus his heart melted into compassion. He cared not only for their spiritual strength but also for their physical strength. He taught them to take what they had and share it with others in caring and prayer. They placed a few loaves and small fish into his hands, and with them Jesus fed the many thousands.

Cherian Puthiyottil

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost
August 22, 1993

Psalm 85:8-13
1 Kings 19:9-18
Romans 9:1-5
Matthew 14:22-33

FIRST READING

Matthew begins by painting two scenes in dramatically contrasting colors. Jesus was "by himself" and "alone." He had dismissed the great crowd of 5,000 men plus unnumbered women and children, and had ordered his disciples to go ahead of him to the other side of the lake.

Alone—and yet he was not alone, for he ascended a mountain to enter into the serenity and community of the divine presence. Meanwhile the disciples were out on the lake in a boat, one which was literally "tortured" (*basanizomenon*) by the pounding of wind and wave.

Just before dawn, in the midst of the raging storm, Jesus strode toward his terrified disciples, treading on the waters. His strange appearing served only to heighten their terror. In his powerful epiphany they found no more help than Elijah found in the hurricane, the earthquake, and the fire (1 Kgs 19:9-18).

But then Jesus spoke, fresh from the serenity of the mountain and the communion of prayer, and his words came as a still and small voice, a faint whisper in the teeth of howling wind (a "sound of sheer silence," 1 Kgs 19:12 NRSV).

Peter made his famous request. What does it amount to? We should not too quickly fall back on the interpretation that Peter (and all other disciples past and present) can do the impossible as long as they keep their gaze fixed on Jesus but are doomed to sink when their attention is captured by the storm. Peter seems to be guilty of "testing" or "tempting" God (4:7), or he is guilty of spiritual arrogance, forgetting his vulnerability. He imagines that he has in Jesus the spiritual resources to set the agenda for his journey. Peter wants to revel in things spectacular and showy.

But Jesus is always at work to turn disciples away from extraordinary displays to the more mundane business of doing the will of God, of performing those great spiritual acts of loving God and neighbor.

Full of grace as of power, Jesus hauled Peter up from the waves, up from the storm, up from chaos, up from a watery grave. He then entered the boat and immediately the storm ceased. Together in the boat, journeying as a community with Jesus at the helm, their fear vanished. The disciples worshipped him, confessing him as "God's Son." RHS

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

We have no way of knowing when storms will enter our life, but we do know that they will come. This is as true in our daily life as it was true for any who would sail on the Sea of Galilee. The gospel text recounts one of these storms with an interesting phenomenon of silence at both the beginning and the end of the story. Each silence reflects a different style and dimension of prayer, but both have to do with perceiving God's presence in the still, quiet way in which God speaks so eloquently and acts to meet our needs. Seeking to hear that voice is the source of our peace. "Let me hear what God the Lord will speak, for he will speak peace to his people" (Ps 85:8).

After feeding the five thousand Jesus dismisses both the crowd and the disciples and goes up a mountain to pray. This prayer of quiet solitude is the prayer that focuses on the relationship. Being alone, together with God, Jesus places himself where the still, small voice of God can speak and be heard. It is another sign of how much Jesus modeled the sense of dependence and the need for this reassuring and guiding voice of God. Elijah's experience in the Old Testament lesson describes the same experience, but from a negative side. Elijah is finally brought to silence so that God could speak. Jesus seeks out the silence, knowing that God meets us there with a reassuring presence.

The scene of the story shifts to the disciples, struggling against a strong wind and rising waves. Comedy enters the story as the leaderless group panics at the sight of a ghost. (Who else could walk on water?) How do you discern what help really looks like? Peter, rather than inviting Jesus into the boat, wants to go out on to the stormy sea with Jesus and ride it out on the waves. Such bravado! Nothing can do him in, he thinks. Relying on his own strength he steps out of the boat, sees the great wind, and begins to sink. At that moment he cries out for help to Jesus. Finally, after using all his own resources, he becomes willing to ask for help. When our pride links with doubt we really do sink. Jesus saves him and then stills the storm.

In the silence that follows the quieting of the storm the prayer of praise and gratitude emerges from the disciples. No doubt, in that moment of stillness they were reminded again that "surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him, that his glory may dwell in our land" (Ps 85:9).

Richard Beckmen

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost
August 29, 1993

Psalm 67
Isaiah 56:1, 6-8
Romans 11:13-15, 29-32
Matthew 15:21-28

FIRST READING

Isaiah seems wide open to the Gentiles: "Foreigners who join themselves to the Lord... will be brought to God's holy mountain and made joyful in the temple. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on the altar, for the Lord's house will be called a house of prayer for all people."

Of course Isaiah had in mind good Gentiles, converted Gentiles, Gentiles who had put away Gentile things and had become proselytes in Israel, keeping the Sabbath and holding fast God's ancient covenant.

Just before meeting the Canaanite woman in

the Gentile territories around Tyre and Sidon, Jesus had been disputing with Pharisees and scribes from the holy city of Jerusalem. He quoted to them a piece of Isaiah (not the first lesson for this week): "This (holy and covenant) people (descended from Abraham, Mt 1:2; 3:9) honor me with their lips but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me." Jesus teaches hard lessons on clean and unclean. And some think that Jesus was taught a hard lesson as the story continues.

On his journeys near Tyre and Sidon (11:20-22) an "unclean" woman approached with a shouted plea for help.

Jesus understands his mission to be one of turning the lost sheep of the house of Israel to God (10:5-6, 23). Furthermore public conversation with a woman was regarded as unsafe, dangerous, improper, not done. And so Jesus meets the woman's request with terrible silence.

She was not silent, not polite, not easy. She was direct about her daughter's need, and she believed that Jesus could meet that need. She countered Jesus' clever proverb with cleverness of her own. And more than cleverness. He spoke of not feeding the children's food to the puppies. She took no offense. "Call me a dog if you will, but just heal my daughter. Even puppies eat scraps from the master's table."

Jesus listened to the woman and took a second look. He saw lips speaking truth about the will of God. He praised her faith and healed her daughter.

Paul speaks not of dogs sharing food with children but of wild olive shoots grafted on so that they share in the rich root of the cultivated tree. RHS

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

Recently a new museum opened up in Los Angeles. It was quite different from other museums that display paintings or sculptures or ancient artifacts. This museum is called "The Museum of Tolerance." The hope is that those who visit this place may come to an awareness of their racial bias. It shows how prejudice can impact our lives and how hatred for one another can have devastating results.

It is interesting to see that all three of our texts heal with the issue of reaching out to the "foreigners." In Isaiah the invitation is made and the promise given that the lives of those who follow the way of the Lord, Jews and "foreigners" alike, will be made joyful.

Paul in his letter to the Romans tells the Gentiles that he is the apostle to them, and though the Jews may reject them, that indeed God accepts them, and that by doing so this action may draw even more Jews to Christ.

It is, however, the gospel text that is the most surprising. We have come to have certain expectation of how Jesus will respond when someone calls out to him for help.

We think of his words, "Come to me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." We don't hear any hint that some could be excluded. We also have the warm and inviting image of Jesus welcoming all children to him, forbidding no one, for such is the kingdom of heaven.

Yet this same Jesus turns to a woman, a mother who is pleading for the life of her child, and says to her, "I was sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.... It is not fair to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs."

Jesus knew his calling was to the Jews first and foremost, and at first he seems to reject this woman's plea. But he heard this "foreigner" responding to him in faith. He seized the opportunity to respond to her faith, and her daughter was healed.

How does this relate to our struggles in 1993? Well, the need for a "Museum of Tolerance" should tell us something. We still have barriers and suspicions and feel threatened by those who are different from us. We separate ourselves by building walls. However, our Lord gives us his example today. Jesus shows mercy and kindness to the "foreigner." We are called to do likewise. Nancy J. Connor

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost
September 5, 1993

Psalm 138
Exodus 6:2-8
Romans 11:33-36
Matthew 16:13-20

FIRST READING

Exodus 6:2-8 is a divine speech, paralleling in several respects the exchange between Jesus and his disciples in Matthew 16.

Previously God had been known by various names handed down among the children of Israel from the days of Abraham. But now their ancient God will do a new thing and earn a new name. The LORD God will be their powerful liberator from that little "lord" Pharaoh, who sits on his dinky throne in his halls of stone, living high on the fruits of slave labor. God said, "You shall know that I am the LORD your God."

Jesus helps the disciples to get his name straight, and then begins to spell out the meaning of "Messiah, Son of the living God." "Messiah" implies a people as surely as "father" or "mother" implies children, or "four star general" implies an army, or "LORD" implies an Israel liberated from Egypt.

Jesus will liberate people and bind them to himself. It is part of his name, in his nature, to build his church, just as surely as God through Moses led ancient slaves out of bondage into the freedom of serving God.

The dread power of death (Hades' gates) will not be any more successful in thwarting Jesus' purpose than Pharaoh was able to withstand God's will in the days of the Exodus. The great doors of the palace of Hades may clank shut on whole generations, but the victories of death are temporary. Jesus is the breaker of every bondage and will at last tear Hades' gates clean off their hinges.

Jesus gives the community the power and responsibility of binding and loosing, of speaking words that will order the life of the new community so that it will in fact be new, no longer living in the old way with old values and old allegiances.

"Messiah" means liberator of a people freed from the fear of death and all the power of the cronies of death, living in a community of new life. RHS

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

Two marvelous metaphors in Matthew's Gospel carry timely truth about the nature and mission of the church. The first image is *rock*. Peter's confession of faith is the rock on which the church is built.

Suppose on this Sunday the preacher challenges the congregation to take on the royal business of building up the church of Jesus Christ. Gladly working under the architectural vision of the Spirit, building on the foundation of Jesus Christ, supported by pillars like Peter and all the apostles and saints, our mission is to participate in building a spiritual house. We participate as we find our place in Christ's house and as we welcome others.

People are looking for a house where sinners are welcomed and forgiven, where gifts are multiplied and shared, where a person can find a proper fit in life. The good news is this house (described in 1 Pet 2:4-8) is already established and there is no shortage of space for it to grow. This spiritual house, the church, is a house called home, a habitat for humanity.

The other important figure in our text is *key*. Keys are of great importance in our daily passages. Keys also mark important milestones in our lives. Recall what it means to finally get a key to the car, the key to one's first apartment, the key to your own home.

The key for entrance into the spiritual house is confession of Christ as Lord, confession of sin and the conferring of forgiveness which Christ has entrusted to the church. The key is delivered whenever the gospel is preached and the sacraments administered.

It may be a good idea to remind the congregation of the Office of the Keys, illustrating with personal examples of how this ministry "works." What a privilege to be keepers of the keys.

When the key of grace is turned in the hearts

and minds of dead and passive stones, a transformation occurs. Dead and passive stones become "living stones" (1 Pet 2:5a). Some of us, like Simon Peter, become cornerstones, and we are built up into a spiritual house. Stephen Cornils

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Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost
September 12, 1993

Psalm 26
Jeremiah 15:15-21
Romans 12:1-8
Matthew 16:21-26

FIRST READING

How painful to see that the prince of apostles can play the role of Satan. It is far more comfortable to draw parallels between Pharaoh (see last Sunday's lessons) and, say, our favorite enemies "out there" beyond the boundaries of the church. Of course, especially in time past it was customary to find a Satan in somebody else's church and so point the finger at the Grand Inquisitor or the Pope.

But what is shockingly clear is that Peter, mouthpiece for the twelve, first even among the inner circle of three, is an insider, maybe even the foundation stone of "our" church. And he is a "Satan." Here is a sad fact to which Jesus points with painful regularity in Matthew's Gospel. A man invited to the wedding in place of the original guests dishonors his royal host by not wearing a wedding garment (22:11-14). Weeds grow up alongside wheat (13:24-30). A man has two sons, and one of them refuses to do what the father asks (21:28-30). Even at the end of the Gospel, when the disciples gather in the presence of the resurrected Jesus, some of them doubted (28:16-17).

Perhaps Peter is not simply the prototype of some recalcitrant, thick-headed, egotistical Christian whom we could name, some Christian in our community, among our acquaintances, who gives us fits. Maybe Peter is a reality, at times, in every disciple's life, including our own.

Here at Caesarea Philippi, we are at a turning point in the Gospel. Up to this point Matthew has reported much teaching and many parables. That does not cease, but here we have the first of the three passion predictions (16:21; 17:22-23; 20:17-19), and talk of Jesus' dying and our self-giving intrudes on the narrative increasingly.

Maybe the two parts of the Gospel are closely connected. The early teaching does not make sense on any other presupposition than a total about-face, renunciation of old habits, opening up the receiving of everything from the hand of God by grace alone. The word "cross" is not used, and the call to "lose your life" has not been issued earlier. Nevertheless the early teaching centered in loving even enemies (5:44) and being perfect (5:48). The source of the power for such living is none other than the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The two halves of the Gospel stand or fall together. RHS

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

Poor Peter. At times we want so very much to say the right thing, and we end up missing the target. Peter wants so much for Jesus' situation to be different, and he perceives that responding in love involves denying the reality of the situation. In this instance it is denying Jesus' fears and pain in anticipating his own death.

During a residency in Clinical Pastoral Education I met a 37-year-old woman with terminal cancer. She was a lovely person, and we hit it off quite well from the beginning. As her condition worsened and she became sicker, I found myself taking on the role of a cheerleader. I began talking about all the possibilities of cure and was not available to her to talk about the darker realities of her situation. She was going to die. It was so painful for me to deal with her dying that I couldn't even begin to help her deal with her pain. I was denying both her humanness and mine.

In the text from Matthew 16 Jesus rebukes Peter for not allowing him to experience his pain. As a human being it must have been difficult for Jesus to go the course that he did toward his death, knowing the reality of what was to come and

dealing with the feelings that reality provokes. We sometimes have difficulty with the human side of Jesus.

The beauty of this human side of Jesus is that it brings him so close to our own suffering. It is powerful to have a God who has suffered all that we suffer in this life, who has wept at the death of a friend, who has been tempted, and who has suffered the pain of an agonizing death. Our God does not reside far, far away disconnected from our human experience.

This text also makes us aware that there is something beyond the pain and the suffering. Jesus points out the problem of getting stuck in the suffering (the things of this world). Being mindful of the things of God is being mindful that we can face our pain head on because we know there is something greater on the other side of that pain. Either to deny the pain and not enter into it at all or to stay stuck in the pain leaves us separated from a God who waits on the other side of it to offer us wholeness. Shawn Mai

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Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost
September 19, 1993

Psalm 119:33-40
Ezekiel 33:7-9
Romans 13:1-10
Matthew 18:15-20

FIRST READING

The Lord issues a dire warning to Ezekiel and to all who would speak for God. A prophet is a "sentinel" (Ezek 33:7), like a guard on a city wall. If the guard fails to cry out when the enemy approaches, the citizens will not be ready and the city will fall. The guard will be guilty of dereliction of duty, and the fate of the inhabitants will be blood on his hands and on his conscience.

Every community has a system of some sort to safeguard its health and well being. Families have their lists of rules, their do's and don'ts. All responsible parents set limits and issue warnings, "Don't play with matches!" "Look both ways before crossing the road!" "Just say no to drugs!"

It happens, of course, that members and leaders of communities become obsessed with rules, and then they quickly discover that the multiplication of rules or the unloving application of rules stifles life instead of protecting it.

Some readers think of Matthew's Gospel as hopelessly mired in rules: it starts with the Sermon on the Mount with its impossible demands and continues into this Sunday's gospel with its rules for legal proceedings against errant members of the community. Isn't this Sunday's gospel a case study in "How to get rid of bad apples"?

Jesus in Matthew does make tough demands on members of the community. (Nothing could be tougher than the call to love God with the whole heart and to love the neighbor as oneself! Mt 22:34-40; cf. Rom 13:8-10.) But all the demands are embedded in a matrix of grace.

In Matthew 18 the "community rules" (vv. 15-20) dare not be ripped from their context. Verses 10-14 speak of unstinting efforts to find the one lost sheep, and Peter is told in vv. 21-22 that forgiveness must be given not once, not even seven times (the number of fullness), but 77 or 70 x 7 times. Fullness multiplied by fullness!

Just like Paul (Romans 13), we struggle with our response to God's grace. What kind of community do we want to be? How can we be that sort of community? What forms of mutual admonition and encouragement are in place? How do we search and strive to share the grace of God and to teach the will of God in our families and congregations? RHS

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

I remember reading a book once with a title something like *How to Get Along with People You Really Don't Like.* Most of the contents of the book have long escaped my memory, but I do recall one thought that deeply impressed me. Namely: we cannot reasonably expect to like everyone, but we can endeavor to love everyone.

Disagreements come about largely because

of the uniqueness and individuality of people. We are, in a word, different, one from another. If we were all cast from precisely the same mold there would likely be no difference of opinion, no variation in viewpoints, no disagreements, no conflict. But because this is not the case, conflict is inevitable. And our various natures are all fallen natures, adding to our conflicts.

That conflict is inevitable is more than some people care to believe, especially some religious people. They believe conflict is only destructive and therefore must be avoided at any cost. Denial seems to be the easiest defense mechanism against it, so many people employ it, much to their detriment. It might be nice if denial actually "worked;" but simply saying there is no conflict has never resolved any disagreement. Denial only drives issues and feelings underground and causes all sorts of negative consequences.

The texts for this Sunday speak directly to the importance of handling disagreements and differences, and conflict in general, in a timely and orderly fashion. Jesus, in particular, takes for granted that the existence of conflict is a reality—it is bound to happen. He rightly encourages us to admit to its existence, identify its content, and confront it openly and directly (passive aggression not allowed).

The resolution of conflict ought always to be carried out in a caring and especially loving manner—never from a vengeful posture. The expression of feelings (especially anger) is appropriate, but must never be done in a destructive manner. Acting out raw feelings inevitably hurts people.

Despite some directives to the contrary from well-meaning Christian people, honest, open, straightforward dealing with conflictual issues turns out to be the healthiest and most constructive method. William A. Miller

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost
September 26, 1993

Psalm 103:1-13
Genesis 50:15-21
Romans 14:5-9
Matthew 18:21-35

FIRST READING

Genesis 50 recounts the final reconciliation between Joseph and his brothers. Those brothers feared that once their father Jacob died, all restraints on Joseph's natural impulse to take revenge would vanish. Did he hold a grudge against them for their very real crime against him? Joseph saw the hand of God in all that had happened, and he spoke kindly.

Romans 14 speaks of disputes in Rome about vegetables and meat, about drinking wine or abstaining, about keeping holy days or counting all days the same. "Quarreling over opinions" had broken out in the community with members "passing judgment" on one another. Paul calls them all to lift their eyes, as Joseph did, to God who is above all, who has opened the divine arms to welcome all and who alone sits on the judgment seat of the universe.

"The kingdom of God," says Paul, "is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (14:17), so "let us pursue" not personal advantage and not even personal perfection, criticizing the piety or style of others, but "let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding" (19).

The gospel also speaks powerfully and a bit comically of judging. Like so many of the parables, this one offers numbers and a situation that are marvelously exaggerated. Forgiven 10,000 talents, an official still goes out and presses his case against someone who owes him a paltry 100 denarii.

The numbers involved are staggering: on the one side a figure approaching something akin to the national debt, and on the other a minuscule amount. 10,000 talents could pay the wages of

600,000 laborers for an entire year. It's an astronomical figure, and it makes a comical contrast to the other number. 100 denarii would pay one day-laborer to work for three or four months.

All three lessons speak of the one great Judge of the universe, whose heart is so full of ungrudging and welcoming forgiveness that all our complaints about one another pale into insignificance. We are called, drawn, attracted by the forgiving heart of God to take a fresh look at the "brothers" and "sisters" who differ from us or in any way offend us. God's sovereignty, says Paul, is full of creative juices yielding righteousness (harmony with God) and peace (harmony with one another) and joy in the Holy Spirit (such a contrast to other spirits that sometimes drive us!). RHS

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

"Forgive us our debts and sins as we also have forgiven our debtors."

This is the Aramaic version of the passage from the Lord's Prayer where Christ teaches us about his code of forgiveness. Almost two billion Christians in the world join in this prayer many times in their life. This is the undisputed, accepted prayer of all Christian denominations.

Every teacher has his or her own symbols, ethical codes and prayers. So the disciples of Jesus asked him to teach them their specific prayer with identifying rules. Jesus taught them a prayer which is comprised of his basic teachings and principles.

Did Peter think hard enough about the Lord's Prayer? Perhaps not. Why else would he ask Jesus, "How often should one forgive?" Jesus could have asked him to refer to the prayer he had already taught. Instead he tried to teach him with stories and metaphors from actual life situations. He realized that Peter and the others needed further discourse to understand the depth of forgiveness. "Not seven times, but seven times seventy," Jesus said to Peter. Jesus could see Peter's frowning face.

No other group known to them ever taught such an elongated patience. They all knew the proverb, "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth." Also, they had not yet witnessed Jesus' own tolerance, patience, and forgiving prayer which he continued until his death on the cross. We have witnessed wonders of his love which were as yet unknown to them.

We are all living in a world where we need God's continued forgiveness at every moment. And the death and resurrection of Jesus are the pledge that we are continually offered the forgiveness that we need. Having such riches, how shall we live? Can we do better than the unforgiving servant (18:23-35)? Cherian C. Puthiyottil

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Do-Gooders and Bleeding Hearts

Jerry L. Schmalenberger
Professor of Parish Ministry and President
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In the stories Jesus told, in what he preached, and in the actions and examples he modeled, he set out for us a mission of social ministry in the world as a part of the kingdom work. One cannot look deeply into our Christian doctrines and not see the same theme written about and believed in by the early church, as well.

The problem is, when the church gets tight on funds or sets its agenda for ministry, there are those who advocate for cutting risk-taking positions and actions which, while being more prophetic in nature, are not likely to be financially supported by many of our people. We need to be aware of that mentality in this year of 1993 and in our merged church as it seeks to discover its prophetic, priestly, and pastoral identity.

When asked by a lawyer, "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus responded by telling the story of the good Samaritan. He pointed out that the neighbor was any person who was beaten up in the side ditch of life and in need of our loving compassion. He could have continued that story by pointing out that if the Samaritan frequently traveled that same road from Jerusalem to Jericho and each time found someone beaten up in the ditch, appropriate action might have included advocating for a safer road or setting up a community organization to care for the victims. We are called to love those who are beaten up and for whom the world is unwilling to take a stand or care about.

Social ministry and action is further continued in the Matthean beatitudes. Here Jesus lists themes that he must have used throughout his ministry. He told us how blessed we would be if we would be peacemakers. The kind of peace he surely meant was more than just the absence of trouble; it was a peace that brings the presence of God to all the people, the shalom of God.

Jesus preached about those who hunger and thirst for righteousness; a hunger and thirst that bring about serendipitous results when we work hard for good and justice in the world. He had a sermon theme about the merciful and how it is a *good* thing to be a "bleeding heart" and a "do-gooder" in any culture. He taught that God would have us add to justice and fairness that great concept of mercy.

Jesus modeled this social ministry emphasis in his own days of ministry in Palestine. He made a whip and drove the money-changers out of the temple because they were taking advantage of the pilgrims and converting coins to ones appropriate for temple worship. He called attention to injustice wherever he saw it, pointing it out to the disciples and all who would listen. By

asking a young lad to get out his own food and share it with others, he convinced a crowd of 5,000 to share what they had to eat that day, and there was enough for everyone. At a well called Jacob's, Jesus gave good advice to a woman who was living in an adulterous relationship. In many instances he modeled caring about the unlovely and the social outcast of the day, the leper and the demoniac and the foreigner.

In the upper room Jesus washed feet like a servant to demonstrate how the greater joy is found in service rather than in demanding to be served.

The doctrines of our church continue a theme of social ministry when we understand incarnational theology and the fact that God put on human flesh and lived in our midst as a servant. Luther extrapolated that out to mean we are to be "little Christs" to our neighbors and live out a life sacrificial for them, as well.

Our theology of stewardship of all creation certainly has a lot to say to us about government budgets and distribution of wealth in the world. It says a lot about conservation of natural resources and the fact that future generations have a right to resource inheritance as well. Even as we can now talk about child abuse, we can also talk about abuse of the non-human resources in our world. Douglas John Hall in his book, *The Steward: A Biblical Symbol Come of Age*, carries this idea further by claiming a "stewardship of all believers."

Reformers like John Calvin, Martin Luther, John Zwingli, John Knox, and Charles Wesley were all involved in the real world and thus the politics of their day. We ought do no less.

Let us beware of those in and outside the church who would have us divorce ourselves from the world and from rolling up our sleeves and getting down in the ditch as the good Samaritan did.

We must not allow ourselves to become divorced from the real world in a glorified theology which would be inconsistent with what Jesus told stories about, preached, and modeled in his own life, and about which the Christian church has held basic doctrines for its entire existence.

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