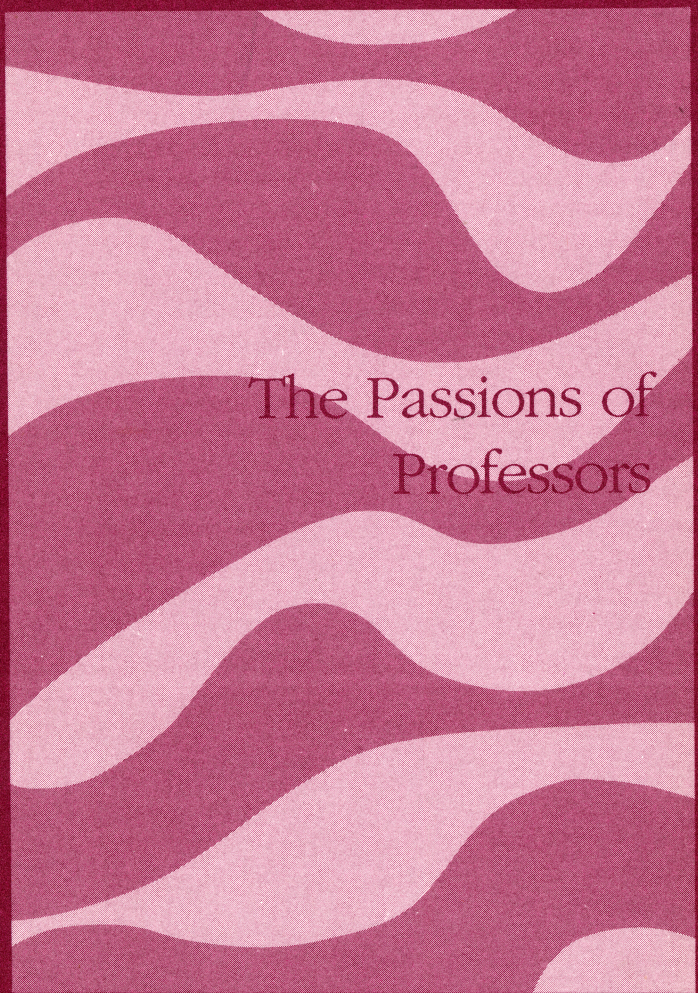
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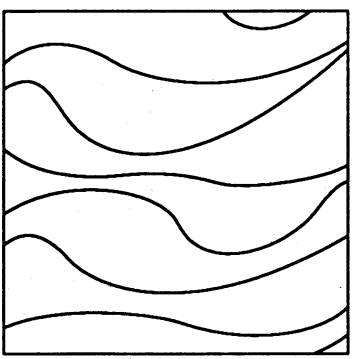
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The Passions of Professors

No, our title does not allude to the suffering that goes along with theological education today, nor to the physical desires of the church's scholars. Instead, by "passions of professors," we refer to those issues faculty members feel most deeply about, what makes them tick, what lends continuing excitement to their vocation.

This issue reflects the passions of some members of the faculty of Wartburg Theological Seminary. In the past the Wartburg faculty has written on special themes for *Currents*: "What in the World are Christians For?" (October, 1987); "Sending and Receiving" (October, 1989); "Where Learning Leads to Mission" (October, 1991). This time they said to one another: "Write on something you feel strongly about." So: "The Passions of Professors" (April, 1993).

James L. Bailey asks, in this year of Matthew, what it would mean for contemporary Christians to use the Sermon on the Mount as a guide for their life together. The Beatitudes foster the creation of a contrast community that is in tension with the values of the larger society, and Jesus shows in this sermon concrete ways in which radical love fulfills the commandments. Praying for enemies and acting positively on their behalf provide the most telling test for a would-be contrast community. The Lord's Prayer, in turn, refocuses the community's attention away from self-aggrandizing actions to the paramount issues of the kingdom. A Christian community needs to be an arena where the punishing of failures and the inordinate rewarding of individual success are not the rule of the day, and where intense relationships with others are not an end in themselves but a contribution towards a deep experience of ministry.

Wi Jo Kang surveys post-war conditions in his homeland, Korea, and the urgent need there, expressed also by Christians, for reunification. The continued division of that country perpetuates the military buildup on both sides and threatens to cause another outbreak of war. Many Korean Christians rightly lament that the policy of the United States toward Korea has not changed in spite of drastic changes in Europe. The highest priority of the Korean Christian mission is to achieve reunification by 1995, the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II and the division of Korea. Those of us who are old enough to have experienced the Korean War need to help bring the needs of our sisters and brothers there to the attention of the whole Christian family.

Peter Kjeseth points to the Kairos Document from South Africa, which demonstrated that the ultimate foundation of *apartheid* is theological. He reminds us that many churches, including the ELCA, decided to observe the quincentenary of Columbus' journey to America by calling for repentance, remembrance, and renewal. He hopes that this observance will eventually produce a Kairos USA, despite the fact that many institutions, including the churches, seem obsessed by survival and the political parties seem to ignore or deny the real problems that are tearing our nation apart. Will a new, more prophetic understanding of U.S. public religion emerge now? Or are we still before the kairos, at a time for truth-telling at the grassroots level?

James R. Nieman tells of the great preacher Chrysostom, who rejected the applause that often punctuated his sermons and tried to drive people from the church by his sermons so that they might share the gospel with others. The message of the gospel has illocutionary force and perlocutionary impact. Illocutionary force means that the good news happens in the very saying of the words: "Your sins are forgiven." Perlocutionary impact means that the gospel leads to changed behavior: "Follow me." "Honor your father and mother." Proclaiming God's gospel not only respects the diversity of our hearers, but it also is able to set them free, get them in motion again, affect their trajectory, and drive them from the church in hope. Sermons are an epideictic speech type in which the hearers are called to imitate the speaker, who bears the values being proclaimed. Our hearers simply will not go where our message leads if we aren't willing to go there ourselves.

Faye Schott notes that unless a proper understanding of the nature of humanity is achieved there can be no affirmation of human salvation. Reformation and Enlightenment confused the definition of humanity, as did the clash of cultures when Europeans conquered the new world. Pannenberg called attention to the human potential for self-transcendence while Rahner believed that the self-emptying of God in the incarnation is the actualization of human reality. Those who exist on the fringes play a large part in defining what humanity is by calling into question the anthropologists' assumptions. The best definition of humanity rests in the finality of Christ's redemptive action, and the task for us who seek to articulate a theological anthropology is to point to Christ as the boundary by which we all are defined. The more diverse the other is, the more I know about myself and humanity.

Ralph F. Smith laments that we are often skeptical of the sacramental, embodied character of Christian life. While early Christians were ambivalent about pilgrimages to the Holy Land, the holy places served as visual reminders that what is already known and believed has its foundation in the historically verifiable past. His driving passion is to keep word and sacrament in faithful tension. All liturgical celebration should be radically local even as it is profoundly universal. Each congregation should reflect upon how its building reflects its environment—its specific locale—in its liturgical life. No specific place is essential to believing, but places are.

Each of us, like our Wartburg colleagues, has passions and priorities in our daily life as ministry. Wealth, fame, and recognition pale before real success: observing a place, person, or condition where God's reign breaks through. In his own passion Christ Jesus did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself and become obedient to the point of death on a cross. Because of this emptying, we live life to its fullest.

Even passionately,

Ralph W. Klein
Editor

Sermon on the Mount: Model for Community

James L. Bailey
Associate Professor of New Testament
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For some years, I have been fascinated with the Sermon on the Mount (henceforth, abbreviated SM), that carefully crafted unit in the Gospel of Matthew which brings together sayings of Jesus. Christians and non-Christians alike know about it; they recognize the familiar ring of the beatitudes, the Lord's Prayer, and many other sayings of Jesus cradled in Matthew 5-7.

But do congregations today begin to tap into the power of Jesus' words? What would it mean for contemporary Christians to engage the SM seriously as a model for community, as a guide for their life together? The SM contains many of the most radical sayings of Jesus and a composite view of community rarely tried by congregations. Reinhold Niebuhr once quipped, "It is almost impossible to be sane and Christian at the same time, and on the whole [we] have been more sane than Christian."

Form and purpose of the SM

Hans Dieter Betz, professor of New Testament at the University of Chicago, has made the intriguing suggestion that the SM looks and functions like the epitome, a literary genre of the ancient world.[1] In the Hellenistic world the philosophical epitome represented a condensation of a larger body of teaching of an important figure, designed by its redactor as "a systematic synopsis" for knowledgeable and mature followers. It is generally agreed that the SM represents a redactional construction—given its current shape either by the author of the Gospel or an earlier redactor, and seems to offer a condensation of Jesus' principal teachings, ones which reverberate throughout the entire Gospel of Matthew.

The literary form of epitome, according to Betz, has as its goal the guidance of disciples following a way of life espoused by their teacher. An underlying assumption is that this involves the disciples both in practicing and meditating, in reflection and

[1]The word epitome is derived from the Greek verb that means "to cut short" or "to reduce." See Betz, "The Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:3-7:27): Its Literary Genre and Function," in *Essays on the Sermon on the Mount* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 1-16. This was Betz's inaugural lecture given at the University of Chicago in 1978.

action. Building on the analogy to the epitome, Betz draws an important conclusion about the purpose of the SM:

> Correspondingly, its function is to provide the disciple of Jesus with the necessary tool for becoming a Jesus theologian. "Hearing and doing the sayings of Jesus," therefore, means enabling the disciple to theologize creatively along the lines of the theology of the master. To say it pointedly: The SM is not law to be obeyed, but theology to be intellectually appropriated and internalized, in order then to be creatively developed and implemented in concrete situations in life.[2]

Focusing on the design and intended use of the SM in the Matthean context, two more points need to be stressed. First, most New Testament scholars date the Gospel of Matthew after 70 C.E., perhaps sometime between 80 and 90, arguing that this Gospel presents Jesus and his teaching, especially his teaching relating to the Torah, as an alternative to the understanding of Jewish sages who are re-establishing Judaism after the catastrophic events of 70 C.E. The teaching of Jesus in the SM spells out an alternative way of reflecting on God's will and acting in accordance with that will; it is designed for Jewish and Gentile Christians living in the urbanized settings of Syria and possibly northern Galilee. It is addressed to insiders.

Second, the SM must not be interpreted in isolation from the rest of the Gospel of Matthew, in particular the opening four chapters that precede it. This beginning narrative prepares for Jesus' first major teaching, directed primarily to his disciples (5:1-2) yet overheard by the crowds (5:1, 7:28-29), by informing Matthew's audience of Jesus' identity and mission. His is a messianic and divine identity (1:1,23; 3:16-17; 4:3,6), and his message and ministry are linked to the inbreaking reign of God (4:17). In view of this narrational sequence, what Jesus teaches in the SM must not be severed from who he is as God's gracious presence. Thus, to say it somewhat differently from Betz, the SM is not law to be obeyed but a way of living rooted in the divine graciousness incarnated in Jesus' life and ministry.

In what follows I intend to use the SM as a model for a "contrast community"[3] in today's world, by tracing some implications that flow from current study of Matthew 5-7, for Christians who seek to avoid total absorption into the values and perspectives of the American culture. Due to limitations I concentrate my comments on the first half of the SM, with only the briefest reference to Jesus' sayings in 6:19ff.

To live as a contrast community (Mt 5:3-12)

The SM begins with Jesus' beatitudes. The community lives under God's gracious blessing. Jesus was not the first to utter beatitudes, since this type of saying that begins "Blessed are..." appears elsewhere in Jewish writings and was also known among the Greeks and Romans. But in contrast to most beatitudes, Jesus uses this form to declare persons "blessed" whose attitudes and activities diverge markedly from those commonly assumed and openly celebrated in the Roman world. In that world, it would be astonishing to claim that

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[2]Betz, 15-16.

[3]Gerhard Lohfink, *Jesus and Community* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, Engl. trans. 1984), 122-32, speaks of "the church as contrast-society." Indebted to Lohfink's phrase, I have chosen to alter it by speaking of "contrast community."

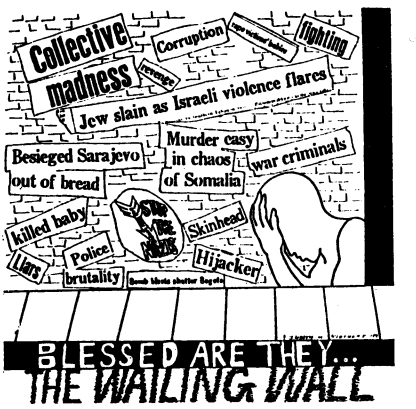
the poor in spirit, the mourners, the meek, the ones hungering and thirsting after righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the makers of peace, and those persecuted for the sake of righteousness were blessed by God.

Note that in this series of eight, the first and final beatitudes carry the promise: "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (God)." These words of promise act as a literary inclusion, suggesting that everything in between—that is, all the beatitudes—describes the character of the faith and life of a community that trusts Jesus' vision and proleptic enactment of God's new rule. Jesus' amazing promises should prompt the community to mirror the kingdom reality by practicing a way of seeing and acting which advances a provocative alternative to the behaviors and values of the larger society. Hence, the beatitudes are designed to foster a contrast community.

But what more can we say about a contrast community that takes seriously these opening beatitudes?

First, it is a community with an eschatological vision. It is a community sensitive to the dramatic difference between things as they seem to be in the world and things as they ought to be; it is a community of people who are not willing to become resigned to things as they are but constantly working to reconcile the present distorted conditions to God's dawning reality actualized in Jesus Christ. Despite contrary evidence, such a community can persevere and hope because, by speaking God's future into the present, Jesus' promises engender hope for the long haul.

Second, the starting point for the community's life and action involves its members in recognizing their poverty of spirit. In contrast to Lk 6:20, Mt 5:3 renders Jesus' opening beatitude in the third person plural and adds a dative of respect—"Blessed



are those who are poor *in respect* to their spirit." That is, those who recognize poverty in terms of their own human spirit are the blessed ones. As the initial beatitude that in some sense says it all, Jesus' words in 5:3 pronounce divine blessing on more than economic deprivation. In Matthew, poverty of spirit corresponds to faith in God, the practical acknowledgment that all depends on God's resources and not one's own. All community members, including those with considerable material wealth, are to live humbly and simply before God and with other human beings. This was no easy trick in the Roman urban society, where people were meticulously conscious of social status and where the rich ostentatiously displayed their wealth, showing open contempt for the poor and all social inferiors.

Third, the focus for a contrast community is on God's righteousness. The fourth and eighth beatitudes center on "righteousness" (*dikaiosyne*): "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied" (5:6), and "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (5:10). Leander Keck provides a helpful

definition of *dikaiosyne*, a favorite word of Matthew.

> Righteousness is not simply goodness. Rather it is rightness—the rightness attained by obeying the Torah as Jesus interpreted and exemplified it. Righteousness prevails where everything is right and rightly related to everything else. Righteousness, in other words, is a way of expressing the moral ecology of the Kingdom of Heaven. Where God's kingship is fully effective, there all things are right...[4]

Dikaiosyne is hence a relational term, prompting me to render this Greek word in 5:6 and 5:10 in the following manner: as a climax to the first stanza of four beatitudes, the fourth one declares those blessed who hunger and thirst—yearn that much—for God's way of "setting all things in right relationships," whereas the second stanza of four ends by blessing those who are willing to suffer in service of "these right relationships." Suffering comes to the community because these God-initiated "right relationships" precipitate hostile reactions from people who stand to benefit from the established, and quite often oppressive, way of ordering relationships in society.

Fourth, members in a contrast community experience pain and joy. In 5:11-12, the shift to the second person plural insures that Jesus' words will be heard even more directly by the audience of the Gospel.

> Blessed are *you* when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. [Continually] rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Indeed it is the case that isolated individuals often become overwhelmed by abuse and mistreatment directed at them, especially if it seems senseless or unfair. But, in contrast, people bound together in a community can endure intense pain and persecution if they perceive that the suffering results from their partnership in undertakings which are linked to the truth and purpose of God in the world. Witness the black church during the civil rights struggle. The sense of blessedness in the midst of such persecution, unless experienced, is almost unfathomable. By means of Greek imperatives in the present tense (5:12), Jesus invites the community to rejoice and be glad *continually* in the face of verbal attacks and abuse. The community's passion for "right relationships" (God's new activity within the affairs of humans) involves the community's investing in life together as God wills it, no matter what the cost.

Jürgen Moltmann makes comments relevant to 5:11-12 when he contrasts "apathy," an espoused virtue in the ancient world, with "passion."[5] Apathy, as the attempt to avoid all suffering, misses the depth of involvement with life assumed by the beatitudes. It is precisely in this unconventional commitment to live fully according to Jesus' view of reality that the community ironically experiences a profound sense of joy in the midst of threatening circumstances. As a contrast community, the community lines up with the prophets in casting its lot for things as God wills them, not things as they appear to be. Like the prophets and Jesus before them, the community encounters enmity and rejection from those who should understand, but in its struggle it also experiences deep rivers of joy.

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[4]Leander Keck, "Ethics in the Gospel According to Matthew, *Iliff Review* 40:4 (1983), 47f.

[5]J. Moltmann, *The Passion for Life* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, Engl. trans. 1978), 91ff.

To live for the world (5:13-16)

When facing unfriendly attacks, a contrast community might be inclined to retreat from the larger society (like most sectarian groups). To offset this tendency, Jesus' sayings in the next segment of the SM offer two images that accent the world-wide and world-affirming mission given to Christians: "You are the salt of the earth..." (5:13), and "You are the light of the world..." (5:14). Analysis of the form and content of these sayings and their placement immediately after Jesus' beatitudes yield some implications for the contrast community.

First, the community's mission is both a gift and a task. Only in Mt 5:13 does Jesus declare, "You are the salt of the earth." Lk 14:34 begins (as does Mk 9:50), "Salt is good; but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored?..." As with the image of light, Mt 5:13 uses the second person plural form to describe the community's character. "*You are* (all of you) the salt..." and "*You are* the light..." The verbs are indicative, not imperative. Christians in community do not have *to become* salt or light; they *are* salt and light. A sheer graciousness lies behind who they are as a called community, and it is the character of the community that is in view, not that of separate individuals.

But these images depict the Christians' life together not only as gift but also as task. "You are the salt *of the earth*..." "You are the light *of the world*..." As paralleling terms, "earth" and "world" define the context for the community's life and mission. Jesus' follow-up comments for both images underscore the tragedy of salt that no longer serves as salt and the absurdity of a city on the hill being hid or a lamp being put under a bushel rather than on a lampstand. Put positively, salt is to do its salting and light is to do its illuminating. So with the community of Christ. It has a purpose and usefulness. It has a mission in the world and for the world, a mission principally focused on the process of discipling (see Mt 28:18-20).

Second, the community's action points beyond itself. As the conclusion of the SM suggests (see especially 7:24-27), the Matthean Jesus is concerned about "the doing" of his words, not just the hearing of them

> Jesus and the Matthean author had no hang-up about "good works."

(see also 12:33-37). Compatible with Jewish understanding, 5:16 provides a key to these metaphors of mission in 5:13-15. Jesus declares, "Let your light so shine before others, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

Verse 16 suggests that Jesus and the Matthean author had no hang-up about "good works." It is precisely the community's good works by which that community gives witness to a gracious God and through which the community itself is shaped. A community is dramatically formed by what it does. Our doing shapes us.

Take note that I have been speaking of the community's good works, although individual persons are obviously involved. The SM suggests that Christians in concert with one another, acting for the sake of God's right relationships, generate a wit-

ness that points beyond themselves. This perhaps implies that self-justifying attitudes and activity are less likely when Christians are cooperatively engaged in aspects of the community's challenging mission in the world (e.g., feeding the hungry, caring for the neglected, evangelizing the rich and powerful, discussing institutional change in church and society) rather than when Christians are concentrating by default on their own individual attitudes and actions unrelated to the community's larger mission. When a group of Christians determines to live as a contrast community in an indifferent society, to take on the enormous challenge of validating "right relationships" even in the face of hostility, or to offer testimony to the living God's love and justice while confronting hatred and injustice, individual Christians are caught up into the movement of an invigorating divine-human drama that simultaneously humbles and exhilarates them as participants.

To work at right relationships

The SM continues its focus on *dikaiosyne*, what we have termed "right relationships," in the next two sections (5:17-48 and 6:1-18).

Jesus models right relationships.

In 5:21-48, Jesus contrasts his interpretation of pivotal commandments in the Torah with commonly accepted understandings. Scholars term these six texts as *antitheses* due to the recurring pattern, "You have heard that it was said... But I say to you that..." (5:21f., 27f., 31f., 33f., 38f., 43f.). In Matthew's design, Jesus is clearly illustrating a way of righteousness for his disciples that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees (see 5:20). In doing so, Jesus provides six examples of "right relationships," which in effect constitute a guide for further reflection and action, to assist disciples in living in a manner compatible with his vision of reality. Undoubtedly, Matthew's audience would see Jesus' interpretations as intentional contrasts to those being espoused by Jewish leaders in post 70 C.E. Judaism.

In Mt 22:34-40, the evangelist makes clear that it is the double command of love, love of God (Deut 6:5) and love of neighbor (Lev 19:18), which serves as the interpretative key for the law and the prophets—and hence for doing God's will. A distinctive feature in this Matthean story supports this; Jesus concludes by asserting, "On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets" (22:40). But unlike Paul (see, e.g., Gal 5:14), Matthew is not content to view the action of love as the summary of the Torah if it implies neglecting the particularity of its commandments. Rather in 5:17-20 the Matthean Jesus proclaims himself to be the fulfiller of all the specific commandments of the law and prophets or, in other words, every aspect of God's will. For Matthew, love supplies the energy for Christians to act faithfully in terms of the specificity of God's will as it may be discerned and enacted in each new set of circumstances.

The antitheses hence provide six examples of specific commandments for which Jesus reveals the concrete ways radical love fulfills them. It is not just murder that is the problem, but love avoids habitual anger that destroys relationships in community and name-calling that diminishes a Christian brother or sister (see 5:21-26). It is not just adultery that is the problem, but radical love is wary of willful lusting that turns another human being into a sexual object (5:27-30). Love is not simply satisfied with declaring a divorce legal if a husband has a defensible

Loving one's enemy is a matter of an intentional decision and consequent action, not a matter of feeling kindly towards the enemy.

reason to discard his wife, because divorce itself ruptures a God-established relationship (5:31-32). Love avoids hedging one's commitment to tell the truth by a complex network of oaths but invites simple honest speech as a necessary ingredient for trustworthy relationships (5:33-37). It is not enough to limit retaliation by matching the punishment to the crime, but love bids Christians to return good for evil in relationships inside and outside the community (5:38-42). Finally, it is not enough simply to love your neighbor (those of your own ethnic and religious group), but God's love invites the community to love enemies by undertaking positive action towards them (5:43-47). Loving one's enemy is a matter of an intentional decision and consequent action, not a matter of feeling kindly towards the enemy. This final antithesis makes clear that as children of God Christians are called to emulate God's unconditional care for all people.

Above all, Jesus' sayings in 5:21-48 provide models inviting modern Christians to consider how they should act in the concrete situations in life. The six situations brought into focus by Jesus' sayings are centrally important to the function and well-being of people in community. Critical to the internal well-being of a community and its witness to outsiders is the attention given to what Jesus deems destructive of relationships within a community—nursing anger towards another member, sexual lust that demeans another person, a devaluing of the marriage relationship, and deceptive speech. Today, for example, Christians could profit greatly from discussing why and how Jesus' hyperbolic language in 5:21-26 and 5:27-30 exposes the powerful emotions of anger and lust and their potential destructive force within human relationships. If neglected, verbal and sexual abuse can take a heavy toll on families and the credibility of the church's witness.

As a culmination, Jesus' exhortations to refrain from revenge and to relate magnanimously towards enemies need attention today. It can be argued that praying for enemies and acting positively on their behalf afford the most telling test for the Christian community as to whether or not it lives as a contrast community. Such activity, which flies in the face of the common notion that having enemies is inevitable and even desirable, impels Christians to discern more sharply the utter dependence of all life on God's unconditional mercy and the inescapable interdependence of all human beings as God's creatures. How a community responds to Jesus' radical call to love the enemy reveals whether or not its members truly understand the character and purpose of Jesus' teaching and ministry.

Jesus warns of human self-deception.

In 6:1-18 Jesus warns against the human capacity to distort "righteous" activities (in 6:1, the Greek word *dikaiosyne* is used). By citing the three pillars of Jewish piety, Jesus contrasts distorted and healthy practices of almsgiving (6:2-4), praying

(6:5-6), and fasting (6:16-18). The repetitious patterns in the texts underscore the difference between pious actions that are self-serving and those done in secret to please God and to help to those in need. This section also has direct relevance for the contrast community.

A contrast community does not withdraw from society but its common life mirrors how persons live under the Lordship of Christ.

First, authentic righteousness implies a correspondence between outward action and inner intention. Jesus' use of exaggerated speech suggests how pervasive is the human capacity for self-deception. This capacity appears deeply rooted in our need to think well of ourselves. Especially persons who are self-consciously religious can easily do the "rite thing for the wrong reason." Thus, Jesus repeatedly warns his disciples to act differently from how the hypocrites act. The hypocrites give alms openly, pray in public places, and fast in noticeable ways to be seen and approved by others. They engage in the foundational activities of Judaism but their quest for recognition distorts what they do. Hypocrisy for Matthew is the opposite of "righteousness" because it represents behavior that is self-deceiving and self-serving. These warnings from Jesus hold special importance for contemporary Christians who attempt to live as a contrast community, since a "better than you" pride can so subtly enter their thinking.

Second, the distortion of piety eclipses the community's mission. It subverts a community's real mission of serving the world into the preoccupation of individuals with their spiritual progress. In fact, such distorted piety introduces competition and comparison into community life and destroys relationships and directions for mission. Healthy righteousness, for Matthew, keeps the focus on God and the neighbor in need and avoids a religious self-absorption that is so prevalent in the contemporary ecclesial and cultural climate.

Finally, the Lord's Prayer offers a model for the community's praying and acting. It represents a corrective to all pious activities motivated by selfish concerns. Most scholars conclude that either the author of the Gospel or some other redactor before him inserted the Lord's Prayer (6:9-13) into this larger sequence on piety (6:1-18). This model prayer refocuses the community's attention away from self-aggrandizing actions to the paramount issues of the kingdom: the holiness of God's name, the appearance of God's gracious will in human affairs, and the basics needed for life and community—daily bread, forgiveness, and deliverance from temptation. Just as prayer is integral to the benevolent action directed to enemies (5:43-48), so here the model prayer (in the sense that it becomes a model for all our praying) is not intended as a substitution for the community's doing of righteousness. Rather prayer refocuses the community's vision, empowering its participants in an active life of faith. The Lord's Prayer binds the surprising graciousness of God to the community's urgent action.

> Deliberately [Matthew] led the disciples in his Sermon on the Mount, after confronting them with the demand of higher righteousness and perfection, into the inner space of prayer. Here is the center of the Sermon on the Mount. Thus Matthew leads the human being through action to grace.... Matthew knows of the depth of the connection of practice and grace in prayer.[6]

The Lord's Prayer reveals that the will of God is not like that of a demanding tyrant but a loving parent. For this reason, God's will offers health and wholeness not only to the contrast community but also through it to the larger world.

Today's church as contrast communities

I have argued that the SM invites modern Christians to take their community life seriously. In the SM, Jesus' sayings are carefully organized to model for disciples, then and now, how they are to live together as a wholesome community whose identity is rooted in God's graciousness. In a time when thoughtful people are seriously wondering if community is really possible in our fracturing and polarizing society, the church is called back to its roots. In the first century world, Christian communities, like those addressed by the Gospel of Matthew, provided a powerful witness that the widest social, racial, and religious chasms could be bridged among those baptized into Jesus Christ. Is it not time in this culture that Christian communities live up to the theological claim that all people baptized into Christ are indeed one?

Throughout the article I have used the term "contrast community" to describe this Christian communal life that offers an alternative vision and ethos to those commonly available in American society. With a new urgency, we need to see our identity and purpose fundamentally tied to the Christian community to which we belong. Moreover, we need to recognize that our identity leads to mission. A contrast community does not withdraw from society but its common life mirrors how persons live under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. The very existence of a contrast community is a witness to the surrounding culture and becomes attractive to many outsiders who are searching for a place of acceptance and hopefulness. This is what Hauerwas and Willimon mean when they assert, "The church doesn't have a social strategy, the church *is* a social strategy."[7]

In a final chapter of *Habits of the Heart*, the authors conclude that many Americans feel caught between the "public world of competitive striving and private world supposed to provide the meaning and love that make competitive striving bearable."[8] This cultural dilemma, I would argue, cries out for the church to recover its authentic role as a contrast community. A Christian community needs to be an arena where the punishing of failures and the inordinate rewarding of individual success are not the rule of the day and where intense relationships with others are not an end in themselves but a contribution towards a deep experience of ministry. The contrast community should be a place of blessedness, flowing from

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[6]Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, Engl. trans. 1989), 388.

[7]Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989), 43.

[8]Robert N. Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton, *Habits of the Heart* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), 292.

God's grace and forgiveness, and an arena of purposeful mission, addressing the real needs of human beings.

I have contended that the SM is a section of Scriptures peculiarly suited to shape Christian community. By preserving the radical teaching of Jesus, it was designed for communities whose life together was to be an alternative to the dominant society. In addition to Jesus' sayings already mentioned, other ones in the SM broach such critical topics as the seductive power of wealth and material possessions (6:19-34), danger of judging (7:1-5), power of praying together (7:7-11), centrality of the golden rule (7:12), detection of false prophets (7:15-23), and cruciality of acting on the basis of Jesus' words (7:13-14 and 7:24-27). A persistent consideration of the SM would allow a community of people time to discover ways of appropriating and internalizing the theology of all these sayings of Jesus as well as time for reflecting on the character of life envisioned by them and how that vision becomes concretized in situations today.

What would it mean for a community to live in such a way that its life together would not make sense if a gracious God did not exist? It would mean, among other things, that its members would live like a contrast community, passionately connecting peoples' public and private worlds and ardently inviting others into a vision and way of living that hold people together and offer praise to God in Jesus Christ. Together these people would discover both the utter delight and the clear cost of taking seriously Jesus' teaching in the SM.

In the words of the Taizé community, the question is posed to us who participate in the church in contemporary America:

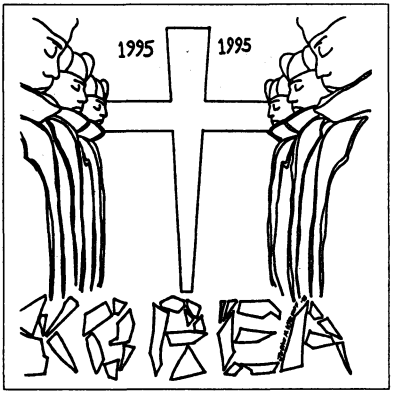
> Are [we] going to become the
> "people of the Beatitudes,"
> having no security other than Christ,
> a people poor, contemplative,
> creating peace, bearing joy
> and a liberating festival
> for [humankind],
> ready even to be persecuted
> for justice?[9]

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[9] J. L. G. Balado, *The Story of Taizé* (New York: The Seabury Press, Engl. version, 1981), 79.

Passion for Theology and Praxis of Peace in Korea

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It is a biblical imperative for Christians to "seek peace and pursue it" (Ps 34:14). The essential meaning of peace in the New Testament is to bind up the brokenness, unite separated ones, and reconcile one person to another. Jesus took this mission of peace among humanity very seriously. He went so far as to say that neighbors who continued to be hostile to one another could not expect to be reconciled to God.

> You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, "You shall not murder"; and "whoever murders shall be liable to judgment." But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, "You fool," you will be liable to the hell of fire. So when you are offering your gift to the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.
> (Mt 5:21-24)

Throughout the history of Christianity, committed Christians have striven to achieve peace and reconciliation in the world. In this tragic century with its many wars, theological giants like Karl Barth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Paul Tillich have been seriously concerned with peacemaking.

Korean Christians today are also taking their mission of peacemaking seriously, and this peace movement of Korean Christians is closely related to the national reunification movement. Thoughtful Christians

rightly believe that the reunification of Korea is the important way to avoid another war and bring lasting peace in the Korean Peninsula.

Korean Christian engagement in the reunification movement is a recent happening, beginning about 1980. Korean Christians previously supported the U.S. policy toward Korea and the presence of the U.S. soldiers in Korea, because of their fear of an invasion by North Korea.

While many countries in the Third World had formerly been colonies of European Christian nations, Korea was colonized by the imperial nation of Japan, which was strongly anti-Christian. During the Japanese colonial rule in Korea, Christianity was treated harshly and oppressively. After the attack on Pearl Harbor by the Japanese Imperial Navy, all missionaries were evacuated from Korea.

The end of the Second World War was an occasion of celebration for all Koreans, who, in expectation of independence, began to dream about political and religious freedom from Japanese rule. But the jubilation did not last long. The Korean people soon discovered that their country had been divided into two parts along the 38th parallel. The expected liberation had not truly come, and the national family remained separated. President Harry Truman summarizes the sad story of this division:

> Neither in Stalin's message to me nor in Antonov's to MacArthur nor in any other communication from the Russians was there any comment or question regarding the line of demarcation for the occupation of Korea. The 38th parallel, which was destined to loom so large in later years, was not debated over nor bargained for by either side. Of course there was no thought at the time other than to provide a convenient allocation of responsibility for the acceptance of the Japanese surrender.[1]

The division of the country soon became the center and cause of conflicts and tragedies in post-Second World War Korea. The division of the country brought about the Korean War, and ten million family members are still separated between North and South Korea.

Most Korean Christians are convinced that the continued division of Korea is not the will of God, for it perpetuates the military buildup in both sides of Korea and threatens to cause another outbreak of war. To avoid such tragedy, national reconciliation and reunification become a serious Christian concern. However, in South Korea, the most active Christian nation in Asia, it was prohibited even to discuss the issue of Korean reunification. Violators were arrested and imprisoned.

Because of this intolerable situation, some overseas Korean Christians contacted the Korean Christian Federation in North Korea and scheduled meetings about national reunification in Vienna, Austria, Helsinki, Finland, and Frankfurt, Germany. These initiatives aroused much interest among Christians everywhere about the issue of Korea's reunification.

In 1983, the National Council of Churches in Korea established the Institute of National Unification and tried to hold Conferences in May and June of that year on the issue of reunification. Both meetings were blocked by the South Korean Police. Then, from October 29 to November 2, 1984, in Tozanso, Japan, the World Council of Churches and the Christian Conference of Asia held a consultation on peace and justice in North East Asia, in which the Korean reunification issue was seriously

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[1] Harry S. Truman, *Memoirs of Harry S. Truman, Vol. 1* (Garden City: Doubleday and Co., 1955), 444-45.

Most Korean Christians are convinced that the continued division of Korea is not the will of God.

dealt with. In the meeting it was agreed among other things to "support Korean attempts to bring about peace, reconciliation and unity, including reunification of the Peninsula," and to establish a "constructive relationship with Christians and with the government" in North Korea.[2]

To implement the "Tozanso Process," two delegates from the World Council of Churches visited North Korea in November, 1985, and met with the officials of the Korean Christian Federation. Christian leaders from the south and north held an ecumenical Bible study seminar on peacemaking in Glion, Switzerland, in September, 1986, and they shared the Lord's Supper together for the first time after the country's division. In the latter part of 1986, the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. issued a policy statement asking the United States to alter its policy of confrontation and make efforts for Korea's reunification. In the following year the NCC sent delegates to visit North Korea, while the National Christian Council of Japan also sent Japanese Christian delegates to Pyongyang in that same year.

As the decade of the 1980s moved along, an increasing number of Korean Christians were stimulated by the efforts of Christians outside of Korea to bring about peace and reunification. Mrs. Dorothy L. Ogle, a Methodist missionary to Korea, correctly expressed such a Korean Christian desire in testimony to a congressional subcommittee in May of 1988:

> From the Christian church in Korea which suffered greatly during the years of the power struggle they are hearing a message of reconciliation. They are seeing a church which is examining itself and confessing the sin of having turned anti-communist ideology into a virtual idol. They are seeing a church which is beginning to think of their North Korean brothers and sisters as co-sufferers in the division, power struggle and war.
>
> They are seeing a church which through a series of consultations beginning in 1984 has been deeply involved in a movement for reunification, and has recently published a document with principles for reunification and proposals for reconciliation.[3]

In February of 1988, the National Council of Churches in Korea issued a "Declaration of the Churches of Korea on National Reunification and Peace," which declared that the year 1995, the 50th anniversary of Korea's liberation from Japanese rule and the subsequent division of the country, will be a year of Jubilee, a year for peace and reunification.

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[2] Korean Ecumenical Education Programs and Catholic Institute for International Relations, *The Reunification of Korea* (London: Third World Publications, Ltd., 1989), 41.

[3] Dorothy L. Ogle, "Testimony before the Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs: Committee on Foreign Afairs, U.S. House of Representatives on Prospects for the Reunification of Korea," May 24, 1988 (mimeograph, p. 4).

April 24-29, 1988, there was a meeting in Inchon of the International Christian Consultation on Justice and Peace in Korea under the auspices of the National Council of Churches in Korea and co-sponsored by the World Council of Churches. Over 300 church leaders from 17 countries participated in the meeting and called for the world ecumenical community to join Korean Christians in North and South for an annual common day of prayer for peaceful reunification and to prepare for the year of Jubilee in 1995.

In spite of heavy-handed government reactions, efforts by Christians to bring about the reunification of Korea continue.

In late 1988, the Suwon conference brought together South Korean Christians and Christian leaders from Europe and North America who were actively involved in the reunification movement. Important theological papers were presented in the meeting, and the need for Christian involvement in Korean reunification was seriously discussed. In conjunction with the Suwon conference, a new theological association, the "Theological Society for Korean Reunification," was organized within Korea to devote its energy to the issues of peace, reconciliation, and reunification of Korea, and to work closely with the National Council of Churches in Korea. Dr. Hong Kun Soo became its first president and the Reverend Moon Ik Hwan, the leading Christian advocate for the reunification of Korea, was selected together with Park Hyung Kyu to its advisory board.

1989 was especially eventful. In March, Rev. Moon Ik Hwan visited the capital city of North Korea. Rev. Moon met with President Kim Il Sung of North Korea and discussed reunification. To this Christian leader, the future of the Korean people depends on the national reunification of Korea. This peace mission of Rev. Moon was seen by the South Korean government as a grave violation of the security law, and Moon was arrested as security officers opened the doors of the plane and arrested the elderly pastor there. Some 11,000 police surrounded the Seoul airport at the arrival of this 71-year old pastor and prevented anyone from approaching or welcoming him, including his 95-year old mother. While he was serving a seven-year prison term his mother died on September 20, 1990.

In spite of heavy-handed government reactions, efforts by Christians to bring about the reunification of Korea continue. Christians are not afraid to witness to God's message of peace. Practically every Christian organization, including student and youth groups, women's organizations, and the like speak out in support of the peace movement and the reunification of their country.

The courage and strong determination of Korean Christians were also reflected in a Conference of Peace and Reunification sponsored by the NCC at the National 4-H Center in Chevy Chase, Maryland, April 23-24, 1989. The conference was mainly aimed to implement and support a common

day of prayer each August and the 1995 year of Jubilee for Korea. Four Christian delegates from the Korean Christian Federation in North Korea participated in the meeting. This was the first such meeting of North Korean Christians within the United States. The North Korean delegates affirmed their solidarity with Christians everywhere to implement the common day of prayer and Year of Jubilee, and to work together for God's message of peace and reunification of Korea.

The most eventful happening of 1989 was the visit of a Roman Catholic student, Im Soo Kyung, to the Thirteenth International Youth-Student Festival in Pyongyang and her return to South Korea through the cease-fire village of Panmunjom with her priest, Father Moon Kyu Hyun. Both spoke against the U.S. troops stationed in Korea and asked for their withdrawal. They stated that peaceful reunification of the country is impossible as long as U.S. soldiers armed with nuclear weapons remain in Korea. They crossed the demarcation line between North and South Korea, carrying their own prayers and the prayer of St. Francis of Assisi. It was a powerful Christian witness of peace and reconciliation to the world.

The movement among the Christians in Korea for national reunification is spreading like wildfire. No one can quench this God-given fire. Korean Christians are playing an important role in the struggle to reunite their divided country. Christians are no longer blindly supporting U.S. policy toward Korea. Rather, many see the U.S. presence in Korea as an obstacle to reunification and peace.

These changes are fortified by the change in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Many Korean Christians rightly lament that, in spite of drastic changes in Europe, the U.S. policy toward Korea has not changed. The U.S. still maintains about 40,000 soldiers in South Korea, and the prospect of the cease-fire treaty of 1953 being changed to a peace treaty seems remote. As far as Korea is concerned, the end of the cold war has meant no change in the U.S. position of maintaining Korea as a military base. National reunification is the most reliable basis for peace in Korea. It is the Korean Christian hope to achieve in the year of Jubilee in 1995, the 50th anniversary of the end of the Second World War and the division of Korea, the peace and the reunification of Korea.

This is the highest priority of the Korean Christian mission.

Remember, Repent, Renew: Kairos USA, Kairos South Africa

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In 1984-85, in the midst of a crushing State of Emergency, some 150 South African activist Christians, pastors, and theologians drafted and published the now much emulated *Kairos Document*. The actual drafting was the culmination of long years of theological struggle which came to expression in student meetings, women's groups, and in sessions of protest, prayer, and Bible study. The streams of questions and insights flowed from the grass roots experiences of ordinary South Africans and culminated in the work of the Kairos drafters. Much of it, but not all, was focused by the Institute for Contextual Theology. Though it reflected the struggle of countless unnamed Christians, the drafters signed the document, a dramatic public statement not unlike Luther's 95 theses.

The South African *Kairos Document* presupposes that the ultimate foundation of *apartheid* is theological. Even Black churches and Black Christian leaders had to shake off presup-positional shackles, a kind of theological bondage. The time had come, the long-overdue *Kairos* was upon them, almost a decade after Soweto, where South Africa's children had been gunned down in the streets by a calloused government. It was time to challenge the taken-for-granted theological underpinnings of that *apartheid* government.

The outline of the *Kairos Document* reflects the logic of this theological declaration of independence. Chapter one, "The Moment of Truth," calls for discernment: What time is it in South Africa today? The closing chapter (chap. 5) is a "Challenge to Action" now: a call for people to participate in the struggle by transforming traditional church activities, by special campaigns, by civil disobedience, and by reminding the whole nation of its moral duty to struggle for liberation and justice.

The *Kairos* drafters attack two false theological foundations of *apartheid*. In the "Critique of State Theology" (chap. 2), they challenge head-on the mischief wrought by an abstract/absolutist/non-contextual interpretation of Rom 13:1-7, "You must obey all governing authorities...." They flatly reject as an idol, the god of "law and order,"

the "god of superior weapons who conquered those who were armed with nothing but spears."[1]

They dislodge the second theological foundation of *apartheid* in chapter 2, "Critique of 'Church Theology.'" The powerful mother churches have preached a message of reconciliation to their Black daughters: the oppressed are, in the name of Christian faith, to be reconciled to their oppressors. This is unmasked as yet another co-opting of a Christian motif in the interest of *status quo* power and privilege. The drafters of the *Kairos Document* articulate what ordinary South African Christians had learned through years of agony. Reconciliation and peace are empty words, even lying words, when they are not combined with justice.

The heart of the *Kairos Document* is chapter 4, "Towards a Prophetic Theology." It is the growing edge, the only chapter substantially recast by the *Kairos* theologians for the Revised Second Edition. This second edition came out in 1986 during the ever increasing suffering of the second state of emergency. Building a new, agreed-upon theological foundation for whatever social contract and governmental structures emerge in the new South Africa will be a long, painful process. But a beginning has been made. And that beginning, for now, is called prophetic theology.

The drafters of the *Kairos Document* know that the task of prophetic theology is to read the signs of the times, to call to action, to dare to be confrontational and to be thoroughly pastoral by denouncing sin (that which causes suffering) and announcing salvation (that which brings liberation and freedom) to the people.

The revised chapter on prophetic theology turns to biblical themes which were absent, neglected or distorted in South African state theology and church theology. These are the themes of suffering and oppression, tyranny, liberation, and hope. When these themes are given their proper place, the new theological substructure for the South African nation can be laid.

Remember, repent, renew

At its 1991 churchwide assembly in Orlando, Florida, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America voted to observe the Quincentenary of Columbus' "Discovery" of America under the rubric, "Remember, Repent, Renew." A gratifying number of congregations, synods, districts, and denominational bodies across the ecumenical spectrum made similar commitments. An ecumenical group which aims at a *Kairos USA* document has also seized upon the Quincentenary occasion to ask what time it is in the U.S.A. This undertaking is intended to stand in continuity with the Kairos documents which came out of the Central America context and out of an international effort that included input from Africa, Central America, and Asia.[2]

Obviously, a Quincentenary celebration does not automatically usher in a Kairos moment. The South African *Kairos Document* grew out of long-time suffering and desperate, immediate necessity. Reading what time it is in the U.S.A. and what time it is for the Judeo-Christian community in the U.S.A. is a tricky task. The majority of mainline denominations are in financial difficulty, in the mode of retrenchment and cutback. Does that mean that the critical voice will be muffled, prophetic preaching

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[1]*Kairos*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 8.

[2]See the 1989 publication, *The Road to Damascus. Kairos*, Three Prophetic Challenges to the Church, ed. Robert McAfee Brown (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990).



postponed, in the name of institutional survival? Or will our experiences of the fragility of our institutional power recall us to our proper power and authority, the prophetic/biblical tradition?

As this piece is completed we are in the midst of a central ritual of U.S. public religion, the presidential campaign, supposedly a defining moment in our national life, a moment of truth, a Kairos. When this issue of *Currents* appears, the campaign will be over. It is theoretically possible that the campaign will have found a moment of fundamental truth. But little has happened so far to suggest that possibility.

The Census Bureau recently reported that last year 35.7 million U.S. citizens (14.2% of the population) were living in poverty, a statistic that did not include the homeless. To this point neither political party has lifted up poverty in the U.S. as anything near the heart of our national challenge.

In Denver, Chicago, Dubuque—the cities I know best—and in countless U.S. cities I learn about from television and newspapers, there are daily terrifying echoes of the L.A. riots, the eruption of hate and violence that followed the Rodney King verdict. We are an armed camp of complex, multi-racial antagonisms. We will continue to ignore U.S. racism only at our peril.

So far as I can see, confronting complex U.S. racism is not even a minor theme for either party in the campaign. On the contrary, Pat Buchanan's divisive, me-first/U.S.-for-us speech at the Republican National Convention and Pat Robertson's demagogic fund raising letter circulated throughout Iowa in opposition to the ERA amendment being voted on there, stand as sober warnings about what time it is in the U.S.A. today. Without clear repudiation from their party, these men suggested the tone of the campaign and raised the specter of the balkanization of the U.S. body politic into isolated, us/them enclaves which threaten to become warring, armed camps.

Some historians and political scientists have begun the public evaluation of the staggering S&L scandal and bail out, the Iran-Contra scandal and cover up, and the full story of U.S. interaction with Iraq before our switch to the "Desert Storm" strategy. At least in the early stages of the campaign these were non-starters, non-issues, although they touch on the fundamental question of our self-understanding as a nation.

Whatever the presidential and vice presidential candidates believed in their hearts about these issues, their crafty handlers kept them from risking substantive debate on them.

The early campaign materially contributed to the national malaise of denial. We were not challenged to speak with clarity and truth about our problems. In fact, the very way in which key issues were defined in the campaign added to the obfuscation of matters and to our psychic numbing. Both parties called us to preserve our position as the greatest military power in the world, but refused to discuss the frightening potential

for corruption and self-deception which this position carries with it. Rather the campaign concentrated on Clinton's draft status in the Viet Nam era or on the level at which we could cut back militarily and still deal with bullies like Sadam Hussein.

The legitimate issue of "family values" and public, governmental support of family structures became either a vicious slogan for bashing gays and feminists or a silly back-and-forth between the fictional Murphy Brown and an equally unreal Vice President Quayle. The so-called economic issue too often became a wooing of the frightened middle class, an understandable reflex. The disquieting facts of endemic poverty and widespread homelessness were mentioned only in passing or as an after thought. Rhetoric rather than analysis is what the electorate got.

Even well into the campaign, the role of most churches, at least as the national media reported it, had been to be silent about obfuscation, denial, and distortion. The glaring exception, of course, was the religious right which exercised its clout as never before. It is hard to know whether the neutral silence of the main line denomination was due to fatigue, resignation, or convenience.

There is a sense in which the balanced, upright, passionless middle-of-the-road analyses on the part of many church bodies or their outright silence has been enforced, not by the candidates and their power, but by the heels-dug-in refusal of the U.S. electorate to demand truth in our national debate.

Repent, remember, renew

Perhaps this is not the Kairos moment for the U.S. Given the majority tendency of our country and the religious community to be absorbed in the survival mode, and given the low-grade fever of national denial, it is undoubtedly too much to expect that the last months of 1992 and the first months of 1993 will see the public proclamation of a *Kairos USA Document* that brings about a shaking of theological foundations similar to the radical movement that the South African *Kairos Document* both focused and set in further motion.

To be sure, there are communities and congregations here and there, liminal, struggling congregations, or small groups within mega churches (the mega churches themselves are undoubtedly into the national mode of denial) who will say a prophetic word or will ask the prophetic question even if these words and questions are not heard on the national scene.

This is a clear sign of hope.

The South African *Kairos Document* was the culmination of a long, grass-roots process, not just the sudden, courageous idea of 150 Christian professionals and activists.

We may be forced to admit that this moment of the Quincentenary, these months of self-definition in the presidential campaign, did not turn out to be the occasion of our confession, the time for throwing off the presuppositional shackles of our national religion, the occasion for formulating a deeper articulation of the church's role in our national life.

Yet again, we may have reason for cautious hope.

The need for *change* in our national life is perhaps the most authentic motif of the campaign. And the call to repent stands at the heart of our worship life. Each Sunday we confess that we are by nature sinful and unclean, that we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves, that we have sinned against God by thought, word and deed.

There's a danger here of saying at the same time too much and too little. Most

often it is easier for us to confess total sinfulness in the abstract than to admit one concrete error whether personal or political.

Still the rubric is repeated Sunday after Sunday—and the opportunity for genuine repentance comes again and again. The rabbis remind us that the glory of the human being, in contrast to all of God's other creatures, is the possibility of changing our minds, of taking a new direction. The possibility of repentance is the possibility of new life. "If we confess our sins, God who is faithful and just will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

"Repent," the central verb in the church rubric for commemorating the Quincentenary, is the first verb in truth telling. The readiness to repent and the assurance of forgiveness and cleansing can give us the courage to remember the past without denial and to break through the psychic numbing which characterizes our present situation.

The moment of truth

"In a conspiracy of silence, one word of truth sounds like a rifle crack." Czeslaw Milosz, recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1980, knew this from experience both under the Nazi occupation of Poland and later when he challenged the intellectual oppression of Communism. Tyranny seeks to silence the poet and the artist because they deal in truth.

Truth telling is the vocation of the Christian community. Eberhard Jüngel, the German theologian who came to maturity in Marxist East Germany where official double talk was one method of oppression, openly acknowledges that he came to Christianity because the church was the place in his fear-ridden society where the individual could speak the truth without being penalized.[3] The church had functioned as one zone of truth where the unspoken and even the unspeakable could come to expression.

This needs to happen at all levels of the church's life if we are to make a difference on the national scene.

The Christian Century recently summarized public challenges to the Religious Right's takeover of the Republican National Convention. People for the American Way spoke out, as did the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs.[4] At the end of August, newspaper headlines informed us that 22 U.S. church leaders issued an open letter to President Bush charging him with blasphemy for the way he talked about God at the Dallas Convention.

A rifle crack?

Perhaps. But we need to be reminded that nothing of real significance will happen at the "top" of the Christian community unless it has first happened — or is simultaneously happening — at the grassroots level.

In South Africa, during the years that preceded the publication of the *Kairos Document*, the Christian community discovered its truth in worship services, clandestine meetings, prayer sessions, and Bible studies just as the U.S. civil rights movement had its birth in thousands of Black homes, clandestine meetings, churches, prayer meetings, and public rallies, before Martin Luther King came along at the Kairos moment to lead the movement that had already been formed.

It remains to be seen whether a *Kairos Document USA* will emerge from the celebration of the Quincentenary. Yet the

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[3]Quoted in Douglas John Hall's 1992 summer lectures to the ELCA Global Mission Events.

[4]*The Christian Century* 109:26 (Sept. 9-16, 1992), 802.

challenge of truth telling is always with us in the Christian community at every level of its structure... especially in our congregations.

Pastors testify that many, perhaps most, of our congregations are reluctant to relate their Christian faith to our national life in general or to the disappointing presidential campaign in particular. Every prejudice and structure of denial lurking in the corporate personality of the U.S.A. finds expression in our congregations, but it is also true that every impulse to tell and name the truth is there as well. Truth that sounds like a rifle crack in a conspiracy of silence does not need to be loud or the voice of the majority, but it must be said with clarity and courage.

Truth that sounds like a rifle crack in a conspiracy of silence does not need to be loud, but it must be said with clarity and courage.

It will take courage to question the assumption by both national parties that we, the U.S.A., must be number one, militarily, economically, politically. Christians know that this need to be number one is, in fact, the corruption of power eating away at our national soul. We have not yet found our voice to say this. We need to keep looking for ways to make this truth heard.

In our Lutheran fellowship there are Hispanic, Asian, Black, and Native American congregations who know the bitter truth of our past history and our present situation. Their persistent truth-telling is becoming ever more difficult to ignore. The Quincentenary should make it impossible for us to continue to suppress the memory of genocide in our national history.

Congregations in shrinking rural and small town communities live and know the truth of the central Americanization of the great American heartland. More and more land slips out of the hands of the small, grassroots people into the "holdings" of large corporations. That truth, too, will have to be heard.

There are hopeful signs; there are discouraging signs. There are rifle cracks sounding here and there. Will the speakers of truth find a common voice, a way of speaking together? And is there any chance the Christian community or the nation will hear?

A Kairos is a moment of grace and judgment which can not be programmed or manipulated. Again, is this the time? Will we seize the moment that makes all the difference? Will a new, more critical and prophetic theological underpinning of U.S. public religion begin to emerge? Or will we miss this moment of opportunity?

Or is this the moment *before* the moment of truth, where the best we can hope for is grassroots truth telling here and there on public policy, the common good, and the general welfare? Is it the time to work in prayer meetings, church services, public rallies, and clandestine meetings so that genuine prophetic insights, questions, and impulses can stream together in the hope that, sometime soon an authentic U.S. moment of truth arrives and a *Kairos Document USA* articulates for us a new direction?

Preaching that Drives People from the Church

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Dream with me for a moment. Dream with me of a city, a great and marvellous city as only exists in dreams. Picture it bisected by a shining river like a shimmering chain bearing some rare and precious gem. See that gem itself set in a mounting of verdant hills and fertile plains. Consider the facets of that gem from every angle, a place glittering with arts, education, commerce. And among these facets, do not neglect the religious life, for there is place given here for true faithfulness. So at the very center of this shining jewel, this dream-city, imagine an immense sanctuary which is at every festival filled to overflowing. The dignity of this church is reflected in the character of its preacher: passionate, holy, beloved, one whose words are at once tender and insightful, humble and honest. And when you have dreamed this dream and pictured such a place, even then your dream will not have matched the grandeur of one city as it actually was long ago. That city was Antioch of Syria at the end of the fourth century, its church was the great octagon cathedral built by Constantine, and its preacher was John Chrysostom.

For a dozen years, Chrysostom preached every Sunday, twice a week during certain seasons, and daily during Lent. By all accounts, he was wildly successful. So crowded was the church and so enraptured were the hearers by his words that warnings were issued concerning the threat of pickpockets. The sermons which survive this period are indeed marvels of eloquence. At every turn one finds the well-crafted phrase, the enlightening analogy, the patient instruction and the passionate exhortation which characterize one of the church's greatest homilists.

One finds something else, however, something quite curious, which is hardly found in other sermons of the period: the mention of applause. Repeatedly, the scribes who recorded the sermons took great pains to recount how Chrysostom was interrupted by applause and wild cheering, sometimes as much as three times in the same homily. To be sure, the scribes were

offering "external evidence" that the preacher was just as good as his reputation allowed. But the main reason for noting the applause was to give a backdrop for recording Chrysostom's reaction to it, and his reaction was not a happy one.

Chrysostom was deeply suspicious of such public outbursts. Was not this behavior suited for the circus and the theater, not the house where the solemn mysteries of Christ were revealed? But there was more at stake here than mere decorum. Toward the end of a sermon on the closing verses of the eighth chapter of Romans, he urged his hearers to serve Christ by serving the hungry, the sick, the imprisoned in their midst, and the beauty of his words inflamed the crowd to interrupt, once again, with loud acclamation. Annoyed by the outburst, Chrysostom fired back,

> What is the good of these applauses and clamors? I demand one thing only of you, and that is the display of them in real action, the obedience of deeds. This is my praise, this your gain, this gives me more luster than a diadem. When you have left the Church then, this is the crown that you should make for me and for you, through the hand of the poor.[1]

The message is clear: preaching is honored not through applause, but through action; the gospel is served not by remaining within the church, but by leaving it.

In this essay, I want us to dream together of such proclamation, of preaching as Chrysostom imagined it. And if this dream must have a name, let us call it: Preaching that drives people from the church.

"Driving people from the church"—we already know the nightmare side of that vision. We need not detail those familiar times when our patience is strained to the limit by some sorry homiletic performance. We will not enhance the quality of *our* sermons by dwelling on the obvious flaws of those that are bad. About those preachers who, through carelessness or callousness, manage uniformly to annoy, degrade, or bore their listeners, let us say nothing more, except this: *no one sets out to preach this way!* Only a fool intends to so alienate listeners that they leave and never return. Our tendency is, in fact, just the opposite: to so please and delight our hearers that they will love the church, love our preaching, and love *us*. And therein rests the real danger.

Chrysostom's concern was with the evils implicit in good preaching that keeps 'em coming back for more. Such sermons not only corrupted the hearer, Chrysostom said, but especially endangered the preacher, who out of vanity pandered to the crowd at the expense of the message. And how subtly this danger also creeps up on us! As the pressures of parish life mount and the "urgent" supplants what is genuinely important, we say, "Well, it won't hurt if just *this* week I don't spend quite as much time on sermon preparation." And lo and behold, we are absolutely right! They love us anyway! "Good sermon," they continue to chime at the door. Week by week we learn to get by with less and less text study, prayer, and reflection. And everything works out fine so long as we just use lots of inflection, include touching illustrations, reinforce the dominant values, and wink, "Isn't that right, Agnes?" to the congregational president. "Just such is our case," said Chrysostom sixteen centuries ago, "when we make it our aim to be admired, not to instruct; to delight, not prick to the heart; to be applauded and depart with praise, not to correct human manners."[2]

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[1] *Homilies on Romans,* 15.

[2] *Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles,* 30.

And what is the point of such preaching, beyond ego gratification? I suppose we want to fill our pews and attain a critical mass of hearers who will be active, happy, and involved with life *inside* the church. We want to reinforce brand loyalty, fostering a commitment to church programs, church committees, church budgets, church events. Preaching with this end in mind is based upon a strategy of containment, trying to bring people in through the sermon and hold them there, like fireflies trapped in a mayonnaise jar, that we may bask in the light they cast upon us. But you know why fireflies flicker as they do, don't you? It's because of sex! It's so they can find one another in the dark and reproduce their kind, that they might finally be scattered like myriad jewels in the coolness of a midsummer evening. It is my plea that our preaching should have a similar aim: not sex, but *taking the lid off the jar*, driving people from the church that they may share the gospel with others.

Such preaching envisions the church as existing for the world, not simply for itself. After all, the Great Commission says, "Go and make disciples of all *nations*," not "Go and make disciples of all *believers*." Behind this is the assumption that the gospel is not derivable from the culture. It is an alien word which must first be proclaimed in order that it can be heard and believed. In other words, there is something inherently outward-directed in the gospel *and* how it is preached. It is to that "centrifugal" message I wish now to turn.

Over thirty years have passed since the Oxford philosopher, John L. Austin, inaugurated what has come to be known as speech-act theory.[3] Austin was concerned that philosophy in his day had reduced the idea of language to descriptions and reports, statements that mean exactly what they say and refer to something outside of themselves for their validity. For example, if I say "Your hair is blonde," I am describing something we can verify by looking at the color of your hair. Surely our everyday language is more interesting than this.

Austin found the richness and variety of language manifested in another class of statements which he called "performatives," sentences that don't simply state facts but actually *do* something. One group of these he called "illocutionary." These utterances accomplish something in and through the very act of speaking. Examples include promises, bets, verdicts, and Austin's personal favorite, wedding vows. When I promise, for example, to do something for you, the validity of that promise is found in the very saying of it; a promise is something you *do* with words. Of course, you may not believe that I will carry through on my promise, but it still remains a promise, though a dubious one. This leads to a second group of performatives which Austin called "perlocutionary." Here, the emphasis is not on what the words do in and of themselves, but on the potential effect of so speaking. Some statements, such as warnings, invitations, and insults, intend an impact upon the hearer which may or may not come to pass. If I try to make fun of you, then the perlocutionary impact of my words is to produce shame and embarrassment, although they may also bring anger.

It's not too hard to see that Austin's work provided new insights for biblical studies. After all, the scriptures include vastly more than mere descriptions or reports. "Let there be light" and "Ephphatha!" are two fairly explicit illocutions, as is the

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[3] John L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962).

whole range of covenantal language which, by its blessing and cursing, does what it says and binds two parties together. Perlocutions are also fairly easy to find. "Follow me," "Honor your father and your mother," and other such exhortations seek to produce the outcome to which they point. That Scripture is replete with such active language is perhaps best summarized in Jesus' one-sentence Nazareth sermon on Isaiah 61: "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." The illocutionary force of that sermon is that the good news, release, sight, and liberty prophesied in Isaiah, have happened in the very saying of the words. The perlocutionary force is there as well, in the doubts of Jesus' hearers concerning his origins and their ultimate efforts to throw him off a cliff.

Now, this kind of language is not especially foreign to the pastoral office. After all, we dare to say things like, "Your sins are forgiven" in absolution, or "The body of Christ, given for you" in distribution, fully believing that such a gracious reality is manifest in and through the words that announce it. Is preaching the gospel all that different? Maybe it is, but only through a loss of nerve on our part, a lack of confidence that declaring God's persistent and relentless love for us in Jesus Christ bears the reality it asserts. At this point we turn to gimmicks and tricks, fearing that something "more" is needed to bring this gospel to pass. But I want to claim that to tell the gospel *is* to do it, and to hear such good news *is* to have it made active in one's life.

If the message of the gospel has such illocutionary force, it is also marked by a perlocutionary impact. In doing what it says, it leads to an outcome. When the gospel enacts peace, healing, freedom, hope, then its hearers are already being carried out toward homes, neighborhoods, and communities, local or global, where such realities will attain their fullest form. The gospel itself, then, has a kind of centrifugal direction to it. And if the gospel has this kind of dynamic trajectory, it provides the grounds for the kind of preaching I am advocating here, one that drives people from the church.

> The gospel itself has a kind of centrifugal direction to it.

The shrewd reader will realize that I am basing the shape of the preached message upon that of the scriptural message. At that point, one might well object that the Bible contains many other utterances than the kind of performative ones I have named. And this is true. Covenants, commands, threats, promises, and all the rest are themselves embedded in a web of narrative material which, while entertaining or enlightening, doesn't really seem to *do* anything in the very saying of it.

Or does it? It might be a bit hasty to assume that the narrative framework of Scripture is a kind of documentary of biblical times into which are set clever sayings and amazing events. Such wooden and flat-footed storytelling would be profoundly dull, like the insufferable bore who doesn't see that the set-up for a joke must be at least as interesting as its punch-line if anyone is going to laugh. But good narrative relates something of special relevance to its hearers which exceeds a mere recitation of the mundane. It comes from a certain point-of-view and intends a particular outcome that will matter to someone. This is what Mary Louise Pratt has referred to as the inherent

"tellability" of narrative, the way in which it conveys something unusual, unexpected, maybe even problematic which arrests our attention and insists upon being heard.[4]

This is the very quality we find in the narratives of so much of Scripture, from the tales of Abraham and Sarah to those of Mary and Joseph, and beyond. These stories are compelling because they deal with things of substance, and what is more, they treat them in an unexpected way. If these narratives only conveyed to us a world we could already know on our own without the telling of it, they would be trite and useless. But implicit in Scripture is an unfamiliar version of reality, a different way of telling the human story that invites us into its possibilities and promises. In this regard, scriptural narrative is infused with illocutionary force: it *does* something to us by drawing us into its flow and its vision.

Of course, not all of Scripture is so open and accessible. We are well aware of the texts whose meaning is anything but clear and inviting, whose purpose seems hidden or even offensive. Many prophecies challenge our assumptions; apocalyptic seems to conceal as much as it reveals; and the cross itself may become a barrier to understanding. But my point again is that such concealment or offense is what these texts *do* to the hearer; to obscure or to alienate *is* their illocutionary force.

Jesus himself seemed to express this in Matthew 13, when he acknowledged that his parables were opaque to certain of his hearers, "because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand." This is a perfect example of what the German literary critic Wolfgang Iser refers to as "negativity": the barriers erected in a story which call the familiar world into question. So radical is their challenge that our old ways of thinking must come to an end, requiring a new perspective from which our world can be understood and transformed.[5] Jesus' parables in Matthew 13 are "negative" in this sense. They present God's realm as one of unexpected decisions, unforeseen growth, and undeserved rewards—a world radically different from our own. Preaching which domesticates these parables to make them utterly transparent corrupts their power to confront us and undermines their ability to *do* something.

My purpose in talking about narratives, whether they are open or closed, inviting or offensive, is not simply that they have illocutionary force, that they *do* something to the hearer, but also that they have an intended outcome as well, a perlocutionary impact. For whether a story has drawn you into a different world or rudely challenged your own, either way you have been uprooted. Just there such stories leave us: suspended, unresolved, dissatisfied. Given a new perspective, we are also given a new task: to finish the story. This is, I think, why Mark 16 ends as it does at verse 8, with the women fleeing the empty tomb in fear and silence. It is an offensive ending, and the hearer wonders, "How can *I* bring this to some satisfactory resolution?" This same dynamic is also behind the final verse of John's Gospel, when the evangelist suggests that there are many other stories about Jesus which could be written. And again, the hearer asks, "What would *mine* be?"

This is the activity Scripture performs on its hearers: first, to de-center us, and then, to have us complete its story in our

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[4] Mary Louise Pratt, *Toward a Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1977), 136.

[5] Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 225-31.

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lives. This is the biblical trajectory, and preaching based upon such a message follows the same trajectory. Its centrifugal direction is to drive people from the church and into the world, there to complete the story in the lives of those who hear it.

Up to this point, I have been describing how the message of preaching and of Scripture itself tries to engage its hearers, to grasp them and bear them outward. This means that our attention always turns from the "what" of the proclamation to the "to whom." This is not an optional matter. Sermons, like animals in pet store windows, depend upon human intervention in order to be delivered from the shame of being treated like commercial products. They cry out, "Take me home—give me a place to live!" and unless the message becomes embedded in the lives of the hearers, it will never leave the four walls of the church. The issue is: what enables hearers to be carried away by what they hear?

Most of us are somewhat familiar with the rich heritage of Black preaching in America, and one of the benefits of my having lived in Atlanta was to hear many fine practitioners of that tradition. As you well know, Black preachers are not half-hearted about their task. They are fully immersed in their message, and they bring the assembly along for the swim. Go to Antioch Baptist North, Big Bethel A.M.E. Zion, or any of a score of other Atlanta churches, and the vocal responses, the bodily movements, the whole tension of the place resonates with the sense that preacher and message and hearers are one. Now, it would be foolish and impossible for someone like me, whose very being is characterized by a kind of boundless restraint, to try to imitate such preaching. But whenever I've attended such churches, I find myself wondering: How do they do it? How do they build such solidarity?

My tentative conclusion is a musical one. Black preachers are masters at knowing the "songs" of their listeners. Their preaching matches the tempo of the assembly and is pitched in the same key. The hearers are easily able to incorporate into their pre-existing repertoire the new melody the preacher is singing to them. Such a feat means hard work for the preacher. It requires knowing in advance the themes and variations in the lives of one's hearers, and then, just as important, not being tone-deaf to them in the proclamation.

This is what Elizabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza means when she says that preaching must attend to the experience of the *hearers*—a seemingly obvious point that is, nonetheless, generally ignored.[6] How easy it is for us to preach out of our own experience, imagining that it is everyone's instead

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[6] Elizabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, "Response [to "From Study to Proclamation" by Walter J. Burghardt, S.J.]," in *A New Look at Preaching*, ed. John Burke, O.P., Good News Studies 7 (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1983), 44-49.

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of the socially-located, historically-situated, caste-bound one that it really is. When we universalize our experience as if it were the key signature of all our hearers, we deny both the limitations of our voice and the repertoire of our hearers. *And we need those hearers!* If the message we sing is ever to leave the confines of the church, it must be borne through the lives and voices of those who hear it, who may sing it quite differently than we would, but in ways perhaps more appropriate to the world than we might ever imagine.

Make no mistake about the ability of our hearers to detect whether we know their songs. In a thousand subtle ways we telegraph to them our respect of their experiences or lack thereof. Forty years ago, Walker Gibson, speaking of literature, made the distinction between the "real reader" of a text, the flesh-and-blood person holding onto the book, and the "mock reader," the one imagined by the author and signalled by various devices in the prose. We find this all the time in, say, movie reviews. Through tone of voice and vocabulary and inside jokes, the reviewer tries to build an alliance with the mock reader that whispers, "You and I both know what trash 'Batman Returns' really is and how we'd much rather be at a Fassbinder film festival." Gibson remarked that what makes such writing good or bad in the mind of the real reader is whether or not that person wants to become the mock reader addressed by the author, to put on that mask and play that role. In the case of the movie review, it is the difference between liking the review because you aspire to be the kind of person who could enjoy films by Fassbinder (whether or not you really do), or hating it because it seems aimed a bunch of high-brow artsy snobs.[7]

Our preaching is not immune from these issues. Our "real hearers," the flesh-and-blood folks in the pew, are quite adept at discerning who our "mock hearers" are, and whether or not they want to play that role. We have all heard well-meaning preachers who seem addicted to using illustrations in which, with apologies to Garrison Keillor, all the women are ditzy, all the men are heroes, and all the children are just props, every last one of 'em. Parishioners are not stupid about the subtext of such entertainment. And after most of the women and children (and, I suspect, some of the men) have left or tuned out, who will remain? Obviously, those who *like* the "mock hearer" portrayed, who want to play that role and adopt its values, and never leave a safe church that so reinforces them.

Let us be clear about it: to project our hearers in such a way is a political act. We are deciding to form a certain kind of community, a fellowship of the like-minded committed to the gospel of the status quo, motionless and inert. But the message we are called to preach has, as I have suggested, a centrifugal trajectory that resists such totalizing closure. Just as the canon remembers a variety of stories concerning the faith, our preaching is to be sensitive to the

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[7] Walker Gibson, "Authors, Speakers, Readers, and Mock Readers," *College English* 11 (February 1950):265-69.

variety of hearers who will complete those stories, each in their own way. Hearers discover in such preaching the many different roles of discipleship open to them and which of these they are able, through Christ, to adopt.

Preaching that so attends to its hearers is rooted in a particular kind of anthropology: a *rhetorical* anthropology. Rhetoric claims that people can be persuaded by words. This assumes, in turn, that what is central to human psychology is not cool, rational intellect, but the affections, the emotive aspect which words can move and transform. Luther, who himself received an extensive humanist training in rhetoric,[8] agreed that we are, at heart, hearers and bearers of words. This is true not simply because human life is swimming in a sea of language, but also because such life is called into being by a divine word.

But in accepting much of rhetorical anthropology, Luther gave it a unique twist through his doctrine of sin. If the core of our being is emotive, it is a core prone to utter corruption. In fact, our corrupt emotions cannot even see themselves as such, let alone free themselves from that tendency. What is required to move us out of this state is something from outside ourselves, a word that can reach into that corrupt core to move and transform it. That word, for Luther, was the gospel.

As preachers in Luther's tradition, these thoughts have profound implications for how we understand our hearers. Those who gather each Sunday are not rocks or boards or dense lumps of protoplasm. They are, by nature, *moveable*. What is more, they are moveable by *words*, subject to persuasion for good or for ill. The question for us becomes: which way are they going, and what word will make a difference? My contention is that proclaiming God's diverse gospel not only respects the diversity of our hearers, but also is able to set them free, get them in motion again, affect their trajectory, and drive them from the church in hope.

By introducing the topic of rhetoric, I am of course thinking about more than just our message or our hearers. I am also pointing to the role of the speaker.

Ancient handbooks on classical rhetoric recognized that different occasions implied different persuasive aims and therefore different types of speech. One of these types of speech was called "epideictic." The purpose of such rhetoric was to praise some person or event or, in other cases, to offer critique and blame.[9] Examples included speeches at festivals, imperial birthdays, commemorations, and the like. Early generations of Christian theologians, themselves trained in rhetoric, immediately recognized that sermons belonged to this epideictic genre.

Epideictic rhetoric has a strongly political and moral cast to it. While it doesn't attempt directly to change society, it moves more subtly to influence the virtues of its hearers. Epideictic always starts from the position that the speaker and hearers share certain basic values, and then it builds from there by lauding one figure or castigating another, until there is a unified and strengthened adherence to a particular moral outlook.[10] If I want to reinforce the virtue of selfless service, I could invoke the memory

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[8] Helmar Junghans, *Der junge Luther und die Humanisten* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1985). Cf. also Ulrich Nembach, *Predigt des Evangeliums: Luther als Prediger, Pädagoge, und Rhetor* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1972).

[9] Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1.3-14.

[10] Ch. Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumenta-*

of a beloved figure who sacrificed everything for others, while scoffing at a notoriously greedy character who brought us to the edge of ruin. The basic value is made concrete, the hearers desire to share it, and my purpose is achieved. The links to Christian homiletics—and potential risks—are fairly obvious.

What is important for our purposes here is that epideictic rhetoric places special demands upon the speaker. The basic strategy of epideictic is one of *imitation*. The hearers are to imitate the figures or events extolled through the message. But what is more, they will only do so if they sense some congruity between that message and the speaker. In a significant way, the speaker, too, becomes an object of imitation, one who bears the very values being proclaimed.[11] This is why, five times over in the undisputed Pauline corpus, we hear St. Paul boldly declare, "Become imitators of me." It's not so much that Paul was arrogant (though he may well have been) as that he recognized the epideictic nature of his message, and that his own ministry must point to the cross as surely as did his words.

What's all this got to do with preaching that drives people from the church? Just this: our hearers simply will not go where our message leads if we aren't willing to go there ourselves. What can it mean to our parishioners when we claim the centrifugal direction of the gospel, only to remain behind at the doors of the church waving, "Have a nice trip! Be careful out there!" I guarantee you, they will grasp that message and draw the appropriate conclusions. "Faith in the world is impossible," they will think, "Abandon hope, all ye who venture forth."

I do not wish to lay further burdens upon an already overburdened job. I, too, would resist the tendency of some to lay the responsibility for every ecclesial task at the feet of the clergy. I am not suggesting that

Our hearers simply will not go where our message leads if we aren't willing to go there ourselves.

we need to be models of perfection for our members—although a little virtue now and again wouldn't hurt. The issue for me is not that we try to do the impossible, but to show what is *doable*—that the faith *can* be lived in and for the world, that the gospel *can* be proclaimed in simple words and humble deeds. It is neither beyond the reach of our hearers, nor of us.

When I lived in Alaska, I sometimes traveled by small plane between remote Lutheran parishes on the Seward Peninsula. One winter as I flew between Teller and Brevig Mission, I looked down and saw the path made in the snow by dog sleds and snow machines travelling the ten miles between the two villages. And next to that path, I could see, evenly-spaced at intervals of thirty feet, six-foot long branches pounded into the ice. On a crystal clear day flying at five hundred feet, it all seemed kind of silly: why mark a trail that was so easy to spot?

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tion, trans. John Wilkinson and Purcell Weaver (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969), 50.

[11] Benjamin Fiore, *The Function of Personal Example in the Socratic and Pastoral Epistles*, Analecta Biblica 105 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1986), 34-39.

But of course, it's an entirely different story when you're on the ground and it's 35 below with whiteout conditions. Then those sticks are a matter of life and death. They provide a message of reassurance: "You are not lost—someone has come this way before you, the way is passable, and your destination is just ahead."

It seems to me that the role we have as speakers is just this straightforward and unmysterious. It is to declare through our ordinary lives that the faith is doable and the gospel can make a difference in the world, not simply in the church. And we are not the first to be given such an opportunity. Ancient hagiographies and martyrologies presented the lives of saints and martyrs as ones to be followed, not because they were people who were bigger-than-life, but precisely because they were ordinary folks whom God had made extraordinary. Did not our own models, our grandparents and parents and teachers and, yes, even pastors, offer a similar image for us? As speakers who bear God's word of mercy and grace, we must be borne away by the same centrifugal message we announce to our hearers. And who knows—as we, too, are driven from the church, we may well find our hearers out there already, far ahead of us and waiting for us to catch up.

Together in these pages, we have indulged in a little dream about preaching. It is a preaching attuned to its *message*: surprising us with something new we would not otherwise hear, knocking us off balance, propelling us into the world. It is a preaching attuned to its *hearers*: people who bear stories of their own but who are willing to be moved by a new story and complete it in their own lives. And, it is a preaching attuned to its *speakers*: those who believe that the efficacy of the gospel applies not only to the gathered, but also to themselves. Perhaps this dream has some reality to it. Maybe by attending to our message and our hearers and even ourselves, we will actually manage to drive people from the church. But then, I fear, something yet more strange may happen—*they'll be back*. Worse still, they may even *like* the preaching, answering our words with admiration and acclamation and, God forbid, even applause. I suppose there could be a worse fate.

Even old Chrysostom, with whom we began this dream long ago, had to admit that his pride swelled along with the size of the crowds. In a homily quite fittingly on the first verse of John's Gospel, he seemed downright benevolent toward those who came to hear him.

> For your manner of running together, for your attentive postures, for the shoving of one another in your eagerness to get the inner places where my voice may more clearly be heard by you, for your unwillingness to retire from the press until this spiritual assembly be dissolved, for the clapping of hands, for the murmurs of applause; in a word, for all things of this kind which may be considered proofs of the fervor of your souls and of your desire to hear—on this point, it is superfluous to exhort you.

But that was not enough for Chrysostom. He concludes:

> One thing, however, it is necessary for us to bid and entreat, that you continue to have the same zeal and manifest it not here only, but also when you are at home. Converse husband with wife, parent with child concerning these matters. Speak first of your own thoughts, and then ask for those of others, and in this way, all of you shall contribute to this excellent feast.[12]

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[12] *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, 3.

We are Human by Grace

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I will never forget the shock I experienced several years ago when, as a young student doing research, I ran across a journal article concerning book illustrations as propaganda. One example shown in the article was a book jacket dating from the turn of the century. It depicted the face of an African-American and below it the title in bold print: **Negro—Man or Beast?**

My incredulous response was: how could this possibly be a question in anyone's mind? But evidently it could be, and evidently the book's author and illustrator had very different assumptions about the nature of humanity than I had.

What does it mean to be human? This is not a peripheral matter for theology; without some understanding of what is meant by humanity there can be no affirmation of human salvation, which is at the heart of all Christian doctrines. But this question of what it means to be human has become increasingly complicated over the centuries for the Christian theological tradition. There are of course several facets to the question—political, philosophical, cultural, psychological, medical—each problematic in its own way. But behind all these facets is a core theological issue, which will be explored here. That issue is how God's promise of salvation changes the whole framework in which we relate to others so that it becomes one of grace rather than of judgment.

How did the question of what it means to be human become more complicated? For one thing, the political aspect of this question underwent a major shift after the time of the Reformation in Europe, when the absolute authority of church and state

over the majority of Christians was broken. This shift had grave repercussions for the theological as well as the general intellectual tradition. During the Enlightenment which followed, individual autonomy began to take precedence as a fundamental human value, and the philosophical thought of Western intellectuals began to be divested of theological underpinnings. Descartes' famous dictum, "I think therefore I am," signaled the turn in this direction. Even though he himself was intent on demonstrating the necessity of God for the human thinker to be certain of his own thought,[1] the trend was started toward using human conceptual logic as the proving ground for the authority of philosophical statements about God.

The succeeding line of Western philosophers and intellectuals, including Hegel, Feuerbach, Marx, and Freud, increasingly relied on the concept of history, exploring its psychological, sociological, and economic elements, to formulate statements about God consistent with the human experience of self-transcendence. In doing away with the dichotomy of spiritual and material for discerning what is peculiarly human, they posed multiple challenges to the theological tradition that had drawn its authority from the presupposition of divine absolute power in contrast to worldly finitude. Participation in a spiritual realm could no longer be used as the criterion for establishing the uniqueness of humanity.

Added to this challenge was the rise of modern science and its pursuit of empirical evidence to verify what counts as truth. No longer able to argue on the basis of divine authority, theologians were confronted with the reality that scientific and religious epistemological frameworks must be correlated in new ways. The breakdown of a generally agreed upon basis of authority greatly complicated not only the political but also the philosophical and scientific facets of the question of what it means to be human.

This breakdown in homogeneity came about within just one cultural milieu, but at the same time the cultural facet of what it means to be human was becoming mottled. While post-Reformation intellectuals were busy facing the challenges posed by more and more autonomous thinking about humanity, explorers and settlers who traveled from their European homeland to the Western hemisphere, Africa, and Asia were confronted with some very different challenges by residents of other cultural environments. Clashes between the various civilizations' understandings of humanity were intricately involved in the events that brought European physical conquest, cultural conquest, or co-existence in an uneasy tension to other parts of the world. The conquerors tended to consider persons of other cultures as less than human; and often they were in turn considered to be more than human, at least on their first appearance. Ironically, it was through such conquest or co-existence, with the accompanying distorted perceptions of one's own humanity in relation to others, that Christian missions endeavored to reach the far corners of the world. The issue of what it means to be human was intensified in the meeting of cultures.

Now where has this history of increasing complication led us who are concerned about working within the framework of the Christian theological tradition? The European stress on individualism and empirical truth has proved inadequate; intellectual

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[1]A detailed analysis of this change and its consequences for theology is given in Eberhard Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World: On the Foundation of the Theology of the Crucified One in the Dispute between Theism and Atheism*, trans. Darrell L. Guder (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 112-14.

An intrinsic part of the revelation of who God is consists of understanding the humanity to whom God relates and into which God indeed has entered.

achievements in exploring the dimensions of humanity have never been able to resolve interracial and intercultural ethical questions. But in the present century, there has been growing appreciation of the wide variety of world cultures and their particular contributions and an acknowledgment that this diversity is in itself characteristic of humanity. In addition, our advances in scientific and medical technology have raised questions about life and death for whole civilizations as well as individuals. All of this has made anthropology one of the most pressing issues for reflection on Christian doctrine as a whole.[2]

Taking into consideration the complexity of the basic question of what it means to be human is especially important for any theologian, pastor, or preacher who is serious about speaking the gospel within our contemporary multicultural world. The reason for this should be clear: the gospel consists of the biblical witness to God who elected to be in covenant relation with human beings and who became incarnate as a human being in the person of Jesus Christ. Therefore an intrinsic part of the revelation of who God is consists of understanding the humanity to whom God relates and into which God indeed has entered.

Is it possible, with all the unresolved and unresolvable political, philosophical, scientific, and cultural differences in understanding humanity, to arrive at a definition of what it means to be human? Or is a uniform definition of humanity necessary for acknowledging the God who is revealed to be in relation to humanity? One of the problems in formulating an anthropology, theological or otherwise, is that humans constitute both the object and the subject of the study, and they bring with them some evaluative judgments or norms from their own cultural and historical experience; thus anthropology tends to be a judgment about as well as a description of humans as a certain class of beings.[3]

Among the current Christian theological attempts to formulate a definition of humanity, there is a tendency to start from the axiom that humans have an intrinsic capacity for religious experience. Some anthropologies use a phenomenological approach derived from Friedrich Schleiermacher's attempt to speak to an audience of Enlightenment types who were skeptical of religious authority. Such theological anthropologies go behind empirical evidence of religious rituals, practices, and

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[2]"There is today both among the religious and the irreligious an overwhelming interest in humanity, its nature, its future, and its destiny, and there is a disposition to turn away from problems that do not appear to be related to the human condition." John Macquarrie, *Twentieth Century Theology: The Frontiers of Philosophy and Theology, 1900-1980* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1981), 410.

[3]John Macquarrie, *In Search of Humanity: A Theological and Philosophical Approach* (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 1-4.

values that appear to be universally present among human cultures to investigate the essence of religious experience contained in the basic structure of human consciousness; Rudolf Otto's *The Idea of the Holy* is a well-known example of this approach.

A phenomenological basis for the question of what is human poses a problem, however. The idea of a universal religious tendency that is outwardly manifested in different religions is itself a product of the European theological and philosophical tradition, which is limited to a particular cultural/historical perspective about the nature of humanity. Nevertheless, the capacity for religious experience as the defining structural element of humanity is not wholly discounted by acknowledging this limitation, and the idea of a human capacity to receive revelation is involved even in theological perspectives stressing that knowledge of God comes only through God-given revelation. Karl Barth and Emil Brunner once engaged in an earnest debate about just this capacity as the grounding for theology.[4]

Christian theologians have traditionally tended to make a distinction in some way between humanity, as the image of God, and the rest of creation. In the earlier tradition, this distinction centered in the rational capacity of humans; it reflected the influence of the Greek view of body, soul, and spirit as distinct levels in the hierarchical structure of the cosmos. After modern science disintegrated the dualistic concept of body and mind inherent in this structure, the search for human demarcation turned to the biological characteristics through which humans show their capacity for progress; humanity was then defined in reference to its still-to-be-evolved future identity. But in either case, theologians defined what is human by assuming that there is a boundary between human and not human, and that this boundary is indicative of a special sort of relationship with God—the relationship involved in redemption.

A theological argument for human uniqueness can also be made in a fundamental way by pointing to the human potential for self-transcendence. Wolfhart Pannenberg builds this type of argument in an apologetic mode, using the scientific concept of human exocentricity, i.e. the innate tendency of humans to relate to what is external to their momentary existence. This universal tendency of humans bespeaks their uniqueness within the cosmos in a relational sense:

> When human beings reach out to a very general horizon embracing all the individual objects of actual or possible perception, they are relating themselves exocentrically to a *reality* prior to them; in this reaching out they are therefore implicitly affirming at the same time the divine reality, even though they have not yet grasped this thematically as such, much less in this or that particular form.[5]

Karl Rahner builds his argument from a dogmatic stance, taking the incarnation as his grounding. The essence of human nature is its indefinability; being human means giving oneself up to be grasped by the mystery which is the fulfillment of our being but which, even in its promised fulfillment, remains incomprehensible. This description of human nature allows him to affirm the self-emptying of God in the in-

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[4]*Natural Theology, Comprising "Nature and Grace" by Professor Dr. Emil Brunner and the Reply "No!" by Dr. Karl Barth*, trans. Peter Fraenkel (London: Geoffrey Bles: The Centenary Press, 1946).

[5]Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), 65.

carnation as the actualization of human reality. Human nature is mystery not just in its being open to God but in the fact of God's self-proclamation as love in the Word that became flesh. "It is all one: the self-utterance of God's Word and its acceptance."[6] Hence anthropology is in effect christology; and although according to Rahner's insistence that the mystery precludes drawing boundaries, there is an equally strong insistence on the uniqueness of human nature in the fact that God posed this particular finite reality as God's own.

In either case, as different as the arguments of Pannenberg and Rahner are, their descriptions of human self-transcendence indicate some kind of God-given potential for humans to be in relationship with God. Thus they concur that humans are created to be relational beings. Their affirmation of the relational nature of humanity can help in overcoming the inherent distortion caused by any tendency to strive for a definition of humanity by establishing boundaries that are derived from only one particular political, cultural or scientific perspective.

If human beings are by nature relational and individuals are selves only in relation to others, then humanity cannot be defined by any normative characteristics that would preclude some of the relationships through which humans are who they are. Use of language, cognitive capacity, physical particularities, action involving values (or any other kind of action) may be descriptive of some or even most human beings, but since these are characteristics that have many levels or manifestations, they cannot be universally definitive in themselves. Any attempt by individuals to utilize these characteristics as norms is always historically conditioned and so cannot be universally applicable.

Humanity can only be defined according to its boundaries—in reference to what it is not. What is characteristic only of some, or even the majority of, human beings cannot therefore be definitive, although it may be utilized in exploring the dimensions of humanity. No final or absolute statement can be made about the uniqueness of humanity in a general sense. But that does not mean that we should give up in trying to perceive what is human or that we should simply discount whatever beings do not seem to fit the characteristics possessed by the majority or by the group with which we most closely identify. Precisely in the impossibility of fitting human identity into neat categories there is the God-given possibility of a more promising approach to the question of what is human. It is this God-given possibility that will be outlined here as the theological framework for an anthropology of grace.

Since humanity always consists of individuals, its boundaries are constantly changing according to what human beings are presently existing. Precisely those individuals who do not possess all the characteristics of the persons attempting to construct an anthropology—those who exist somewhere out on the fringes of what they consider to be normatively human—play a large part in defining what humanity is by calling into question the anthropologists' assumptions. There are always individuals whom a particular group may consider to be abnormal or subnormal and therefore of

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[6]Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 4, *More Recent Writings*, trans. Kevin Smyth (Baltimore: Helicon Press; London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1966), 120. Elsewhere he describes humanity as the "event of a free, unmerited and forgiving, and absolute self-communication of God," in Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, trans. William V. Dych (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 116.

less consequence for arriving at a definition of "human"—such individuals may be children, women, those who are disabled, destitute, or ill, or persons belonging to a culture or race one deems inferior to one's own. Those of us who bother our heads about a definition of humanity probably consider ourselves normatively human. But are we, or do we merely think so from our particular perspective? Those persons who do not share our precise characteristics or perspective are by their very existence constantly challenging us to reconsider our assumptions, to revise our vision of humanity, and to act in accordance with that continually altered vision. In so doing, they confront those of us who are seeking to define humanity with the reality of how incapable we are of ever defining ourselves absolutely or of assigning value to ourselves on the basis of normative characteristics.

The very ones who may be considered questionably human by some are performing a vital task for all humans precisely because they are unable to choose for themselves the situation they are in. In their obvious powerlessness they represent and indeed actualize the powerlessness of all humans in this particular way: their existence as beings who are questionably human is a sign that humanity can never be determined by those who call themselves human. This is in a sense the law that is revealed to us in the first commandment. It is the law behind the wrath of God toward those who believe they could become like God if only they could get a grasp on who they are by utilizing their own best efforts and calculations or by setting themselves up as judges of others.

The ones among us who contribute the most toward defining humanity do not do so intentionally. But by making others aware of the question of human boundaries they

The role usually assigned to a hard thinking theologian is that of observer and evaluator; in reality it is that of recipient.

are a valuable gift to us all, and particularly to those of us who struggle to articulate the question of humanity in terms of grace. As we who preach, teach, and hear the gospel begin to discern the theological task others are performing for us, even unintentionally, we are given the possibility of recognizing our own humanity in relation to them. The role usually assigned to a hard thinking theologian is that of observer and evaluator; in reality it is that of recipient. Those of us who conceptualize theologically must humble ourselves in recognition of our spiritual poverty; we can only recognize who we are, in relation to the God revealed to us in the Bible, from those who do not or cannot provide a definition of humanity that matches our own. They are by their very being a statement of God's grace toward us all, reminding us that humanity is not defined by capabilities or appearance but rather by God's continual faithfulness to the ones to whom God elects to relate. If humans are the image of God, they are so by reason of their intrinsically being related to the God who elects to relate to them, in spite of their incapability of corresponding to such faithfulness in their own relations and in spite of

their efforts to avoid admitting this incapability.

Thus human relations, even with all their destructive cultural and personal clashes and in all their futile endeavors to evolve a self-definition apart from God, are a reflection of God's incarnation among us in Jesus. That is, they are a reflection of God's loving determination to relate to us all precisely at that juncture, humanity, where we demonstrate our incapability to reciprocate. God became incarnate as a human being, Jesus of Nazareth, who spent most of his ministry dealing with people on the fringes, whose human status was questionable to others: women, children, persons with disabilities or illnesses that rendered them outcasts of the community, gentiles, and even the dead. To all of them he brought new possibilities of relating to God and other humans, through faith from God who had compassion on them in their situation.

The Bible is a grand and variegated witness to this determination of God to relate to the marginal, manifested to the point of entering into total relationlessness in the death of Jesus himself. It is worth noting that the Apostles Creed states as part of the terms of Jesus' lordship that "he descended to the dead," and thereby encompassed even the totally lifeless and totally forgotten within the compassion of God. Therefore there is no longer any total relationlessness for humans, even though we still reject each other, isolate ourselves, and eventually all pass out of human existence in our deaths. These apparent boundaries of rejection, isolation, and death are encompassed in Jesus' death; and they are surpassed in his resurrection, so that the reality of being in total relationship with God, and thus of being human, is here before us.[7]

Not that the question of what it means to be human is now resolved; but in the persistence of the question we are confronted with our own inadequacy of answering and thus are thrown back on the grace of God shown to us in Christ. And we may rejoice in the persistence of the question, because our faith in Christ—dead and resurrected—allows us to live with the unanswered question and at the same time to proclaim that the gospel of God's love is for all humanity that God has created and for whom Christ died. The definition of humanity therefore rests in the finality of Christ's redemptive action, and the task for us who seek to articulate a theological anthropology is to point to Christ as the boundary by which we all are defined.

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[7]This thought is expressed by Jüngel in his statement that God, in coming into contact with death in identifying with the crucified Jesus, is revealed as "The One who calls nonbeing into being and who imparts new being to that which is no more." Eberhard Jüngel, *Death: The Riddle and the Mystery*, trans. Iain and Ute Nicol (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975), 109.

People, Places, and Things

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Each time I visit the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington D.C. I am moved to tears by two things. The first is the number of names on the wall and how they convey an overwhelming sense of the cost of this and so many other wars. The second is the almost irresistible need of people to touch the wall, especially to run their fingers across the letters of the name of someone they knew and loved.

> *As the elderly man pulled a cardboard box from the closet he knew a flood of memories would start to pour over him. It contained the few remains from a fire that had destroyed the family home years earlier. No one had died in the fire, but they had lost a part of themselves. Only a few things were nestled carefully in the box—a scorched picture, some toys, worthless knick-knacks that used to decorate a shelf near the kitchen window. He had thought many times about throwing the whole box out, mindful that it was crazy to hang on to things that had no value or meaning to anyone but him. Yet somehow these remembrances were more than what they appeared to be.*

> > *A mother and father sat in the hospital waiting room pondering a request from the doctor. Their son was dead. The causes of death were natural, but complicated. The doctor wanted to perform an autopsy in order to understand more clearly why the death occurred when and as it did. Both mother and father were reluctant. They could not bear the thought of the son they knew and loved being dissected somehow. It wasn't rational to deny the request. But this was more than just a lifeless body. It was their son. His pain and their pain had already been too much too bear. They wanted him, his body, to be at peace.*

Life is fragile. These three very different pictures have in common a focus on the tangible—a place, things, a human body. They are materially spiritual, or spiritually material glimpses of how and why life is significant. This is not to toy with the words spiritual and material. It is to try to take seriously what it means to believe that Christianity is an incarnational faith. Put another way, it is to see in these examples of life experience some hint of what it means for Christian faith to be both sacrament and word.

We are often skeptical of the sacramental, embodied character of Christian life in spite of the incarnation of God in Jesus. We have tended to cling to the words from the upper room appearance of Jesus to Thomas, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe." With Paul and Luther, we explain that "faith comes from hearing," as if to settle once and for all that the visible stuff of creation is at best a crutch for the weak, at worst an impediment to "true believing." We seem to forget that Jesus did offer his hands, feet, and side to Thomas: Touch. See and feel that it is I.

Word and sign belong together, and the signs are drawn from the raw stuff of creation that surrounds us every day. Life is sacramental because God has sacramentalized it. Of course there is danger in emphasizing this. We have sufficient historical justification for our worry about worshipping things instead of God. Idolatry seems to be deeply rooted in the human condition.

Perhaps that is why we have so often taught that body and spirit may not really belong together. We have too often split the world into a false dichotomy, sacred versus secular, in order to compartmentalize and control it. Some call this disembodied approach to faith "religionless Christianity." Misuse has made it an unfortunate phrase. Why are we afraid of creation and of our natural impulses to know God through it?



One way to explore the question is to examine a specific issue that makes it possible to see the interplay between word and sacrament, between faith and idolatry. If we also choose an historical example it allows us to enjoy the measure of objectivity that distance can provide. Pilgrimage in the early church meets both conditions. So we will take a brief journey together into the first few centuries. We will then return to our opening stories.

Have you visited the Holy Land? Have you ever thought about making the trip? If you can answer yes to either question you know something about the inner drive that urges people to make a religious pilgrimage. But why do we do so? Is it simply a matter of satisfying our curiosity? Do we think that somehow we will be closer to God there?

Places have a profound impact on us. The sheer power of geography to evoke admiration, awe, fear, or exhilaration is undeniable. When we associate specific events or personal life experiences with places their impact is doubly significant. Memory and associative meaning can trans-

form places and alter forever our relationship to them.

Pilgrimage always involves attachment to a place. We may try to explain away our bonds to places (and things), or give theological reasons for transcending them, but we cannot escape them. Protestants have tended to be more skeptical than Roman Catholics about the religious significance of geographical places, of their capacity to be bearers of the holy. Yet all Christians share some sense of attachment to the "Holy Land" because it is the historical and geographical foundation for the Incarnation. We cannot go back in time to visit Jesus in the first century, but we can "go back" in space. We can walk the land where he walked. Why would we do so?

Early in the fifth century (409 C.E.) Paulinus of Nola observed that "no other sentiment draws people to Jerusalem but the desire to see and touch the places where Christ was physically present, and to be able to say from their own experience: 'we have gone into his tabernacle, and have adored in the places where his feet stood' (Ps 132:7)."

Paulinus is writing some eighty years after the Emperor Constantine's building program in Jerusalem made the sites of Jesus' passion and resurrection accessible to pilgrims. Many other New Testament and Old Testament sites were visited as well. Why? What was a Christian to gain by making a pilgrimage?

Although religious pilgrimage was not a matter of major concern to Christians in the first three centuries, the idea was certainly not foreign to them. Both paganism and Judaism had well-developed understandings of pilgrimage. In Judaism the Torah specified the three great pilgrim feasts of Passover, Weeks, and Booths as times when all males were to go to Jerusalem. In paganism, shrines for the cult of Artemis or the Delphic oracle indicate that the primary motivation for a pilgrim journey was to make an offering at some significant cultic place. The purpose was to appease the gods, secure particular blessings, or request advice or divine aid.

Two things restrained early Christians from making pilgrimages: the insecurity of persecution and the expectation of the imminent return of Jesus. Once those constraints were removed, which was certainly occurring in the course of the late third century, Christians could begin to reassess their identity as "strangers in the world" (Heb 11:13) and come to terms with their own history. Interest in the origins of names and places learned from the proclamation of Jesus' story grew.

Another constraint, however, was the church's eucharistic practice. A Christian's "cultic offering" could be made in every place and at any time. So what was a Christian in late antiquity—or today—to gain by making a pilgrimage?

In its initial stages the phenomenon of Christian pilgrimage had an individual character. Origen, for example, says that his journey through Palestine was "to acquire knowledge of the traces of Jesus and his disciples as well as the prophets." The same is true for Jerome's report of a visit by Firmilianus, bishop of Caesarea. The motivation seems to be more scientific or academic than devotional. Nothing comparable to the mass movement of people for the great Jewish feasts can be found in Christianity until the time of the Crusades, and then it is a quite different type of pilgrimage. The closest one gets to such mass movement is the crowds that assembled for the Holy Week liturgies in Jerusalem to which Egeria bears witness late in the fourth century.

The primary motive for making these difficult journeys appears to be personal

The sensual character of faith is evoked by things, by bodies, by places.

confirmation of the existence of places or things mentioned in Scripture. The Bible served as a veritable tourist guide. Egeria, for example, explains that her concern is to see the places mentioned with her own eyes in order to satisfy her curiosity. Interestingly, however, seeing the places prompts prayers of thanks and often a spontaneous liturgy "appropriate" to the site: "All there is on the actual summit of the central mountain (Sinai) is the church and the cave of holy Moses. No one lives there. So when the whole passage had been read to us from the Book of Moses (on the very spot!) we made the Offering in the usual way and received communion."

It is clear that for Egeria as for other pilgrims the point is to see the places firsthand. Faith precedes knowledge in the sense that the holy place is not the cause of faith nor the site of the miraculous now. Instead it is the visual reminder that what is already known and believed has its foundation in the historically verifiable past.

For Egeria, however, the holy places have an incarnational, a sacramental character. Her devotional responses reveal the transition from an earlier, eschatological perspective that placed little emphasis on place toward a view that increasingly associated place and presence. The rise of the cult of the saints also played an integral role in this transition, and of course became the impetus for later pilgrimages to places outside the "Holy Land" itself.

Observations from a variety of early Christian writers such as Jerome, Gregory of Nyssa, and Augustine make it clear that a mix of naivete and incredulity accompanied expectations for pilgrimages. They and other theologians convey a strange ambivalence toward them. One can find in their writings equally forceful words both for and against pilgrimage. The question is why they were so ambivalent.

Writing to Paulinus of Nola, for example, Jerome comments that a person is no worse for not having seen Jerusalem and that furthermore, he does not consider himself a better Christian for having been there: "It is not to be praised to have been in Jerusalem, but to have lived well in Jerusalem." In a letter to Marcella, however, he encourages her to come to Jerusalem and describes the wonders she will see if she does so. Similarly, in a letter to his friend Desiderius he says, "If our companionship proves displeasing, to have adored where the feet of the Lord stood is equal to faith; just as to have seen traces of the nativity and cross and passion."

The fact that he lived in the Holy Land afforded Jerome the opportunity to witness the best and worst of the growing phenomenon of pilgrimage. While he saw potential dangers in it, namely a superstitious attachment to the physical that could diminish the "spiritual" character of faith, he recognized its power as a concrete sign for faith, even as a "completion" of faith.

The most frequently quoted comments on pilgrimage are those of Gregory of Nyssa. Like Jerome and Augustine he attempts to make a case against it. First, he argues that there is no biblical mandate for pilgrimage: "When the Lord invites the blest to their inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, he

does not include a pilgrimage to Jerusalem." Furthermore, going on a pilgrimage can lead to moral mischief since men and women are thrown together by the necessities of the journey in ways not fitting for the Christian.

Beyond such practical problems with their moral implications, Gregory asks the critical question: "What advantage is reaped by the one who reaches those celebrated spots? They cannot imagine that our Lord is living, in the body, there at the present day, but has gone away from us foreigners; or that the Holy Spirit is in abundance at Jerusalem, but unable to travel as far as us."

Commenting on his own journey to Jerusalem (which he explains was for political reasons), Gregory offers the assurance that "the Christ who was manifested is very God as much before as after our sojourn at Jerusalem; our faith in him was not increased afterwards any more than it was diminished." We are made partakers of the Spirit "according to the proportion of our faith, and not in consequence of pilgrimage to Jerusalem."

Despite such comments, Gregory is not above recognizing something special in holy places. He notes in his *Life of Macrina* that he went to Jerusalem at one point "to fulfill a vow to see evidence of our Lord's sojourn in the flesh." In speaking of martyrs he goes a step further and states that those who see their tombs "embrace, as it were, the living body in full flower: they bring eye, mouth, ear, all the senses into play, and then, shedding tears of reverence and passion, they address to the martyr their prayers of intercession as though he were present."

This is a surprising explanation from someone of the theological disposition of Gregory. It betrays the dynamic tension one finds in efforts to understand the significance of Christian pilgrimage. Such comments by early Christian writers indicate that there is more to pilgrimage than meets the eye. It is not a simple and forgettable act of piety. It is linked to issues that lie at the heart of Christian faith—the relation of memory and faith, the uniting of the "carnal" and "spiritual" in the Incarnation.

In pilgrimage, Christianity is faced with an issue it has never really settled: the limits of its understanding of sacramental presence. How does one reconcile the manifestation of God's presence at a specific place, traditionally attested by miracles or appearances past and/or present, with the presence affirmed by the tradition concerning assembly around word and sacrament? Is it simply a matter of asserting that the latter is exhaustive and nothing else is a legitimate vehicle of grace?

A privileged religious topography that excludes Christians who are geographically distant from the "holy place" is obviously dangerous. Evangelism is seriously undermined if an integral part of the message is that to be a true believer you must go to a specific geographical location. The early Christian writers quoted above were correct in their harsh judgment of such a perspective.

Yet the compelling reality, the sacramentality of place, remains. Gregory's words ring true: "they bring eye, mouth, ear, all the senses into play, and then, shedding tears of reverence and passion, they address to the martyr their prayers of intercession as though he were present." The sensual character of faith is evoked by things, by bodies, by places. Sights, sounds, and smells are as much a part of it as words; not more, not less, simply *as much* a part of it.

Faith is constituted in the same kind of wholeness that we know as a direct consequence of our individual being as spirit/body meshed in one reality. We long to embrace creation because deep down we know that we are a part of it. And we know

that in the embrace the God who brought the creation into being has something to say to us. We also know that this "saying" is not with words alone.

To return to our opening images, the one about the Vietnam Veterans Memorial provides the clearest connection with pilgrimage. People who visit the wall know that no one named on it actually died at this spot. But the reality of both the place and fact of each death is transferred here. The transfer occurs because each engraved name is the publicly recognizable symbol of a distinct human life. The letters carved in stone are a visible, touchable point of access for the unique story of the person they name.

Because the person is dead, the name summarizes the whole of their lived identity. For those who knew the person, the name calls up specific content of the remembered relationship. For those who did not, the names are symbolically equivalent to other names of people who are known. Place focuses memory. As it does so it evokes the wealth of thoughts and feelings that are associated with the memory. At the wall one sees tears, clenched fists of anger, bowed heads, poignant laughter—all the stuff of human relationships remembered and cherished.

Few people confuse the names on the wall with the reality of the persons to whom they refer. Few people can be described as worshipping the wall—even in their most devoted daily pilgrimages to it. Place, when connected as it is here with both public (the Vietnam conflict as part of our history) and private (the individual lives of the persons who died) stories, serves as the vehicle of memory. And memory is crucial to faith.

Most of us know the power of things from our past to "bring to life" what lies within us. The elderly man coming upon the box of remains from a fire is like any one of us going through a closet, an attic, a garage and finding there some unexpected artifact from our past. We pause, pick up the thing, turn it in our hand, smile or frown, laugh or cry. We know that it is not the thing itself that causes the response. It is our own lived history. The thing has a specific role to play nevertheless, and without it our remembering, if it occurred at all, would be quite different.

The personal locus of incarnational truth is our own life. God became one with us in Jesus as a distinct human being. Just as we have flesh and blood, thoughts and feelings, body and spirit, so did Jesus. His oneness with us is also our oneness with him. The parents who could not bear the thought of an autopsy on their son are not unlike Mary, Joseph of Arimathea, and others who cared for Jesus' body when he died. We only know one another as animated bodies, or embodied spirits, whichever you prefer. The point is the unity of life. Whatever Jesus' glorified body may be, for it was surely more than a resuscitated corpse, it is the final word of God that our lives have a sacramental destination.

Undoubtedly we run the risk of entering dangerous theological territory with such exploration. If we pay reverent attention to people, places, and things, will we compromise the centrality of Jesus as the way, truth and life? Will we slip into pantheism, panentheism, animism, or some other heresy? Will we sacrifice the gospel as pure gift of grace and replace it with a thinly veiled works-righteous attachment to what we can see and touch?

The fears are not unfounded, but we do not deal with them well by throwing out the baby with the baptismal water. Sacramentality is embodiment (incarnation), embodiment means creation, and for that reason creation is central to faith. If I have a driving passion as a student and teacher of

No specific place is essential to believing. But places are. So are people, and things like bread, wine and water.

liturgy it is to keep word and sacrament in faithful tension. Like evangelism and social justice, they are the proverbial two sides of a single coin.

One implication of this perspective is that all liturgical celebration should be radically local even as it is profoundly universal. If people, places, and things truly are essential, each local gathering of Christians, each church should reflect its environment—its specific locale—in its liturgical life. One should be able to enter a church building where people gather to worship and see there signs of the uniqueness of this place and its indigenous people. At the same time one should find recognizable signs of the larger community's universal and historical identity—water (font), table (eucharist), Bible (word), cross, etc.

This is yet another dimension of the now popular and helpful adage, "think globally, act locally." The richness and diversity that constitute the pluriform character of creation are to be celebrated. Uniformity in liturgical practice does not produce unity. The Church is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic because it is faithful to its mission, not because everyone says and does the same thing in exactly the same way.

Gregory of Nyssa was right. It is not necessary to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem to know the salvation God gives us through Jesus Christ. No specific place is essential to believing. But places are. So are people, and things like bread, wine, and water. Liturgy is the work of the people. It is an event, an action, a verb. This is good, right and true—so long as we remember and honor the fact that verbs cannot do anything without nouns.

Book Reviews

From Father to Son: Kinship, Conflict, and Continuity in Genesis. By Devora Steinmetz. Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation, edited by Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991. 214 pages. Paper. $15.95.

Devora Steinmetz attempts to understand the patriarchal narrative of Genesis 12-50 and its place as the introduction to the history of the nation of Israel. Her starting point is the symbolic understanding of kinship, especially the father-son succession. Genesis 12, which begins "with a command and a promise, with a mission and a blessing," introduces a specific cultural heritage to be transmitted within a single family. This transmission, a striving for cultural continuity, is fraught with conflict and violence, between father and son, between brothers.

Informed by psychoanalytic and anthropological studies, Steinmetz focuses upon specific episodes of transfer from father to son and lexical analysis of these transfer stories. From the details of kinship and word patterns, Steinmetz then examines kinship in the context of the narrative structure and finally in the broader context of the primeval history of the first chapters of Genesis and the history of the nation of Israel, which follows Genesis 50.

Steinmetz works carefully and moves from analysis to analysis in building-block fashion. She continually re-examines and expands the boundaries of her discoveries in a creative and thought-provoking manner. Her grasp of the Hebrew text and her ability to make lexical connections within specific stories and across narrative lines is sure and insightful. She presents a Genesis that is an intentional and well-constructed literary unity.

I picked up this book with low expectations, since I have little background in psychoanalytic/anthropological studies. The first chapter does engage Freud, Malinowski, Spiro, Girard, and others in the problem of defining the father-son conflict. This is helpful. However, Steinmetz is clear that this is primarily a literary study. Kinship is a structure which symbolizes narrative concerns and meaning.

This is the type of book I like to encourage my Hebrew language students to read, because it takes language and text seriously. It is a salutary response to that ever-nagging classroom question, "Why do we have to learn this language?" Steinmetz demonstrates that literary intentionality can be discovered through language and narrative analysis. Tapping that intentionality elucidates seemingly disparate stories in Genesis, lends credibility to the characters of the text and their decisions which is not imposed from outside the text, and points to the theological assumptions of the text.

May Burt Persaud
Wartburg Theological Seminary

The Gospel of Peace. By Ulrich Mauser. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992. xii and 196 pages. Paper. $16.95.

Mauser explores the multifaceted understanding of peace in the Bible, a topic largely neglected in recent scholarship. He does so to assist Christians in their vital activity of peacemaking in today's world. Mauser views the knowledge and pursuit of peace in our times as a matter of survival because the world lives under the nuclear threat (his analysis in this initial chapter already seems somewhat dated, however, due to the collapse of the Soviet system).

The author presents his exegetical work on the topic of peace in chapters 2-7, focusing on the major uses of the biblical words for peace — *shalom* and *eirēnē*—in the Hebrew Scriptures and especially in Matthew and Luke, Paul's letters, and Colossians and Ephesians. Mauser

discovers that these words for peace carry a wide range of meanings. In Matthew, for example, "peacemaker" is one important way to characterize Jesus, which leads to commending peacemaking as a critical task of the Christian community since God's gift of peace never comes without resistance and hostility. In Luke, Jesus is pictured as the mediator between God and humans and the bringer of peace. This Gospel can even appreciate the *Pax Romana*, which was established and maintained by military might, as a cultural reality that aided the Christian mission. In Paul's letters, peace becomes associated with fertile concepts that relate to the final benefits of God's saving act in Jesus Christ for history and creation. And both Colossians and Ephesians, considered by Mauser to be letters authored by later leaders of the church within the Pauline sphere, enlarge the cosmic and global dimensions of the peace realized in Jesus Christ. In chapter eight, Mauser returns to our current situation and clarifies in a number of ways how the wide range of biblical understandings of peace can guide Christians today as peacemakers.

Mauser has avoided the distortions that can accompany a "word study" approach: the failure to appreciate the contextual meaning of a specific word, that is, its meaning in light of the socio-literary context. Mauser repeatedly demonstrates his firm grasp of the research that illuminates the various New Testament writings as literary wholes in their first century circumstances. This results in his explaining the various texts employing "peace" by interrelating them with the larger designs of a specific New Testament writer. The final chapter, "Peace in the New Testament and Peace Today," is valuable because Mauser understands that a simple summary of New Testament teaching on peace is not sufficient. Instead, his comprehension of the current scene shapes his creative synthesis of the biblical teaching on the topic. Biblical scholars and ethicists, clergy and seminarians, and all who care about peace and justice will benefit from reading Mauser's solid reflection on peace as a key to understanding the New Testament.

James L. Bailey
Wartburg Theological Seminary

Sexual Paradox: Creative Tensions in Our Lives and Congregations. By Celia Allison Hahn. New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1991. iv and 244 pages. Paper. $14.95.

This book is good news for women who feel uneasy about being bound by a new set of "shoulds" as they seek to articulate their own identities and for feminist men who feel that their own reality is somehow being obscured in current discussions. Celia Hahn describes maleness and femaleness as grounded in different physiological and developmental realities which both contribute to human growth and creative energy as they are recognized, respected, and integrated. The polarities of male and female and the many related psychological and sociological phenomena which cluster around each are starting points in the human journey, and God's life happens in the lived tension between them.

Hahn goes on to explore these tensions in the areas of work and love with uneven persuasiveness, but her foundational position rings sensible and true. She holds up for our consideration several possible mediating "spaces": the congregation as a place where private and public life can be integrated; friendship as the model for a human relationship which is both responsible and intimate; God our Companion as a faithful metaphor for our time.

Like many feminist writers, Hahn offers a special challenge to Lutherans in a creation theology which legitimately questions the traditional understanding of sin as pride and ends up by marginalizing and even rejecting any speech about justification. I wonder, too, about an understanding of community which depends so thoroughly on such sophisticated self-knowledge and extraordinary good will.

Sexual Paradox is a book worth reading. It is an intelligent appeal for honesty, clarity, patience, and charity in our life together as women and men.

Christine K. Hallemeier
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Abiding Astonishment: Psalms, Modernity, and the Making of History. By Walter Brueggemann. Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation Series, edited by Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991. 94 pages. Paper. $8.95.

Brueggemann prefaces this short monograph by saying that it is a purely personal reflection which he cannot help but present to the academic world with "fear and trepidation." For Brueggemann, the essence of the recital of the historical Psalms 78, 105, 106, and 136 is Israel's "abiding astonishment" at what Yahweh has done. This astonishment is intrinsic to Israel's remembered experience; it is not "second-hand theologizing." By stressing "obedience, petition, gratitude and new political possibility," the historical psalms "make a world" which each generation can engage and which sets Israel apart from the rest of "the world." History in Israel, then, is a particular vehicle for specific conversation about social power and possibility. Israel's historical recital "retells the past, shapes the present and proposes a specific future," defining Israel not only theologically but socially and politically.

The recital of the historical psalms challenges other interpretations of history, particularly modernist interpretations and reconstructionist histories which claim to be objective, but reject "theological awe." Hidden in the agenda of modernist interpretations is the autonomy of reason and power. These "counter-world" psalms challenge "from below" the tenets of modernist interpretations.

This recital also offers an internal challenge to the community of Israel. These psalms speak for those who have benefited from Yahweh's wonder. Yet, there are those in the community who have not had this experience. It is the protest of those marginal to the establishment which must proclaim anew Yahweh's abiding astonishment for the present and the future.

Admittedly, Brueggemann spends less time with the texts than with their two interpretative thrusts. This may be due to the tentative nature of this work but also to Brueggemann's own socio-political/theological interest. Ultimately, his concern is empowerment of the marginalized.

Brueggemann is an artful wordsmith. But I wonder if he moves too quickly from text to generalities. In fact, this is my primary hesitation. So much more needs to be said about text, power and empowerment, categories of marginal and status quo, and the internal textual dialogue that canon implies. However, I found it helpful to reflect upon "abiding astonishment" and to be reminded that the biblical text is at once the recital of the marginalized and yet the recital of the established.

May Burt Persaud

No Other Name: An Investigation into the Destiny of the Unevangelized. By John Sanders. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992. xv and 315 pages. Paper. $16.95.

It is always a delight to be instructed by one's current or former student—especially in a volume as comprehensive, balanced, and important as this one. While mainline churches are struggling for a clear witness and identity against relativism and pluralism that would compromise the gospel, the more "evangelical" churches are also struggling. Externally they struggle against universalism. Internally, they struggle with what Sanders calls "restrictivism"—a view rooted in Augustine and Calvin, which claims that "all the unevangelized are damned."

Sanders proceeds with even-handed objectivity, setting forth the biblical, theological, and historical pieces of each position before setting forth his own (and others') evaluation and critique. What he says about universalism, which he weighs and finds wanting, is interesting: "My heart longs that the doctrine be proven correct" (107). But the reality of hell, human freedom to be damned, and divine judgment convince him otherwise. I resonate to his longing and his objections to universalism.

Instead, Sanders argues for the "wider hope" of "universally accessible salvation." He finds Luther and other reformers open to this, while rejecting universalism. Different versions of the wider hope are examined: "Universal Evangelization—Before Death" (Chapter 5)—a view he

identifies primarily with Roman Catholics before Vatican II; and "Eschatological Evangelization" (Chapter 6) with which he identifies George Lindbeck and, apparently, Carl Braaten because of his insistence on Christ alone and faith alone. His clear preference is for a third version of the wider hope which he calls "Inclusivism" (Chapter 7). Including Wesley, C. S. Lewis, and his mentor, Clark Pinnock, among its champions, he finds inclusivism dealing best with central "control beliefs" (=theological presuppositions or commitments), namely (1) salvation only in Christ and (2) God's universal will to save. For me, the problem comes in what Pinnock calls "the faith principle" ("that people are saved when they believe that God exists and that he rewards those who seek him," p. 258, citing Heb 11:6). The preferred term of Sanders is "an act of faith" understood as commitment to God who saves through Jesus without any knowledge of Jesus. This leads to a forced distinction between believer and Christian which moves dangerously close to "anonymous Christians." Indeed Sanders notes that this is "the dominant view among Roman Catholic theologians" today (216; cf. 278f. on Vatican II, Rahner, and Küng).

For me, as an heir of the classical Reformation, the insistence on human freedom (faith as decision) is a semi-Pelagian rejection of an Augustinian view of bondage of the will (e.g. Luther's "I believe that I cannot... believe"). This makes several versions of the wider hope problematic from the medieval exhortation to do what is within your power to Vatican II's offer of salvation to those "who strive to live a good life, thanks to His grace" with or without seeking or knowing God.

For me, as a confessional Lutheran (and Sanders is not a Lutheran), the short shrift given predestination is disappointing. Sanders seems to identify the doctrine of predestination with the Calvinist idea of *double* predestination. The Lutheran (and biblical) understanding of single predestination is hardly acknowledged. Furthermore, the separation of faith from Christ as its object makes "inclusivism" an impossible option for a Lutheran. "Eschatological evangelization" may then be a *pious* hope, but certainly not a doctrine!

The only serious historical problem I would note is the somewhat misleading implication (28f.) that the Alexandrian church of Origen was universalistic and the Western church of Augustine was restrictivist. Sanders later notes the condemnation of Origen's universalism and some of the scholarly debate surrounding that (98).

Overall, this is a significant work with which laity and clergy, seminarians and scholars should wrestle. Sanders has shown a range of positions—past and present—of which most of us are probably unaware. Sanders' passion and compassion are evident as he discards an easy universalism and a harsh restrictivism for a wider hope. Through it all he strives, remarkably successfully, to be fair.

Ralph Quere
Wartburg Theological Seminary

Theology and Social Theory. Beyond Secular Reason. By John Milbank. Oxford/Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1990. 443 pages. Cloth. $64.95.

Why should one bother reading a dense and difficult book which is longer than 400 pages and costs more than $60? Why should one take the pains and climb on a high mountain? Why should one take the time and learn to play piano? Why should one take the pains and raise children? All of these activities are risky, costly, and time-consuming, but we undertake them and many more similar to them because all of them have their peculiar rewards. The same is the case with John Milbank's book. It is of a remarkable intensity and intellectual scope. Yet more important, it is a book of the highest importance for the ongoing debate between Christianity and modernity.

Milbank forcefully challenges and undermines modern social theory's privilege of defining the horizon of the discourse in the humanities, political, and social theory, and the privilege of "placing" theology in its framework. He unmasks modern social theories as concealed theologies or anti-theologies. Thereby he is attempting to liberate Christian discourse from the Babylonian captivity of secular reason by demonstrating the inherently parasitic character

of secular discourse on tacit theological assumptions.

In a first part Milbank interprets the history of modern thought from Hobbes' political theory to Adam Smith's and Malthus' political economy as neo-pagan Machiavellian concepts or as theological heresies. None of the concepts were what they claimed to be, namely emancipated social sciences. In the second part of the book Milbank analyses the connection between theology and positivism and deconstrues modern sociology of religion from Parson to Berger and Luckmann as well-disguised faith in a secular mythology. In a third part Milbank focuses on modern political theory and political economy, especially in Hegel and Marx, and enters into a critical argument with political theology's and liberation theology's uncritical acceptance of modernity's philosophical core-assumptions.

In the last part of the book Milbank moves toward his constructive proposal. After a theological deconstruction of the deconstructionists and postmodernists Derrida, Deleuze, and Lyotard and a critically appreciative discussion of Alasdair MacIntyre's work, Milbank unfolds his constructive proposal. Augustine's *City of God* serves as a springboard for understanding Christianity as the "other city," and ecclesiology as the church's social theory. What is the point of this? Modernity from its very conception in the 17th century gave an ontological primacy to violence in its political and economic thought. The upshot of this development is 20th century nihilism with its philosophical and practical celebration of violence. Milbank's postmodern reading of Augustine's *City of God* restores the ontological primacy of peace as a preferable reading of the world as God's creation.

Milbank's grand strategy in this deeply impressive book is to turn the tables in the argument between modernity and Christianity. The church and theology have gotten used to being the defendant and modernity the plaintiff. Milbank's postmodern theological deconstruction of modern philosophical, political, and economic thought and the unmasking of the nihilistic core of secular modernity and post-modernity have turned the plaintiff into the defendant. Yet far from idealizing the church and the church's history, Milbank calls us to critical self-examination, since again and again the church has failed to live the ecclesial peace: "Insofar as the church has failed, and has even become a hellish anti-Church, it has confined Christianity, like everything else, within the cycle of the ceaseless exhaustion and return of violence" (433). The book is a very difficult mountain to climb, yet the view from the top is more than the work's reward.

Reinhard Hütter
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

Voces: Voices from the Hispanic Church. Edited by Justo L. González. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992. 171 pages. Paper. $8.95.

One might question the wisdom of publishing an anthology focused on the Hispanic church. Who, beside Hispanics, might be interested in reading articles centered on the particularities of the Hispanic church? Yet when one starts reading the articles, ancient voices from the very beginnings of the early church can almost be heard. The struggle to contextualize tradition can be heard here. The article, for example, on Wesley by Edwin Sylvest, Jr., may not be Acts 15, but the issue is the same: the gospel must be spoken by particular voices in specific languages and unique contexts. Tradition must be reinterpreted to take flesh and bone in the particularities of time and place. *Voces* may not be a history book of the early Christian church, but it has the freshness, brashness, variety, and enthusiasm characteristic of the genesis of a new chapter in the long history of the Christian church. As such, the publication of *Voces* is not only wise but timely.

The voices in *Voces* had their origin in a relatively recent journal known as *Apuntes*, or Notes, that twelve years ago was but a dream of a group of Hispanic scholars. Their mutual concern was the need for a forum to articulate the experience of the Hispanic church in the U.S. and Puerto Rico. Since then, *Apuntes* has sought and published articles from Hispanics involved in every corner of the Hispanic church. Twenty-four articles from *Apuntes* have been brought together in this anthology and grouped into four major categories that all start with the significant

word: Rethinking. Thus, we have articles on rethinking theology, tradition, mission, and our future.

Rethinking is an apt term describing the flavor and spirit of the majority of the articles. Orlando Costas "rethinks" the universality of Galilee. Isasi-Diaz "rethinks" feminist theology. Rivera-Pagán "rethinks" the significance of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The "rethinking" takes place at two different levels. At one level, "rethinking" means emphasizing certain subjects over others. Thus, Galilee, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Reina-Valera Bible, Wesley, and the Book of Micah are picked out for reflection in a logic that is closely tied to the specifics and particularity of Hispanic experience. At another level, "rethinking" means reorientation of the subject towards Hispanic experience with sometimes surprising results. For example, Costa's choice and re-orientation of the subject of Galilee presents us with a multicultural and multilingual crossroads of a place very similar to the experience of the Hispanic refugee or migrant in the United States. The relevance and significance of Galilee, then, startle those of us who live in similar crossroads.

No work, however, is without its faults, and *Voces* can be criticized for lacking a coherent focus. The articles range over a wide terrain of topics, and one is left full of interesting ideas and suggestions; but we are left without a compass. Another criticism might be the prominence of Protestant, especially Methodist, authors. This is the consequence, no doubt, of *Apuntes'* Methodist origins. These criticisms, however, are minor. *Voces* can be forgiven its rough edges as the articulation of a new, young voice in the saga of the Christian church taking flesh and bone in the circumstances of her Hispanic experience. I definitely recommend this anthology to Hispanics and non-Hispanics alike. All, I believe, will find fresh directions to problems that perennially plague the faith.

Alejandro Garcia-Rivera
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

A Teachable Spirit: Recovering the Teaching Office in the Church. By Richard Robert Osmer. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990. xi and 298 pages. Paper. $12.95.

Osmer, Assistant Professor of Christian Education at Union Theological Seminary, Richmond, Virginia, says that "the single most important task before the mainline Protestant churches today is the re-establishment of a vital teaching ministry at every level of church life." The "teaching office" to which he refers in the subtitle is the teaching function of the church, not the institutional role of teacher. The teaching function includes three tasks: the determination of the normative beliefs and practices of the church (transmission); the reinterpretation of the beliefs and practices in shifting cultural and historical contexts (reinterpretation); and the formation and sustenance of educational institutions, processes, and curricula (institutionalization).

The teaching office of the church has been lost to mainline Protestantism as a result of the modernization of society. The pressures of modernization causes the churches to be pulled in two directions. The first is continued accommodation to modernization by internalization of individualism. The second is a rejection of modernization through a reaffirmation of traditional forms of authority in conservative Protestantism. Osmer's remedy for the situation begins with the cultivation of a "teachable spirit," a phrase he borrows from Calvin. A teachable spirit is one that is modest in its claims for itself and high in its regard for the teaching of God. A person with a teachable spirit is open and receptive to the teaching of scripture and the leaders in the church. The author has no magic wand by which to instill teachable spirits in this age of modernization. He can only point to the kind of teaching office in the church that might possibly engender such a spirit.

In an effort to describe such a teaching office, Osmer goes back in history to examine the Roman Catholic magisterium and Luther's and Calvin's reaction to it. The Roman Catholic magisterium developed into a monarchical papacy that was the target of the Reformers. Luther

repudiated that form for the teaching office and emphasized the teaching function of the congregation and pastors. There was a healthy tension in Luther between the two that provided protection against a strict congregationalism that demeaned the office of pastor or a hierarchical ministry that destroyed the authority of the congregation. Calvin saw the church primarily as teacher but always in the sense that the teaching of the church was derivative, fallible, dispersed, and real. For Calvin, there was a constellation of teaching authorities: ministers, church councils, congregations, theologians, individual consciences, and church tradition. Out of this historical analysis Osmer derives three centers of teaching authority for the modern church: professional theologians and seminaries, church bodies and their leaders, and congregations. Each of these centers has the responsibility to carry out the threefold educational task of the church: transmission, reinterpretation, and institutionalization. The centers are to be in a dialogical relation with one another, no one of them predominating. There is, however, a key position in the church that makes the dialogue possible. It is the position of the ordained minister. She or he can facilitate or block the dialogical process and thus either help or hinder the revitalization of the teaching office of the church.

One of the major contributions of this book is the discussion of the nature of practical theology and the five stages of the reflective process. The focus of practical theology is threefold: the practical moral reasoning that takes place when people are involved in social issues, the interpretation of particular situations to discern what God requires persons to be and to do, and concrete responses to the situations. Osmer expands on this focus by describing the five stages of the reflective process: 1) identification of what is going on; 2) an evaluative description of why it is going on, including locating the situation in terms of the relevant "whole" of which it is a part and forming causal explanations of the situation; 3) determination of the relevant theological and ethical concepts and principles; 4) formation of possible courses of action; and 5) enactment of a concrete response and continued reflection on the effects that it has. This five-stage reflective act is to be carried out mainly by congregational members with the assistance of the other centers of teaching authority but especially by the ordained minister. Osmer gives directions for age-appropriate education through all the stages of Fowler's developmental sequence. When such age-appropriate reflective acts take place in the congregation there is the restoration of the teaching office and the inculcation of a teachable spirit.

Osmer's work is highly instructive to those concerned about the teaching office of the church. His treatment is comprehensive, well documented, and challenging. He makes a contribution to the ongoing discussion of the nature of practical theology and, most of all, he points the way toward a recovery of a vital office in the church.

Robert Conrad
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Varieties of Prayer: A Survey Report. By Margaret M. Poloma and George H. Gallup, Jr. Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1991. xv and 142 pages. Paper. $14.95.

Yes, it is true. Nine out of ten Americans continue to pray at least on occasion. That figure has been constant for forty years. Among the interesting findings of this Gallup research project is that the frequency of prayer is declining over time. This should come as no surprise, especially to those of us who teach prayer. Now we have statistical evidence to support this suspicion.

While it appears the authors have done some background reading on prayer, Gallup and Poloma have reduced the rich variety of prayer forms to four: ritual, conversational, petitionary, and meditation. While this decision is based on the methods of their research, it would seem to be a major limitation.

Nonetheless, I will also say that this is must reading for spiritual directors and all who teach prayer. It is less suitable for the devout who wish to learn which prayer form(s) is best for them.

Much of this research supports what we already know or, at least, suspect. One example: "Relatively few of our respondents felt that God

used prayer to lead them into a deeper understanding of spiritual truths" (55).

To their credit, the authors have properly concluded that "continued interaction with other people of prayer can teach the beginner how to move from the simplest form of one-way conversational prayer to wordless prayer with deep spiritual encounters" (132). Spiritual directors are still needed!

Fascinatingly, "Based on the data... we can state with some confidence that Americans are not only having religious experiences but that these experiences are at the heart of their relationship with God. Religious ritual and belief may commonly accompany or precede these experiences, but the experiences themselves may be regarded as the vital link between pray-ers and the God to whom they pray" (65). A socio-demographic definition of "Lex orandi, lex credendi"!

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Transformed Judgment: Toward a Trinitarian Account of the Moral Life. By L. Gregory Jones. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990. xi and 189 pages. Cloth. $22.95.

When we follow the "conventional wisdom" of the present time and age and ask what Christian ethics is all about, we should expect to hear "values" and "decisions." It is the refreshing nature of Greg Jones's book that we encounter neither "values" nor "decisions." Rather we learn the reasons why discussions about "values" and "decisions" are all too often frustratingly unsatisfying! These discussions neglect the central importance of character formation for moral judgment and of our central convictions, our friendships, and the core practices of our lives for the way we see and describe the world morally. Exactly these issues are the theme of the book: the Christian moral life as informed by Christian convictions and as shaped by the friendships and particular activities Christians are involved in.

The book is organized in three main chapters which develop a clear pattern: "Learning to Describe Actions, Persons, and the World," "Learning to See and Act Rightly," and "Learning to Live in the Mystery of the Triune God." Jones's central claim is that we learn to describe, see, and act rightly by being formed and transformed through the central practices and friendships of the Christian community. The book's central metaphor is "friendship." God has befriended humanity in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And we are called to become nothing less than God's friends, to participate in the mystery of the Triune God. Here Jones draws strongly on Thomas Aquinas who understood God's happiness to be the life of friendship between the three persons of the Trinity. The Christian life has a *telos*, namely, friendship with God, which is the goal of our transformation. In and through this transformation we become "persons," living in a befriended relationship with God and humanity. Concrete friendships and particular practices are the contexts in which this formation and transformation of our character takes place. In the last section of the book Jones gives an interesting account how the practices of baptism, eucharist, forgiveness-reconciliation, and interpreting Scripture serve as these forming and transforming practices.

The book offers a theologically informed account of plurality in the Christian community. The "others" are gifts for us; in befriending them we are called again and again to self-critically question our own ways of seeing, describing, and acting. This diversity in unity is understood as the Holy Spirit's presence causing an ongoing "puzzlement" which makes us grow continuously.

Jones's book is an important and welcome contribution to the present debate on what Christian ethics is all about. It not only shows how the Christian moral life, sanctification, and the Christian community's convictions and practices are inextricably interrelated. It also suggests how the Christian moral life and God's trinitarian life are interwoven, with the reality of "friendship" in the very core of it. An understanding of the Christian life with which we should befriend ourselves!

Reinhard Hütter

The Recovery of Virtue: The Relevance of Aquinas for Christian Ethics. By Jean Porter. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990. 208 pages. Cloth. $25.00.

This book serves two purposes in one. First, it is a reconstruction of Aquinas's moral theory as he developed it in his *Summa Theologiae*. Second, it attempts to show how a contemporary reconstruction of Aquinas's moral theory could serve to overcome fundamental disagreements among leading Roman Catholic and Protestant ethicists in America.

The second purpose stands clearly in the foreground in the first and the last chapter of the book, yet recedes considerably in the substantive expository chapters. Here the first purpose, a reconstruction of Aquinas's moral theory, dominates the book. Porter unfolds a tightly and brilliantly argued exposition and defense of Aquinas's moral theory. Lucidly argued points are interwoven with relevant and contemporary examples.

One does not know for sure whether it is the strength of Aquinas's reflection or Porter's interpretive and reconstructive skill which renders the permanent significance of Aquinas's moral theory self-evident—just on grounds of the unfolded reflection as such! The depth and scope of Aquinas' moral vision unmasks, in and of itself, the poverty and fragmentation of the current debates and concepts in philosophical and theological ethics. Yet the interaction with contemporary ethicists, especially the two Protestants Gustafson and Hauerwas, lacks that level of penetration and therefore remains slightly disappointing. Despite this shortcoming the book offers an excellently argued exposition of Aquinas's comprehensive moral theory.

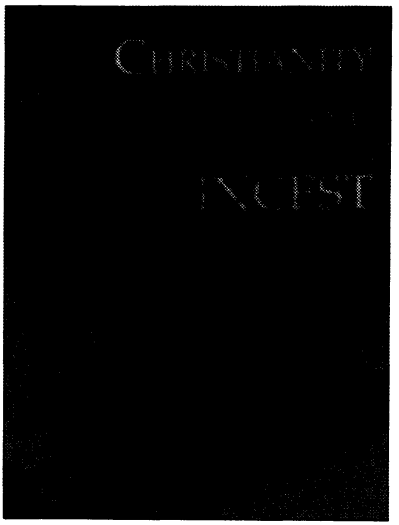
The reconstruction of Aquinas's moral theory falls into three parts: an exposition of his general theory of goodness, the unfolding of the human good (with a very interesting discussion of rational action), and the subsequent discussion of the four cardinal virtues temperance, fortitude, justice, and prudence. In addition, in the chapter on prudence we find an appendix-like section on the theological virtues faith, charity, and hope, next to a discussion of the interconnectedness of all four cardinal virtues.

This appendix raises the critical issue I have with this very impressive, informative, and thought-provoking book. It has to do with Porter's project of reconstruing Aquinas's philosophical moral theory in considerable distance to Aquinas's theology proper. Can God be attained by the human person in either a supernatural or a natural sense? In other words, can Thomas's philosophical theory of the human good be legitimately distilled from the *Summa Theologiae* apart from and independent of the theological claims and contents? Or does the one come necessarily with the other in Thomas Aquinas? In Porter's reconstruction the "natural human being" is de-theologized; in other words, Aquinas's moral theory is considerably "de-Augustinized." As a consequence, the concept of God remains relatively weak in the overall reconstruction. What would the consequences be if we were to take Aquinas's understanding of sin more seriously for his moral theory and if we were to read the cardinal virtues in light of the theological virtues under the general primacy of charity and Aquinas's quite revolutionary concept of "friendship with God"? Is it not precisely the supernatural good which allows Thomas—in contrast to Aristotle—to develop a comprehensive theory of the natural human good, which transcends the polis and the philosopher? It seems to me that this question, how the "natural good" and the "supernatural good," philosophical and the theological thinking are interwoven and mutually presuppose each other in Thomas Aquinas's moral theory, has only been insufficiently addressed.

Despite this point of critique the book is highly recommended as an introduction to the moral theory of Thomas Aquinas and as a cogently argued eye-opener for the stunning relevance of Aquinas's ethical thought for the current ethical debate in America.

Reinhard Hütter

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World as Lover, World as Self. By Joanna Macy. Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 1991. xii and 251 pages. Paper. $15.00.

It is clear why this well-written and always insightful book is helpful for Buddhist readers; what about Christians? I think it has several cross-religious interests. But first notice that it's really four books—articles collected into four collections. There are four sermons, six helpful pieces on early Buddhist teaching, six lively accounts of the author's experiences in Asia, and seven pieces on ecology, all woven together with the ecological theme of the utter interconnectedness of all living creatures.

The first great joy of the book is encountering Joanna Macy herself. She writes *oral* prose, not written prose. You can hear her voice throughout and more than once touch her spirit. It always inspires and refreshes to come into contact with a truly alive, spiritual personality. Here certainly is one.

Second, much of the book, explicitly and implicitly, is concerned with insights into the ancient Buddhist doctrine of "co-dependent origination"—the relatedness and interdependence of all the universe. First in a doctoral dissertation and then in these pieces, free of all pedantry, the author discovers a virtual identity between this teaching and the theses of "deep ecology." For Christians who hear the groanings of all creation and are inspired by creation spirituality as well as those who look to a *pleroma* where all will be one, these are notions you will find familiar, but drawn from a decidedly fresh perspective. This book is a major sketch of what a common ground in Buddhist and Christian thought may look like.

Third, there are adventures here which are simply delightful to read. I will not soon forget the picture of Joanna and her family astride Tibetan horses on wooden saddles, racing across the upper plains of Tibet. She writes, "To ride along hour after hour in the file of mounted lamas stirred something within me that felt like memory.... I thought, 'This is the happiest day of my life.'"

Then there are wonderful passages of the heart of Buddhist spirituality, stories of unbelievable but spontaneous compassion. I read many of these over two and three times. There are sermons on ecology, helpful for those looking for fresh material, deeply felt and clearly seen. Finally for teachers of comparative religion (call it that or not) there are clear, authoritative, and helpful explanations of basic notions in early Buddhist sources. I've marked several to pull out when I need to explain things like karma, the five skandhas, and co-dependent origination itself.

Upasaka Ronald Kidd
Director, Bultasa Zen Group
Chicago, Illinois

The Conversation Continues: Studies in Paul and John in Honor of J. Louis Martyn. Edited by Robert T. Fortna and Beverly R. Gaventa. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990. 400 pages. Cloth. $29.95.

This is a noble Festschrift in honor of a significant scholar who retired from Union Seminary (New York) in 1990. Contributors to the Festschrift concentrate interest on Paul and John, to whom Professor Martyn devoted the bulk of his scholarly career. His *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968; 2nd ed. 1979), as D. Moody Smith points out in "The Contribution of J. Louis Martyn to the Understanding of the Gospel of John" (pp. 275-94), decisively shaped the discussion of the location of John in early Christian history. In recent years Professor Martyn has contributed much to Pauline studies in the Consultation on Pauline Theology of the Society of Biblical Literature and in articles that are offshoots from his preparation of the Anchor Bible commentary on Galatians.

The 26 contributors include his students (John Koenig, E. P. Sanders, Beverly Gaventa, Robert Fortna), faculty colleagues (Raymond Brown, W. D. Davies, John Knox, James A. Sanders, Reginald H. Fuller, Walter Wink), and friends (Victor Furnish, J. Christiaan Beker, Leander Keck, William Baird, Abraham Malherbe, Nils Dahl, among others). They are a distinguished group of American scholars whose contributions are a stunning tribute to the honoree.

All the articles deserve careful reading. Several struck me because of my own interests. Victor Furnish's "Paul the Theologian" formulates ten theses on the study of Paul's theology. Leander Keck's "Christology, Soteriology, and the Praise of God (Romans 15:7-13)" carefully interprets an often disregarded, but significant paragraph. Beverly Gaventa studies Paul's startling language in "The Maternity of Paul: An Exegetical Study of Galatians 4:19," while in "Philippians: Paul's Most Egocentric Letter" Robert Fortna argues that Paul is preoccupied with himself, "displaying Paul's theology at perhaps its least noble" (221). Abraham Malherbe answers the interesting question, "Did the Thessalonians Write to Paul?" with a "Yes, probably." The articles on John amply demonstrate the influence Prof. Martyn has had on Johannine studies as they all, in one way or another, evaluate the significance of Judaism in the formation of the Gospel.

This Festschrift honors a distinguished New Testament scholar by forwarding the research he himself does in many ways. It deserves a broad readership.

Edgar Krentz
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

Time to Meet: Towards a Deeper Relationship between Jews and Christians. By Marcus Braybrooke. Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990. xii and 180 pages. Paper. $13.95.

The two questions that arise with books like this are, first, what new things are covered herein that make it worth buying? and, second, does it approach the material in such a way as to open up new areas for dialogue? My answer to the first question: there is a section on the response various churches throughout the world have made to the problem and prospect of Jewish-Christian dialogue. This is helpful material to have in one book. My answer to the second question: material on the Jewish Jesus and christological issues is well done, the treatment of the Holocaust raises the right questions, and the material on Israel is probably new or at least newly presented for the reader in this volume. So the verdict is, yes, this *is* useful for Jewish-Christian dialogue, but then one is never sure of the audience. Though one hopes that parishioners of St. Mark's Church, in a city where Jewish-Christian dialogue is part of the ecumenical imperative, would have the resoluteness of will to read this book, which is not all that technical, will they? Is it too much to ask publishing houses to provide or at least suggest video presentations that might accompany lengthy books which seem daunting to all but the convinced, or those of us in the academy for whom this is a part of our theological inquiry and program?

Jay C. Rochelle
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

St. Cyril of Jerusalem's Lectures on the Christian Sacraments. Edited by F. L. Cross. Crestwood NY: St. Vladimir Seminary Press, 1986, xli and 83 pages. Paper. $5.95.

Did you know that in the early church, the "Lord's Prayer" was part of the eucharistic mystery which was taught to converts only after they had been baptized and brought in to the church? Are there any predecessors to Martin Luther's *Small Catechism* from which he may have drawn or which bear any similarities to his? These things and much more one can learn from a quick (or thorough) reading of these relatively recently reprinted *Lectures* by Cyril of Jerusalem.

F. L. Cross (well known for the *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*) provides a 49-page introduction to the 19th century translation of the *Lectures* by the Oxford Movement's R. W. Church. Cross discusses the life of Cyril; historical background on the church in Jerusalem, the Arian influence there; the liturgy of the Jerusalem church, and more.

Presented here are five lectures in all: three on baptism, two on eucharist. The three on baptism include comments on pre-baptismal rites, exorcism, the overthrow of Satan, baptismal garments, baptismal vocation, the meaning of baptismal unction and its power to safeguard the soul, etc. In the two lectures on the eucharist

Cyril comments on, e.g., the kiss of peace, the *sursum corda*, the epiclesis, commemoration of and prayers for the departed, each petition of the "Our Father," and "How to Receive" the body and blood of Christ. For the scholars or those open to challenge, the Greek text (with English subheadings) appears as the first 39 pages; R. W. Church's translation follows on pp. 40-80.

As pastors and other Christian educators search for adult—or even high school age—education materials, they will find in these *Lectures* by Cyril (in a well bound, paperback volume) Christian wisdom of the ages, solid material on Christian basics; and a simple introduction to a significant 4th century pastor, his liturgy, church, and their times. Your congregation may delight in seeing the resemblances between their own liturgy and Cyril's.

Andrew F. Weisner
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

The Geneva Bible (The Annotated New Testament, 1602 Edition). Edited by Gerald T. Sheppard. Introductory essays by Gerald T. Sheppard, Marvin W. Anderson, John H. Augustine, Nicholas W. S. Cranfield. Pilgrim Classic Commentaries, Vol. 1. New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1989. 41 pages, 135 folia. Cloth, $37.95; paper, $22.95.

The Bible of the Poor [*Biblia Pauperum*]. A Facsimile and Edition of the British Library Blockbook C.9 d.2. Translation and Commentary by Albert C. Labriola and John W. Smeltz. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1990. ix and 190 pages. Cloth, $38.00; paper, $20.00.

These two facsimile editions with modern introductory essays put valuable resources for the history of biblical interpretation and theology into our hands. The Geneva Bible was the most widely used English translation from its appearance in 1560 until the Authorized [King James] Version supplanted it, not without difficulty, sometime after its appearance in 1611. Robert Barker, who printed the first edition of the Authorized Version, published the Geneva Bible New Testament in 1607 with the marginal notes of Laurence Tomson (based on those of Theodore Beza's 1574 Latin translation of the Bible) and the notes of Franciscus Junius on Revelation. The scholars who produced the Westminster Confession of 1646 (wrongly dated 1945! by Sheppard on p. 1), the primary confession of the Presbyterian Church, used this text. Thus the Geneva Bible is part of the direct heritage of those denominations that arose out of the Cromwellian revolution (Presbyterian, UCC, etc.).

This facsimile reprint with introductory essays inaugurates the *Pilgrim Classic Commentaries* series. The editor pays tribute to Brevard Childs of Yale, who uses and praises the contributions of the biblical scholarship of the Reformation and post-Reformation period, for stimulating the publication of this commentary. The introductory essays describe the influence of the Geneva notes on the English commentary tradition from 1600-1645, give a brief history of earlier English translations and the Geneva Bible, discuss the use of the Geneva Bible in the defense of poetry, and its significance in New England. The folio sized facsimile (135 leaves = 270 pages) makes a text available that would otherwise remain a footnote in histories of interpretation.

The *Biblia Pauperum*, a blockbook (printed from wooden blocks carved with both text and illustrations) dating from approximately 1470, is valuable both iconographically and textually for understanding the piety of the late fifteenth century. After an introduction, the editors reproduce the forty pages of the British Library copy in facsimile. The book tells the story of Jesus from annunciation to Pentecost, then concludes with pages on the coronation of the Virgin, the Last Judgment, the Damned in Hell, the Gathering of the Blessed under the Mantle of Christ, and the Reward of the Righteous. The forty pages each contains three panels, two that cite scripture in Latin and one with three related illustrations (120 in all). The editors print the Latin text (57-96), provide an English translation (97-139), and conclude with interpretive essays on the iconography and typology (141-79). An appendix gives precise reference for the

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biblical texts, page by page, according to the Douay and New English Bible versions.

These blockbooks originated about 1470 in the Netherlands. The central panel on each page is drawn from the New Testament. Two scenes from the Old Testament flank it, reflecting the typological or allegorical methods of medieval exegesis. Thus the transfiguration is framed by Abraham and the three angels in Genesis 18 and the three youths in the fiery furnace in Daniel 3. Christ carrying his cross on the *via dolorosa* is compared to Isaac carrying the wood for his own sacrifice and the widow of Sarepta holding two pieces of wood in the form of a cross (1 Kg 17:10-11). Many of the scenes appear in the medieval play cycles and in the stained glass of medieval cathedrals and churches. The unknown compilers cited both canonical and deutero-canonical works of the OT, reflecting the fact that debates about the OT canon arose only in the sixteenth century confessional debates. The iconographical commentary calls attention to the significance of details in the pictorial scenes that modern viewers may no longer notice or understand. Students of late medieval and Reformation piety will discover here the theological notions that informed the laity, reflections of the exegetical methods that the reformers both used and reacted against.

Both reprints deserve wide use. Each contributes to our understanding of the theological heritage of the contemporary church in a significant way.

Edgar Krentz

A note from Editor Ralph W. Klein:
In my list of recommended commentaries in the February, 1993, issue of *Currents*, I inadvertently omitted a very significant commentary on Isaiah, that has recently been published in an English transation. Here are the data:

Wildberger, Hans. *Isaiah 1-2. A Commentary.* Translated by Thomas H. Trapp. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, $39.95.

Briefly Noted

Jesus and Divorce. By George R. Ewald (Herald, $9.95). Ewald's laudable aim is to encourage certain church denominations to become more evangelical and compassionate in their approach to divorced persons. He bases this appeal on the model Jesus provided in his teaching about marriage, divorce, and celibacy. Ewald's discussion of the relevant texts, though sensible in many ways, ignores most pertinent commentaries and studies written during the last ten to fifteen years (e.g., those of Gundry, Guelich, Meier, Patte, Luz, Furnish, Murphy-O'Connor, Countryman) and relies almost exclusively on secondary literature published during the 1960s and 70s. In developing his picture of Jesus, dealing with marriage and divorce, Ewald facilely sets aside Mk 10:1-12 and accepts Mt 5:27-32, 19:3-9, 19:10-12 as accurately representing the teaching of the historical Jesus vis à vis the Hillel-Shammai rabbinical debate regarding Deut 24:1. Without question, Ewald assumes the Pauline authorship of the Pastoral Epistles. Hence, whereas most of his suggestions regarding the church's witness to marriage and its ministry in divorce and remarriage are solid, his biblical interpretation lacks credibility at many points. James L. Bailey, WTS

A New Handbook of Christian Theology. Edited by Donald W. Musser and Joseph L. Price (Abingdon, $19.95). To an older generation of students, the *Handbook of Christian Theology* originally brought out in 1958 was the sort of guide you kept near the front of your bookshelves for easy and continual reference. This *New Handbook* is meant to ring the changes that have occurred in the nearly four decades since the original came into print. The old handbook

was decidedly Protestant in focus, and since 1958 Roman Catholic scholars in all areas have carved a new niche in theology which is fully represented in the new volume. At the same time, in the late fifties there were as yet no "adjectival" theologies on the scene: Black theology, Feminist theology, Liberation theology, and so forth. The hermeneutical movement had yet to fully explode into new forms of criticism (redaction, narrative, and so on). This new handbook covers the contemporary waterfront with a collection of 146 articles. If you don't want to own it, at least you now know that it is at the library for reference. JCR

Vernon K. Robbins' **Jesus the Teacher** (1984) was a pioneering socio-rhetorical study of Mark. Reviewers praised it for stressing the elements in Mark that fit well into the ideology of the Mediterranean world. In a reissue (Fortress, $16.95) Robbins describes his method (more clearly than he himself could in 1984) and survey [Markan] scholarship since that time. The ideal is to unite literary approaches with a reading of the "social-economic-political-military world." He reviews Elliott on 1 Peter, Chad Myers and Burton Mack on Mark, Bernard Scott on the parables, and Clarice Martin on Acts 8:26-40. Some reviewers challenged Robbins for undervaluing historical concerns in favor of literary insights; his introduction recognizes the problem, but does not solve it. Still, the introduction is a contribution to the ongoing debate on exegetical method for today. Edgar Krentz

Recently scholars have stressed using literary critical techniques in Bible study. **The Bible and Modern Literary Criticism. A Critical Assessment and Annotated Bibliography** (Greenwood, $65.00), by Mark Powell, gives a critical evaluation of recent research (1-19) and a classed bibliography of 1,749 items, each annotated with summary and evaluation (21-411). Categories include the philosophy of language, sociology, linguistics, narratology, semiotics and structuralism, rhetoric, reader-oriented approaches, and deconstructionism, method, each testament and individual books, evaluations, and implications for homiletics, theology, and literary studies. It is a trustworthy guide, enhanced by detailed indexes of authors, titles, and subjects. Users will notice gaps in areas they know. If only one could download the basic bibliography as a computer file and add to it! Perhaps the Society of Biblical Literature would consider such electronic publishing. Edgar Krentz

D. Moody Smith gives a valuable contour map of Johannine scholarship in **John Among the Gospels. The Relationship in Twentieth-Century Research** (Fortress, $12.95). He traces developing, changing, and dissolving solutions to the problem of the relationship of John to the Synoptics in chapters titled "John among the Gospels: The Problem and Its Earliest History," "The Independence Theory" (B. W. Bacon, H. Windisch, P. Gardner-Smith), "The Formation of a Consensus" (C. H. Dodd, After Dodd [numerous scholars]), "John and Luke: A Parallel Consensus" (J. Schniewind, F. C. Grant, J. A. Bailey, P. Parker, F. L. Cribbs, R. Maddox), "The Renaissance of the Problem: Passion Narratives" (A. Dauer, R. Baum-Bodenbender), "The Dissolution of a Consensus" (M. E. Boismard, F. Neirynck, A. Dauer, H.-P. Heekerens, H. Thyen, B. de Solages), and "Retrospect and Prospect" (H. Weder and K. T. Kleinknecht). A valuable guide to a fascinating—and probably insoluble—problem. The scholars named above are only a sample of those listed in the bibliography and reviewed in the book. Read it to trace the contours of changing opinion. Edgar Krentz

Martin Hengel is writing a series of books delineating his understanding of the history of Christianity. In **The Pre-Christian Paul** (Trinity, $21.95) he traces Paul's life from birth to his activity as persecutor. He discusses the significance of citizenship in Tarsus, Paul's education (Hellenistic Tarsus or Hebraic Jerusalem), Pharisaic study of the Law in Jerusalem, Greek education in Jerusalem, and Paul's life activity as persecutor. He puts forward the hypotheses that Paul was of lay nobility by birth, could have received a Jewish-Greek rhetorical education in Jerusalem, Paul was a militant persecutor of the Greek-speaking Jewish-Christians in Jerusalem because they challenged the Torah. Hengel's control of the enormous amount of ancient and modern literature is magisterial (60 pages of

notes), his evaluation of Paul's letters and Acts as historical sources conservative, his writing clear, his contribution great. I shall commend this book to seminary students; pastors will find it fascinating and informative. Edgar Krentz

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

Roman historians generally pay little attention to the New Testament. A. N. Sherwin-White's magisterial lectures on the legal, administrative, provincial, and municipal background of the Gospels and Acts (**Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament,** 1963) was a major contribution to biblical scholarship. The paperback reprint (Baker, $11.95) deserves wide reading. This book is not yet out of date. Edgar Krentz

Freedom for Ministry. By Richard John Neuhaus. Revised Edition (Eerdmans, $17.00). And worth every penny! I know of no other book which covers the theology and practice of parish ministry with as much grace and style as this one. Buy it. You will not regret the purchase, and we are grateful to Eerdmans for bringing it back into print after a period when it was away. Neuhaus writes with a surety born of conviction, and he is aware that parish ministry is in the process of being re-invented by this generation of pastors. The cross, word and sacrament, and the process of becoming obedient to the faith are at the core of this book. Excellent. JCR

The Concise Evangelical Dictionary of Theology. Edited by Walter A. Elwell, abridged by Peter Toon (Baker, $19.95). A scaled-down version of the original 1984 EDT, this dictionary contains about 1,000 entries that deal with theological movements, terms, personalities, organizations, and ideas. The "evangelical" in the title refers to the aggregate of writers who contribute to the book more than to the choice of articles. There is much here of usefulness for pastor and parish alike. JCR

A Dictionary of Liturgical Terms. By Philip H. Pfatteicher (Trinity, $15.95). Hundreds of entries, focusing on the liturgical life and rites of the Western church and therefore specifically of use to Roman Catholics, Episcopalians, and Lutherans, by our most prolific writer in matters liturgical. This book belongs in every sacristy; of great use to pastors, worship committees, and altar guilds. JCR

Instruction in Faith (1537). By John Calvin. Paul T. Fuhrmann, translator and editor (Westminster/John Knox, $8.95). A reprint of the original American edition of 1949 by Fuhrmann, this treatise offers Calvin's essential theological thought distilled from the *Institutes* of 1536, and produced after urgings by Guillaume Farel, his cohort in the Reform at Geneva. Simply written, not in question and answer format, the book offers a primary text for understanding early Protestant and Reformation theology as communicated to ordinary people. Though subsequently superseded by Calvin's own question-and-answer catechisms, *Instruction in Faith* made deep impact at the beginning of the Swiss Calvinistic Reform, and shows a clear and non-polemical piety that was subsequently submerged under polemicism. Brief and easily read, the *Instruction* is recommended for those of an historical bent. JCR

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The Day of Pentecost—Eighth Sunday after Pentecost, Series A

Voices on Pentecost

Commentaries worry whether the miracle of the first Pentecost is best described as one of speaking or one of hearing. Did the disciples have sudden mastery of different languages, or were the hearers suddenly equipped with fresh receptors?

That discussion seems like a good way to avoid the substance of the claim that ancient prophecy came to stunning fulfillment a few weeks after Jesus' resurrection.

We are perhaps in the habit of speaking glibly about the fulfillment of prophecy. Jesus' birth, baptism, miracles, teaching, suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension all fulfilled some prophecy. Luke, in authoring Acts, wants us to think about Pentecost as fulfillment. God's will, God's scheming and dreaming, God's massaging of history came to a high moment of fruition on Pentecost.

As I write these words a week after New Year's Day, the whole world seems intent on breaking up along linguistic, ethnic, tribal, clan, class, or religious lines. The sentimental love ballad says that "breaking up is hard to do," but the daily news tells us just the opposite. Nothing is easier. What is hard is for people to come together into caring community. Pentecost says precisely that hard thing is what God is seeking and willing through the strange lordship of Jesus Christ, that sovereign at God's right side who has declared amnesty (forgiveness) and freely distributed gifts (the Spirit).

Helping us to find our way in this brown season of the world (green in the church, I trust) is Pastor Kit Kleinhans of Ringgold, Georgia. Kit is due to defend her doctoral dissertation this spring along with being a pastor's spouse and the mother of two young children. We thank her for the First Readings and the messages for preachers culled mostly from Luther's Lectures on Romans.

The Pastoral Reflections in this issue come from Minneapolis. In a conversation last summer about preaching and the Year of Matthew, Senior Pastor Steve Cornils and I somehow cooked up the idea that the six members of the pastoral staff of Central Lutheran Church in Minneapolis might adopt the texts of the Pentecost season as their joint project.

Steve called on his associate, William Miller, pastor charged with publications and communications (along with recruitment and evangelism), to coordinate the effort. The six members of the pastoral staff met in a mini-retreat to review all the texts, offering input on each one. (Their discussion, I trust, was more like Pentecost than Babel!) Texts were assigned to staff members who then went off with the varied comments to work individually on the readings. The result is a rich set of Reflections for which I am grateful, even as I selfishly look forward to the next two installments to be published in our June and August issues.

The pastoral staff of Central is large enough to have its own conference. But I hope that all of us make our way to lectionary study groups or find some other format so that we too study Scripture in community, with brothers and sisters and perhaps with books bringing us the voices also of our fathers and mothers in the faith.

Yours in the community of the word,

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The Day of Pentecost
May 30, 1993

Psalm 104:25-34
Joel 2:28-29
Acts 2:1-21
John 20:19-23

FIRST READING

The emphasis of Acts 2 is less on the *fact* of miraculous speech than on the *content* of that speech. At the midpoint of the pericope, v. 11, is the people's declaration that what they are hearing *about*, in their own languages, is "God's deeds of power" (NRSV). Surely their amazement and perplexity (v. 12) is not only about their ability to understand the Galileans but also about the very strange message that the Galileans are preaching!

The text of Peter's sermon extends beyond the two verses from Joel appointed for the day in our lectionary but still gives only a hint of what is to come. Peter's goal is not just to validate the speech of the believers as a fulfillment of Joel's prophecy and not even just to associate the events of Pentecost with "the last days" (v. 17). More than that, Peter's goal is to identify "the last days" with "the name of the Lord" (v. 21). Which Lord? Which name? "This Jesus" (vv. 23, 32, 36)! Which of "God's deeds of power" (v. 11) are being preached? Which "wonders and signs" (v. 19) have been given? Those concerning the crucified and risen Jesus (vv. 22-24)! The present-day preacher's task is not to preach about the preaching by focusing on the Holy Spirit's gift of language to those early Christian believers but to preach the Spirit-given message of Jesus to our own hearers, as they did to theirs.

What of the apparent conflict between the Acts account of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost and John's account of the giving of the Holy Spirit by Jesus on Easter evening? The emphasis of both texts is on the purpose, rather than the timing, of the coming of the Holy Spirit. In John 20, it is the crucified and resurrected Jesus who gives the Holy Spirit to the disciples; in Acts 2, it is the Holy Spirit who empowers the disciples to witness to the crucified and resurrected Jesus. Taken together, the two texts emphasize that the Holy Spirit, as opposed to other spirits, is "the spirit of our Lord and of his resurrection" (*LBW* Eucharistic Prayer I). By freeing ourselves from the need to date the "first" coming of the Holy Spirit, preachers are free to focus on the present comings of the Holy Spirit through Word and Sacrament as definitive of the church's identity and mission. *Veni, Creator Spiritus*! KAK

Luther for Preachers
"Shine in our hearts, O Spirit, precious light;
Teach us Jesus Christ to know aright,
That we may abide in the Lord who bought us,
Till to our true home he has brought us.
Lord, have mercy!" (*LBW* 317:4)

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

The three texts for this festival Sunday unfold over a long period of time like a slow moving yet determined drama.

The prophet Joel utters the promise of God's Spirit being poured out on all flesh. It is a bold, liberating vision. The Spirit will be poured out on men and women, young and old, servant and family. It is a promise of a time when God will bless all without regard to age, sex, or social standing. It will be a time of all being included in the visioning and experiencing of God's fulfillment. In the Joel text the idea of the drama is planted in the midst of God's people as a prophecy toward which they were living.

In the text from John we see Jesus, who "fleshed out" the vision of a person empowered by the Spirit, launch a marvelous plan for the next phase of the drama. He provided the "lived" story with his ministry, death, and resurrection. Gathered in the upper room he gives out the roles to the actors who will step on the world's stage to enact the play. With the gift of his peace, the breath of his Spirit, and the power to forgive or retain sins, he sends them forth.

What unfolds next is the text from Acts. The drama begins in the life of the church. What has

been enacted in that little theater tucked away in Palestine is now ready for Broadway and beyond. Gifted in the Spirit as Joel had prophesied, the apostles burst upon the scene of a crowded Jerusalem to proclaim the liberating and healing story of Jesus.

The Christian church took its place on the world's stage that day to speak the words and play the part of the greatest story ever lived.

And since that time, touring companies (missionaries really) have traversed the globe delivering the drama in all its wonder and power to the world.

We continue to take the show on the road. Empowered by the Spirit bestowed on each actor (Christian), a witness is provided through word and deed that God is saving the creation.

Ps 104:30 describes the wonderful impact of God's Spirit upon creation and all of its creatures: "When you send forth your spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground."

Richard J. Beckmen

The Holy Trinity
June 6, 1993

Psalm 29
Genesis 1:1-2:3
or Deuteronomy 4:32-34,39-40
2 Corinthians 13:11-14
Matthew 28:16-20

FIRST READING

The second lesson ends with the verse with which the *LBW* communion liturgy begins. This is a timely reminder that the doctrine of the Holy Trinity is a doxological confession rather than a dogmatic first principle. We do not deduce truths about God and the world from a prior acknowledgment of God as triune; rather, the confession of the triune God is a response to God's saving action among us. Paul highlights the blessings we receive from the three Persons of the Holy Trinity: "the *grace* of the Lord Jesus Christ and the *love* of God and the *fellowship/communion* (*koinonia*) of the Holy Spirit" (v. 14). Christians gather for worship in the name of the Triune God not because a three-in-one god is such a good thing by definition but *because we have experienced* and *to experience again* through Word and Sacrament the blessings of *this* Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

In a similar move from last to first, the long season of Sundays after Pentecost begins with the final pericope of Matthew's Gospel. It is the resurrected Jesus, to whom all authority has now been given (v. 18), who sends the disciples out to *all* nations (v. 19) to teach *all* that he has commanded them (v. 20), promising to be with them through *all* the days (v. 20; most English translations make it difficult to detect *pas* as the common Greek root). These final, all-encompassing words of the risen Lord are not the end of the story for Matthew but the starting point for the disciples' mission—and for the proclamation of all the rest of the Series A gospel pericopes. The content of the coming "green" gospel pericopes is Jesus' teaching. Matthew 28 reminds us that we cannot preach on the coming texts as if we were contemporaries of Jesus during his earthly ministry (a sort of "You Are There" approach). Rather, even the most didactic pericopes are told by Matthew and must be proclaimed by us in light of the rest of the gospel story of Jesus' suffering, death, resurrection, and exaltation. The goal of the sermon is not to teach doctrine or morals but to address the hearers with the life-giving Word of the living Lord. KAK

Luther for Preachers

God "created us for this very purpose, to redeem and sanctify us. Moreover, having bestowed upon us everything in heaven and on earth, he has given us his Son and his Holy Spirit, through whom he brings us to himself. As we explained before, we could never come to recognize the Father's favor and grace were it not for the Lord Christ, who is a mirror of the Father's heart.... But neither could we know anything of Christ, had it not been revealed by the Holy Spirit." (*Large Catechism*, Third Article of the Creed)

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

If you are singing "Holy, Holy, Holy" as the opening hymn this week, it must be Trinity Sunday. According to legend, St. Patrick taught the Irish about the Holy Trinity by holding up a three-leaf clover. Oh, that it were so easy! One look at the Athanasian Creed proves that we are in trouble if we are looking for simple explanations about the Trinity. And maybe we should be in trouble, for the totality and the mystery of God will always elude us. And so, I offer not an explanation but a perspective on what the Trinity means to us today.

Genesis speaks of creation. At the very beginning, Scripture says, "Let *us* create...." The Holy Trinity? Who knows! The important point is that in creation God took "chaos" and brought it into order and meaning. God created our world and gave it light and life. And so, as we confess in the first article of the Creed, God is the creator, the one who turns chaos into order, not only for the cosmos but for our individual lives as well.

In our second lesson we see the importance of community. God does not stop at merely creating order out of chaos. No, God has more in mind. What God creates is community, an order of life where care and love are lived out. Each of us is included into a community by God—a community where the Holy Spirit dwells, a place where we are called, gathered, and sanctified.

Our gospel lesson is known as the "great commission." We are given that same commission in 1993: a commission to imitate our Creator and to bring chaos into order in our own right. We are not God, but through our proclamation, through our teaching "everything we have been told," we can lead others to Jesus and can show others that God has a meaning and purpose for our lives, that we can leave the chaos of the world around us and the isolation of our existence and enter into a new creation within a community of believers. We are commissioned to share our Triune God's love and mercy with all the world.

A three leaf clover. The texts describe the one God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) creating, calling into community, and actively commissioning.

Nancy J. Connor

Second Sunday after Pentecost
June 13, 1993

Psalm 31:1-5 (6-18) 19-24
Deuteronomy 11:18-21, 26-28
Romans 3:21-25a, 27-28
Matthew 7: (15-20) 21-29

FIRST READING

On the surface, today's lessons seem to offer contradictory messages. While Romans exalts a righteousness by faith apart from works of the law, Deuteronomy and Matthew maintain that being blessed or cursed, having one's house stand or fall, depends on whether or not one obeys God's commandments and does God's will. Must the preacher choose one message and ignore the other?

By no means! The contrast is intended from the very first words of the Romans text. "But now" (*nuni de*, v. 21) signals an eschatological inbreaking; something radically new is here. This pivotal phrase appears here for the first of *seven* times in Romans (cf. 6:22, 7:6, 7:17, 11:30, 15:23, 15:25). The verb "has been manifested" is in the perfect tense (v. 21, RSV), thus emphasizing the lasting result of this definitive revelation of the righteousness received only through faith. Although "the law and the prophets bear witness to" the revelation of this new righteousness in Jesus Christ (v. 21, RSV), they are clearly excluded as means of achieving it. The emphasis is unmistakable. Forms of "faith" or "believe" (*pistis, pisteuō*) occur five times in these few verses, forms of "righteousness" or "justify" (*dikaiosunē, dikaioō*) four times; the two concepts are linked by the object of that faith and the bearer of that righteousness, Jesus Christ.

Is the obedience theme of Deuteronomy and Matthew simply the old way which is superseded by the "but now"? That would mean not only to dismiss Moses as irrelevant but to sever the teaching of Jesus during his earthly ministry from the good news of the risen Lord and Savior. Obedi-

ence to God's will is not rejected as an aspect of Christian living; it is rejected as a means of (self)justification and a reason for boasting. In fact, obedience to God's will is a real possibility only after one has been freed from the need to save oneself. Moses' exhortation to Israel to obey God's commandments (vv. 26-28) is preceded by the instruction concerning phylacteries, which serve as constant reminders of the Israelites' deliverance from slavery in Egypt (vv. 18-21); obedience is not a precondition for God's saving action but a consequence of it. KAK

Luther for Preachers

"Belief in Christ means faith in Him wherever He is and through whomsoever He speaks. Thus we must be very much on our guard that we do not sometime become set in our minds, that we do not resist Christ and refuse to believe in Him, not realizing when, where, how, and through whom He is speaking to us. And almost always it is the case that He speaks to us in the place, the time, the manner, and through the person that we do not think He should." (*LW* 25:243, on Rom 3:21)

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

The conclusion of today's gospel is the finale of Matthew's account of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Before leaving this section of Jesus' teaching, Matthew wants his readers to realize that Jesus "left the crowds spellbound at his teaching." When Jesus got through teaching, the crowds were "astounded."

Samuel Goldwin, the movie producer, once remarked that he wanted a "film which begins with an earthquake and works up to a climax." He rightly assessed the popular attractiveness of the colossal. The question is, can Jesus' teachings claim even mild interest of today's generation without a multi-million dollar ad campaign or a cinematic extravaganza? Competition for "market share" is at an all-time high.

When is the last time anyone you know was astounded? In some ways, Jesus had an easier time making an impression on people. Jesus and the other preachers in his day were uniformly limited to lo-tech oratory and the power of personal persuasion. Folks in his day actually got excited over a good story or a convincing argument. They were not spoiled by Sesame Street and CNN!

What sets Jesus' teaching apart from the media and all other messages of yesterday and today is the authority with which he speaks. He is telling the truth about the way things really are.

Suppose this Sunday we preachers exercise with authority our administration of Word and Sacrament, intentionally preaching and presiding in the power of the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus, endowed with full authority, remains permanently with his church, is active in his ministers and is the assurance of their authority. At his post-resurrectional appearance, he shares that authority to teach (Mt 28:18-20). Let's not be timid with the truth. Stephen J. Cornils

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Third Sunday after Pentecost
June 20, 1993

Psalm 50:1-15
Hosea 5:15 - 6:6
Romans 4:18-25
Matthew 9:9-13

FIRST READING

The first and second lessons depict sharply contrasting attitudes toward God. Paul emphasizes the relationship between hope (*elpis*, v. 18) and faith/believing (*pistis, pisteuō*, vv. 18-20; also note the contrast with unbelief, *apistia*, in v. 20), which are together linked to God's promise (vv. 20, 21). Because the promise is God's, hope can be sure; because the promise is promise, hope is characterized by faith-full waiting.

Hosea depicts a shallow and uncommitted faith that, instead of waiting for the Lord's fulfillment, attempts to manipulate God into respond-

ing with cheap grace as a "sure" thing (6:3). (The people's insincere confession is an excellent reminder of Jesus' warning in last week's gospel, "Not every one who says to me, 'Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven" [Mt 7:21].) Paul says Abraham turned to God "in hope" (4:18); Hosea shows the people turning to God only "in their distress" (5:15). Paul describes Abraham holding unwaveringly to God's promise despite evidence to the contrary (4:20); Hosea's God accuses the people of having only a fair-weather love instead of the "steadfast love" (*chesed*, 6:4,6) God desires and demands.

Even the stark reality of old age and approaching death does not weaken Abraham's faith-filled hope in God's promise. Both Abraham and Sarah are described with "dead" words: old Abraham is "as good as dead" (a euphemism for impotence) and Sarah's womb is characterized by "deadness" (v. 20, both from the root *nekros*). But the promise of offspring is not thereby thwarted, because the promising God is the God "who gives life [precisely!] to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist" (v. 17b). The promising God is the God "who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead" (v. 24).

The Hosea text reappears in the lectionary as an option for Good Friday. Despite the people's faithlessness, God does choose to heal, to bind up, and to raise from death; this is no longer the cheap grace the people expect but a grace whose cost is the cross. God's love is steadfast, even when ours is not. KAK

Luther for Preachers

"For if God promises and there is no one who believes Him when He promises, then surely there will also be no promise of God and no fulfillment, for it has been promised to no one, since no one has received it. Therefore faith ratifies the promise, and the promise demands faith in him to whom it is made." (*LW* 25:40, marginal gloss on Rom 4:17)

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

As I look at the Matthew text I am drawn to the theme of mercy in the quote from Hos 6:6. It is in mercy that we respond with beneficence and compassion. It is in Psalm 103 that we find the mercy of God for the creation: "As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him" (Ps 103:13 NIV). It is Jesus who made mercy a touchstone of the renewal of one's life (Mt 7:1-2).

Throughout the Gospel of Matthew the essence of discipleship is described in terms of servanthood. These verses from the ninth chapter once again draw us toward that theme of servanthood. It is on the tail of his call of Matthew that Jesus points toward the essence of what the call is about. There is a call toward showing mercy and being merciful.

The church that I serve in downtown Minneapolis is located in the midst of all kinds of suffering that is the result of ongoing poverty in the inner city. A woman worker at the church coordinates a free store that opens twice a week for the neighborhood community. Herself a recipient of the graciousness of a helping hand from the free store over 20 years ago, she continues to help others as she had been helped. Although she has since moved from the neighborhood, she drives over 100 miles round-trip daily to help those who are in need.

Christ calls us out of the world of sin but calls us to continue to live amidst the world in which we exist. We are called to bring Christ's message and Christ's compassion to those around us. That happens in many different ways. Nevertheless it happens through our presence with all God's people. We are called to be where there is the greatest need. Jesus was making a point when he ate with "the tax collectors and the sinners."

We are called not to stand "away from" or "outside of" or "apart from." We are called to stand "with" and "among." In mercy we are called to show a hand of beneficence and a heart of compassion. Shawn R. Mai

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost
June 27, 1993

Psalm 100
Exodus 19:2-8a
Romans 5:6-11
Matthew 9:35–10:8

FIRST READING

Romans 5 offers a three-part, increasingly serious diagnosis of the human problem. The initial diagnosis, "while we were still weak" (v. 6), is reminiscent of the oft-heard line, "After all, we're only human." If the diagnostic process stops here, one is left with the impression that the human problem is only our weakness, our incapacity, our finitude. But if the problem is only, or primarily, that we are limited from the start by our creatureliness, we are to a great extent let off the hook of culpability, for God is the one who made us "only human."

Against this evasive misunderstanding, Paul presses a more advanced diagnosis: the problem is not just human weakness but that "we still were sinners" (v. 8). The problem is not with what we can or can't do (our weakness) but with who we are, sinners; the problem is not just that we are limited but that we rebel against those limits. Even at our very best, we continue to "fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23, Pentecost 2).

Worse yet, our attempts to use our finitude as an excuse are the most damning evidence against us. By rationalizing our failures we attempt to avoid God's judgment, and that means we reject God as judge, setting ourselves up as judges in God's place. Paul's final diagnosis, then, is not just that we are "weak" or "sinners," but that we become "enemies" of God (v. 10)!

Unless the diagnosis is pushed to that final degree, the remedy Paul offers makes no sense. At each of the three stages of the diagnosis, Paul announces the death of Christ as the solution: "Christ died for the ungodly" (v. 6), "Christ died for us" (v. 8), "we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son" (v. 10)!

Just as Paul pushes the diagnosis to its full extent, he also unfolds the solution more fully. Now that we have been justified, now that we have been reconciled, Paul twice asserts, "much more surely... will we be saved" (vv. 9-10, NRSV). Paul uses the verb *sōzō* to denote the fullness of future, eschatological salvation, in distinction from the justification and reconciliation that have already been accomplished. The Good News is not just that our past alienation is overcome; the Good News is that God in Christ *opens up a whole new future for us*, a future characterized by "rejoicing" (v. 11, RSV) or "boasting" (NRSV) in God.

The other lessons address putting this new future into action. Jesus sends the disciples out with his own authority to preach, to heal, and to cast out demons, thus opening a new future not only for the disciples as ministering servants but also for "the lost sheep" whom they tend. Israel's obedience to God, although at one level conditional ("if you will obey my voice," Ex 19:5), is fundamentally grounded in God's saving act of liberation from Egypt (v. 4); it is only God's "therefore" (v. 5) which opens up the possibility of Israel's faithful obedience. KAK

Luther for Preachers

"There are two kinds of enemies of the cross of Christ. The first kind is the violent type, and the second type is the cunning. The violent are those who want to make the cross of no effect by force, and they attack it with all their forces.... But the cunning enemies are those who desert the cross in flight, that is, those who do not want to speak or perform the truth for anyone but are always trying to please, to wheedle, to flatter everyone and to offend no one, or else they withdraw into solitude." (*LW* 25:290, on Rom 5:3)

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

How very modern it all is. Jesus goes about his earthly task of ministering to the people in their needs, teaching them his "way of life," preaching to them the good news as he heals their bodies and minds of every known infirmity. And he is continually moved by what he perceives to be the sad and sorry plight of humankind. "They were

harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." How very modern.

"What is the meaning of it all?" People ask nowadays. "Is this all there is?" "What is the trend? What is 'in' this month?" We study modern man/woman/child and we soundly conclude that the majority of humanity seems to have lost their sense of direction. There is no focus in their lives, and they seem to wander aimlessly, settling briefly on this "fix," then on that "panacea"—all the while experiencing a deep restlessness which most people do not want to acknowledge even to themselves.

Perhaps modern humanity needs a better standard of living, or an improved social security, or extensive psychoanalysis. No doubt all of those would benefit, just as they would have benefited the "harassed and helpless" people Jesus encountered. But he did not say, "We need more economists," or "We need more sociologists" or "I wonder if there are enough therapists to go around?"

How very modern it all is. Then as now the core issue was a spiritual matter. It was clear to Jesus; hopefully it is as clear to us. Augustine (or whoever it was who said it first) was right: "The soul is restless until it finds its rest in God." So Jesus selected a handful of people and charged them to begin a truly epic task—to "re-center" a fallen humanity that had gone (and continues to go) eccentric. They were to do this by means of the same teaching, preaching, and healing that he had inaugurated. A profound charge to mere mortals, but backed by immortal support. Awesome, but manageable.

That charge has continued uninterrupted to today. We are called to fall in behind the ranks of the countless disciples of Jesus all the way back to the original group. Jesus, the leader and model; allegiance, the base requirement; servanthood, the essence of discipleship. William A. Miller

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost
July 4, 1993

Psalm 69:1-20
Jeremiah 20:7-13
Romans 5:12-15
Matthew 10:24-33

FIRST READING

Sin and death are linked. Because we are sinners, we must die—not *will* die as merely some organic inevitability but *must* die—and die not only at the end of our lives but throughout our lives. Our problem is not just the existence of death but the dominion of death (v. 14, RSV/NRSV) in our lives. It is not physical death but this kind of soul-destroying, life-quenching death that is worth fearing (*phobeomai*), Jesus tells his followers (Mt 10:28).

Jesus does not dismiss our fears as groundless but offers himself as the answer to our real and deadly phobias! The NRSV's "so" at verses 26 and 31 is easy to pass over; *oun* is more forcefully translated "therefore" (which RSV has at v. 31 but not at v. 26). The first and last of Jesus' three exhortations to the disciples not to be afraid are grounded explicitly in the authority Jesus claims as their master and teacher (vv. 24-25) and as the representative of "my Father in heaven" (vv. 32-33). The disciples belong to Jesus, who speaks to and for the Father, "therefore" they need not fear. Death's dominion (*basileuō*, Rom 5:14, 17) is overthrown by another Lord and King whose reign is life-giving (v. 17).

Since God's righteousness has been manifested "apart from the law," in Christ (3:21f, Pentecost 2), sin is no longer counted against those who are in Christ (5:13b). Both sin and righteousness are corporate realities, in which we are bound to others, for ill or for good. Those who resist the doctrine of original sin as being somehow unfair or as undermining individual responsibility are still living by the law rather than living in Christ. If those who insist on being judged

solely on the basis of their own actions refuse to accept Adam's sin as their own, "much more surely" (v. 15) will they be unable to accept God's free gift of grace in Jesus Christ as their own. KAK

Luther for Preachers

"Thus the likeness of Adam's transgression is in us, because we die, as if we had sinned in the same way he did. And the likeness of Christ's justification is in us, because we live, as if we had produced the same kind of righteousness that He did." (*LW* 25:305)

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

Have no fear.

Matthew 10 details Jesus Christ's commissioning instructions to his disciples. This chapter is very appropriate for today's Christian workers and leaders.

In a fast paced society, living with uncertainties causes fear and anxiety. When corporate America implements quick decisions, the fear of job instability prevails strongly. Most people who are leading a two-faced life are scared of the revelation of reality. Relationships built on "make-believe" may crumble at the point of transitions and change, and that also causes worry. Unwillingness to accept or accommodate alterations in living standards leads to constant alarm. Matthew 10 is relevant and comforting to those who face situations like this. Jesus is very up front with his inner circle of disciples. He is sharing with them the worst scenarios of what they may face in their ministries.

Jesus tells them not to expect better treatment than their master received. Disciples or servants are not above the teacher or master. Disciples and servants should follow the master's way of life.

Man-God Jesus had moments of glory and moments of dejection. He suffered the most terrible bodily afflictions; he faced the most extreme shaming situations in his life; he was abandoned by everyone, including his closest friends; he was denied by the most trustworthy disciple; he was betrayed by the closest colleague; he got the most contemptible persecution; he encountered the most devastating execution to his precious life.

What was Jesus' attitude and reaction at these situations? Silence. Calm. No unnecessary arguments. No protesting his innocence. He was aware of his credentials and powers, but because of the commitment to his vocation and the determination to fulfill his call he tolerated and suffered. At all these moments in his life he was very clear about the will of his Father. And he was quite aware of the presence of the Father with him.

The most comforting feeling on earth for Christians is that the Master-Teacher, Jesus, is there when we encounter trials, troubles, and tribulations. His charge, "have no fear," is the most consoling and relevant bid for people who live in a world where Christ's message is being questioned and tried. The life-affirming anecdote of a little sparrow clearly states that God cares for even the little bird. How much more he cares for the crown of creation, you and me. Because of our stature in God's plan even the loss of a hair from our head is known to him. If God cares for everything in our life and is aware of every move in our life, how much we deserve to share our experiences with that love to our fellow men and women. One more step: Jesus promises that if we witness him on earth, he will witness for us in heaven before God the Father.

Have no fear. He was there, and he will be there!

Cherian C. Puthiyottil

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost
July 11, 1993

Psalm 89:1-4, 15-18
Jeremiah 28:5-9
Romans 6:1b-11
Matthew 10:34-42

FIRST READING

Romans 6 offers something of a mini-creed for Christians. Through baptism, the Christian has been crucified with Christ (v. 6), has died with Christ (v. 8), and has been buried with Christ (v. 4). The Christian is no longer dead *because of* sin but *dead to* sin. Living in sin is no longer possible (v. 2). Instead the Christian lives "to God" (v. 11). As Christ was raised up from death to be "seated at the right hand of the Father," the Christian is raised up from the waters of baptism to "walk in newness of life" (v. 4).

For Paul, this new life is not a goal or an ideal but a *fait accompli*. Those who have been joined to Christ's death have been acquitted once and for all of their sin, judged and made righteous (v. 6, the verb translated "freed" in RSV and NRSV is the perfect passive of *dikaioō*). As death no longer "has dominion" over Christ, so also sin and death can no longer "lord it over" the Christian (v. 9, *kurieuō*).

Romans 6 puts a radically new slant on the preaching of Matthew 10. Taking up the cross to follow Jesus (v. 38) can be understood not just as a goal but as a description of what has already happened to each Christian in baptism, where we were crucified and buried with Christ. Losing one's life, for Christ's sake, in order to find one's life (v. 39) is no longer a proposition about the future that might be met with fear or doubt rather than with trusting anticipation; the statement functions instead as a description of the present reality in which we live, wherein the sting and power of death have been conquered and newness of life is a gift already being enjoyed. Division among family members (vv. 35-37) is not a prediction of the Christian's future personal troubles but a recognition that relationships based on kinship have been superseded by the relationship based on discipleship (vv. 41-42). Those who follow Jesus through baptism into death find not only a new life but a new identity within a new family.

Jeremiah challenges false prophets who preach only what the people want to hear. His point is not that God's message is always bad news for unfaithful people but rather that God's truly Good News is recognized only after the fact (v.9). KAK

Luther for Preachers

"We are baptized only once, by which we gain the life of Christ, even though we often fall and rise again. For the life of Christ can be recovered again and again, but a person can enter upon it only once.... This expression "once for all"... is a commendation of the eternal nature of grace, and it denies the possibility of some other kind of righteousness, so that the meaning is that whoever has been baptized or has repented has already so escaped sin and acquired righteousness that never again for all eternity is it necessary to escape sin or to acquire another righteousness. But this single and only righteousness is sufficient forever." (*LW* 25:315-16)

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

Imagine a family gathering for a holiday meal and day together. If they are like many families, there are undercurrents of disagreement or resentments that lie just beneath the surface. In the course of the dinner a comment is made and someone disagrees. An argument begins, and soon the jovial mood turns to one of anger and dissension. The party is over. Perhaps the comment was true, but that truth is not allowed to be expressed in the family because it will disrupt the false harmony that prevails.

As Jesus speaks to his disciples in this gospel we get just the same sense. When he sends them out they will be just like his presence—a truth that will disrupt. Consistently, Jesus' presence was the unmasking of a situation. His presence was always an illumination and a call. It illumined the

present situation, bringing to light any hidden deceptions or falsehoods. He would speak what others would not in order to keep an easy and false sense of peace and harmony. His call was to a new truth that would lead to life, a true harmony based on that truth and not on a lie. He challenged people to give up life based on deception in order to find a life they could live in truth.

This prophetic presence of Jesus cut like a two-edged sword. Among those who suffered under society's deceptions and illusions, he was welcomed. Those who felt threatened by this naked truth rejected him.

Jesus indicates to his followers that this prophetic function is theirs, and they will experience the same reactions from others when they share and live the truth with which he has equipped them.

Those who receive the revealing presence of Jesus in the disciples whom he sends are worthy of Jesus. They, in turn, come to identify with Jesus themselves and take up their cross and follow.

Dying to self is the way to life for the self in the prophetic presence of Jesus' truth. This is what we can bring to the world as Christ's disciples. Paul in Romans points to baptism as the place of identification with Christ. Dying to sin, we rise with Christ to walk in newness of life. The prophetic presence of the disciple, that disillusioning and truth-telling presence, is really an invitation of grace to find that newness of life in baptism into Christ. Richard J. Beckmen

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost
July 18, 1993

Psalm 145:1-2 (3-13) 14-22
Zechariah 9:9-12
Romans 7:15-25a
Matthew 11:25-30

FIRST READING

Romans 7 depicts the sinner's situation as that of a prisoner of war, "captive to the law of sin" (v. 23); worse yet, the sinner is a collaborator, waging war with the enemy against God's law. Like all prisoners of war, the sinner cries out to be delivered (v. 24, RSV; "rescued," NRSV). At the same time we live both as sinful prisoners of war and as faith-full "prisoners of hope" (Zech 9:12), trusting the promise that the captives will be set free (v. 11).

The verb translated almost unanimously as "understand" in Rom 7:15 is literally "know" (*ginōskō*, cf. *epiginōskō* in Mt 11:27). Because *ginōskō* can denote an intense, personal knowledge, in contrast to a merely cognitive understanding, NEB translates the verse, "I do not even acknowledge my own actions as mine, for what I do is not what I want to do...." This reading reinforces the heart of the predicament described by Paul: the problem is not one of understanding our behavior (a problem that the right therapist might help us to solve) but one of being *unable to change* our behavior, no matter how desperately we want to. Two mutually exclusive claims, "the law of God" and "the law of sin," struggle within us (vv. 22-23). For Paul there is no neutral ground. The default setting on the human computer is Sin, and we cannot reprogram ourselves, however much we may try.

But if, for Paul, there is no intermediate state between sin and righteousness, there is a Mediator! "Through Jesus Christ" (v. 25) there is deliverance for the prisoners on death row (v. 24). Not that our conviction is overturned, but someone else bears the penalty for us. Zechariah 9

offers a strong reminder of Holy Week, from the triumphant-yet-humble entry into Jerusalem on a donkey (v. 9) to "the blood of my covenant" that sets the captives free (v. 11). As recipients of the gospel-promise and "prisoners of hope," our struggle is not taken away (Romans 7), but we are offered rest along the way (Mt 11:28ff.) and rejoicing in the end (Zech 9:9). KAK

Luther for Preachers

"The saints at the same time as they are righteous are also sinners; righteous because they believe in Christ, whose righteousness covers them and is imputed to them, but sinners because they do not fulfill the Law, are not without concupiscence, and are like sick men under the care of a physician; they are sick in fact but healthy in hope and in the fact that they are beginning to be healthy, that is, they are 'being healed.' They are people for whom the worst possible thing is the presumption that they are healthy, because they suffer a worse relapse." (*LW* 25:336, lecture on Rom 7:8)

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

"It's easy." That is a phrase my older sisters would often say to me as they would ice skate past me or take out their two-wheel bikes and ride so swiftly, while I was left behind struggling with my double runner skates or trying to keep up with a tricycle.

"Try it, it's easy." But so often I would hesitate to try, for I was afraid. What if I would fall? What if I failed? Maybe it was safer just to keep doing things the same way. Then I would question my not trying, and would think, "But if I don't try I might miss out on the adventures that my sisters enjoy."

In today's gospel Jesus says, "Try my yoke on, it's easy." You won't find it a burden, you can learn from me." We stand a bit awkward in that moment of decision. Do I want this yoke on me or not? What if it is too heavy? What if it doesn't fit? What if I look foolish in trying? What if I don't like it? What shall we do? Muddle on as we are? Or accept the invitation to a new way that we are told is easier? Can we believe such an invitation?

Paul in the second lesson speaks to this very issue when he writes, "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate." Paul reflects that even though he knows the way, he hesitates and his choices are not in keeping with the calling of Jesus. The lesson concludes with Paul's "good news": there is one who can rescue us from our poor choices. This one, Jesus Christ, continues to call us to himself.

We are often tempted in our day to make the choice that is contrary to our calling as Christians. We go after prestige, power, and possessions, trying to make it on our own, and the results are often despair, depression, and defeat. The question posed to us in our lives this day is this: Are we willing to try another way?

The gentle Jesus invites us to try a new way. If we take the yoke he offers, we are assured that we will learn. We are promised that amidst the tensions and pressures and pains of this world we will find true rest. We are assured our lives will never be the same. Nancy J. Connor

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Eighth Sunday after Pentecost
July 25, 1993

Psalm 65
Isaiah 55:10-11
Romans 8:18-25
Matthew 13:1-9 (18-23)

FIRST READING

Hope has been a recurring theme this season; this week's texts provide strong illustrations of hope's fulfillment. Isaiah 55 declares that God's word always bears fruit. Matthew 13 expects a bountiful harvest with yields up to a hundredfold. Those who, in Rom 7:24, cried out for release from captivity to "this body of death" wait earnestly and hopefully for "the redemption of our body,"

possessing already "the first fruits of the Spirit" (8:23). The fulfillment of this hope is not yet revealed, but it is certain, "for in this hope (*elpis*) we were saved" (v. 24).

What about present sufferings, then? To say that they "are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (v. 18) does not mean that they are not to be taken seriously. Our experiences of rocky ground and thorny struggles are very real—not only because we ourselves are sinners but because the whole creation in which we live is in "bondage to decay" and suffers together with us (v. 21f.). Hope does *not transport us out of* our present reality but *transforms us within* that reality! Paul insists that our hope is not only for our own freedom from suffering but for the redemption of creation itself along with us.

Paul's strong emphasis on hope and on the certainty of hope's fulfillment frees us from reading or preaching Matthew 13 too analytically ("And what kind of soil are you?"). We hear the gospel as believers who have already also been addressed by Paul in Romans 8. Paul declares that we who are in Christ already have "the first fruits of the Spirit" (v. 23). Since this is so, there is no point in worrying about whether we will turn out to be fertile or infertile soil. According to Paul, we are already fertile, fruit-bearing soil; the only question that remains is how abundant the harvest will be (Mt 13:8,23). To be sure, our fertility is often contrary to appearances. We live by hope, not by sight (Rom 8:24). But fertile soil we are, because the Sower continues to cultivate and recultivate us, in and out of season, planting the seed of the Word deep in the broken places of our lives. KAK

Luther for Preachers

"Hope which comes from a desire for something which we love always increases the love by delay. Thus it happens that the thing hoped for and the person hoping become one through the tenseness of the hoping.... Thus love transforms the lover into the beloved. Thus hope changes the one who hopes into what is hoped for...." (*LW* 25:364, lecture on Rom 8:24)

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

The teaser on the advertisement reads, "Greatest Wealth-Building Discovery of the Last 50 Years." The premise of the pitch is to "simplify and grow rich." In light of the magazine's advice to "sell all investments that will cause you trouble," you have to wonder about the sower's investment strategy in today's gospel. He broadcast his precious resources with abandon. Talk about a diversified portfolio and multiple risk!

Much as one could say about the extravagance of God's investment in humanity, it appears Jesus' parable invites us to reflect on how each of us manages what God has invested in us.

This may be a timely occasion to affirm the receptivity of our elders, some of the most receptive soils (souls) in the church. Suppose we commend those who have worshipped, prayed, and studied Scripture faithfully over the years, whose lives have bone fruit in abundance. At the same time we celebrate our aging saints, we need to assess the outcome of younger "crops" to come, many of whom are not receptive in the same way.

Rather than goad and guilt younger generations in hopes of deepened devotional life, consider appealing to a feeling of rootlessness which is characteristic of teens and "boomers" across the land. The possibility of forming deep roots in a *place* in this time of rapid transitions is highly unlikely. However, one may form a lasting connection in the *person of Jesus and in the community of the church.* Intentional personal and group study of the Word allows God's investment (the Word) to germinate, take root, and grow.

The investment ad offers a bonus ("$10 value") for those who subscribe: "The Ten Biggest Mistakes Investors Make." Matthew offers better advice about potential mistakes regarding God's investment in us in four verses (4-7), and it's free.

Why not point out the appeal of investing where it will make a substantial difference? The promise is that by receiving God's Word and allowing it to grow within us, God will provide a payoff beyond our expectations. Where else are you going to get a thirty, sixty, or hundredfold yield? Stephen J. Cornils

The Quest for the Good Society

Roger Fjeld
President, Wartburg Theological Seminary

The organizing principle for this issue of *Currents* was a simple and welcome one—write about something that is very important to you. For me that something is the pressing need to reshape the social order and the necessity to engage the church in that task. As an American historian, I know what happened to an earlier initiative in that direction—the social gospel and its political partner, the Progressive Party. I'm not ready to recover that innocent optimism about social change. But we are a society desperately in need of change, and the church must be an agent for that change.

The starting place for me is the analysis offered in *Habits of the Heart.* There authors Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, and Tipton, speaking especially of and to the American middle class, argue that we have deserted the sense of the common good in favor of a particularly destructive form of individualism. The founders of this nation assumed the enduring obligation of all citizens to contribute to the common good. What was intended to be new in the American experiment was the freedom of the individual to choose his or her own best contribution, rather than being assigned a station in life by accident of birth or class or gender or religion. Instead, we have consistently tilted toward individualism in American society, enlarging individual freedoms and construing them as freedom from obligation, not freedom to determine one's best contributions.

Habits of the Heart ends with a prophetic worry that it may already be too late; that there may not be enough glue left to bind us together into a common body with firm commitments to each other. The alternative, the authors suggest, is a breaking up into "enclaves"—people of like minds and circumstances banding together in competing groups, each securing what advantage is possible in a decaying society.

These same authors have now written a sequel, *The Good Society.* In it they argue for the central importance of institutions and the necessity to view institutions as instruments for renewing society. The good life is lived in and through institutions; those who, by necessity or choice, go it alone find themselves not liberated so much as isolated. We've become a nation of suspicious individualists, not trusting institutions or their leaders and then wondering why national life is gradually being drained of meaning and direction.

Last summer I was a participant in a week-long summer institute on *The Good Society.* Twenty-five of us joined the five authors in discussions about the alternatives which confront our society. The conversation turned again and again to the

importance of institutions, and repeatedly the authors held up religious institutions as the best hope for a renewal of American society. All five authors come out of religious backgrounds and all five are currently involved in religious life. But their call to the churches to become instruments for renewal is more than an extension of their personal beliefs. Rather, they believe religious institutions have the possibility of rising above sectarian restraints; of becoming broader communities than the traditional "gatherings of the like-minded" and then pointing to and helping develop a universal sense of community. They believe religious institutions can learn to model the larger sense of community that is essential if anything approaching the good life is to be a reality in our future.

Our ELCA is one of those institutions which can and should take the lead in moving us toward a renewal of society. We are large in numbers. We are gifted with human resources and material wealth. Our own church bears a great responsibility to make its contribution and make it now!

We have yet to begin to fulfill that potential. We've been distracted by the mechanics of merger; further distracted by frequent reorganizations born of financial crisis. There are struggles for leadership, as some who had hoped to dominate the church's life find themselves shouting from the sidelines. We tend to invest in the maintenance of what we have, rather than in focusing our minds and our resources on mission. We are tempted to take care of our own interests without recognizing that our own interests must be subordinate to the interests of others if renewal is to occur.

The authors of these books are not optimistic about the future. Theirs is a desperate call to people to recognize the danger if American society continues on its present trajectory toward greater and greater individualism and autonomy. Prophetically, they call us to reinvest in each other, to reach out across the barriers that regularly and easily keep us apart. For us in the ELCA, it is a call to commit ourselves as individuals, congregations, synods, schools, and the national church to the task of renewing society. To whom much is given, of them will much be required—that describes us. And the failure to rise to the occasion will be recorded as a great failure!

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