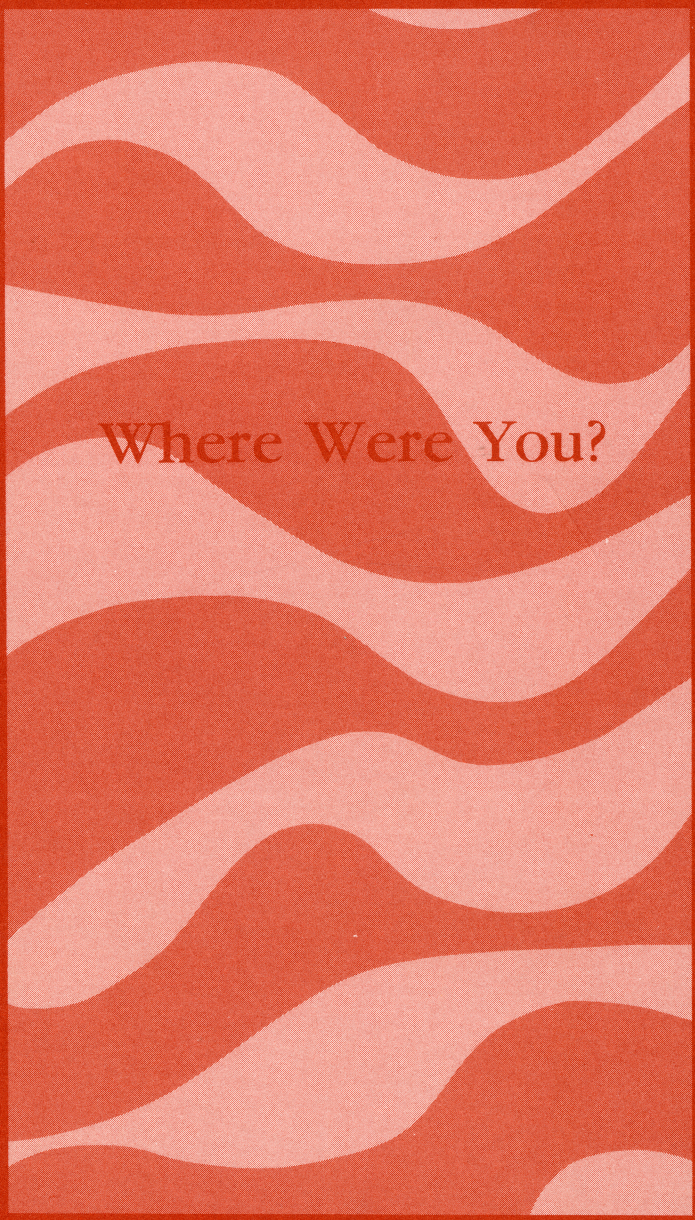
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CURRENTS

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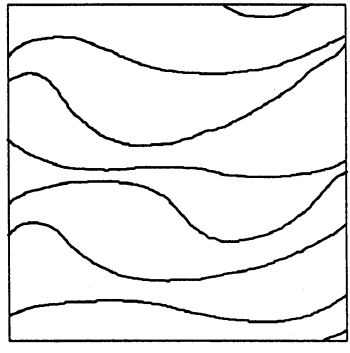
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Series C
Ninteenth Sunday after Pentecost—Thanksgiving Day

Where Were You?

Where were you when the verdict in the Rodney King case was handed down? I was driving out of Midway Airport, nervously punching the radio buttons to find news, music, or sports babble to interest me on the way home. The news from L.A. was as stunning as that fateful shot in Dallas nearly thirty years ago.

But, really, where were you on April 29? I grew up in still-segregated America, went through the waves of changes in the '60s, remember staring blankly at the TV in the kitchen when Martin Luther King, Jr. was shot, served an African American parish in St. Louis, and have lived with many of you through the borning days of the ELCA as we struggle to become a multicultural church.

I have heard the fears and frustrations of our African American students, read about the development since the '60s of a new underclass, and known in my bones that the tensions and injustices in our cities are deeper than ever.

But my mind was anywhere but there as I drove out of Midway Airport into the late afternoon rush hour.

It's too early to tell what the ultimate significance of that day and its aftermath will be, but given the incredible verdict and the subsequent urban riots, given the divisive, corrosive, and on-going festering of racism in our society, each of us needs to ask with redoubled urgency: In all that, where were you?

George L. Murphy believes that discussion of bioethics should affect our theology, the dialogue between religion and science, and our seminary and parish education. Our theology may help us make difficult

decisions without being paralyzed by fear that a mistaken decision will destroy us. Doing something technological—like taking radiation therapy—may be at the same time an expression of faith in the Creator. A scientific understanding of matter, on the other hand, may enable us to speak of the resurrection of the body without having to worry about whether that body will have the same atoms or same kidneys.

Mark D. Tranvik finds a separation of Word and sacraments in many Lutheran contexts. Luther saw baptism as the place where the Triune God in all his power makes himself bodily present and brings the baptized person into his kingdom. The water of baptism is divine and heavenly by virtue of Christ's presence in it. A close reading of Philip Melanchthon and Johannes Brenz finds the word and water of baptism standing beside one another almost as strangers. A devalued sacrament tends to limit the gospel to the sense of hearing and makes it susceptible to the vagaries of human subjectivity.

Mary C. Vance-Welsh reviews the pastoral theology of Gustaf Wingren, a Swedish theologian who finds God's activity in all of creation. For him the everyday world in which human beings work and rest and play is God-given and God-governed and, hence, of immeasurable worth. Since God continues to be active as creator and redeemer with the world, our worldly involvement is highly esteemed. Through Christ's work we are freed to become totally human, while salvation will mean, finally, the restoration of a wounded humanity. On the last day, we and all the rest of creation will be restored to the wholeness God intends.

Jay C. Rochelle tells us Bonhoeffer was opposed to "religion" when it advanced only individualism, inwardness, and piety. Bonhoeffer knew the whole world as the one sphere of the Christian's activity, whereas "religion" allows for two spheres, one of which is individual and inward, and one is worldly, where one may live independently of one's relationship to God. The presentation of the divinely-revealed mystery occurs through preaching the word and administering the sacraments. And that requires the assembly or *Gemeinde*, itself created and sustained by the ongoing proclamation of the Word and the ongoing proclamation of the

Sacraments. The world can only come of age if and as it comes of age in Christ. Christ is the ultimate truth of the world, the one in whom the world achieves true worldliness.

Rogers W. Jackson hears from John's Gospel that God is the foundation of all life. If this is so, then blackness is ontologically based and has relative and eternal significance in that it issues from God. After all, all things came into being through the Word, and without him not one thing came into being. Listen to the author: Jesus turned on the lights for me. The cross of John declares the negatives I face; the resurrection declares the transformation, re-creation, and the redemption of God for the ambiguity and distortions I faced without a cause. This gospel can be seen by us too in situational and contextual areas where the broken, bruised, and abused are made whole in Jesus.

Don H. Zinger approaches the ecological crisis from a christological starting point: the finite is capable of the infinite. Nature's ways struck Luther's eyes and ears with the vivifying wisdom and graciousness of God. If God comes to us in matter, God's created order ought to matter to us. The image of God puts us into a relationship with God, the human community, and the natural world. Christians are called upon by their theology to invest themselves in the ecological health of our planet.

Gary Blobaum tells us a story about stewardship, evangelism, and forgiveness, with echoes of Luke 15:11-32.

Jesus turned on the lights also for me! Regardless of where I was on April 29, he was there—on the cross, in the courtroom, out in south central L.A. Everywhere but in the tomb which could not hold him!

Our secularism, Bonhoeffer said, opens the door to genuine "autonomous" life in the world as it is and not as we would like it to be.

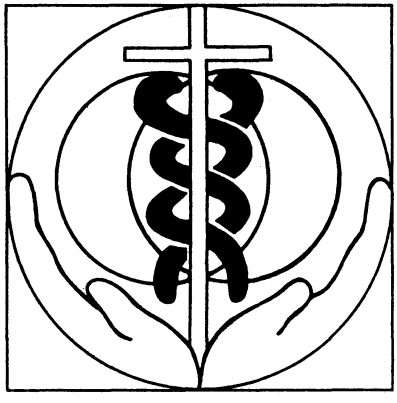
Now is no time to flee that world.

Ralph W. Klein
Editor

The Place of Bioethics

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

Modern biological science and medical practice have exacerbated some old ethical questions and raised some new ones. The new area of bioethics has developed in connection with attempts to deal with some of those issues.



The importance of the issues needs little argument: *in vitro* fertilization, use and withdrawal of life-support systems, and organ transplants, to give just a few examples, are literally matters of life and death, and more and more people are having to make decisions about the uses of such technologies. Like many new disciplines, bioethics first developed in response to specific concerns of people—in this case medical and legal personnel—who had to deal at first hand with issues

which were arising.[1] There comes a time, however, to ask some larger questions about the relationship between such a new discipline and other aspects of knowledge and activity. My purpose here is to make some suggestions about the significance of bioethics for theology and for the life of the church in general.

It would be possible to speak about the *locus* of bioethics, which would suggest that it is to be treated as a particular part of a formal system of theology. Such systematization is not to be despised, and I will make some concluding comments on it, but I am more concerned here with the role of bioethics in the day to day life of the Christian community. Where and when do we need to be aware that we are dealing with bioethics, and where should we make efforts to introduce such concerns? What is the place of bioethics in the church?

1. First of all, bioethics has a place in *theology*—not, as I indicated earlier, only as a part of formal systematics, but as part of the reflection of all intelligent Christians on their faith. Bioethics should be seen by Christians as part of theologically informed ethics.

This is certainly not to suggest that theology has a monopoly on the subject, or that only the insights of Christians are of value. Medical and legal views are also essential, and it is certainly possible to develop an essentially secular bioethics to which Christians should give due attention.[2] But from a Christian standpoint, some fundamental points will be missed if questions of bioethics are not set in a theological context.[3] A couple of examples may make this clear.

Many people today have to make decisions about the appropriate use of life-support technologies. In some cases the capability for maintaining life functions in situations in which that would have been impossible a few decades ago is an unqualified blessing. But other cases are not quite so clear. What kinds of efforts need to be made—or *not* made—to continue life for a terminally ill patient in great pain? Is there any point in keeping the bodily machinery going when there is no realistic hope of return to consciousness? Some believe that life should be allowed to end, or even be terminated, in many situations of that type, and they support those positions with arguments for "death with dignity" or "quality of life." On the other hand, there are those who will insist in the name of "right to life" that ventilators and feeding tubes should *not* be removed.

Serious theological consideration of this issue will make it clear that both "death with dignity" and right to life" positions have significant limitations. The Christian gospel proclaims a God who submitted to "the utterly vile death of the cross,"[4] the most *un*dignified of deaths. In the light of the cross, and of Jesus' call to his disciples to take up the cross and follow him, avoidance of suffering simply cannot be given the highest ethical priority. But the gospel also proclaims the resurrection of the Crucified and a hope for life out of death (note,

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[1] For some comments on this development see Martin E. Marty, "Where Medicine and Faith Meet: The New Situation," *Taproot* VI (1991): 36.

[2] E.g., H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr., *The Foundations of Bioethics* (New York: Oxford, 1986).

[3] For one proposal on how to do this see George L. Murphy, "Chiasmic Cosmology as the Context for Bioethics," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 42 (1990): 94.

[4] *Mors turpissima crucis*. For a discussion of this phrase of Origen see Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), xi.

e.g., Rom 4:17-18). And there may come a time when insisting upon keeping bodily life going for every possible second becomes a denial of that hope.

Obviously those considerations do not in themselves equip us to decide if and when to pull the plug in any given situation. The point here is that theological reflection gives some unique insights into the problem. But we can go further than that. We feel that there *is* a correct decision in such cases, and that in order to behave rightly and have ethical standing in the world we should be able to make the right choice. And it is true that such issues demand our most careful, intelligent, and prayerful consideration. But when all is said and done, we may finally not be certain that our decision is right. Can we still go ahead and act, knowing that our decision may be wrong? Here the doctrine of justification tells us that our relationship with God, and thus our fundamental worth, is determined by God's grace and forgiveness, not by our making the right choice. This theological consideration does not tell us *how* to act, but it does tell us that we *can* act, and not have to be paralyzed by fear that a mistaken decision will destroy us.

2. Secondly, bioethics has a place as part of the larger conversation between theology, science, technology, and ethics which we may refer to briefly as the "science-theology dialogue." It is part of the larger subject of trying to understand how God is active in the world which science enables us to understand and which technology enables us to change.

It should be remembered that questions about the relationships between medicine and religion did not have to await modern biomedical technology. The Bible in general has a balanced view of the role of the physician, Sirach 38:1-15 being the most sustained discussion. Unfortunately a positive view of the role of medicine often was rejected within the Christian tradition in favor of the idea that God would heal a person who had faith without the use of medicine or doctors.[5] Such ideas are still held by some sects today and sometimes give rise to court cases and stories in the news.

Questions about the relationships between medicine and religion did not have to await modern biomedical technology.

In order to understand how a person of faith can look to medicine for healing, we have to think about one of the primary concerns of the science-theology dialogue, the way in which God acts in the world. We can come to see that God is active precisely through the natural processes which God has created, and which can be described by science. The development of life through biological evolution and the provision of food through solar energy, weather, and soil chemistry can be described from one side by scientific means, and from the other side as the gracious creative activity of God. This is precisely what traditional dogmatics

[5] Andrew Dickson White, *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom* (New York: D. Appleton, 1898), chapters XIII-XVI.

described as the doctrine of concurrence, the idea that God is the creator in the world today by acting through natural processes.[6]

If a person of faith reflects on what he or she is doing in praying for healing *and* going to the doctor, whether for "old fashioned" or for "high-tech" treatment, the same idea of concurrence is useful. It means that God's role in the healing process is hidden, seen only by faith. But it also means that there need be no faith-science schizophrenia about what is happening in that process. We take the radiation treatment or undergo the surgery *as* an expression of faith in the Creator.

> One might begin in a parish with treatment of bioethics as part of an entire course on science-theology issues for adults.

Setting bioethics within the total science-theology dialogue can also be helpful in dealing with specific issues. A serious problem which continues to plague organ and tissue donation is the severe shortage of donated organs. There are several reasons for this, but one is the fact that some people have religious concerns about bodily integrity in the resurrection. When that is considered in the context of the larger science-theology dialogue, and particularly when the modern quantum mechanical understanding of matter is introduced, the problem of identity of material in the resurrection becomes a non-problem.[7] One can speak in a realistic way about "resurrection of the body" without having to worry about whether the body in the resurrection will have "the same atoms" or "the same kidneys" as before.

Thus bioethics gains by having a place within the science-theology dialogue. But influence goes in the other direction as well. Many of the issues involved in the dialogue, such as physical cosmology and the creation of the universe, while very important, may appear quite theoretical and distant. Bioethics represents the working out of significant science-theology issues in practice, and thus can rescue the dialogue from the temptation to be excessively academic. It shows, for example, that we are not only products of an evolutionary process, but that we now have the potential to make a deliberate impact on evolution, for good or for evil, through technologies such as genetic engineering.

3. It is vitally important for the life of the Christian community that its members give some thought to issues of bioethics before a time comes when decisions have to be made. If people are to participate in decisions about termination of life support or organ donation in a faithful and intelligent way, they must have opportunities to know something about the basic theological and ethical issues involved beforehand. It will be too late for that in the intensive

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[6] Heinrich Schmid, *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 3rd ed. (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1961), 170-94.

[7] George L. Murphy, "Quantum Theory and Resurrection Reality," *CTNS Bulletin* 11 (1991):25.

care waiting room. Thus the third place where bioethics needs to be found is in parish education.

In line with the previous point, one might begin in a parish with treatment of bioethics as part of an entire course on science-theology issues for adults. It is likely that there will be enough interest to develop a spin-off series devoted just to bio-medical concerns. Certainly available medical and legal expertise should be utilized for such a class. But in line with our first point, there also needs to be distinctively theological discussion. The purpose of all this would not be so much to tell people what decisions to make—the situational character of many choices tends to rule that out—as to develop some familiarity with broad issues and habits of theological reflection which may be useful when choices need to be made.

While preparation for wise choices is the main reason for inclusion of bioethics in parish education, there is also another reason for this. It is good for people to be aware that the church does attempt to stay abreast of (might it even be ahead of!) developments in science and technology, and to deal with theological and ethical issues which arise from it. The impression which is sometimes given, that the church is always behind the times and playing obstructive roles in such matters, can be weakened by letting people know that topics like bioethics are being dealt with thoughtfully at the local level.

4. Finally, bioethics does have a place, or places, in the formal structure of dogmatics and in seminary education. Its most obvious setting is in ethics and in considerations about pastoral care. But some of its aspects could be discussed in connection with the doctrine of creation. For that matter, the points we have noted above about the resurrection and the impact of genetic engineering on the future of evolution indicate that discussions of eschatology might include some reference to the area of bioethics.

Bioethics has considerable utilitarian value and needs to be studied and discussed on that account alone. Its major purpose is to enable us to make wise decisions about the use of our technologies. But it also has the potential to help in making connections between different areas of theology, and even beyond that, between theology and other disciplines. And through such interactions, our understanding of the ethical uses of biomedical technology will in turn be deepened.

A Water Gracious, Heavenly and Divine: Baptism in the Lutheran Reformation

Mark D. Tranvik
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Recipient of the Arthur Carl Piepkorn Prize, June 1991

"I therefore admonish you again that these two, the Word and the water, must by no means be separated from each other."[1]

In ordination, Lutheran pastors are called to a ministry of Word and Sacrament. Unfortunately, in many quarters the sacraments are still treated like a poor relation. Perhaps because they read the masters of neo-orthodoxy uncritically or suspect the sacraments to be too closely linked with Rome, many Lutheran clergy see the preached Word as preeminent. Water, wine, and bread are addenda, necessary to be sure, but at best "aids" or "pictures" which help us to understand the oral Word. Word and sacrament then become severed, with deleterious results for both.

Arthur Carl Piepkorn noted this trend more than a quarter century ago. In an insightful article for the Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue, "The Lutheran Understanding of Baptism—A Systematic Survey," he states that an "intellectualistic tendency to let the proclaimed word (plus, at most, the written word) exhaust the idea of the word of God has strongly marked Lutheran theology and practice for over 250 years."[2] While Piepkorn probably had in mind the erosion of the church's sacramental life caused by pietism, rationalism, and

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[1] Martin Luther, *Large Catechism* IV:17 (hereafter cited as LC) in *The Book of Concord*, ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 439. Hereafter cited as *BC*.

[2] Arthur Carl Piepkorn, "The Lutheran Understanding of Baptism—A Systematic Survey," in *Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue II, One Baptism for the Remission of Sins*, ed. Paul C. Empie and William W. Baum (Washington: National Catholic Welfare Conference, 1966), 32-33.

neo-orthodoxy, the first evidence of this decline can actually be found in the Reformation era itself.

Though a similar case could probably be made for the Lord's Supper, we will look at the relationship between Word and sign through the prism of baptism. In this essay we will examine the baptismal theologies of three highly influential Lutheran reformers: Martin Luther, Philip Melanchthon, and Johannes Brenz. We will begin with Luther and show how he viewed the Word and the earthly element as inextricably intertwined. Then we will turn to Melanchthon and Brenz and note how the water (and therefore the sacrament) is relegated to a separate and secondary position. We will conclude with some reflections on the sacramental life of the church.

Martin Luther

The earliest stages of the Reformation observed a loose collection of individual thinkers and communities who, among other things, saw the wide cleavage between heaven and earth to be capable of mediation only by spiritual realities. Luther's broad title for this group (which included everyone from Zwingli to the anabaptists) was *Schwärmer*, hereafter referred to as the "enthusiasts."

Given their metaphysical dualism between spirit and matter, it is not difficult to predict how the enthusiasts would view the sacraments. At most the sacraments have symbolic value for them and thus are diminished in importance. The faith of the believer, generated by an autonomous act of the self, is determinative, and the direct mediation of grace is denied.

In light of his reaction against the Roman assertion of a metaphysical relationship between the Spirit and the sacrament and because of his stress on faith, some expected Luther to be sympathetic with enthusiasm. But no embrace was forthcoming. In his treatises, catechisms, and sermons, Luther distances himself from their understanding of faith and the sacraments. Indeed, as we shall see with baptism, Luther, far from lessening the role of water, highlights in bold fashion its intimate union with Christ.

First it must be stated that it is completely foreign to Luther's sacramental theology to make baptism depend upon any kind of human initiative. As Piepkorn phrases the understanding of Luther and the confessions: "Baptism is a demonstration of what God has done and still does for our salvation in and through Christ ...."[3]

Luther sees baptism occurring at the instigation of the Holy Trinity itself. Even the traditional description of baptism as a "means of grace" is a less than felicitous phrase because it suggests the presence of something other than God himself.[4]

In a sermon from 1534 on Jesus' baptism this accent on the divine presence is especially clear:

> "But here [in baptism] everything is living, the Son and also the Father and the Holy Spirit in their own persons are truly and bodily (*corporaliter*) present... therefore he is in baptism with his own blood, death and life—not metaphysically or materially but efficaciously present."[5]

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[3] Piepkorn, "The Lutheran Understanding of Baptism," 31.

[4] Lorenz Grönvik, *Der Taufe in der Theologie Martin Luthers*, Acta Academiae Aboensis, Series A (Abo: Abo Akademi, 1968): 177-79.

[5] Martin Luther, "Predigt am Sonntag Septuagesima" (1534), in *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, Kritische Gesamtausgabe (Weimar: Herman Böhlaus Nachfolger, 1883-), 37:272.

Enthusiasm attempted to make baptism secondary by seeing it as a human ceremony which confirms a prior experience of conversion. Luther, however, with his strong emphasis on the sacrament as God's work, sees baptism as the place where the Triune God in all his power makes himself bodily present and brings the baptized person into his kingdom.

Further, it should be noted that when Luther says God is present in baptism, this does not refer to some kind of divine ether that hangs over the font.[6] He is actually speaking of the divine presence *in* the water. The catechisms speak of this in a number of different ways. The coming of the Word to the water makes the latter a "gracious water of life"[7] and a "divine, heavenly, holy and blessed water."[8]

In his sermons Luther can speak of Christ having "stuck" (*gesteckt*) his death and life in the water[9] and that the water is "mingled" or "mixed" (*gemenget*) with God's name.[10] He also suggests that the eyes of faith see not water in baptism but the "innocent, rosy-red blood of Christ." Mention might also be made of Luther's baptismal hymn, focusing on the seventh verse:

> The eye but water doth behold,
> As from man's hand it floweth;
> But inward faith the power untold
> Of Jesus Christ's blood knoweth.
> Faith sees therein a red flood roll,
> With Christ's blood dyed and
> blended...[11]

What then of faith? Is this simply a retreat to a mechanical *ex opere operato* conception of the sacraments? As Piepkorn points out, "The requirement of faith as a condition for an effective reception of baptism is as old as the first written reflection of the church on baptism."[12] Luther and the confessions would heartily agree. While baptism is valid even if faith be lacking, it is not efficacious without it: "Thus you see plainly that Baptism is not a work which we do but is a treasure which God gives us and faith grasps.... Therefore they are unfair when they cry out against us as though we preach against faith. Actually, we insist on faith alone as so necessary that without it nothing can be received or enjoyed."[13]

But the sign cannot be dispensed with, either. For "faith must have something to believe—something to which it may cling and upon which it may stand."[14] The water of baptism makes the death and resurrection of Christ personal and certain. It highlights the *pro me* character of the sacrament. Again, to quote Piepkorn: "The fact of baptism serves the person who stands in a state of faith and of grace as evidence that God will provide him with all the means necessary to assure him a happy death and a resurrection to everlasting life."[15]

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[6] Arthur Carl Piepkorn, "Christ Today: His Presence in the Sacraments," *Lutheran World* 10 (1963): 275.

[7] Martin Luther, *Small Catechism* IV:10 in *BC*, 349.

[8] LC IV:17 in *BC*, 438.

[9] See Otto Hof, "Taufe und Heilswerk Christi bei Luther," in *Zur Auferbauung des Leibes Christi. Festgabe für Professor D. Peter Brunner*, ed. Edmund Schlink and Albrecht Peters (Kassel: Johannes Stauda-Verlag, 1965), 227.

[10] Grönvik, *Der Taufe*, 86.

[11] Martin Luther, "To Jordan When Our Lord Had Gone" (1541), in *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann, 56 vols. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955-86) 53:301. Hereafter cited as *LW*.

[12] Piepkorn, "The Lutheran Understanding of Baptism," 45.

[13] LC IV:37 in *BC*, 441.

[14] LC IV:29 in *BC*, 440.

[15] Piepkorn, "The Lutheran Understanding of Baptism," 50.

Luther's emphasis on externality flows naturally from his view of the incarnation. At the heart of the reformer's theology is a christology that goes to daring lengths in its view of the divinity's extension into the humanity.[16] Peter Brunner suggests a linkage between the communication of attributes (*communicatio idiomatum*) and baptism. As the human nature shares the majestic power of the divine nature so the baptismal water shares in the divine power bestowed by the Word. It is no longer "simply water" (*aqua simplex*) but a "divine, heavenly" (*divina, celestis*) water by virtue of Christ's presence in it.[17]

Ultimately for Luther, the fact that the "Word became flesh" negates any dualism of spirit and matter. Free of the Neoplatonic framework of enthusiasm, emboldened by his christology, and driven by faith's necessity, he has few inhibitions about mixing the earthly and heavenly realms.

Philip Melanchthon

Next to Luther, no other Lutheran reformer enjoyed such widespread influence as Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560). The relationship between the two men has long fascinated scholars.[18] It is indisputable that Luther had a strong and enduring influence on his younger colleague. This is particularly clear in certain sections (though not the sacraments) of the first edition (1521) of Melanchthon's "systematic theology," the *Loci Communes*. In his later years, however, Melanchthon tended to travel a more independent path. His theology is laced with philosophical concepts alien to the work of Luther (proofs of God's existence, the positing of a cooperation of the will in conversion, etc.). While there was never a public break between the two men, even the untrained eye can see fissures in what was



previously a relatively smooth theological surface.

The importance of Melanchthon and his *Loci* for Lutheranism's doctrinal direction can hardly be overestimated. Philip's spirit hovers over the entire confessional period and even into the later age of Lutheran orthodoxy. The *Loci* enjoyed wide popularity and was one of the key vehicles in the transmission of Reformation theology.[19] Beginning with the 1521 *Loci*, we will look at how Melanchthon sees the relationship between the Word and the element in general and then see how he applies these principles in his understanding of baptism.

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[16] See Marc Lienhard, *Luther's Witness to Jesus Christ*, trans. Edwin H. Robertson (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1982).

[17] Peter Brunner, *Die Evangelisch-Lutherische Lehre von der Taufe* (Berlin: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1951), 20.

[18] See Heinz Scheible, "Luther and Melanchthon," *Lutheran Quarterly* IV, 3 (Autumn 1990): 317-39.

[19] Wilhelm Pauck, "Introduction" to *Loci Communes Theologici* in *Melanchthon and Bucer*, ed. Wilhelm Pauck, The Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1969), 16.

Melanchthon shows a certain reticence when speaking of the material element in the sacraments. In the 1521 *Loci* he seldom uses the word "sacrament," preferring "sign" instead. This most likely reflects the polemical context and what Melanchthon views as the misuse of "sacrament" by Rome. While he can speak highly of signs, suggesting that a knowledge of them is "most beneficial" and stressing the power of baptism to console those who are about to die, there is at the same time a tendency to relegate them to a confirmatory role.[20] Again and again he makes clear that "signs do not justify" (*Loci Communes*, pp. 143, 144, 148). Justification is solely the result of the oral gospel promise. Signs are added in order to "bolster the conscience" (p. 148). Their function, while helpful because of human frailty, is secondary to the promise. Melanchthon uses the story of Gideon as an example. To prevent Gideon from doubting his role as a leader he was given two signs (Judg 6:33-40) in order to "encourage, strengthen and confirm" his faith (p. 143).

> For Luther Word and water are so intimately joined that he declares baptism to be "actual death and resurrection."

More specifically, when we look at baptism, the symbolic function of the sacrament is accented. Drawing an analogy between baptism and the Israelite crossing of the Red Sea, Melanchthon says the sacrament "signifies" what really happened in that historical episode, namely a passage from death to life (p. 145). Further, note the wedge which is driven between justification and the sacrament. When speaking of the baptism of Jesus and John, Melanchthon asserts that "neither of these justified but rather confirmed faith." Christ's baptism is to be understood as the "strengthening" of a "faith that is already given" (p. 148).

How far this is from Luther! While Melanchthon's understanding of baptism is largely cognitive, Luther does not shrink from mixing the Word and water in a dramatic fashion. Luther does not view the sacrament in a symbolic way and therefore as something which confirms a prior reality, i.e. the event of faith. For him Word and water are so intimately joined that in "The Babylonian Captivity" he declares baptism to be "actual death and resurrection." He disdains those who see the sacrament as a mere washing, saying that the sinner really needs to *die*. Furthermore, he does not hesitate to assert baldly that "baptism is justification."[21]

Thus it is apparent from the beginning that Luther and Melanchthon inhabit different thought worlds in how they view the connection between Word and sign in the

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[20] Philip Melanchthon, *Loci Communes von 1521* in *Melanchthon's Werke in Auswahl. Studienausgabe*, ed. Robert Stupperich (Guetersloh: C. Bertelsmann Verlag, 1951-1975), II, 1:142. Hereafter cited as *ST*.

[21] "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church" (1520), *LW* 36:68. See also David W. Lotz, "The Sacrament of Salvation: Luther on Baptism and Justification," *Trinity Seminary Review* 6, 1 (Spring 1984): 3-12.

sacrament. The former freely links the two, believing the traditional barriers between physical and spiritual realities to be a philosophical artifice. The latter is more careful and continues to preserve the classical distinction between spirit and matter.

Wilhelm Maurer, in his study of the young Melanchthon, says there is a "profound" (*tiefgreifender*) difference between the two reformers on this issue: "For Melanchthon the sign... is something external which follows the essentially inner event of faith and justification, but which is not necessary to be added. Luther, on the other hand, warns expressly of separation...."[22]

Perhaps it might be objected that a burden is being placed on the 1521 *Loci* that it does not deserve to carry. After all, it was written by a twenty-four year old professor of Greek who was still cutting his teeth in matters theological. Maybe charity demands that we expect less of this initial attempt to construct an evangelical systematic. It could also be pointed out that Luther's daring christological innovations only became explicit when pressed by Zwingli and the radicals.

However, even in the maelstrom created by the radicals, Melanchthon shows no evidence of a heightened appreciation of the sacramental elements. If anything, his final edition of the *Loci* (1559) pares and hollows baptism even further. While he now accepts the more conventional term "sacrament" (as opposed to his earlier preference for "sign"), he omits his previous reference to baptism's ability to console in the hour of death. Discussion of the sign is also kept to a bare minimum. The baptismal rite is now described as a "picture" and a "washing that signifies our own cleansing from sin." Thus it would appear that Melanchthon's previous separation of the sign and promise has become even more pronounced.[23]

Johannes Brenz

Johannes Brenz (1499-1570) was a prominent Lutheran theologian and pastor in southern Germany. He became a devoted follower of Luther in 1518 after hearing the Wittenberg reformer at the Heidelberg Disputation. In the 1520s and 1530s he led the reformation of Schwäbisch Hall. Later in his career he was instrumental in bringing church polity in Württemberg in line with Lutheran principles. Because we will be looking at Brenz's doctrine of baptism as contained in his catechisms, more background in this area will be helpful.

While introducing the reformation to the local schools, Brenz wrote several catechisms.[24] The first in 1527 was for Schwäbisch Hall. In 1535 he developed a second and better known catechism for the duchy of Württemberg. Because it was appended to the Württemberg church order, Brenz's catechism help lay the theological foundations for generations to come. In 1733 we find the theologian Gregor Langemack saying that "next to the catechism of Luther, none is held in higher regard or has received more use then that of the pious and learned theologian, Johannes Brenz."[25] Though modified in 1696, Brenz's catechism went through many editions and was used well into the twentieth century.

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[22] Wilhelm Maurer, *Der junge Melanchthon*, 2 vols. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1969), 2:394.

[23] Philip Melanchthon, *Loci praecipui theologici von 1559* in *ST* II, 2:510.

[24] See Christoph Weismann's *Eine kleine Biblia. Die Katechismen von Luther und Brenz. Einführung und Texte* (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1985), 45-77.

[25] As quoted in Weismann, *Eine kleine Biblia*, 45.

Like Luther, Brenz also wrote a large catechism as a companion piece to the smaller one and intended primarily for the parish pastor. He completed this work in 1551. It, too, went through numerous editions and in the twenty-five years following its appearance was translated into at least six different languages.[26] It is this larger work which will serve as the reference for the remarks below.

As suggested above, the enthusiasts were puzzled by the relationship between the *sola fide* and the sacraments. They wondered: If faith alone puts one right with God, what real need is there for Baptism and the Lord's Supper? Are the sacraments not merely "externals," a hangover from the medieval church? In the face of this polemic, Luther and his followers were always concerned to legitimate their sacramental practice. Brenz's section on baptism in his larger catechism begins by wrestling with this question.

Brenz says the sacraments are necessary, first of all, because of the "command and example" of Christ himself. But, more interesting for our purposes, he also says the sacraments are needed in order to give a public witness to God's prior election. This latter warrant is given a fairly elaborate defense by Brenz.

First he likens baptism to the anointing of a king. He notes that in the Old Testament the anointing of David did not confer royal status upon him. He had already been chosen for kingship. The anointing by Samuel was a public recognition of this prior reality: "This anointing does not make David a king. For had he not been chosen and called to be a king, so this anointing would not make him a king. However, the anointing was a public ceremony... [showing] that he was called and chosen to be king." The meaning for baptism is clear. The bestowal of the sacrament is not the event of salvation but rather the ratification of God's prior calling.[27]

Brenz also draws a similar analogy from marriage. He says the core of marriage is the free agreement of husband and wife to enter into a relationship. But beyond this there is need for a public consecration of this previous accord. Thus baptism is likened to a wedding: "When one becomes baptized, one should regard it as a public confirmation (*einsegnung*) of a heavenly marriage...." Again, as in the anointing of a king, baptism for Brenz is not the *locus* of salvation but rather the attestation of what God has already decided in the heavenly councils. The selection of God's people is an abstract decision that takes place outside of time; the sign tends to trail behind as a witness.[28]

Finally, in his formal definition of baptism, Brenz urges his readers to consider not only the "externals" of the rite, such as water, sponsors, and parents, but rather be mindful of the presence of the holy Trinity as was the case at Jesus' baptism. But in no sense is the Trinity linked with the water. Instead we are given a lengthy description of the benefits God bestows in baptism.[29]

Again, as was the case with Melanchthon, Brenz is a considerable distance from Luther in his understanding of the relationship between the Word and the water. The idea of baptism as God's act is preserved. In that sense Luther and the entire tradition of the church has been followed. But because there is a reluctance to place the Word in the water, baptism has merely a confirmatory

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[26] Weismann, *Eine kleine Biblia*, 74-77.

[27] Johannes Brenz, *Der Katechismus, erklaert durch eine heilsame und neutzliche Auslegung* (Wittenberg, 1563), D6r.

[28] Brenz, *Der Katechismus*, D7r.

[29] Brenz, *Der Katechismus*, E2r-E3v.

role, much as the anointing of a king simply serves as a public verification of a reality previously decided.

In summation, one searches in vain in the writings of Melanchthon and Brenz for the idea that the Word, God, or Christ are present *in* the waters of baptism. Luther's notion of a water which becomes "divine" or "living" when embraced by God's Word is absent. Indeed, one is struck by the relative absence of all references to water in these sections on baptism. Save for the obvious acknowledgment that the sacrament involves the *use* of water, Melanchthon and Brenz are more concerned to say what baptism "points to" or "signifies" rather than what happens in baptism itself. Word and water stand beside each other, almost as strangers. Of supreme importance is that baptism be "understood." Unlike Luther, it was not seen as the eschatological event of salvation. As we shall suggest below, the difference here is not trivial.

Thus the seeds of what Piepkorn termed the "intellectualistic tendency" of Lutheran theology go as far back as the Reformation itself. While this trend would not be glaringly evident until the end of the period of orthodoxy, the influence of figures like Melanchthon and Brenz should not be minimized. Though attempting to be faithful to Luther (and surely they were in many ways!), they appear to have failed in this crucial area. Nor was this without ramifications for Lutheranism as a whole. As suggested by their popularity, Melanchthon's *Loci* and Brenz's catechism exerted considerable influence in the schoolroom and the study.

Meaning for today

We have seen how the relationship between the water and the Word changed in the theology of two important reformers who followed Luther. But what is the relevance of this history for the church today?

Whenever the Word and water are separated, the value placed on the sacrament lessens. Baptism is no longer likely to be seen as the place where salvation occurs, that is, a temporal event where one is engrafted into the body of Christ, but rather as something that "seals" or "affirms" what has already taken place. The Word has the preeminent place; it delivers the essential knowledge that one is saved. Baptism tags along, a sort of "yes man," nodding in confirmation. There are at least three reasons why this separation is undesirable.

First, it rests on a shaky biblical foundation. A noetic understanding of baptism can simply not be forced on the Pauline texts. In Rom 6:3 we are said to be "baptized into the death" of Christ Jesus. Gal 3:27-28 says "as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ...." In 1 Cor 12:13 we are told that "by one Spirit we are all baptized into one body." The force of these and other passages is that baptism means nothing less than assignment unto Christ. Baptism *causes* salvation. As Oscar Cullman puts it, speaking of baptism: "God sets a man within, not merely informs him that he sets him within, the Body of Christ; and at this moment therefore the reception of this act on the part of the person baptized consists in nothing else than that he is the passive object of God's dealing, that he is really set within the Body of Christ by God."[30]

Second, the separation of Word and water, and the resulting diminution of baptism, ultimately puts the gospel in danger. Luther's stress on the external sign is rooted

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30 Oscar Cullman, *Baptism in the New Testament*, trans. J. K. S. Reid (London: SCM Press, 1950), 31.

in the fragility of faith. He likens faith to "butter in the sunshine." While Luther will always maintain that trust in the promise will make baptism efficacious, he is wary of focusing on faith: "One must believe, but we neither should nor can know it for certain."[31] Therefore, one dare not base his baptism on his faith. For who can be sure if he really believes?

In other words, the devaluation of the sacrament means the gospel is limited to the sense of hearing and thus susceptible to the vagaries of human subjectivity. The self is wholly unequipped to let the gospel have its say. It assaults the gospel with doubts and conditions long inbred by worldly experience. And, in the end, the self usually triumphs. It either silences the gospel completely or mutes the message to such an extent that it is rendered harmless.

Only the presence of Christ in water, bread, and wine can overcome these forces within. Faith, in order to thrive, must be anchored in something tangible and external. Otherwise it will be consumed by hearts forever on the edge of idolatry and despair.

Third, the division of Word and water can have significant consequences for the place of baptism in the worship life of the church. If the Word is preeminent, so will be the pulpit. The font will be relegated to a corner of the nave, with its cover occasionally removed for a "private" baptism following regular worship. Similarly, the sermon will make few references to baptism, as its power to console and strengthen has been hopelessly diluted. The congregation will simply be exhorted to "believe," and probably left wondering whether their modern minds are capable of such a feat.

On the other hand, where Word and water are held together, then the font is front and center. Prior to baptism, the pastor pours and perhaps splashes a pitcher of fresh water into a deep basin. The ceremony itself is public, with the faithful not only witnessing the new life being born in their midst but also recalling the miracle of their own baptisms by making the sign of the cross.[32] In the sermon, baptism will be frequently linked to daily Christian life. And since repentance is nothing else than a return to baptism, the order for confession and absolution will take place at the font.[33]

In his magnificent *Profiles in Belief*, Arthur Carl Piepkorn stated that "Lutherans do not want to be construed merely as a church of the word, as if the pairing 'word and sacrament' could be divided without great loss to the faith and life of the church."[34]

Such a sentiment highlights one of the many legacies Piepkorn bequeathed to the church: A concern for her sacramental life as rooted in Luther, the Lutheran confessions, and the entire catholic tradition. This essay has sought to affirm and extend his insights on the relationship between Word and sign with special reference to the sacrament of baptism. It is offered in the hope that the church be renewed and invigorated by her Lord's gift of this "divine, blessed, fruitful and gracious water."

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31 "Concerning Rebaptism" (1528), *LW* 40:252.

32 Arthur Carl Piepkorn, *Profiles in Belief. The Religious Bodies of the United States and Canada*, vol. 2 (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 78.

33 The idea of having the Brief Order for Confession and Forgiveness take place at the font is indebted to a conversation with the Rev. Mons Teig, January 20, 1991.

34 Piepkorn, *Profiles*, 75.

Gustaf Wingren: Creation Faith and Its Call for Full Incarnation

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"I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth." Every Sunday millions of Christians confess their faith using these words of the Apostles' Creed. Yet it is often unclear, at least within Lutheran worship services, how the rest of what we do and say proclaims belief in God the creator. Rather our focus is on "Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord." In many ways such a focus is appropriate. Jesus Christ is the one through whom we know God as our savior. Jesus Christ is the one who invites us to share in his death and resurrection. To praise and thank Christ as we receive him anew in word and sacrament is right and proper.

Is God only active through Jesus Christ? The creeds seem to say "no." In addition, the experience of many persons affirms that "no." Yet the dominant theology in the twentieth century—a theology permeated with Karl Barth's propositions—leaves no room for God's gracious activity apart from Jesus Christ.

Gustaf Wingren, on the other hand, is a twentieth century theologian who offers a different proposal in which God's gracious activity is not limited to Jesus Christ but is found in all of creation. His is a theology which I find full of potential for the sake of the church; his theology is made to be preached.

Gustaf Wingren was born on November 29, 1910, in a small manufacturing town in western Sweden. He studied theology and philosophy at the University of Lund, writing his dissertation on Luther's idea of vocation. From 1942 to 1951 Wingren served as assistant professor of theology at Lund. In 1951 he was promoted to professor of theological ethics, succeeding Anders Nygren. Wingren lectured throughout Europe at many major universities and served on the Lutheran World Federation and the International Faith and Order Commission of the Ecumenical Movement.[1]

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[1] Henry Vander Goot, Foreword to Gustaf Wingren, *Creation and Gospel: The New Situation in European Theology* (New York and Toronto: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1979), xii-xiii.

With such a list of credentials, it would not be surprising to find in Wingren yet another theologian concerned with the academic study of theology. Yet he is a theologian whose work is never confined to academic pursuits; he is stretched by a passionate concern for the practical life of God's people. As Wingren himself wrote, "I have always sought to choose topics that throw light on the integrating function of the Christian faith in human life as a whole. For this reason I have felt that the modern tendency to cut the church off from ordinary human life is the most profound theological tragedy of our time."[2]

Creation and redemption

Wingren has focused on God the creator whose activity can be seen throughout and within all of history. This activity of God is continuous and consistent; it includes both creation and redemption, it is accomplished through law and gospel. Basically Wingren asserts that all living creatures were and are being created by God. This is an ontological assertion, not an epistemological one. That all is created by God has to do with *the very being of God* as the sovereign Lord of all rather than with the *creatures' knowledge of* the Creator: "Creation in fact means that the creature depends for his existence on the Creator.... Creation does not mean that a knowledge of God is given, but that life is bestowed."[3]

Wingren sees his position as over against that of Karl Barth, in which the revelation of Jesus Christ is stressed as the sole means by which God becomes known to the world. Wingren does not so much argue with this assertion as he does with the appropriateness of the question being asked by Barth. In Wingren's opinion, Barth is asking how one gains knowledge of God; the answer is through the revelation of Jesus Christ. Yet what if "knowledge of God" is not central?

More important than human knowledge is divine activity. Wingren looks appreciatively at the law of God as the means by which God has been and continues to be active in the world. There is little room in Wingren's system for a division of the world into "sacred" and "secular." The everyday world in which human beings work and rest and play is God-given and God-governed and, hence, of immeasurable value.

In particular, Wingren's exposition of Luther's understanding of vocation is helpful in seeing the connection between everyday life and life within the church. He notes that in Luther's explanation of the first article of the Creed (concerning creation) all "spiritual" activities which call for a distancing of oneself from the world are opposed: "Luther strove vigorously against the monastic ideal, for he wished to give the worldly vocations a position of honor as the only "spiritual" callings in the life of the Christian: for Luther the world was the place where it is possible to serve one's neighbor and live in the imitation of Christ" (*Creation and Gospel*, 6). For both Luther and Wingren the reason that worldly involvement is so highly esteemed is because it is within the world that God continues to be active as creator and redeemer.

As noted above, the means through which God governs the life of the world is the law. Here is another point of conver-

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[2] Gustaf Wingren, *The Flight from Creation* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1971), 15.

[3] Gustaf Wingren, *Creation and Law*, trans. Ross Mackenzie (Philadeplphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958), 28-29.

gence between Wingren and Luther: both view the law as good and God-given yet incapable of bearing salvation. The point of the law rather is to structure our life together in the world in a way which is just and fair for all. The law does not make us righteous before God, but it does regulate the external events on earth which, as seen in the ongoing work of creation, are of great value and worth not only to us but to God. The law is active among us whether we willingly participate in it or are coerced into obedience. Either way the law is viewed as good, as accomplishing the will of the sovereign God either with our cooperation or in spite of our resistance (*Creation and Gospel*, 40-45).

It is into this world which is continuously being created and governed by God that Jesus Christ comes. The work of salvation which Christ accomplishes for us on the cross is affirmed by Wingren as unique and absolutely necessary. However, this God who is met in Jesus Christ is not met for the first time in Christ. For this God is the God of every person, a God intimately involved in every breath which is drawn, every decision made, every tragedy faced. We human beings *gain knowledge* of this God only in Jesus Christ, but it is a knowledge which does not so much introduce us to someone new as give us a name whereby we may address the one whom we have experienced as with us throughout life.

Redemption as restoration

In addition, this Jesus Christ heals us of our mortal wounds so that we may grow into the fullness of who we were created to be. This healing is accomplished by Christ through the forgiveness of sin. Salvation, in Wingren's understanding, is forgiveness whereby we are freed to finally become fully human even as Jesus Christ was fully human. Wingren is indebted to the second century church father, Irenaeus, for this understanding of salvation as the restoration (*recapitulatio*) of a wounded humanity. This concept is far different from that often espoused in which God and humanity are viewed as enemies with Christ as the mediator between a wrathful God and a totally depraved humanity.

This God who is met in Jesus Christ is not met for the first time in Christ. For this God is the God of every person...

Rather, Irenaeus and Wingren view humanity as the beloved child of God, created as an infant in the Garden of Eden with the potential to grow into full adulthood. However, humanity was injured—that is the meaning of the story of the fall found in Gen 3:1-19—and healing was needed if humanity's potential was ever to be realized. And so, Christ entered fully into the world of human beings, restoring humanity by healing its wounds. Death came through Satan's temptation in the Garden; life came through Christ's victory over temptation and death as witnessed in the resurrection.

Yet, the life which has been given to humanity through Christ's death and resur-

rection is not simply a restoration of what was already given at the beginning of creation. For human beings are no longer "infants;" through Christ's healing, they are now able to grow into full adulthood. Hence the restored life is far greater than what was previously realized: "But the life that Christ wins is more than the life that Adam lost. For Adam could die; he had to grow into the state of living forever. But Christ can never die; he lives eternally (Phil 2:5-11). Christ is Adam—fullgrown, healthy and whole" (*Creation and Gospel*, 28-29). So too are we "fullgrown, healthy and whole" in Christ, at least proleptically through faith.

Again Wingren picks up on a primary focus of Irenaeus' in that both theologians are concerned not only with creation but also with consummation. The understanding they have of God's involvement with humanity throughout history is very much a faith stance in that what they posit is not seen anywhere within this world at the present time. Their hope and confidence is in a promised future which has been realized only once in the humanity of Jesus Christ (*Creation and Gospel*, 36).

Redemption then is the restoration and fulfillment of the life originally given in creation. Redemption begins with the forgiveness of sin by which humanity's mortal wounds are healed; it will be complete only on the last day at which time creation will be whole. In the meantime the battle between God and Satan rages on around and within us. Yet there is no question about the ultimate victor of the battle—God has already won, as witnessed by the resurrection of Jesus Christ in which death was defeated and life began its eternal reign.

This gospel of restoration becomes the content of the church's proclamation; the proclamation is, in fact, that for which the church is called into being. It is not that only those within the church are God's beloved children; all persons are lovingly gifted with life at every moment by God. Rather it is through the church that God's specific word of salvation is offered to all: "The Christian church with its Gospel, its Baptism, and its Holy Communion is the spring from which all people may drink of the clear water of salvation. But salvation is nothing other than becoming man [human]—that is, being healed of the wound of sin" (*Creation and Gospel*, 29).

Full incarnation

It is important to note that Wingren speaks of salvation as becoming human, not divine. The goal of humanity is not transcendence but full incarnation. To grow into the fullness of what we were created to be means to become as human as Jesus was. It means to delight in our very physicality, to respect and care for the created world, to believe—quite literally—in the resurrection of the body. Wingren argues that if resurrection is only understood as that which happens to one's "spirit" then the implication is that the human person who exists as a body actually dies. Yet, it is the human being who is to be redeemed; sin is that which must die. Therefore if the person is to be freed from bondage to sin and death through death, the whole person must rise from the dead in order to be saved.[4]

Such an understanding of resurrection is inextricably linked to creation faith in which the common stuff of life is seen as the

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[4] Gustaf Wingren, *The Living Word: A Theological Study of Preaching and the Church*, trans. Victor C. Pogue (London: SCM Press LTD, 1960), 130.

Wingren speaks of salvation as becoming human, not divine. The goal of humanity is not transcendence but full incarnation.

holy work of God. Yet such an understanding may not be common among many persons in our parishes. A few years ago I taught an adult Sunday School class on the topic of resurrection. I began the first session by asking the participants how many of them believed in the resurrection of the body; not one of them did. They believed that at death our "souls" or "spirits" were reunited with God. They also did not think that the Lutheran Church believed in bodily resurrection. When I pointed out that the words of the creeds—which we use to confess our faith each week—include belief in "the resurrection of the body," they commented that these creeds were written a long time ago and that no one believes them literally anymore.

There are other signs which seem to point to a lack of belief in the goodness and value of the physical world. The lack of interest in the physical elements of the sacraments—good wine and bread, lots of water—seems to indicate a subordination of the physical to the spiritual. That one would prefer wafers to good bread if indeed this meal is "a foretaste of the feast to come" is inconceivable. If, however, the upcoming feast is a "spiritual" banquet, then the kind of "food" eaten now is immaterial. In fact wafers, especially those stamped with little crosses, are perhaps a better spiritual focus for our souls than real bread. If baptism has nothing to do with the drowning of our whole selves—the death of all that we are, including our bodies—then a few drops of water that symbolize spiritual cleansing are more than adequate.

Wingren himself views the sacraments as "bodily words," as affirmations of our physicality whereby we are literally united to Christ in his death and resurrection. In speaking of baptism Wingren says "faith possesses something that is more than the Word, where the body is included in the sacrament, but where listening to the Word is still the only possible way of holding fast to what has happened" (*The Living Word*, 154). The "what has happened" is the actual passing over from death to life; this always includes bodily resurrection.

To express this intimate connection between the gifts of God given through the sacraments and our physical selves, Wingren suggests using good, satisfying food and drink for the Lord's Supper and enough water in baptism to really drown or wash someone. This, he feels, may help fight "spiritualizing interpretations" of the sacraments in which their very real connection to our physical selves is overlooked" (*The Living Word*, 162). It is not insignificant that we literally wash in baptism and eat and drink in the Lord's Supper: "Only when faith in creation takes firm hold in our celebration of the Lord's Supper does the eschatological hope get firm footing in the meal.... When bread and wine mean something for the body, the first article of the Creed becomes real in the Eucharist, and at the same time so does the second article, expectation of the resurrection of the body" (*The Living Word*, 155).

Wingren's stress on the importance of the physical elements in the sacraments as well as the promised redemption of the whole person is consistent with his understanding of God as the creator and redeemer. What is created and redeemed is that which we can see and touch and care for. Creation faith calls for concern not only for the whole person, but for the whole creation. In *The Flight from Creation* Wingren argues that, for the most part, Christian theology in the twentieth century has led us away from viewing creation as the realm in which God graciously acts. He looks at some of the historical reasons for this flight from creation as well as the reasons why such a flight must end.

Wingren eloquently concludes the book with a litany of needs which can be met only when we in the church embrace creation as God's good gift and hence learn to care for the earth. He believes that Christians must learn to work with non-Christians, seeing them as God's children who are about the work of God with us through the guidance of the law. "In order to protect man [humanity], in particular the weak and the stressed, during the coming years we must begin the great battle against environmental pollution all over the world: the fight against industrial poisoning of water, air and earth; the fight against meaningless rise in production which sacrifices the health of the individual for fairly pointless material gains; the fight against a population explosion which can only be halted by a new, conscious respect for the female body; above all the fight against mass hunger" (*Flight from Creation*, 83). Such needs, in Wingren's understanding, are as "religious" as belief in the incarnation, in the resurrection of the body, in the real presence of Christ in the bread and wine of the Eucharist, for they all grow out of belief in God as the one who is present and involved in all that exists.

Creation faith

Such a belief seems to me to be clearly grounded in the biblical witness as well as in the theology of Martin Luther. So why isn't this theology being preached in most Lutheran churches? Again Wingren is helpful in that he traces some of the historical reasons for the avoidance of creation faith.

He feels that one of the reasons for this avoidance was the misuse of this concept by the Germans following World War I. The "orders-theology" (*ordnungstheologie*) of the 1930s, in which it was asserted that certain races and persons were superior by virtue of their place within the God-given orders of creation, made theologians understandably cautious about using such concepts. However, says Wingren, "National socialism's misuse of the concept does not provide a reasonable explanation for the behavior of contemporary theology. Somewhere in the background there seems to be an animosity to the body and the natural manifestations of life" (Flight *from Creation*, 8-9).

This "animosity to the body" can be seen in the work of Søren Kierkegaard with "his hatred of everything that smacks of everyday life, his hatred of all natural forms of life" (*Flight from Creation*, 25). However, such animosity did not come to birth with Kierkegaard but rather confronted the church from its earliest encounter with Greek philosophy. Plato and subsequent Greek philosophers viewed the body and the rest of the natural world as "lower" than the spiritual realm. The collision between this ideology and the church's theology became particularly sharp with the Gnostic movement.

Wingren asserts that "Gnosticism was the most serious enemy of the young martyr church, and it was in response to this deadly threat that the early church constructed its

Trinitarian Creed, in which, as one could expect, the sentence about the Creator comes first" (*Creation and Gospel*, 106). In today's church, the Trinitarian Creed still begins with the sentence about God the Creator; I suspect "the most serious enemy" of our church is also the same. Gnosticism with its denigration of the created world threatens the church of Jesus Christ which by definition is the body of Christ in the world. The church is founded on the incarnation of Jesus Christ, on his very real death and resurrection. The church lives by faith and hope, trusting in the resurrection of the body. As Wingren put it: "The Gospel is a 'yes' to the body" (*Creation and Gospel*, 106).

Denial of the goodness of the created world may also account for the quietism of which the Lutheran church has rightly been accused throughout its history. If God is primarily "spiritual," and if our tasks in service to this God can best be accomplished by being as far removed from the world as possible, then involvement in the structures of this world are distracting or at best unnecessary. If, however, God is primarily to be found in Jesus Christ, who was not only truly God but truly human, and if our tasks in service to this God can only be accomplished by becoming fully human even as Christ was, then full engagement in the most ordinary structures and events of this life are vital and holy. "All acts of work like these which cause nutrition to reach the hungering and clothing to be given to those who are cold and violence to be prevented from affecting the defenseless—all of these earthly tasks are in the service of the Creator, who chooses life over death" (*Creation and Gospel*, 108).

Wingren's call for a return to creation faith is a call worth answering. It is firmly grounded in the biblical witness as well as in the theology of Irenaeus and Martin Luther, to name but two eloquent spokesmen for this position. In addition, creation faith is a bold way of confessing in word and deed a belief in the sovereignty of God. There is nothing outside of God's concern and power. As Irenaeus asserted: "if God is held to be powerless in any respect, then that before which He is powerless is in point of fact 'God.'"[5]

> What is created and redeemed is that which we can see and touch and care for.

Such a position may sound naive and insensitive; it may sound like a message which will offend those in the midst of great pain and loss. If God is so powerful, why do such horrible things happen? The "answer" to this question remains a mystery for Wingren to the same extent that the cross remains a mystery. Here is the real crux of Wingren's "answer" to this dilemma: God is powerful, yet God's power is primarily seen in the cross. God does not will Christ's death, yet through it life triumphs. God always wills life; the cross teaches us that sometimes that will is hidden in mystery. "When God destroys, He is doing something that is really contrary to His will" (*Creation and Law*, 128).

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[5] Gustaf Wingren, *Man and the Incarnation. A Study in the Biblical Theology of Irenaeus*, trans. Ross Mackenzie (Philadelpia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), 3.

This is the message which Wingren calls all preachers to proclaim: God is alive and active throughout creation. God's general word to all people is spoken in creation itself and is embodied within the laws which govern our life together. God's specific word to all people is spoken in Jesus Christ's death and resurrection and is embodied within the church which proclaims this gospel. This specific word is one of salvation by which we are delivered to naturalness, to "essentially worldly duties, already given to everyone in creation but lost by rebellion against God" (*Flight from Creation*, 21).

Though our "rebellion against God" continues throughout life as the Devil continues to battle for our very selves, God's ultimate victory is assured by virtue of Christ's resurrection. And so the gospel is truly good news: it frees and forgives without cost or demand. It is God's law which continues to demand from each one of us: it demands justice and peace and care for all of God's creation. Yet this law is good even as the God who gives it is good and even as we and the rest of creation will be good on that last day when all is graciously restored to wholeness as God intends. Such restoration is happening even now in the midst of God's ongoing work of creation and redemption.

Mystery and Relationship as Keys to the Church's Response to Secularism

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In the early part of the twentieth century, the so-called neo-orthodox movement in theology was dominated by Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, Eduard Thurneysen, and a young man who was to die in Flossenburg Prison Camp on 9 April 1945, namely Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

Most of this article was a lecture in a course on the thought of Dietrich Bonhoeffer team-taught by Dale Brown of Bethany Seminary, F. Burton Nelson of North Park Seminary, and the author. This was the second of three Bonhoeffer courses team-taught by this group. The first, in Spring 1990, used as text *Cost of Discipleship*; the second in Fall 1991 used *Letters and Papers from Prison*; the third in Fall 1992 uses *Communion of Saints* and *Life Together*. The course content is partially developed in concert with small groups of students who lead evening sessions on material.

This lecture was a response to a series of student questions that dealt with Bonhoeffer's concepts of "religionless Christianity" and, more specifically, what it might mean to find the secular meaning of the gospel, to use Paul van Buren's term. It would help the reader to look at some of the pertinent letters from May, June, and July of 1944 in *Letters and Papers from Prison* for the context, though that should not be necessary to understand this article.

Both Bonhoeffer and Barth mean something precise when they speak of "religion." When this term occurs, it is pejorative: both Barth and Bonhoeffer oppose the notion of religion. This seems odd to us, since we use the term to mean *cultic acts*, and we use "religion" as a neutral term. But Bonhoeffer means, by religion, those constructions which take us out of thisworldliness and plunge us into dependence upon the gods who are out of this realm or sphere of our existence. Religion plunges us into "two-sphere thinking," which can result in the rupture between faith or belief and ethics

characteristic of the degenerate two-kingdoms theory used by the Nazi regime. Bonhoeffer seeks a way, especially in his late writings, to both discern and proclaim the presence of God in the midst of ordinary reality. The problem antedates the peculiar issues raised by Nazi theology. Already since the Enlightenment, religion (or "faith") and *Wissenschaft* (science, knowledge) have been split. Bonhoeffer asks, what options do we have to heal the gap between them? At this point, we begin.

Prolegomena concerning 'secularism'

Bonhoeffer was not trying to turn back the clock of theology, but to tell what time it was. He rejected what he called *salto mortale* (the fatal leap) back into the middle ages for theological grounding. That system of scholastic theology, natural law, and natural revelation was preliminary to the modern problem of the church. With Barth and the neo-orthodox he rejected this system as inadequate, because it created a place for theology that was easily eroded. This theological position was matched by a religion oriented toward the three-fold areas of individualism, inwardness, and piety. Bonhoeffer rejected this kind of religion in his early studies about the communal nature of Christian faith. *Communio Sanctorum* and *Act and Being* treat this on a systematic level, *Cost of Discipleship* and *Life Together* on a practical level. To some extent, one may see his Christology lectures, *Christ the Center*,[1] as a bridge between these approaches which places the Christ proclaimed at the center of the community formed by the proclamation. In his emphasis on the communal nature of the Present Christ, he overcomes the gap between system and practice. Service of Christ in the world is at the same time our proclamation of the presence of Christ to the world, by both our words and our actions.

The world's coming of age in secularism moves us beyond the earlier system, which overcame too easily the distance between God and world (represented by the doctrine of sin) by creating in religion a place where faith and world are united. In this system, God stands in continuity with the world and religion becomes adaptation to existing social conditions. Earlier ages of faith "conceded to the world the right to determine Christ's place in the world."[2]

In the secular age, God is discontinuous from the world. For Bonhoeffer, this is not loss but gain because it enables the church to return to its proper task: to proclaim the inbreaking of God's kingdom into the world. At the same time, it locates the religious problem, because there is no longer a continuity between God and the inner person on the basis of feeling or sense (Schleiermacher) that needs only to be perfected by the preaching of Christ. The shift away from this position occurred as Bonhoeffer began to see that the proper reading of Scripture is not *for* but *over against* oneself. As Feil says, "the chief task for the theology of his generation was, in Bonhoeffer's view, to overcome religion as something which either *separates* or *identifies* faith and the world."[3] I think we may see Bonhoeffer's work, in part, as an attempt to line the boundaries within which theology must work in the twentieth cen-

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[1] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978).

[2] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, the enlarged edition (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1972), 327.

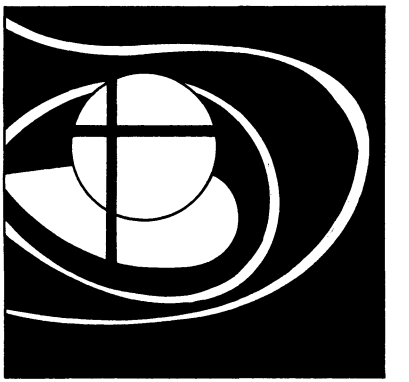
[3] Ernst Feil, *The Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 101. Underlining mine.

tury. The razor is the free grace of God (as in Barth, with noteworthy distinctions). God's free grace reaches out to people in the midst of their world, and this grace must be guarded by theology lest we lose the whole point of grace as what Barth calls "God's downward action," and we end by reconstructing religion as a means whereby we either assuage or are unable to disregard God in the world.

Bonhoeffer knows the world as the *one* sphere of the Christians' activity, whereas religion—in his view—allows for two spheres, one which is individual and inward and oriented toward private piety, one which is worldly and in which one may live independent of relationship to God. Behind this is the earlier notion that God occupies a "space" which can only be maintained by separating "God" from "world."

At this point, we must note that what we are talking about is different from the historical Lutheran teaching of "two realms," which has to do with church-state relations. For Bonhoeffer, church and state exist in two realms which are joined in and by God. Church and state exist in mutual interdependence, but also in mutual limitation. The task of the church is to assist the state to limit its agenda; the church bears the word of salvation, which is a godly task, but the state does not preach the gospel. The task of the church is to preach against the state when the state oversteps its boundaries—e.g., in the Aryan clause—and acts against its God-given responsibilities. By assigning limits to the state, the church acknowledges the proper rights of the state. This is *not* the world/church dialectic we have been examining.

In the secular age, God has been edged off the world. For Bonhoeffer this is not tragic, but is rather a new beginning whereby the true nature of Christianity as the proclamation of an alien and simultaneously free-



ing word can be made. When this word is proclaimed the world is once again the "world which is loved, condemned and reconciled in Christ,"[4] and which is "the sphere of concrete responsibility which is given to us through Jesus Christ" (*Ethics*, 233). In his earliest period Bonhoeffer vacillated between positive and negative assessments of the world, with little recourse to christology, and in the middle period discipleship and world are diametrically opposed (*Cost of Discipleship*),[5] in this final period he comes to a full appreciation of the world as the *one* sphere with which Christ is inseparably involved, so that christology and secularism become merged in his thought. Christ is not only *pro nobis* in the community but in the world *pro aliis*, "the man for others." Otherworldliness has now completely collapsed, and we are prepared to be this worldly Christians.

In the world come of age, we are in a godless context which is capable of either

[4] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1955), 232.

[5] On this, Feil, *Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, ch. 4.

promise or despair, depending upon whether or not the word of Christ is rightly heard. Where the gospel is proclaimed, godlessness becomes the source of promise because it prepares the way for the audacious, liberating Word of God's freedom *from* all religion and *for* thisworldliness in Christ. By destroying the spirituality of inwardness which results in retreat from the world into forms of piety that supposedly relate one to God, secularism prepares the way for a renewed understanding of the gospel. By denying the validity of religion as a means to construct a connection between humanity and God, secularism opens the doorway to genuine "autonomous" life in the world as it is and not as we would like it to be.

Mystery

Understanding the term. The term "mystery" means, theologically, a revealed truth which could not be spoken had it not been revealed, and which remains mystery even when spoken. We can see that we do *not* mean by "mystery" a fact about natural phenomena or human relations which is discoverable and then ceases to be mystery. A mystery, in the Bible, is the truth of God which is undiscoverable apart from revelation. To be precise, our redemption in Christ is a mystery, called such in Colossians, where it is called "God's secret," and in Ephesians and 1 Timothy 3, which use the term "mystery": great indeed is the mystery of our faith.

Recall that Bonhoeffer distinguishes between reflection and faith (which he calls *actus reflectus* and *actus directus* in *Act and Being*). Faith apprehends the mystery, reflection talks about it. God is the great mystery, but this does not mean God is unknowable: "God lives in mystery. God's being is mystery to us, mystery from eternity to eternity. Mystery, because it speaks of a home (*heimat*) in which we are—not yet—at home (*daheim*)."[6] God's mystery is announced in preaching and forms the starting place for Bonhoeffer's theology. In a circular letter of Christmas 1939, he makes this point with bold clarity: "God revealed in the flesh, the God-man Jesus Christ, is the holy mystery which theology is appointed to guard. What a mistake to think that it is the task of theology to unravel God's mystery, to bring it down to the flat, ordinary human wisdom of experience and reason! It is the task of theology solely to preserve God's wonder as wonder, to understand, to defend, to glorify God's mystery as mystery!"[7] Faith is part of the mystery and cannot be transformed into knowledge, which would be definable and graspable. The mystery always eludes us in the end.

Theology's task is to explore how the Christian movement presents or publishes the one true mystery; namely, the revelation of God's saving will in Jesus Christ, which is not a *discoverable* truth but a revealed truth. For Bonhoeffer, this presentation of the mystery occurs through preaching the Word and administering the sacraments. And that requires the assembly or *Gemeinde*.

The assembly

Most Protestants approach the church as a sociological, spiritual entity called into being by the gospel of Jesus Christ. Augustana 7 is a key example of a confessional principle: the church comes into being as "an

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[6] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Gesammelte Schrifte* (München: Christian Kaiser Verlag, 1958-61), vol. V, 516f.

[7] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *True Patriotism* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 28.

assembly of believers among whom the gospel is preached in its purity and the sacraments are administered according to the gospel." This understanding lay close to Bonhoeffer's heart as a Lutheran.

In his writing, however, he makes additional notes about the church which are not customarily identified with Lutherans. These have endeared him to other traditions, perhaps notably Anabaptist, because he emphasizes discipleship and because he expands christology to mean not only the Christ who is present in the proclamation of the Word and the administration of the sacraments, but the Christ who is present among us as community.

Assembly is thus enormously important as the place where Christ's presence in Word and sacrament is related to his presence in the community as reality is to figure.... Christ is the community by virtue of his being *pro me* (*Christ the Center*, 59). The only form Christ takes between the ascension and second coming is the form of community (*Gemeinde* in German; contrast with *Kirche*, which can refer to an institution). Community is a living bond of faith between members of the baptized household of God, it is not the juridical term which would describe a *Landeskirche*, which occupies institutional space and has administrative organs. Christ as community is constituted, finally and really, through the ongoing proclamation of the Word and the ongoing proclamation of the sacraments. Christ as community does not, cannot, exist apart from these central *actions* of the community of faith. Bonhoeffer emphasizes that these are actions, not maxims or propositional truths, because the community is event, not institution.

The Word, as creative action of God, constantly brings both the world and the church into being. This community called into being by Word and sacrament is the body of Christ and no other. Thus, the reception of the body and blood of Christ by the faithful is at once the *creation* of the community as body of Christ. The community of faith is *event*.

The community of faith never "progresses" to a point where sacraments are no longer necessary.

Since this body of Christ takes up time and space, it is a *reality* in the world of humans. To call the community a reality means that we abandon terms such as "potential to claim the church as the real self-presencing of Christ in the world." The body of Christ—even as Christ himself—is at the "center of human existence, history and nature" (*Christ the Center*, 62).

There is an internal connection between Word, sacrament, and the Present Christ. They cannot be separate one from the other; they exist in mutual interrelatedness. The community of faith never "progresses" to a point where it no longer depends upon the proclamation of the risen Christ to constitute the community. The community of faith never "progresses" to a point where sacraments are no longer necessary. With this emphasis, Bonhoeffer denies forms of spirituality or theology which rely upon the guidance of the Holy Spirit apart from the means to which the Spirit is committed. Now this interrelated

nature of the Word, the sacrament, and the Presence of Christ in the community means that the self-presencing of Christ requires the act of preaching. The announcement of gospel in the congregation is at once the announcement of the presence of Christ in forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation, since "to know Christ is to know his benefits" (Melanchthon). To preach is to make clear the benefits of Christ within the assembly.

The place of preaching in the assembly

Bonhoeffer places more weight on the proclaimed word than upon the word enshrined in scripture. This locates him in the Lutheran reform, since Luther's insight was that the community is a *mundhaus* and not a *schrifthaus*; that is a place where the word is orally proclaimed and not solely a place for the study of scripture. In accord with Luther's explanation of the Third Commandment (Small Catechism), Bonhoeffer locates true worship of God in the authentic proclamation of the Word, which is the proper service of all pastors of the church, who have no authority in themselves, but only as they are servants of God's Word. Where this proper authority is exercised, the body of Christ grows; where authority is arrogated by the preacher, the body of Christ is frustrated and shrivels. In commenting on the Third Commandment, he says, "the consecration of the holy day occurs through the proclamation of the Word of God in worship and through the willing and respectful hearing of this Word.... Thus the renewal of this holy day must begin with the renewal of preaching" (*Gesammelte Schriften* IV:611).

If we explore such renewal in Bonhoeffer's sermons,[8] a set of themes emerges. They include: "insistence on human dependence on God's grace; the reminder that the Christian must not forsake the world; the concern for the Christian's relationship with others; the victory of Christ crucified; and attention to... the word 'religion.'"[9] Bethge gives another list in the *biography*: (1) he constantly reiterates the antithesis between faith and religion; (2) he emphasizes the presence of Christ in the church as the Thou that imposes restrictions and commandments (the church as place of devotional encounter, mutual intercession, and personal confession); and (3) he points to the importance of the concrete and the earthly so that the contemporary present is always partner to the eschatological event of God.[10] His sermons are neither political nor examples of applied morals. Always his point is to render the historic, biblical Christ present through the kerygmatic act of proclamation. (It is noteworthy that he was impressed by the nineteenth century work by Martin Kähler on *The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic Biblical Christ*,[11] which deals with such matters.

Preaching to the world come of age

Now to return to the world-come-of-age, Bonhoeffer says in the *Ethics* that the only way the world can truly come of age is

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[8] Cf. works by Clyde E. Fant, *Worldly Preaching*, rev. ed. (New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 1991), and David Gracie, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Meditating on the Word* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 1986).

[9] Fant, *Worldly Preaching*, 8.

[10] Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 80f.

[11] Martin Kähler, *The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic Biblical Christ*, English text (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964).

through the proclamation of this Word of grace, because only by such preaching can humanity be brought to its proper place of responsibility and "autonomy" before God. "Religion" makes us dependent upon other authorities and, ultimately, takes away our responsibility for our deeds.

In this word of proclamation we include confession, so that the public and the private life of the believer are shaped thereby. The concrete ethic for which Bonhoeffer looks is made possible when we return to the office of confession, which he believed to be sacramental (*Ethics*, 259). As he says in *Spiritual Care*,[12] confession and care of souls (*Seelsorge*) are the personal application of the saving Word to the lives of individuals, whereas in preaching, one presents Christ publicly to the congregation.

He is clear about the preaching task: "What the church proclaims *is* the word of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ" (*Ethics*, 259). The preacher is thus not "the spokesman of the congregation" but is the "spokesman of God before the congregation." Preaching is the proper locus for the Word of God. "Scripture requires to be interpreted and preached... it is not a book of edification for the congregation" (*Ethics*, 260).

Thus, "on the basis of holy scripture, the office of preaching proclaims Christ as Lord and Savior of the world. The only legitimate proclamation of the church is a proclamation of Christ.... The church's word derives its sole right and its sole authority from the commission of Christ, and consequently any word she may utter without reference to this authority will be devoid of significance" (*Ethics*, 260).

It is important to set this in a larger context; in the *Ethics*, Bonhoeffer struggles with a set of issues in his society, chief among which is the so-called "two sphere" thinking, which he terms the "colossal obstacle" to the gospel: "so long as Christ and the world are conceived as two opposing and mutually repellent spheres, man will be left in the following dilemma: he abandons reality as a whole, and places himself in one or other of the two spheres. He seeks Christ without the world, or he seeks the world without Christ. In either case he is deceiving himself."[13] For Bonhoeffer, the world and the community which is the body of Christ are not separate spheres. The reality of Christ comprises the reality of the world within itself; the church is thus a reality which is both sign and witness to a fuller human being in the midst of worldliness.

The comprehensiveness of this approach extends itself even to prayer. In prayer, we unite with the words of Christ, our great high priest. We are enabled to pray through Christ; prayer is the power of the human Jesus in solidarity with other humans, who lifts up the prayers of the faithful as the Christ of God (*Psalms*, 63f.). In preaching as in prayer, we literally stake our lives on the faithfulness of God to the Word which invites us to pray and which never loses sight of this high view of preaching, and is disappointed when he finds in his American visits the sort of preaching which undermines such an understanding of the calling to proclaim.[14]

If the world can only find its reason for being in and through the proclamation of Christ, then it seems natural that Bonhoeffer explores, in *Letters and Papers from Prison*, the idea that the world is come of

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[12] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Spiritual Care* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 32ff., 60ff.

[13] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Psalms: Prayer Book of the Bible* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1970), 9-16.

[14] On which cf. Fant, *Worldly Preaching*, 11-20.

age. That the world comes of age is a function of the gospel. His other writings have led us to affirm the central theme of proclaiming the mystery of God in Christ. That is to say, the world can only come of age truly and authentically if and as it comes of age in Christ. Thus, the preaching of the Christian message is not in *opposition* to forms of maturation of the world, but rather is an antidote to all false forms of maturation which would only lead back to restrictive, irresponsible forms of faith which reject the world. Bonhoeffer's word has direct and immediate meaning for us in 1992 because he clarifies issues for the church even as he opens up space for the public gospel.

The question has now arisen in your minds as to why humanity can come of age only through the proclamation of the gospel. This is a legitimate and crucial question.

The answer is that the proclamation of the gospel reveals to the world its godlessness and stands in tension with the world for the purpose of bearing witness to that world that in Christ it can become truly worldly. Apart from the proclamation of the gospel, the world seeks its *own* resources to answer the problem of godlessness and will eventually "set itself in the place of God" (*Ethics*, 263). The world confers upon itself a divinity which it cannot possess because of its status as creation (this includes what Bonhoeffer calls the "mandates of preservation"—family, community, nation, state, church, work, marriage). When the world hears, *in its very godlessness*, that it is reconciled to God in Christ, the world is then free to be what it rightfully is. At the same time, the world is freed from the burden to make itself more than it rightfully is. This allows those who have heard the gospel to embrace the world soberly, as that fallen order which is yet redeemed in Christ, so that we expect neither too much nor too little of the institutions and social orders by which we govern ourselves. It frees us from deifying the orders. Such deification blocks criticism and change of the structures. This is both a pastoral and a prophetic word which the church bears to the world.

This word bears fruit in the renewal of relationships.

Relationships

In *Ethics*, Bonhoeffer says that community (*Gemeinde*) occurs where the Word of God is preached, indeed they are "inseparably united."

This means that people "are there who accept the word concerning Christ, and who believe it and acquiesce in it, unlike others who do not accept it but reject it... [people] are there who stand as deputies (*Stellvertreter*) for others, for the whole world. Certainly these are people who at the same time lead worldly lives in the family, culture, and government; they do so as people whom the word of Christ has set free for life in the world, but now they also form a community, a body which is distinct and separate from worldly institutions, for they are assembled together around the word of God and they are people who are chosen and live in this word" (*Ethics*, 265).

The Word creates a community which exists, on the one hand, to support the effective proclamation of the gospel; and on the other hand, the community formed by the Word exists for the world. "The congregation stands in this twofold relation of deputyship entirely in the fellowship and discipleship of its Lord, who was Christ precisely in this, that he existed not for his own sake but wholly for the sake of the world" (*Ethics*, 266). In both cases, the community of faith lives in "deputyship" (or better, as representative) in service *to*

the gospel for the world, even as Christ is the deputy, the "man *for* others."

I would identify three modes of involvement in the world:

1. In the *personal* mode, we have the *hidden discipline*. A place for piety returns, but it is a piety transformed from disciplines which extract the Christian from the world into a private sphere of religion. Now our discipline prepares us *for* life in the world. In the world come of age, each person must identify and claim her own form of discipline. Bonhoeffer's way may not be yours, but we may note that the rhythm of the church year informs both his hidden discipline and his theology as well. He breathes the seasons of Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, and Pentecost as living resources for his life in the world practically and theologically. Again, intercessory prayer links us with the Christian community in part, at least, to gain strength for the pursuit of genuine worldliness. We read the Bible to identify the activity of God in that *one* world to which we are called.

The hidden discipline, in the words of Kenneth Hamilton, "is a way of witnessing to the ultimate without attempting to call attention to it or to give it structure. Both faith and church are thus utterly hidden, secret, unnoticed."[15] It may well be, as Andre Dumas pointed out, that the Christian lives with a kind of code language or shorthand which is no longer understood by the world as a whole, and the hidden discipline allows us to use that language while we are forging a new, nonreligious language by which to communicate our faith. The church and especially individual members thus enter what Bethge has called "a sacrifice of silence," not because we have nothing to say but because we are no longer willing to force our message on the world before we discover ways to interpret the faith in a new age. Meanwhile, the hidden discipline enables us, as persons and in community, to feed ourselves with the Word in order that we remain an outpost of God in the secular age.

> To be helpful, Bonhoeffer says "we must be ready to allow ourselves to be interrupted by God."

2. In the *interpersonal* mode, we exercise the ministries outlined in *Life Together*. Here, Bonhoeffer speaks of the ministries of holding one's tongue, meekness, listening, helpfulness, bearing, and proclaiming authority (*Life Together*, 90ff.). He wants to provide ways for the community to engage in mutual support and exhortation (one of the five modes of the gospel) in the *Smalcald Articles*.[16] "To speak about the brother covertly is forbidden, even under the cloak of help and good will; for it is precisely in this guise that the spirit of hatred among brothers always creeps in when it is seeking to create mischief" (*Life Together*, 92). Confession is needed for the common life, since in humility we must look to our sinfulness in disrupting community before we accuse another. To be help-

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[15] Kenneth Hamilton, "A Secular Theology for a World Come of Age," *Theology Today* 18:4 (January 1992), 441.

[16] *The Book of Concord*, ed. Theodore Tappert (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), 310.

ful, Bonhoeffer says "we must be ready to allow ourselves to be interrupted by God. God will be constantly crossing our paths and cancelling our plans by sending us people with claims and petitions" (*Life Together*, 99). If we pass them by, "we pass by the visible sign of the cross raised athwart our path to show us that, not our way, but God's way must be done." Lastly, we take authority for this ministry only under the Word. "Pastoral authority can be attained only by the servant of Jesus who seeks no power of his own, who himself is a brother among brothers submitted to the authority of the Word" (*Life Together*, 109). This style of life is incumbent not only for pastors but upon all members of the Christian community. This relationship is formed when we focus on the Christ who comes to us in the form of our sister, and when we remember that we bear Christ's freedom and word into a sister's life. We bear the cross into interpersonal relationships not in a gloomy way but with hilarity ("a certain kind of boldness").

These interpersonal modes of the gospel are values derived from the end of faith. We practice them only when we are aware that Christ claims us for a community which is unique precisely because we know his victory in the resurrection. Resurrection, in interpersonal relations, is known through forgiveness, caring, and attentiveness.

3. In the *societal* mode, the church engages economic and social orders to clear the pathway for the proclamation of the gospel. "In everything which the Church has to say with regard to the institution of the world she can only prepare the way for the coming of Jesus Christ; the real coming of Jesus Christ itself lies within his own freedom and grace. It is because Jesus Christ has come and is coming again that the way must be prepared for him everywhere in the world, and it is therefore also solely for *that* reason that the Church is concerned with the secular institutions" (*Ethics*, 324).

Bonhoeffer continues: "There are... certain economic or social attitudes and conditions which are a hindrance to faith in Christ and which consequently destroy the true character of man in the world. It must be asked... whether capitalism or socialism or collectivism are economic forms which impede faith in this way. In this respect, the conduct of the church is twofold, on the one hand, drawing negative limits, she will, by the authority of the word of God, necessarily declare those economic attitudes or forms to be wrong which obviously obstruct belief in Jesus Christ, and on the authority of the responsible advice of Christian specialists and experts, she will be able to make her contribution towards the establishment of a new order" (*Ethics*, 325). The first task belongs to the preaching and the second is a *diakonia*.

We see, finally, why Bonhoeffer eschews "religion as a flight from the world." At the incarnation, God identified with the world as it is; Christ is the ultimate truth of the world, the one in whom the world achieves true worldliness, but we Christians live in the realm of what Bonhoeffer calls "penultimates." In that realm God comes to us, calls us to faithfulness, and offers us life. The "penultimates" are "God's way to us" (*Ethics*, 141), but they receive their meaning only in the light of the ultimate truth known as Christ. In Christ, we are oriented away from "arbitrariness and disorder" (*Ethics*, 143) yet which makes us work out our ethic in solidarity with all humanity, since we have no way to proceed from penultimates to the ultimate. That procession is from God, and this is the only orientation the Christian has. It is a call to God's gracious future.

The Future of the Fourth Gospel

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I have found the study of the Fourth Gospel to be exciting. Reading the Gospel from a literary perspective has given me a new view of the drama and suspense of the Christ event. The extensive study of characterization and plot development has helped me to examine the human condition in a greater way. This course has enabled me to see the Gospel of John as a powerful proclamation of God's transforming relationship that makes me genuinely human in the world. I will reflect on the meaning of the Gospel from my point of view as an African American preacher and determine its relevance and future for preaching in the African American religious context.

Examining the Gospel, I see it as a message that affirms life in spite of distortions, confusions, and denials. Its message is suited well for my ministry as a pastor within an African American (Black) church.

The relevance of John for me

What is the relevance of the Fourth Gospel for me as a preacher within the Black Church context? What future does this Gospel have within the preaching and teaching tradition that I have received? This Gospel offers me and those within the church an "ontology of being." This ontology of being, as I understand it, affirms the dignity of life in the face of disgrace and dehumanization because it is life grounded in the very being of God; it offers transformation in my life in spite of existence's tendency toward the deformation of life. More importantly, this Gospel offers me "being and becoming" amid attempts within existence and society at the denial and destruction of "personhood."

I have discovered that this Gospel offers the life of God in all of its completeness to those who depend completely on Jesus. The history of being Black in America has been a search for wholeness. It has been a mixture of both bitter and sweet experiences. The experiences with Jesus have been sweet. The experience of "nobodiness" within the confines of society has been bitter. Because of Jesus, my life has been in a creative process—a move from "non-being" to "being." I am moving from distorted concepts of an inferior to that of a human being.

My experiences of deprivation and denial have not been as severe as those who have gone before me, but the feelings of not being fully accepted for who I am lingers deep within my soul. The feeling of always

having to prove myself still haunts me. I am unable to shake my history. What has happened to me is the courage to believe that all things can be made new. I have come to see the kingdom in Jesus Christ while still wondering if a person can be born when he or she is old. My experience still tells me that I am not accepted in American society for who I am, but the Gospel of John proclaims to me that I am accepted by God. It tells me unequivocally that I am loved by God (Jn 3:16). The affirmation of my being takes on greater significance in this Gospel because the God of creation is intimately and personally concerned for me—loves me—to the extent that this God is revealed to me and is at home in me:

> They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them. (Jn 14:21)
>
> Those who love me will keep my words, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. (Jn 14:23)

The announcement of the Fourth Gospel is transforming because it has reached to the very essence of my being. It proclaims to me revelation and incarnation. God is in me. This message tells me that "I am" because God is. In spite of being denied by others in society, this Gospel affirms I cannot be denied as long as Jesus is. The "I am's" of Jesus proclaim my "I am-ness." To abide in Jesus (Jn 15:4) is to have life, being, and significance despite what others have affirmed.

Since I accept the Bible as the Word of God "to me and for me" in my blackness (experience of alienation, fear, self-defacement, rejection, despair, and hopelessness), I am able to go on affirming myself even in the conflict and anxiety of life.

The ontology of the gospel

The Gospel of John fits my contextual hermeneutic (system of interpretation) because when I read the story, it becomes my story. It becomes my plot. Jesus is my Jesus. This radical leap, interpretation, and relationship is easily made based on my understanding of God in this Gospel. God is connected to all life because God is the creator of all life. God is eternally present to the creation. God is the "I am, I am, I am." If God is eternally present, then I have concluded that God is now what God was then: the Creator and Transformer of life. What God did for the Samaritan woman, the blind man, the lame man, and Lazarus, God can do for me.

I accept ontologically that "God is the reality and foundation of all life." If this is so, then "blackness" is ontologically based and has relative and eternal significance in that it issues forth from God:

> All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. (Jn 1:3)

At one time I was ashamed of "being black" because I was made to believe by the dominant culture that there was something inherently wrong with it. John's proclamation that all things came into being includes "blackness." Accepting this as my biblical and theological base, I affirm my being black as good (Gen 1:31).

The good news of John for me and those to whom I preach is, "God came into the world to change 'me' in my state of sin, disgrace, and dehumanization." Jesus turned on the lights for me. He reveals to me who I really am, and that gives me life. The truth that he proclaims about life cannot be put into the dark by the ignorance of any person or society:

> What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. (Jn 1:5)

In Christ's coming, according to John, the transformation of life happens, conversion happens, the "new being" happens. This transformation happens for me in this Gospel as the conditions that bring about dehumanization are changed. This is done as I am taken into a new family and community:

> He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him, But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God. (Jn 1:11-12)

I have accepted Christ and I believe (abide) in him, and the power to be God's child through Jesus Christ has become for me an ontological reality. The foundation for my preaching and teaching stands on the proclamation, "And the Word became flesh and lived among us" (Jn 1:14). This same Word that was the agent of creation in Genesis 1 is the agent of recreation and transformation for me and my human condition. This Gospel declares that the Word transforms the negatives of demoralization and dehumanization to personhood. Jesus affirms me and makes me "somebody" when the world denies me and declares me to be "nobody."

This Gospel declares that the Word transforms the negatives of demoralization and dehumanization to personhood.

The relevance of the Gospel for preaching and teaching

The Gospel of John is meaningful for preaching and teaching because it offers wholeness to brokenness. It offers the opportunity to start over again. It proclaims radical change to the conditions of my life. It declares a transformation: "You must be born from above" (Jn 3:7).

The two-hundred-year history of slavery in America and the one hundred years plus of segregation and racism that African Americans have subsequently endured in this nation has destroyed families and bent the backs and minds of countless generations into a fearful, submissive, and subservient state from which recovery has not yet been experienced. To be black in America is to experience life in brokenness. It is to be born with the stigmas of humiliation, abandonment, anger, fear, frustration, and despair about one's being. This existence is a crucified existence. It is crucifixion without a cause.

On the cross Jesus was rejected, abandoned, and humiliated without a cause. On the cross, he was abandoned and considered nothing. It is at the cross that I meet Jesus. I know how he feels, and he knows how I feel. He was completely dehumanized, and it killed him.

The gospel for me doesn't end at the cross. It doesn't end with my burden and destruction. For me, the glory is not in the cross alone. It is both in the cross and in the resurrection of Jesus. The two together point to my condition in the world. The

cross of John declares the negatives I face; the resurrection declares the transformation, re-creation, and the redemption of God for the ambiguity and distortions I face without a cause.

The cross of John declares the negatives I face; the resurrection declares the transformation, re-creation, and the redemption of God for the ambiguity and distortions I face without a cause.

The resurrection is significant and glorious because it is God's positive. It declares that I am ontologically based and that I can never be lost regardless of the conditions of a negative existence. Modern scholarship often denies the literal resurrection of Jesus, but the preaching of the African American church declares, "somebody rose." It is faith in the resurrection of Jesus that assures me a place in the presence of God. Trouble won't last always. In Jesus Christ, I have been resurrected. I am a new creation; I am "a brand-new me" because of Jesus. Who I am in my blackness is affirmed. My soul will not see corruption. The Gospel of John gives hope for my crucified state of being because it proclaims the value of my life for God that cannot be denied.

It is believed within the teaching and preaching tradition of the African American church that if Jesus rose from the dead and transformed death into life, he can change me. If Jesus made water into wine (Jn 2:7ff.), he can change—through the cooperation of persons willing to help him—a racist society into a righteous society, a dehumanized society into a human society, and a supposed inferior status of a people to the "best/good" status (Jn 2:11).

The good news of this Gospel is the transformation of life. Jesus brings transformation to cultural relationships (Jesus and the Samaritan woman, John 4); Jesus brings transformation to dehumanization (Jesus and the woman caught in adultery, 8:1-11); Jesus brings transformation of those who are different (the man born blind, John 9); Jesus transforms life that is void of dignity and dynamic (the raising of Lazarus, John 11).

The future of this Gospel can be seen in situational and contextual areas where the broken, bruised, and abused are made whole in Jesus. And that is my future.

Lutheran Reflections on Nature: Prolegomena to a Theology of the Environment

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The churches of our nation have too often failed to be on the vanguard of new social or ethical movements. This is also true in the case of environmentalism. Yet denominations and congregations are now beginning to sense the crisis and to be alerted to the cry for saving the earth. Christians need a converted sensitivity to God's creation, which on the seventh day was deemed delightful.

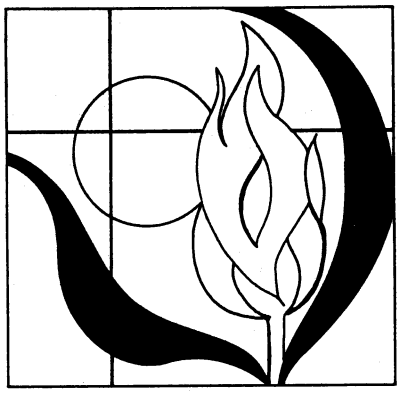
This essay will explore a number of Lutheran sources in order to construct a theology that is relevant to the nurture and stewardship of our planetary environment.

This ecological-theological analysis will center on second article concerns, particularly in my first theme, which deals with the christological motif of the finite being capable of the infinite (*finitum capax infiniti*). Christianity is an overtly incarnational religion, not a Gnostic spiritualism. Lutheranism focuses its tradition on the earthy embodiment of God. The original notion for this essay came from Robert W. Jenson's *Visible Words*, where he plentifully uses words like somatic and embodiment.[1]

Related to this christological context is our second theme, the overtly sacramental character of Lutheran Confessionalism. God comes not in ethereal spirit but through Word and Sacrament. God likes matter. In the familiar terms of C. S. Lewis, "He made it."

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[1] Robert W. Jenson, *Visible Words* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 131-36. I also thank Dennis Beilfeldt of Grand View College for his counsel and Mark Ellingsen, formerly of the Strasbourg Ecumenical Institute, for his encouragement.



A third theme will be the relational nature of the image of God that centers our humanness. This is primarily first article material, but the implications will also be christological, as well as informed by the Old Testament. Not only is God the caring Servant-Lord of creation, but the image of God we bear as children of God takes shape in our capacity for relationships to God, to our fellow humans, and not least to God's creation. Therefore the nurture and stewardship of nature will be a vital part of life under and in God. This is significant in the light of the charge that Western society has been so anthropocentric that nature has been a leftover concern for "Adam" the Dominator.

Before explicating these positive theses, one needs to be realistic about the resources in our tradition. Too often Lutheranism in the past has rejected a natural knowledge of God (natural theology), or it has ignored nature in any sense that could now invite an environmental theology. Too often nature or the order of creation has simply been a platform or a backdrop for the drama of salvation. The "platform" or "backdrop" has been only that, leading to humans, who are declared by the creator to be "a little lower than the angels" (Psalm 8), neglecting or pillaging the natural order.

Paul Santmire has shown how ambivalent the history of Christian thought has been on the role of nature in the theological schema. On the positive side, he sees an ecological motif in Irenaeus, the mature Augustine, Francis of Assisi, and, surprisingly often, in Luther and Calvin. According to Santmire this ecological vision of reality is that God's good creation, still within the arms of God's care, is indeed "ravaged by sin" but shall one day be "consummated in glory by God, when every creature shall enjoy the glorious liberty of the children of God."[2]

In this article our concern is the order of redemption, and we shall find the roots of a deep view of nature in Luther's christology associated with the eucharistic controversies. Before looking at the technical details of this "finite capable of the infinite," however, it is well to briefly review contemporary witnesses to this in-carnational view of nature.

The finite capable of the infinite in contemporary Lutheranism

A Christianity seen as utterly dualistic has been accused of fostering our ecological crisis. Never mind that technological-scientific modernism is more the culprit. Ignore the fact that Daoism with its "letting be" of cosmic Dao-Nature did not deter the Chinese from denuding their great forests for ancient urbanization. Christianity still has to face its accusers.

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2 Paul Santmire, *The Travail of Nature* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 217.

Lutheranism does not represent such spiritualism, dualism, nor the apocalyptic fundamentalism of the TV indulgence hawkers. The Lutheran tradition sets its mind against such very "religious" tendencies, including the Gnostic and monistic tendencies of the "New Age," because it sees the Infinite become flesh, the Eternal become timed, embodied, earthy. An incarnational religion, as Robert Jenson has reminded us, has an "embodied God."[3]

We will now briefly overview the incarnational connections seen by Carl Braaten, Joseph Sittler, and Philip Hefner. I begin with Carl Braaten because he typifies a "sacramental vision." Emphasizing in his own terms the deeply incarnational and sacramental character of our tradition, he states that "[God's] infinite transcendence arrives within the material matrix of creation."[4] In the same passage, walls come tumbling down "between the holy and the common, the religious and the secular,... the natural and the supernatural." Thus, "a sacramental vision of life reacts positively to the contemporary search for an ecologically sound theology and ethic."

The pioneer Lutheran on an ecological vision was, however, Joseph Sittler, with whom I first studied theology. Even then he had a tacit, sometimes explicit, lovingly incarnational theology, peppered with allusions from literature and especially the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins. For Sittler, nature and grace need not be alienated from each other.

Joy and wonder were evident as he reimaged a christoform nature, the presence of God richly incarnational in nature and culture. Like Jonathan Edwards, Sittler saw the "beauty of the Lord." The sacred was for Sittler in the concrete, the immediate. "In him [Christ] all things cohere" is the motif of Colossians that is integral to Sittler's thought. Nature and grace interpenetrate and are not alien to each other. Sittler managed a joyous affirmation of the world without falling into a sentimental, romanticized nature religion.[5]

Philip Hefner has a rich, lyrical theology. In "Nature as God's Chosen Medium," a conference address, he concludes that "the sweep of biblical history shows us that in both testaments God continually showed that nature was the chosen medium for God's grace and action," the "mud" of creation, the rains and rainbow in the Noah story, the sea in the Exodus event, or a valley of dry bones in Ezekiel. Nature is "God's chosen medium." He adds: "There is no nature without the possibilities of spirit," and "the incarnation in Jesus Christ is the normative image." In the same address Hefner calls us to a shalom of being "sibling to the geese and the spiders" and even "eye, tongue, and heart to sweet earth, covenant partners with earth."[6]

The finite capable of the infinite in Luther

The central point of this study is to see that such rich incarnationalism occurs already in Luther's eucharistic controversies with

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[3] Robert W. Jenson, throughout his work.

[4] Carl E. Braaten, *Principles of Lutheran Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 98.

[5] For Sittler on the environment, see especially his essay, "Ecological Commitment as Theological Responsibility" in *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* 5:172-81.

[6] Philip Hefner, "God So Loved the World—Taking a Chance on You and Me," address at the ELCA Region 5 Conference on "Care of Earth and People," April 19-21, 1991, used by author's permission. Some of these themes appear in an essay in *After Nature's Revolt*, ed. Dieter Heffel (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1991).

his "spiritualist" opponents, Carlstadt in his own camp and Zwingli and others in the Reformed churches. Luther's position in these often acrimonious debates echoes the Lutheran motto: "The finite is capable of the infinite."

> Luther had a dualism of God's conflict with Satan but not one of heaven vs. created nature.

Luther did not view the ascension as Jesus zooming into space to a throne, while Zwingli viewed Christ's body sitting on a "golden chair" at the right hand of the Father. Luther means by the right hand of God "the omnipotent power of God by which he can be everywhere in all things, and that therefore Christ can also be present in his Lord's Supper on earth." Braaten thus explains that Christ is present in every leaf and rock, yet we cannot find him simply in any place but only where he has instructed us to be in fellowship with him, in a particular meal of bread and wine.[7]

This doctrine is related to the "exchange of attributes" which Luther borrows in part from the scholastics. This means, first, that the person of Christ has the attributes of each nature. Second, the power and majesty of the divine is communicated to the human Christ. Third, all acts performed by either nature have the participation of the other.

Luther believed that the divine property of omnipresence was now communicated to the humanness of Jesus Christ. As Braaten articulates it, the presence of Christ is now "on all altars of the church at the same time."[8] Both the ubiquity of Christ and the related "communication of divine attributes to the human" are based on the incarnational nature of Luther's theology.

Such a religion could not be expected to be ecological in the sixteenth century, but we can claim its inner integrity to aid us in recovering an environmentally sensitive theology in our day. We Lutherans need to see that our tradition is not anti-environmental at its core.

In answering the charge "that we are eaters of flesh and drinkers of blood and that we worship a baked God," Luther charges that if Christ's body cannot be in the bread, then Christ's entering into Mary's womb is not "reasonable" either.[9]

Later in the same work Luther declares:

> Heaven and earth are his sack, as wheat fills the sack, so he fills all things. And as a seed bears a stalk, an ear, and many kernels, or again, as a single cherrystone cast into the ground brings forth a tree which bears many blossoms, leaves, inner and outer bark, and cherries.[10]

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[7] Braaten, *Principles of Lutheran Theology*, 90.

[8] Braaten, *Principles of Lutheran Theology*, 93.

[9] Martin Luther, "The Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ—Against the Fanatics," 1526, from *Luther's Works* (hereafter *LW*), Vol. 36 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1959): 336, 338.

[10] Martin Luther, "The Sacrament of the Body and Blood," 343.

The point here is not that Luther is a modern biologist but that in his christology he does reverence nature. Nature's ways vividly strike Luther's eyes and ears with the vivifying wisdom and graciousness of God.

To be sure, Luther is a theologian and not a scientist. Though his God is "present in all creatures... in stone, in fire, in water, or even in a rope," yet Christ does not want us to find him apart from the Word. So we "grope" not for the rope but for the Word of God, which allows us to return to the sacramental character of the Christian faith and to the presence of the true body and blood in the Lord's Supper.[11]

> Once one firmly sees God come in a human person, then all creatures will be magnified in their beauty. "Then I will properly appreciate the sun, the moon, the stars, trees, apples, pears, as I reflect that he is Lord over and the center of all things" (from a sermon on the 4th Gospel).[12]

In "That These Words of Christ, 'This is My Body,' etc., Still Stand Firm Against the Fanatics," Luther has a magnificent passage on the immanence and the transcendence of God.

> God in his essence is present everywhere in and through the whole creation in all its parts and in all places, and so the world is full of God and he fills its all, yet he is not limited or circumscribed by it, but is at the same time beyond and above the whole creation.

Then he immediately compares this with the eucharistic-christological issue by saying, "in comparison with this it is a trivial matter that Christ's body and blood are at the same time in heaven and in the Supper."[13]

In summary: 1. The doctrine of the omnipresence of Christ, articulated in the doctrine of the communication of attributes, forms the basis of the christology of the Lord's Supper controversies. 2. This marks Luther as a deeply incarnational theologian. Once he has ascertained the heart of things, the Word made flesh, then all things in nature become clearer. From Luther's early encounter with the Zwickau prophets and Carlstadt when he returned from the Wartburg Castle, Luther was clear: he wanted no anti-natural spiritualism, fearful of the Spirit getting mixed up with matter. Luther had a dualism of God's conflict with Satan but not one of heaven vs. created nature.

Further implications of an incarnational theology

It is obvious by now that not only the christology behind Luther's sacramental teaching should be useful to us but also the very notion of a sacrament itself. If the gospel is predicated on a self-giving, incarnational, embodied God, then the sacraments are visible, material signs of God's presence. My plea now, however, is: how about seeing the relevance of the sacraments for saving the environment? If God comes to us in matter, God's created order ought to matter for us.

Robert W. Jenson notes:

> The incarnational foundation of sacramental presence has connection with the whole of life. The holiness of God appears in human form, and his infinite

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[11] Martin Luther, "The Sacrament of the Body and Blood," 342.

[12] Quoted in Santmire, *The Travail of Nature*, 131.

[13] That These Words of Christ, 'This is my Body,' etc., Still Stand Firm Against the Fanatics," *LW* 37:59.

transcendence arrives within the material matrix of creation.

So, Jenson continues, the divisions erode between the sacred and the everyday, religion and the secular realm, this world and the one coming in hope, nature and supernature; "all have been broken down." The Creator delights in matter.[14]

Similarly, John Carmody has shown the implications he draws from the sacramental character of Roman Catholicism. As God's presence is "transparent" in the sacraments, so humans should use nature "so that it is revelatory."[15] He shows up the Puritanism of most Protestants, who devalue the sacraments, art, and liturgy, and hence by implication seem to devalue or make docetic the incarnated, embodied nature of God.

The chief value of a sacramental approach to nature is that it enables us to be sensitive to material signs as well as words, to seeing and smelling as well as hearing. Christianity needs a "balance between manifestation and proclamation," inherent in the Johannine "the Word became flesh," the delight of God in his creation on the seventh day, and in "the Pauline assertion that all things hold together in Christ."[16] Christ's presence is Real in real matter, bread and wine, fruits of earth and sun and human labor. Lutherans should revel in the "naturalness" of the Sacrament of the Altar (especially in the use of real bread, I might add).

Christ's presence is Real in real matter, bread and wine, fruits of earth and sun and human labor.

The relational character of the image of God

The best theologizing on the issue of the image of God is by a United Church of Canada theologian, Douglas John Hall, who appropriates the Reformers' view of the *imago dei*. Hall calls for a Christian conversion to the world of nature in crisis. Christ's love for the *world* (Jn 3:16) is central to this conversion. The world is indeed "greatly loved," and "its mending is an immediate and vital dimension of the whole work of God."[17]

Hall's main doctrinal tool is the image of God. He views Luther as authentically articulating a new view of the image of God that is "relational" instead of "substantialist" (set in Greek philosophical categories). Luther reimages (a favorite term of Hall's) the *image* in relationship terms: relationship to God, the human community, and the natural world.

Luther and Calvin insisted that our relationships to God and each other and the world became estranged because of the Fall. God intends to correct that.

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[14] Jenson, *Visible Words*, 98-99.

[15] John Carmody, *Ecology and Religion: Toward a New Christian Theology of Nature* (New York: Paulist Press, 1983), 61.

[16] Carmody, *Ecology and Religion*, 77.

[17] Douglas John Hall, *Imaging God: Dominion as Stewardship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; New York: Friendship Press, 1986), 40.

> The whole intention of the relational conception of the image of God is to position the human nature responsibly in relation to the other creatures; not to demonstrate that this creature is higher, or more complex, or worthier.... Relationship is of the essence of this creature's nature and vocation.[18]

It is our relationship as creatures of God to the nonhuman creatures that especially interests us, from cougars and horses to rocks and plants. Hall sees a third dimension to the love commandment. He notes that there is no explicit reference to nature in Jesus' command to love, yet "it belongs to the basic ontology of this tradition that the extrahuman creation constitutes a third focus of the love commandment...." (p. 124).

Hall calls this an "ontology of communion" where "being means being-with" (p. 113, and the entire chapter). Therefore we are to be *stewards* in our care for the cosmos and the earth, "serving and representative creatures, whose complexity of mental, spiritual, and volitional powers makes it possible for us, within the creation, to image the holy and suffering love of the Creator" (p. 141). The ontology of "being-with" includes being-with the natural world, the image of Christ being the paradigm.

George Forell sees the connection of this position with Luther's doctrine of vocation, that in this "ordinary" material world Christians are to do their thing, that is, do the "extraordinary," so that "we are Christs to each other."[19] This is a specifically Lutheran way of saying what Hall has been proposing.

Conclusion

The burden of my proposal is that we connect the matter-matrixed character of Christianity to the sacramental and then to the "ordinary" matters of our environmental issues. To be sure, this will take an extraordinary Spirit-led endeavor.

We have cited authors from the Reformers to contemporary Lutherans who are deeply incarnational and sacramental in their Christian thinking. The finite is indeed capable of the infinite.

So what may we conclude? Carmody is correct as he states his "impression" that ecological beliefs are widespread, yet "they have yet to penetrate the churches' doctrinal assumptions sufficiently to make the churches effective exponents of an ecological ethic or worldview."[20]

That must change not only in our own interests and that of future generations but for the well-being of the egret I saw on a lakeside walk, or the pelican I watched as he seemed to wait for a meal, gazing at waters in Oklahoma. There is danger of romanticizing nature, of course, forgetting the tooth and claw it exhibits. The lion and the lamb do not yet cohabitate. We will not find God directly in nature, as Bishop Chilstrom has recently reminded us.[21] We dare not fall into a Bible camp nature-religion. Yet I think that I, as a city youth, found intimations of glory at those Bible camps in an incarnational, sacramental spirituality.

Christians are called upon by their incarnational theology to invest themselves in the ecological health of our planet.

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[18] Hall, *Imaging God,* 106-7.

[19] George Forell, "The Place of Theology in the ELCA," *Lutheran Forum* 25:1 (February 1991), 34-37.

[20] Carmody, *Ecology and Religion,* 114.

[21] Bishop Herbert Chilstrom's monthly message in *The Lutheran,* May 22, 1991, 41.

The Purple Box

Gary Blobaum
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Every year we had Lenten banks. When I was growing up, every year in Sunday School they handed out these purple boxes. Lenten banks they were called. There was a hole in the top where you put the money in. Lenten banks had pictures of crosses, nails, and crowns of thorns. They were always purple. Purple was the color for repentance. Purple was the color for Lent.

Every year on the first Sunday in Lent, Mr. Gingrich, the Sunday School Superintendent, would stride across the gymnasium bringing purple Lenten banks to each classroom—one for every student. I thought he was the tallest man in the world. Mr. Gingrich would walk among us kids like a farmer striding through a field of wheat—he was so far above us.

Old Mr. Gingrich sometimes came into our classroom. We sat in these tiny chairs, but he would bend way down to look at our work. "I like your style, sonny," he would say to us boys. "You know you're the apple of my eye," he'd say to the girls.

All Lent we'd fill up our banks. Finally on Easter, two students would carry around a big, purple box and we'd put our Lenten banks into it. When the banks had been collected, Mr. Gingrich would count the money and, at the end of Sunday School on Easter, the total of our Lenten offering would be announced.

Well, we had these two neighborhood boys in our Sunday School. Bickford was their last name: Burl and Jamie Lee Bickford. Burl was my age. I'd met him one day when I was walking down the alley behind our church and he sprang out from behind some garbage cans and punched me in the guts.

That's all I wanted to know about Burl Bickford. But one year on Evangelism Sunday Mr. Gingrich had sent the entire Sunday School out ringing doorbells in the neighborhood of the church. We fanned out over a twelve-block area with Mr. Gingrich leading the way, pointing out the houses of the unchurched and stopping traffic in the name of the Lord.

I don't know who rang the Bickford's doorbell, but ever since that Evangelism Sunday, Burl and Jamie Lee had been part of our Sunday School.

My parents said the only reason the Bickfords sent their kids was to get them out of their hair for an hour on Sunday mornings. Mr. Gingrich didn't seem to care *what* the reason was. Mr. Gingrich took a shine to those Bickford boys. "I like your style, sonny," said the tall man as he leaned down, his big hand on Burl's shoulders.

I was surprised how quickly the hands of Burl and Jamie Lee shot into the air on Easter Sunday. Mr. Gingrich had asked for

two volunteers to collect the Lenten banks, and the Bickfords were right there, Johnny-on-the-spot. They carried the big, purple box around to the different classes. We put in our Lenten banks.

"Where's Burl?" my teacher said when ten minutes had passed. I was sent off to scout around for him and, when I couldn't find Burl *or* Jamie Lee, I told Mr. Gingrich.

The old man put on his hat. "Come with me, sonny," he said. We deployed into the back alley.

Meanwhile at the corner drug store, two boys were filling their pockets with bubble gum, licorice whips, and jawbreakers. "Yeah, two more boxes of them Boston Baked Beans and that should about do it," the older boy said as he laid a pile of quarters on the counter.

The heist had been premeditated. That morning the Bickford brothers had left their coaster wagon, like a junior getaway vehicle, in the alley behind the church. With all the Lenten banks in the purple box, they had ducked out the back, loaded the box into the wagon, and made off for the drugstore. Now, pockets bulging, they were pulling their wagon toward home.

"What'd they say the color purple meant?" asked Jamie Lee trudging behind the coaster wagon.

"Beats me," said Burl. "But who wants to know?"

"I'm not feeling too good," said Jamie.

"I told ya not ta eat them jawbreakers so fast," Burl replied. He pulled the wagon to a stop.

"Think they'll ever let us back into Sunday School?" Jamie asked.

"Are you nuts?" said Burl. "But anyway, who wants to go?"

There was a silence. Jamie Lee sat down in the coaster wagon next to the purple box. There were tears in his eyes.

"Hey, what?" exclaimed Burl. Nothing frightened Burl as much as tears did. Everyone knew that Burl had never cried a tear since he'd been four years old. But he was always afraid he would. Only *he* knew that. He wouldn't know what to do if he ever *did* start to cry. The thought of it scared him. "Come on, Jamie," Burl pleaded.

"They was nice to us," said Jamie Lee, tears streaking his face. "They was real nice. What'd we go and do *this* for?"

Burl could feel the tears, way back behind his eyes, and suddenly he was afraid it would start happening. "Hey, Jamie, hey Jamie boy, let's you and me roll this vehicle right back to Sunday School," said Burl. "Hey, we only liquidated three of them boxes, man. We can wash windows. We'll get it back in the newspaper drive. We'll give it *back*, man, I promise. Hey, don't cry. Hey, you're my main man. Help me roll this crate down to Sunday School."

Meanwhile, *I* was trying to keep up with Mr. Gingrich. "Come with me, sonny," he was saying. "We'll wait 'em out on the steps of the church. No reason to get all up in arms about it just yet." We sat down on the church steps and waited.

Mr. Gingrich saw it first: a coaster wagon and two boys coming our way. The old man was up on his poor legs and running down the sidewalk. His hat blew off and he didn't turn around. I saw him drop to his knees and hug those Bickford boys both together.

"We're gonna pay back," spluttered Burl.

"You smell like jawbreakers, Jamie," Mr. Gingrich laughed. "Jawbreakers, licorice whips... I've got an idea." He sent the three of us back to the drugstore with the wagon and the purple box. "I want jawbreakers for the whole Sunday School," he said, "enough licorice whips to go around three times. Buy the place out if you have to."

We started off down the sidewalk. "And buy some party whistles!" the old man hollered after us.

We came back with fixings for a party and, sure enough, Mr. Gingrich had called off classes. There was going to be a celebration. We passed out candy to everyone. Whistles were blown. Children laughed.

I don't think anyone had ever seen Burl Bickford cry before. Maybe nobody else saw him *that* day either. But I did. And Mr. Gingrich did. I saw big, heavy tears start to roll down Burl's cheeks. And I saw old Mr. Gingrich bending down to hug the daylights out of him. "I like your style, sonny," he must have been saying.

When you are only nine years old, you don't know how to take things like this. And when you don't know how to take something, and if you are lucky enough to have good parents, you ask *them* about it.

"He did *what* with the Lenten offering? my father exclaimed. "Has that old coot gone completely off his rocker?"

And my father was not the first person to dial the pastor's number that day. The pastor explained that his phone had been ringing off the hook, and he was so concerned he'd called a meeting in his office that evening. Any parent who wanted to come was more than welcome.

"Just what did you think you were doing, Gil?" the pastor said to Mr. Gingrich that evening. "Are you teaching our children to *break* the seventh commandment rather than to obey it, teaching them that stealing pays off? Imagine how lightly they will consider their Lenten offering from here on out—as if an offering to God is no more important than penny candy."

"Why reinforce that kind of behavior?" said a doctor who had two children. "You should have praised those children who gave faithfully. My children receive a set allowance and I teach them to discipline their use of it. But when an adult does something as undisciplined as this..."

"It isn't fair!" interrupted an angry mother. "You've been favoring those Bickford kids ever since they showed up here. I'd have thought their little prank this morning would have taught you something about coddling the good-for-nothings."

"I believe my son can tell about Mr. Gingrich's favoritism," said my father.

I swallowed hard. Since I'd witnessed more than anyone else, my father had brought me along to verify what had happened. "You *could* call it favoritism," I said. And then I just started talking about how Burl Bickford had punched me in the guts in the alley, and what sort of person he was, and how it was known that he'd never cried once since he was four years old. And finally I told what no one else knew about except Mr. Gingrich—and what Mr. Gingrich didn't even know that I knew. I told how big tears had started to fall from Burl's face during the celebration, and how Mr. Gingrich had bent down to hug him. "Is it favoritism," I said, "or is it being somebody as much like Jesus Christ as somebody can be?"

People were awfully quiet then. Everyone was looking down.

Finally old Mr. Gingrich, who hadn't said a word, stood up. "When pastor invited me down here," he said, "I thought refreshments might be in order." He stepped into the hall and came back with doughnuts and juice—which he carried into the room in the big, purple box.

"A celebration of repentance!" someone said and laughed. Gradually people got lighthearted again.

How old Mr. Gingrich knew that was going to happen, I'll never know. I guess he just really believed in the kind of stories Jesus told.

Book Reviews

Spiritual Traditions for the Contemporary Church. Ed. Robin Maas and Gabriel O'Donnell, O.P. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990. 464 pages. Cloth. $29.95.

Authors Maas and O'Donnell have produced what amounts to a very usable text book on spiritual traditions. In fact, this is the origin of their work: a team-taught course for seminarians in the Washington Theological Consortium.

Spiritual Traditions is divided into three parts. Part One looks at the roots of western spirituality. Topics include the spirituality of the early church, monastic spirituality, mendicant spirituality, and *Devotio Moderna.* Part Two considers several distinctive spiritual traditions such as Lutheran, Ignatian, Reformed Piety, Carmelite, Anglican, Wesleyan, and Black spirituality. Part Three deals with the feminine dimension in contemporary spirituality in such areas as Marian spirituality, holy women of the Middle Ages, and the impact of feminism on spiritual traditions.

Each of the fourteen chapters is a self-contained description of a particular tradition plus a "practicum," an exercise to *experience* the prayer technique or devotional practice related to that tradition. The practicum for the chapter on the early church is an extended discussion of *Lectio Divina* with suggestions for both individual and group use, plus discussion questions. The Lutheran practicum discusses "Luther's instructions on the Devotional Use of the Catechism." The Anglican practicum discusses praying the office.

Uses for this book would certainly include the seminary setting. Adult education courses in the parish would benefit, although more explanation may be needed; for instance, the venerable Bengt Hoffman wrote the chapter on Lutheran spirituality in a way that would leave most lay people scratching their heads. What Dr. Hoffman says is very important, but it needs translation.

When I finish teaching my own parish adult courses on prayer, this looks like a good bet for a follow-up.

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Ancient Christian Gospels: Their History and Development. By Helmut Koester. London: SCM Press, and Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990. xxxii and 448 pages. Cloth. $29.95.

This book is the culmination of a lifetime of scholarly study of the Jesus tradition and its preservation in the Christian community. Some will regard it as an attack on the canonical principle because of its attention to extra-canonical texts and the history of tradition. Others (I among them) will evaluate it as a major work of historical scholarship and an extension of our knowledge of primitive Christianity in a way that increases our appreciation of the four canonical Gospels.

Koester's (K.) approach is historical, based on all ancient texts titled Gospels in antiquity or that he regards as Gospels (more than a dozen from the first two centuries). Many of the apocryphal Gospels are too late to be relevant to his inquiry. K. divides his work into five major sections. The first discusses the use of the term "Gospel" in extra-Christian texts, Paul, the NT Gospels, the apostolic fathers, the Nag Hammadi texts, and in other second century Christian literature. He concludes that defining the term "Gospel" by analyzing the four canonical Gospels is too narrow: "This corpus should include all those writings which are constituted by the transmission, use, and interpretation of materials and traditions from and about Jesus of Nazareth" (46). This excludes such writings as The Gospel of Philip, The Gospel of Truth, and other texts from Nag Hammadi, while including works

such as The Gospel of Thomas and the [hypothetical] Q collection composed of collections of Jesus' sayings and narratives, but without passion and resurrection accounts.

The second section examines "The Collection of the Sayings of Jesus" in the oral tradition, Paul and other NT writers, the Gospel of Thomas, and the Synoptics Sayings Source (Q). There is no common pattern to this material. The sayings Paul cites in 1 Corinthians are not typical of the Q collection. James draws on a parenetic tradition that also provided material to the tradents of the sayings tradition. The Gospel of Thomas and Q share certain characteristics: silence on Jesus' death and resurrection and an absence of christological titles.

The third section, titled "From Dialogues and Narratives to the Gospel of John," is a somewhat disjointed section. It discusses the "dialogue gospels" preserved in the Nag Hammadi texts, the gathering of narratives about Jesus (miracle catenae, Papyrus Egerton 2, the passion narrative and the Gospel of Peter), the textual transmission of the four Gospels, and the Gospel of John.

The fourth section examines "The Synoptic Gospels." K. treats the manuscript tradition, the attestation, authorship, sources, and composition (literary analysis) of each Gospel. He also discusses the "Secret Gospel of Mark," infancy narratives, and infancy gospels in this chapter.

The final section examines "The Harmonization of the Canonical Gospels" by studying the quotations in 2 Clement, Justin Martyr, and *The Diatessaron* of Tatian. (William L. Peterson wrote the discussion of Tatian on 403-30.) The volume includes a list of books frequently cited (not a bibliography) and an index of passages.

K.'s survey will be cited frequently and discussed extensively in the next years. His extensive use of extra-canonical materials arises from his understanding of his work as historical research, not theological interpretation. That strength is also one of the work's weaknesses. The sources are all listed, described, analyzed, and dated. The notes point the reader to other scholarship. But K. leaves the reader hanging in two senses: he does not provide a concluding synoptic overview of the history of the Gospel tradition in these centuries, and he does not aid the reader who asks how such knowledge aids or inhibits proclamation. Do the canonical decisions of the later church have any relevance to the use of this material today? K. leaves that question unanswered.

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The Serpent and the Goddess. Women, Religion, and Power in Celtic Ireland. By Mary Condren. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1989. Paper. $13.95.

Mary Condren divides Irish history into three ages. "The Age of Eve" is pre-Christian and matricentered. The invasion of the Celts with their warrior culture marked the beginning of the end of the existing goddess culture.

"The Age of Brigit" is the age of transition. Condren chronicles the transformation of the pre-Celtic goddess Brigit into the Christian saint of the same name. This domestication of the once-powerful feminine deity accompanies women's loss of status and power in an Ireland increasingly under the control of the church. And yet, vestiges of the old goddess remain evident in the legends about the saint, especially in her feisty encounters with Brendan.

"The Age of Mary" presents contemporary Irish Christianity in which patriarchal power is consolidated and the feminine is almost completely subjugated.

This provocative book tells history from the perspective of the losers. It is a history of compromise and survival at best, and of betrayal and annihilation at worst. By using Ireland as a case study on the destruction of the indigenous, feminine, earth-centered culture, Mary Condren challenges us to rethink what the "triumph" of Judaeo-Christianity over paganism really means in light of world environmental devastation and political dis-ease.

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The Political Meaning of Christianity. The Prophetic Stance. By Glenn Tinder. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991. 243 pages. Paper. $14.95.

In view of a declining political culture where politics has lost its moral purpose and structure and has instead turned into a "continuation of war with other means," namely the jungle-fights of interest-groups, Tinder re-affirms the crucial and particular political meaning of Christianity. Christian faith provides the necessary "moral ontology" for those core-convictions which make a democracy possible. If Christian faith disappears as that convictional and moral force which makes these convictions binding, the normative nature of such convictions as respect for the individual, equality, etc., would cease to exist and give way to convictions which in the long run will undermine not only the reality but also the very possibility of a democratic society.

By unfolding the Christian agape-concept, Tinder develops an understanding of the exalted and the fallen individual. This approach allows him to criticize political idealisms such as nationalism, communism, and consumer- and market-oriented individualism. Between forms of self-deceptive political idealism on one hand and a despairing cynicism on the other hand, he places the crucial relevance of the *prophetic stance*, which is the very political meaning of Christianity. The prophetic stance is characterized by "responsible hope" and "hesitant radicalism," a political existence which is both anti-conservative and anti-revolutionary, identified with the presumptions of neither capitalism nor of communism. Rather, the prophetic stance seeks to face the staggering problems of our time without getting trapped by the false promises and consolations of this or that contemporary ideology.

While his presentation is strongly informed by classical, especially Lutheran theology, Tinder unfolds his construal in a highly non-technical language accessible to a wide audience. Tinder is a Christian, but his field of work and of present concern is the nature and culture of politics! On grounds of the givenness of the Christian faith—and its assumed truth—Tinder as political scientist argues for Christianity's genuine and unavoidable political relevance. Thus, the most important merit of the book is the clarity with which Tinder develops an understanding that the political meaning of Christianity does not lie in our unreflected and unqualified identification with this or that political party line or movement, but rather that Christianity's political meaning is a *constitutive* one. In other words, the very moral convictions of Christianity make politics in a democratic and pluralistic sense possible. Christian faith provides the spiritual grounds out of which grow those habits and customs necessary to maintain a democratic society: "it is the paradox of the prophetic stance that we can live as good citizens in the world only if we are able to live, in faith, hope, and love, as what we inescapably are—strangers in the world" (98). So a political scientist who happens to be also a Christian tells us, the point is not to wrongly politicize theology—just another form of idealism—but rather to rightly theologize politics!

Tinder's account is weakened in one serious respect. He fails to develop a convincing ecclesiology (despite the thoughtful remarks on pp. 90-99), a concept of the church which appreciates her particular political meaning! Rather, Tinder's concept remains dominated by the "individual" on the one hand and "society" on the other hand, with Christianity as some gaseous reality providing the spiritual grounds for the prophetic stance. Here Tinder seems to unreflectively inherit the problems of a weaker strand of Lutheran ecclesiology and social ethics and of Reinhold Niebuhr's mapping of the moral world in *Moral Man and Immoral Society*. Does not the "prophetic stance" have its own concrete "political" embodiment in the church which not only informs but also shapes the politically relevant habits and customs of each single person? What are the concrete practices in which these habits and customs are rooted and trained? The lack of a strong concept of the political meaning of the church as witnessing community makes him vulnerable to another kind of self-deceptive idealism, namely that of the heroically solitary, almost Stoic individual. His understanding of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's life as a paradigmatic model of prophetic hope and action is telling in this regard. In Tinder's reading Bonhoeffer

appears as the heroic and solitary individual, never as the Christian and theologian who was deeply and continuously informed by and involved in the—political!—life of the *church*. Yet Bonhoeffer's later solitary path makes sense only in light and in context of his ecclesial existence! While Tinder acknowledges this point to a certain degree, the individual is radically prior to the church as "association": "In the picture of an individual situated at once within the church and within secular society, solitary yet engaged, determined by an eschatological faith but observant also of temporal responsibilities, and in maintaining so ambiguous a posture prepared to 'appeal to heaven,' we have a picture of the prophetic stance." (97)

Despite my critique, this is an outstanding and very important book, Lutheran political ethics at its best, to be read widely not only but especially in the Christian community. It should be a standard reading for pastors, college students, and seminarians.

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Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament. Ed. Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider. Volume 1: *Ἀαρών – Ἐνώχ*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990. xxiv and 463 pages. Cloth. $39.95.

Welcome with exultation the first volume of the *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (*EDNT*), a reference work that should grace every pastor's desk in the United States and beyond. Two more volumes will complete the translation by Virgil P. Howard and James W. Thompson. Seminary students have long heard professors sing the praises of "Kittel," the ten-volume *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (*TDNT*). Most sadly recognize that they either are too poor to purchase it or lack the time and diligence to read its long, authoritative articles. Some settled for the one-volume condensation of the longer work but soon realized its severe limitations. The *EDNT* now provides a trustworthy but less lengthy guide to the language of the NT.

The *EDNT* is organized partly by stems, partly by word complexes, partly by informed *ad hoc* decisions. Usage is more important than etymology. The three Greek words for "lamb" (*ἀμνός, ἀρήν, ἀρνίον*), for example, are treated in one article, though two stems underlie these words. The terms *γράμμα, γραμματεύς*, and *γραφή, γράφω*, all formed off the same root, are treated in three different articles by two authors. Some entries are brief, others extensive. Major articles use a standard format. The Greek lemma to the article also transliterates the Greek term(s) and gives a basic English definition. An outline of the article follows (often 1. Occurrence, 2. Meaning, 3. Theological Significance, but varied for articles on significant proper nouns or when the term[s] demand it). A more than minimal bibliography of relevant books and articles in English, German, and French completes the introductory material. There are no footnotes, as there are in *TDNT*. Writers include all information and documentation in the articles. Word statistics clarifying usage are always included. Longer articles discuss the terms "from the oldest strata of NT tradition in which the pertinent word carries a significant weight of meaning" (vi) through the later strata, though the editors stress that this does not imply any theory of evolution or gradual transformation that might distort an article.

TDNT almost always devotes pages to the usage of a term in the OT, in early Judaism, and in the Greco-Roman world before discussing the NT usage and significance; at times one suspects an implicit "history of religions" approach, e.g. in C. Colpe's article on "Son of Man." *EDNT* follows a different path. After giving the basic meaning of a term, writers plunge directly into the NT texts and introduce such extra-NT documentation as they feel NT texts demand it. A. Sand writes the article on *ἄνθρωπος* (1.100-104). After discussing the basic meaning "human being" as opposed to animals, angels, and God, Sand discusses the term in Q, the Gospels, Paul, John, and the remaining NT writings. (Unfortunately the translators used the non-inclusive "mankind" at times, though Sand makes clear that the term means the human being. Sand points out that Paul uses Hellenistic terminology and ideas in 1 Cor 2:14, that John's almost

"metaphysical dualism" is not Gnostic, and that the later writings (Colossians, Ephesians, Hebrews, 1 & 2 Peter, etc.) use more Hellenistic terminology. There are major articles on a series of important terms: Ἀββαδάμ (O. Betz), ἀγαθός (J. Baumgarten), ἀγάπη (G. Schneider), ἅγιος (H. Balz), δικαιοσύνη and δικαιόω (Both by K. Kertelge), ἐκκλησία (J. Roloff), ἐλπίς (B. Mayer), and surprisingly on γάρ and δέ (both by K.-H. Pridik). The list of authors is both ecumenical and international, though the majority are Germanic.

The editors titled this work an exegetical, not a theological dictionary, hoping that this work would serve students, pastors, and scholars alike. This first volume fulfills their hope magnificently. The *EDNT* should be purchased, read, studied, preached, and taught. It will benefit preacher and hearer too.

Edgar Krentz

The Least of My Brothers. *Matthew 25:31-46.* A History of Interpretation. By Sherman W. Gray. Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series, no. 114. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989. xxii and 462 pages. Cloth, $26.95; paper, $17.95.

Gray investigates the interpretation of two problem areas within the text of the Last Judgment: (1) The identity of πάντα τὰ ἔθνη (all the nations) in v. 32 and (2) the identity of ἑνὶ τούτων τῶν ἀδελφῶν μου τῶν ἐλαχίστων (one of the least of these my brothers) in vv. 40 and 45. In regard to the first issue the question is whether "all the nations" are only the non-Jewish or the non-Christian nations or all human beings. In regard to the second issue the question is whether "least of my brothers" refers to the disciples, or all Christians, or Jews, or any human being in need, in other words whether the interpretation is restrictive, narrow, particularist or expansive, all-encompassing, universalist.

Gray has researched all the literature from the early church up to modern interpreters (to 1986). Anyone who has had anything to say about the interpretation of these verses has been included, grouped into four major periods. While the second century begins with only 4 uses, the period from 325-431 has 265 entries. There are 736 authors in over 800 works in the last three centuries.

In a final chapter, Gray summarizes his findings. In the second century, the main use was against heretics, while there is a growing moral and pastoral use of the passage in the third century. Clement and Tertullian are the first to identify "the least" as Christians. Otherwise, the universal and particularist interpretations are both found. Universalism emerges in the fourth century; from 554-750, most interpreters are neutral, not specifying whether it refers to Christians only or also to other poor. The commentaries in the Medieval period are largely dependent on the opinions of the Fathers; the majority are universalist in regard to "all nations." But "the least" are frequently the "perfect" Christians. This narrow view of "the least" continues during the Renaissance and Reformation, but "all nations" is seen in a universalist manner. In the eighteenth century the judgment is considered, under the influence of Swedenborg, as the individual judgment of every human soul, not as a public event. From the nineteenth century on, the universalist position grows. The nineteenth century adds the premillennialist or dispensationalist views, according to which "all nations" are the *living* non-Christians and non-Jews at the time of the judgment and "the least" are Jewish missionaries who, in the absence of Christians, preach the gospel during the period of tribulation preceding the battle of Armageddon. In this time also, the reference to the destruction of the Jewish Temple is found. The twentieth century is characterized by its universalism in both "all nations" and "the least." There are many other nuances in the interpretation of the parable.

Gray observes that many interpreters failed to take into account the parabolic nature of Mt 25:31-46 and failed to realize that the Matthean judgment scene can be interpreted only in the context of the remainder of the gospel. In this context, "all nations" should be interpreted universalistically, most likely also including the Jews but not the Christians. "The least," according to Matthew, are most likely only Christians. Then Mt 25:31-46 is concerned more with the acceptance of the Christian faith than with the

performance of charitable works. However, these last observations are reported so briefly that more evidence would be needed.

I would not urge every pastor to buy this book, but it is of good use as a history of the interpretation of this important text.

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Called to Care: Biblical Images for Social Ministry. By Robert Kysar. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991. ix and 165 pages. Paper. $11.95.

The main question in this well-written book is how we can, as communities of faith, form a real *and* realistic, biblically based ministry of care to the marginalized. To answer this question, Kysar begins by taking seriously both the Bible and contemporary society as the starting points for his vision of social ministry. With an exegesis of Hebrew Scripture in chapter 1, he uncovers an image of God who cares about the total welfare of all humans. He also examines several counter-images of God as exclusive (of "the unclean" and "foreigner") and as divine punisher (of wickedness), but concludes that "the major stream of Old Testament thought is found in the cluster of these images of the God of social justice... that of a God who cares passionately..." (29).

The second chapter focuses on Jesus' image of God. Here, Kysar asks how Jesus' ministerial concerns reflect on and inform us of this passionate God. He sees a Jesus who, healing the sick and feeding the hungry, was clearly concerned with the welfare of those he encountered. Jesus' ultimate concerns are a reflection of God's ultimate concern. Therefore, Jesus' identification with those who suffer affirms the major Hebrew image of God's care while destroying the counter-images of a God who excludes and punishes.

In the next three chapters Kysar draws upon these God images as a foundation for how we can become agents for God's concern. He develops the themes of community, discipleship, and the future of God's concern, arguing that we must embody them to truly bear fruit as co-workers in God's divine ethic. This means creating an alternative community of faith in which there is a place and a strong sense of belonging for Christians. Discipleship is seen as incarnating human agency for the divine care of all people, which for Kysar "is a matter of being as well as behavior" (77). It is a ministry based on Jesus' instruction and sending of the seventy: to act and to proclaim. It is a ministry that criticizes oppressive structures and energizes itself in solidarity with the poor, the outcast, and the unclean. As we embody this ethic of care, God's concerns become our ministry and God's reign becomes our community, here and now.

Kysar provides us with some practical advice for this vision. He points out that as our popular culture mentality is transformed, we will encounter some common fears associated with the embodiment of this new ethic. He warns that when we are exposed to a new consciousness, both on an individual and communal level, our old vision is called into question. This leads to fear. We have fear of failure toward ourselves, each other, and God. We have fear of "the how and what to do" of this new social ministry context. We have fear of losing/sharing our power and control.

Kysar submits that we must acknowledge that social ministry is ultimately God's ministry, beginning and ending with faith and confidence in God's power. Thus, he concludes that as co-workers of God we "can take risks that may entail failure. We need not be successful in order to be faithful... [we have] the liberty to venture programs in ministry that may not succeed and the independence to take stands when the clarity of truth on the issue is far from certain" (130). In naming our fears, we are enabled by our freedom to change and be changed.

The final chapter is concerned with a brief theology of mission. To be biblically "called to care," we must move away from a strictly spiritual, individualistic, achievement-oriented ministry of charity. We should advance toward a new consciousness based on a holistic, communally empowered, justice-rooted mission of connectedness and wholeness. For Kysar, it is ultimately a move toward "a radical theocentricity" (116), the rationale which enables this vi-

sion of peace, empowerment, and authorization to guide a new ethic of care.

With Kysar's insight-filled and helpful presentation, we can be God's caregivers as surely as we believe that God can care for the world, empower us, and commission us to be advocates of the marginal. This book should be required reading. The church will be faithful to its calling if we base our social ministry upon Kysar's images and follow his guidance toward incarnation, to act as Jesus acted. It should be studied by all pastors, professors, parishioners, and students who are "called to care" or who think they might be.

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Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement. Edited by Nicholas Lossky, Jose Miguez Bonino, John S. Pobee, Tom F. Stransky, Geoffrey Wainwright, and Pauline Webb. Geneva: WCC Publications, and Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991. 1196 pages. $69.95.

It is perhaps a little ironic that just as many observers are beginning to conclude that the modern ecumenical movement is in a state of decline, suffering from loss of momentum and a clear sense of direction, this monumental work of scholarship has appeared to give it new life. Four years in the making, with over 600 entries prepared by an international team of over 300 specialists, this dictionary is "state of the art" as a tool for ecumenical reference and quick study of nearly every conceivable aspect of the movement for Christian unity. The principle of selection blends trendiness (e.g., under "A," articles on abortion, AIDS, anti-Semitism and apartheid) with attention to classical headings such as apostolicity, Athanasian Creed, and authority. Photography, bibliographies, indexes, and cross-references make the book user-friendly, despite its weight and formidable scope.

Among the features which especially commend the book are its summary articles on bilateral theological conversations, beginning predictably with Anglican and continuing with Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist, Orthodox, Reformed, Roman Catholic and other relations. Under the "ecumenical" entry there are twelve separate articles, including an extensive survey of ecumenical conferences, especially those sponsored by the WCC. The "theology" entry offers a potpourri of articles: African, Asian, black, contextual, ecumenical, European, feminist, liberation, and min-jung theologies, among others. Philip Potter contributes a major article on mission, and Emilio Castro one on evangelism. Other entries deal with various meanings of, and ways to, unity. Brief biographical sketches help to identify leading ecumenical figures of the twentieth century; these are for the most part too brief to be of much value. The orientation of the dictionary is unmistakably toward viewpoints and activities of the World Council of Churches, yet there is no slighting of the major denominational and confessional traditions.

Students of ecumenism will welcome this dictionary as a useful "Michelin Guide" to the terrain of the ecumenical movement. No theological library will be able to dispense with it. Pastors, professors, and ecumenical specialists should think seriously about adding this volume to their library, despite its cost.

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Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity. By Birger A. Pearson. Studies in Antiquity and Christianity. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990. xix and 228 pages. Cloth. $29.95.

The Nag Hammadi texts have reshaped the study of primitive Christianity in the first two centuries. Birger Pearson, thirteen of whose essays are reprinted here, has been one of the major contributors to that reshaping. Pearson, as the title indicates, first investigates the Jewish aspects of Egyptian Gnosticism in "Friedländer Revisited: Alexandrian Judaism and Gnostic Origins," "Jewish Haggadic Traditions in *The Testimony of Truth* from Nag Hammadi (CG IX, 3)," "Jewish Elements in Gnosticism and the Development of Gnostic Self-Definition," and "Jewish Elements in *Corpus Hermeticum* I (*Poimandres*)."

A second focus is on the "Biblical Exegesis in Gnostic Literature" (i.e. OT interpretation). Pearson evaluates how significant OT figures are used in Gnostic texts: Seth, Cain, and Melchizedek. "The Figure of Norea in Gnostic Literature" turns out to be Noah's wife, an adaptation of the tradition about Na'amah, equated with the sister of Tubal-Cain in Gen 4:22, interpreted both as a sexual seductress and, in another tradition, as a feminine heavenly power, a redeemer figure who works on behalf of Gnostic humanity. Given the frequent identification of the feminine with the evil, Norea is a surprisingly unusual feminine figure in Gnosticism.

Finally, one essay discusses "Gnosticism as Platonism." Pearson argues for "Middle Platonism" as a strong influence, though he does not mention major members of that school, Arcesilaus, Philo of Larissa, Antiochus of Ascalon; I suggest he identify it as the New Academy. The last three—"Philo, Gnosis, and the New Testament," "Anti-Heretical Warnings in Codex IX from Nag Hammadi," "Gnosticism in Early Egyptian Christianity"—reconsider the nature of Early Christianity in Egypt in light of the Nag Hammadi documents.

One major conclusion, first suggested by Friedländer, is that Gnosticism originated as a Jewish, not a Christian, heresy in Alexandria. But it transcended both its Jewish matrix and its adaptation to Christianity. It deserves to be called a "religion" on its own, even through it has a parasitical character. Pearson summarizes eleven features of Gnosticism in the introduction, as clear a summation as one can find anywhere.

All this will sound esoteric, bizarre, even at times fantastic to many of Pearson's readers. And that is one of the major values of Pearson's essays. They deal with issues that appear esoteric, even foreign. They will not interest most modern readers, who have a very sanitized picture of the culture and religion of the Early Roman Empire and of early Christianity. Pearson reminds us, via the Nag Hammadi texts, that the early Christian world was much more complex and varied than post-Chalcedonian Christianity leads us to expect. The Nag Hammadi texts remind us that the history of Christianity might have taken a different course. For readers who appreciate such insights Pearson's essays are a significant treasure.

Edgar Krentz

Liturgy and Tradition. Edited by Thomas Fisch. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1990. 156 pages. Paper. $6.95.

When I read Fr. Alexander Schmemann, former dean of St. Vladimir's Seminary and priest in the Orthodox Church in America, I invariably learn more about my own faith as well as Orthodoxy. The editor of this volume has collected ten of Fr. Schmemann's articles written over a quarter of a century on the place of liturgy within tradition.

The avowed intent of this work is to be a companion volume to Schmemann's *Introduction to Liturgical Theology* (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1988). The editor's preface, which attempts to place Fr. Schmemann within the context of the liturgical renewal movement, and a concluding article by Fr. John Meyendorff make this book a memorial as well.

Fr. Alexander's concern to recover not simply the forms of the Fathers but the spirit of the living church (as represented in the Fathers) speaks to a common concern of many thoughtful people in many different traditions. Coining the phrase "liturgical theology," Fr. Schmemann sought to restore the liturgy to its rightful place as not only the object of theology but (and especially!) the *source* of theology.

Speaking primarily to his own Orthodox community, but with obvious parallels here in the West, he decried the separation of liturgy, theology, and piety into separate intellectual enterprises. Over time these dimensions of the faith have had less and less to do with each other.

Conclusions are formed about each in isolation from each other. We are left, he says, with a theology bereft of the living conversation between God and the church that liturgy provides. Piety divorced from this liturgical conversation tends to end in meaningless legalisms. Liturgy without theology and piety becomes rite without substance.

In centering on the gifts that liturgy brings to theology and piety, Fr. Schmemann provides

gem after gem in these short articles. Whether reflecting on the meaning of the offering or thanksgiving or the nature of the priesthood or a critique of the liturgical movement itself, there is much here for fruitful meditation.

Timothy D. Hubert

Romans. By James D. G. Dunn. Word Biblical Commentary 38A (Romans 1-8 [lxxii and 514 pages]) and 38B (Romans 9-16 [xxxviii, 515-976 pages]). Waco: Word Books, 1988. Boards.

James D. G. Dunn has given us highly significant commentary on Romans that will aid in proclaiming the gospel. And we Lutherans need all the help we can get for two reasons: (1) Romans provides the second lesson in 23 Sundays in Lectionary Series A (plus seven lessons for significant observances and in series B and C); (2) Lutherans easily assume that we already know what Romans says because of our insistence on justification by faith. That pre-understanding, significant because drawn from the Reformation tradition, can lead to a foreshortening of our vision in reading Romans.

Dunn's commentary is detailed, based on a close reading of the Greek text and the control of the massive recent bibliography on Romans. Careful study of this work will pass in review the research of the past half century, itself a contribution of great value. But Dunn does more. He argues that Romans arises out of a problem that Paul and the Roman church share: How do non-Jews share in the justifying action of God which arises out of God's fidelity to the covenant? Out of that problem arise the great themes of Romans: the law, the priority of the Jews, the stress on Abraham, the long theodicy of Romans 9-11. Dunn stresses that Romans, though its complex thought probably implies a plurality of purposes on Paul's part, arises out of a truly historical situation.

The *Word Biblical Commentary* has claimed its place among the significant series of scholarly biblical works. One reason for that is its format. For each section of the text the commentary writer supplements the "Comment" (the detailed textual commentary) with a section titled "Explanation." Dunn uses these sections to develop the significance and implications of Paul's words in a way that should stimulate and enrich preaching in the pulpit and teaching in adult forums. Consistent use of this commentary, ideally coupled with that of Ernst Käsemann, will enrich both preacher and congregation. This is really a good one to put on your shelves.

Edgar Krentz

The Christbook: A Historical/Theological Commentary. Matthew 1-12. By Frederick Dale Bruner. Waco: Word Books, 1987. xxx and 475 pages.

Matthew. A Commentary. Vol. 2: The Churchbook: Matthew 13-28. By Frederick Dale Bruner. Waco: Word Books, 1990. xx and 477-1127 pages.

F. Dale Bruner's commentary on Matthew was published in two volumes under different titles, as given above. But that is the least of the things that makes this an unusual commentary. Bruner includes most of the material that one expects in any standard commentary—and a good bit more. He writes, to use his own words, "biblical commentary in the conscious service of Christian doctrine, believing that a better reading of Scripture leads to a better teaching of the church and thus to her better service of the world" (2.xi).

Bruner developed his approach while teaching in a Philippine theological seminary, where abstract western theological literature was alien to student minds. He began to teach doctrine directly from Scripture and decided that Matthew, being both the most didactic and systematic of the four Gospels, was the ideal text for what he wished to do: practice critical exegesis on the text, in no sense determined by doctrinal preconceptions, in order to mine the text for theological reflection.

This commentary is the result. Bruner begins the study of each section with a critical exegesis of the text but interrupts or concludes it with implications of the text for contemporary theology and life. These are partly personal in

nature, strongly christological, and generally challenging and provocative. As a commentary it fits no contemporary pattern. Its major virtue is also its drawback; Bruner demands that his reader work through quantities of material on each text. Those who have the patience and fortitude to do so will be challenged, enriched, and stimulated to use biblical texts on the presupposition that they speak to our world. That is a great gain.

Edgar Krentz

Good News to the Ends of the Earth: The Theology of Acts. By Howard Clark Kee. London: SCM Press, and Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990. 122 pages. Paper. $10.95.

This book is the theological prolegomenon to Kee's forthcoming commentary on Acts. Kee states in the introductory chapter that he wishes to emphasize three points in his study of Acts: The Roman social, political, literary, and cultural world in which the early church lived and worked, the various answers to the question of what constituted the Jewish "identity as ... heirs to God's covenantal promises and as those addressed by God through the legal prophetic traditions of ancient Israel," and to take into account the variety of ways in which Jews of the first century described the agent through which God accomplished the divine purpose for God's people.

The book is largely a failure when set against these criteria. The first chapter briefly summarizes the current state of research on Luke-Acts, emphasizing the dominant role of the Baur-Hegelian construct of *Früh-Katholizismuss*. The remaining chapters treat the christology and pneumatology of Acts, the early church's outreach across both cultural and religious boundaries, the general shape of the early community, and the spread of the witness of the early church throughout the known world. Except for scattered references within the text and the endnotes, the promised socio-cultural analysis is neglected—surprisingly so for a dedicated sociological and cultural exegete like Kee. The chapter on christology relates Jesus to the fulfillment of prophetic texts in the understanding of the early church, but it only tangentially relates this understanding to the messianic exegesis and hermeneutics of inter-testamental Judaism. Similarly, the self-understanding of the early community as the covenant people is minimally related to the Jewish self-understanding as the covenant people.

Additionally, the first chapter seems "tacked on" to the remainder of the book. The state of research is described so briefly that the informed scholar learns nothing new and looks for greater depth. The student, novice exegete, and interested non-expert are frustrated by seeing only the briefest outlines of a scholarly argument they probably have never heard of. This chapter should have been longer, explaining the nature of the issues in question, or shortened into a brief introduction to the book.

Another frustration is Kee's seeming reticence to discuss the nature of the historicity of Acts. Except for one or two comments buried in the endnotes and a brief discussion in the final chapter, Kee never makes a clear statement on this important point. A non-scholar or less than alert reader might interpret Kee to understand Acts as providing a literal detailed historically accurate chronology of the early church. Kee's emphasis is on the constructive understanding of the theology of Acts. But he needs to state that very clearly.

However, all is not lost. Despite Kee's failure to deliver what he promised, he has written an excellent short introduction to the theology of the book of Acts. If we ignore Kee's stated intentions (by ignoring the first chapter), we have a concise discussion of major theological themes in Acts. The various christological titles used by Luke are discussed and explained. So is the importance of the Spirit. The various titles of prophet, teacher, deacon, elder, etc., are examined. In the chapters on cross-cultural outreach and mission to the world, and indeed throughout the book, Kee rightly emphasizes the importance to Luke of the concept of mission and outreach to Jews, to Gentiles, to the entire world. All of this information is presented clearly, concisely, and at the appropriate depth.

This is an excellent text for adult forums on Acts when the first chapter is ignored (or supple-

mented), for undergraduate New Testament courses, and for a first seminary course on Acts. It can also be used as a basic resource for seminary discussions and as a study tool for graduate exams. Perhaps most significantly, it can easily be used in any discussion of the church's mission and outreach.

It would be a glorious day if the church had the joy and excitement about outreach and mission that Kee finds in the book of Acts and that Kee brings to his study of Acts.

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Confessing the Faith: Reformers Define the Church, 1530-1580. By Robert Kolb. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1991. 192 pages. Paper. $14.95.

For some Lutherans today, "confessional" is a pejorative adjective, meaning "off in right field, divorced from contemporary 'reality'"—and thus, hopeless. Elsewhere "confessional" is flaunted as a kind of badge, even as entire portions of the Confessions are ignored in favor of what "sells" today. Moreover: the Confessions themselves are today often little more than ciphers, largely unknown and/or ignored.

This book is a welcome antidote for such trends. According to Kolb, to be Christian is to *confess*, to announce clearly, as an act of praise and profession, what God has done for one's self and for all in Jesus Christ. This is how the Reformers understood "confession."

The "model confession" is the Augsburg Confession: "Never before had a confession of faith delivered in a public forum by lay people acquired ecclesiastical or theological authority" (14). Kolb shows how the Augustana was more than a "document" for the reformers: it represented a *way* of living and speaking for Christians and for the church. Indeed, "Confession" was the reformers' continuing response to events and struggles in the church: externally against the likes of Charles V, Zwingli, and the mid-century "interims," and internally between the Genesio-Lutherans and the Philippists. In the process, however, the concept of "confession" changed from a proclaimed witness to a written *corpus doctrinae* (122f.).

Turning to today, Kolb calls Lutherans to recapture the earlier sense of confession/profession (*testifying* is the actual meaning of the term "Protestant" [28]). Condemning those for whom "confessional" is but a hollow shibboleth and a refusal to address contemporary issues honestly, as well as those who dismiss the Confessions as rigid, archaic documents that have outlived their usefulness, Kolb writes, "even when the Confessions do not speak explicitly to the questions of today, they will guide the formulation of answers by highlighting the well-worn channels of biblical confession, always centered in God's action in Jesus Christ and his care for his people through the Holy Spirit" (134).

Although short, the book is not a quick read. Much data is compressed into a few pages. Occasionally confusing and criticizable on some points, it will nevertheless reward the serious reader's perseverance and careful attention.

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Yearning to Breathe Free: Liberation Theologies in the U.S. Edited by Mar Peter-Raoul, Linda Rennie Forcey, and Robert Frederick Hunter, Jr. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991. xii and 242 pages. Paper. $16.95.

People who are doing theology in the United States will need this book. It is a wonderful mixture of essays, poetry, autobiography, reports, and case studies which reveal the multiplicity of contemporary theological reflection being done here. While the editors state that this is only a partial collection of the many different voices and ways of expressing various theologies of liberation, the sources which are included—African American, Asian American, White, Latino and Latina, Native American, female and male, pastors and professors, parishioners and grass roots organizers—give us a strong taste of the current American context.

The text is divided into four sections entitled Connections, Communities, Praxis, and

Connecting Beyond. Each section and the various writings contained within are prefaced with a poetic selection which sets the tone and introduces each piece. The inclusion of these selections of poetry is itself a distinctive feature of this collection. The poetry reflects the editors' commitment to presenting non-traditional ways of doing theology which, nevertheless, reflect a traditional value in a particular community. In the words of Orlando Costas, it is "a challenge to the notion of Anglo-white supremacy" (40).

It was the editors' goal to present authors who are reflecting what is happening in the U.S. in terms of theology while connecting with and in the "context of people everywhere in the world committed to the praxis of liberation" (6). This is clearly evident in the first section on Connections. Two essays, by Mar Peter-Raoul and Orlando Costas, argue that those who are of privilege must choose to take sides with the refugee, the homeless, the abused. Our theology must rise from the lives of these people. We must ask questions like, Why have the poor been so absent from the work of biblical scholars? How is it that the scriptures, which tell the stories of faith of the poor, oppressed, and humble, of former slaves and their descendants, have been often utilized to repress the cry of the poor, to neutralize the struggle for liberation, and to minimize God's explicit commitment to justice and peace? These two authors, while working within their own perspectives, conclude that if their particular reflective journey is to be a mutual communal journey, liberation theology must become dialogue among theologies of liberation and solidarity with the marginalized.

The next section on Communities has an excellent essay by Ada Isasi-Díaz discussing the future of a theology based on ideas derived from Mujeristas. I was particularly struck by her understanding of theology as a communal task. Professional theologians, for her, should really be "theological technicians" who enable the community of struggle to do the theology. Indeed, the real theologian is the community. This is where theology is located, and who does it. And while a theologian who is an intrinsic part of the community can be very instrumental in writing what the community needs, the epistemological privilege belongs to the poor. They are the members who can see differently, and to whom we must listen.

The third section on Praxis provides thirteen examples of specific communities in the U.S. acting out their theologies. These selections are statements and reports reflecting the activity of urban parishes, a theological classroom at Sing Sing, the Sanctuary Movement, disarmament groups, a community founded by homeless people, and a farming community, among others. These reports allow us to read about concrete experiences of people facing and responding to oppression. However, unless one really tries to walk in someone else's shoes, it is almost impossible to understand. Most of us can only "offer" silence to the oppressed and to what they have been through (157).

Thus, the major task of any future theology in America must begin with a commitment to solidarity and dialogue. This is the vision of the final section on Connecting Beyond. We must know oppression, both our own and others.' It is we, our community and the "I's" within those communities, that are the starting point for any future articulation of theology. We must be aware that where we choose to stand will determine much of what we see and how we see it. From a liberation viewpoint, it becomes the task of theology not only to unmask established academic theology which claims a false ideological claim to be universal, objective, and value neutral. We must also nurture questions a community needs to ask about the future they are creating, that is, who we will become. Christianity will be much aided if its practitioners take up the challenging insights and thoughtful essays that are presented here. Dialogue with these writers will at the very least strengthen your own commitment to and articulation of theology. Whether you encounter these readings in the classroom, parish, or home, you can only benefit from these representatives of liberation.

Eric Utto-Galarneau

The Earth and the Waters in Genesis 1 and 2. By David T. Tsumura. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplementary Series, ed. D. J. A. Clines and P. R. Davies, Vol. 83. Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989. 201 pages. Cloth. $33.50.

The author intends to clarify the nature of the relationship between the earth and the waters in the first two chapters of Genesis. According to some recent scholars, that relationship is totally different in the two chapters. In Gen 1:2, the earth was a "watery chaos" prior to creation; water was an enemy of creation. In Gen 2:5-6, the primordial state of the earth was the "dry chaos" of the desert, and water became an "assisting element of creation." Does, however, 1:2 sustain the assumption of "a primordial threat against creation"? What is the function and the meaning of the Hebrew term that is rendered as "mist" or "flood" in 2:6? The author presents careful linguistic explanations and contextual analyses of the Hebrew terms *tohu wa-bohu* (RSV: without form and void) and *tehom* (RSV: the deep) in 1:2, and of the terms for earth and water and their relationship in chapter 2. He concludes that there are both similarities and differences in the nature of the relationship between earth and the waters in the two chapters. It is inadequate to focus on the cosmological discrepancies between the two creation stories as former scholars do. A "chaos-motif" is not attested by 1:2. It is misleading to assume in that verse "a primordial threat against creation" and, hence, a sharp cosmological contrast to 2:5-6.

The author offers an accurate analysis and an alternative view as opposed to previous scholarship. I find his solution attractive. Beyond the specialized field of Old Testament studies, the book addresses issues that should also concern biblical theology, the theology of creation, and Christian preaching insofar as it is engaged in preserving God's creation—our world.

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Sowing the Gospel: Mark's World in Literary-Historical Perspective. By Mary Ann Tolbert. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989. xvi and 336 pages. Cloth. $27.95.

The goal of this literary-historical analysis is "to articulate one possible interpretation of the Gospel [of Mark] in all its parts in light of its authorial audience" (79). Mary Ann Tolbert of Vanderbilt University argues that if we can locate the genre and authorial audience of Mark we will have the key to unlock the mysteries of this Gospel. Add her literary interpretation which seeks to make sense of the Gospel as whole cloth, and you have a very interesting and innovative work.

In the first part of her book, Tolbert sets out the criteria for a literary reading of Mark that avoids fragmentation by interpreting each part in light of the whole. She also sets out the criteria for determining the historical context of genre and audience. Tolbert argues that Mark's genre is the ancient novel, extant examples of which are five romances and several biographies, including the life of Apollonius of Tyre. This is popular literature performed for popular audiences. Mark shares an episodic plot, the presence of plot synopses, minimal introductions, a central turning point, a final recognition scene, the lack of suspense about what will happen, stereotypical characterizations, and crude repetition. The audiences for such works were ordinary Greek-speaking people of the urban working populace who shared the insecurity, isolation, loneliness, and helplessness of the age. Their appreciation for this literature and their capacity to understand it grew out of the rhetorical training which was part of the basic educational system of the Roman Empire. In Tolbert's view, Mark shared this same audience. If we then ask, Tolbert argues, how such an audience would have understood the ancient novel, we can infer how the same audience would have understood Mark's Gospel.

In the second part of the book Tolbert turns to an interpretation of Mark based on these considerations. She finds the key to interpretation in the two main parables Jesus tells—the parable of the sower and the parable of the vineyard. These she considers to be plot synop-

ses to each of two parts of Mark: 1:11–10:54 which emphasizes proclaiming, and 11:1–16:8 which recounts Jesus' death. These parables guide the reader to organize the plot, interpret the characters, and understand the events. For example, the parable of the sower focuses on the various types of ground which receive the seed. The types of ground in turn define the various characters in the story who receive the word about the kingdom: those which fall beside the way correspond to the Jewish leaders; those on rocky ground to the disciples; those among thorns to the rich man and others; and those on good soil to suppliants who come to Jesus for healing. The parable of the vineyard explains the sending of Jesus to Israel, the meaning of his rejection and death, the consequent destruction of the tenants, and the giving of the vineyard to others. The major part of Tolbert's book is devoted to an exposition of the whole Gospel in light of these two parables.

Tolbert has articulated well a method for interpretation which is quite interesting and illuminating. She has brought forth a fresh genre to compare to Mark. She has significantly enhanced our understanding of Mark's audience. And she has produced many new insights for consideration: Jesus is the one who prepares the way; the splitting of the curtain at Jesus' death signifies his passage to heaven; evil will destroy itself; the authorities will be destroyed first before the vineyard is given to others; and so on.

However, the genre of the ancient novel is inadequate to account for the complexity of Mark's narrative. Mark's characters are more rounded than Tolbert supposes; there is suspense in Mark about what will happen (the disciples' fate); there is ambiguity around many matters (such as boundaries); and the patterns of repetition are quite sophisticated. Furthermore, a writing which has such an unexpected ending will not easily fit any genre and may in fact be written to subvert conventions. It is not clear why Tolbert identifies only two parables as plot synopses, when Jesus tells many parabolic allegories. The two parables Tolbert has chosen say too little to be considered comprehensive reading guides. All the parables taken together do not exhaust the meaning of such a complex story. Mark seems to share the traits of many genres, and it is reductionistic to think one genre can explain Marks' Gospel adequately, helpful as the comparison may be.

Other elements of Tolbert's interpretation also diminish the complexity of Mark's narrative. The division of the Gospel into two parts is simplistic for a narrative that has so many narrative patterns and interwoven connections. The specific application of the parables seems to limit the possibilities for interpretation. In the sower parable, it is not clear that the good soil equals the minor characters, for we do not see enough of the suppliants to know whether or not they too would stumble or fall away. Also, the disciples might as easily be thorny as rocky ground. Furthermore, in assuming that all characters will be stereotypes, Tolbert sees the disciples as flat characters whose presentation elicits no hope or sympathy from the reader. But the disciples are more complex than this, and the reader is led to hope for their ultimate success—in part because Jesus does. Also, by assuming that the reader would think Jesus always to be right, Tolbert ignores the irony of Jesus' surprise when the disciples do not understand the parables, and she softens Jesus' initial refusal to heal the Syrophoenician woman by interpreting his refusal as a mere ploy.

Tolbert argues that the mysteries of the text will come to light once we discern the proper reading conventions. But by limiting herself to these particular conventions she strips the Gospel of much of its vitality and treats it as a rather transparent narrative which makes few demands on the readers. Nevertheless, by the rigor of her methods she has brought many mysteries to light and illumined much for us about the audience of the Gospel and the contours of its story. For anyone interested in probing the conundra of Mark's Gospel, this volume is well worth reading.

David Rhoads
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Thinking the Faith: Christian Theology in a North American Context. By Douglas John Hall. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1989.

In this book, Douglas John Hall of McGill University in Montreal makes a strong case for a contextual method in doing theology. Lamenting the gap between academic and practical theology, Hall would provide a bridge by methodologically attending to the contextuality of all theological formulations Clearly Hall has been influenced by the insistence on context-relatedness in the various liberation theologies. One cannot, however, simply apply the insights of a liberation theology developed for an Asian or Latin American context directly to the North American one. Thus, Hall seeks to delineate the basic elements constituting the contemporary North American context and to write a convincing theology in view of them.

Hall elaborates seven issues which he believes define the contemporary North American situation: (1) the end of the Constantinian era, (2) religious pluralism, (3) the theological impact of Auschwitz, (4) Marxism and the revolution of the oppressed, (5) the rebellion of nature, (6) the nuclear crisis, and (7) apocalyptic consciousness and the rise of religious simplism. Hall writes persuasively of the need to incorporate these components within the scope of contemporary theology. Many theologians have done so already, although few so comprehensively or systematically as Hall.

Three chapters are devoted to the topic of epistemology as a prelude to two projected volumes, one on *Professing the Faith* (doctrines of God, creaturely being, and the Christ) and the other on *Confessing the Faith* (doctrines of ecclesiology and eschatology). A contextual theology, according to Hall, must not only listen to the agenda of the world but must bring that agenda into conversation with the fundamental elements of the theological tradition. Theology as a discipline must thus bring to its discussion with the world its concern for the reality of faith, the witness of the Bible, the doctrinal tradition, living experience, prayer, and the church. Hall builds his theological method with explicit reference to Barth's kerygmatic approach and Tillich's method of correlation. Yet he criticizes both for insufficiently reflecting on their own contextuality. To differentiate his approach, Hall argues that the Kerygma must be forever announced *strategically*. This means that the given context is so determinative for theology that every theological statement must be weighed for its appropriateness to the realities of the given moment in time and space.

Hall addresses the tension between reason and revelation within his epistemology by defending revelation as "the disclosure of a presence." Revelation manifests itself not in propositions nor in doctrine but in the mysterious self-disclosure of God. "No single lesson in theology is more needful among North American Christians today than this. For in both liberal and conservative camps, our particular brand of the *theologia gloriae* manifests itself most conspicuously in our readiness to identify our *doctrine* with revelation—or, which is the same thing, our failure to grasp the hiddenness of God in God's self-revelation" (409). Where theology today is polarized into camps convinced of the truth of their own doctrinal purity, Hall would juxtapose them with the mysterious presence of God, mediated decisively in the appearance of Jesus the Christ.

Hall's favorite pre-twentieth century sources are Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Kierkegaard, and Schleiermacher, with due reference to the "misevangelists" (Rosenstock-Huessy), Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche. In our century Barth and Tillich loom large, but dozens of others are cited, most often Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Robert McAfee Brown, George P. Grant, James Gustafson, George Lindbeck, and Reinhold Niebuhr. One large subsection ("The Search," 177-89) is a preliminary anthropology based entirely on the work of Ernest Becker. Another section in the discussion of "Two Types of Reason" draws on Karl Jaspers, Paul A. Baran, Martin Heidegger, and George Grant as exemplars.

Hall's volume is a major contribution to current theological discussion as it appropriates more fully the profound insight that all theology is rooted in its own particular context. The major question I would raise regarding Hall's work is whether he has sufficiently carried forth his own methodological proposal. Can one make gener-

alizations about a context so large as "North America"? Are there not, for example, peculiarities of context which will alter one's theology depending upon whether one speaks in the Bronx, southern California, or southeast Missouri? In surveying Hall's contemporary sources, are the voices of North American women adequately represented? Is Hall's intended audience not those North Americans who are university educated and share a familiarity with academic discourse?

Similar questions arise in considering Hall's use of theological sources. Even as we today are bound by the particularity of our own context, so also are those voices speaking to us from the past. How applicable are the insights of a Luther or Calvin for a context far removed from them in time and space? Has Hall sufficiently attended to the history-boundness of his theological sources?

In addition to these issues, Hall's work is to be understood as addressed primarily to those who operate within the milieu of Protestantism. Although his abundant use of examples from literature and the arts manifests a greater sense of sacramentality than in his earlier works, this is theology written in a Protestant key. Hall seems aware of Roman Catholic theologians such as David Tracy, but rarely finds them useful (Tracy appears only in three disparaging footnotes; his only work mentioned is *Talking About God*). Are not the large number of Roman Catholics and the current vitality of their debate also part of our North American context? Has not their 25-year struggle with indigenization within a worldwide communion produced many useful insights (cf. the absence of reference to Robert Schreiter's *Constructing Local Theologies*)? Perhaps Hall will be able to write his forthcoming ecclesiology without the Roman Catholics, but one hopes that his breadth will prove to be catholic in several senses, and that he can lead us to aspire to think, profess, and confess the faith in our own communions and communities with both contextuality and catholicity.

A final, even more fundamental question arises regarding the possible limits to contextuality as a methodological principle. How thinly does one slice with the razor of contextuality before nothing remains of universal human experience? At what point does attention to the particularity of context lead to a tribalism that renders impossible a genuine understanding of the other? Similar questions can be raised regarding George Lindbeck's cultural linguistic model for doing theology. While most twentieth-century theologies have neglected their own contextuality at the peril of making their own positions absolute, due attention must be paid to that which also binds us together over space and time. Hall's work in this way presupposes an ontology and theory of language that makes communication and mutual understanding possible in the first place.

There is much to appreciate about *Thinking the Faith*. Hall's writing style here as in his other books (*Lighten Our Darkness, The Stewardship of Life in the Kingdom of Death, God and Human Suffering*, and others) makes for characteristically pleasurable reading. He raises a multitude of issues which deepen awareness of the contextuality of all theology. Yet the reader needs to be aware that Hall's project, at least as evidenced in this first volume, is a primer for those who would do theology contextually rather than a thoroughgoing exercise in the task itself.

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Preaching Helps

Ninteenth Sunday after Pentecost—Thanksgiving Day, Series C

Out of Sync

As usual, I am out of sync. Here I am in the season of beginnings (it's Easter), writing about the end of the church year and the end of the ages. Working on "Preaching Helps" makes it both easier and harder to live with the church's calendar.

But that's nothing compared with the difficulty or confusion of living both "in the world" and "under God." Maybe Christian living means always being out of sync. It's a good thing to be out of sync with much that the world admires and practices, if it means being in tune with God.

The world itself plays many tunes, some far better than others. And God's good tunes are incarnated in very earthy noises and rhythms. It's complicated, and my ears don't always catch Gabriel's playing, even though I deceive myself into thinking that I know the good tunes from the bad.

This morning after church I drove around Union Square in San Francisco and down onto Market Street around 4th and 5th, where a couple of nights ago some folks were expressing how out of sync they feel by smashing the plate glass at Macy's and dozens of other stores. Someone had spray-painted a long wall with huge letters screaming: "Revolution is the hope of the hopeless. No justice, no peace." That is not a happy tune, but I have the sense that someone is telling me a hard truth.

Optimists express the hope that the violence in the wake of the Rodney King case will be a wake-up call for our society. Others regard our society as hopelessly racist.

Ev Kalin in the "First Readings" is conscious that his words will be read in October at the height (or depth) of the quincentennial of Columbus' fateful voyage. It will be good if all these days from Easter and Rodney King to Columbus Day and Christ the King can help us focus on the character of our nation. What kind of people do we want to be? Thomas Wolfe (of *Look Homeward, Angel*, not the *Bonfire* Tom Wolfe, although the latter probably shares the sentiment) somewhere wrote, "I believe that the true discovery of America lies before us."

The true freeing and authentic liberating of which Martin Luther is the champion also lies before us.

The church has unparalleled resources to bring to bear on our life together under God. Who else even has a vision of "life together under God"? The texts at the end of the church year speak powerfully to current issues: rich and poor, insider and outsider, free and slave, the right and the wrong. To all of them God in Jesus Christ offers freedom, adoption, acceptance, a place in the family at the family table. All because one is our King, our Lord, our Boss, hard words rejected by those who prefer less hierarchical notions like Brother and Friend and Lover. They have a point, of course, but we live in hard times, and in recent days I have felt again the power of the vision of a time when "every knee will bend [together as in a graceful dance] and every tongue confess [in multicultural and harmonious chorus] that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Author of "First Readings" in this issue is Everett Kalin, Christ Seminary-Seminex Professor of New Testament at Pacific Lutheran Seminary in Berkeley, California. At the time of this writing, Ev had recently returned from eight weeks in Guatemala and Mexico, where he continued studying the Spanish language, observing the cultures (including the church culture) of Mexico and Central America, and reading in liberation theology.

These recent studies together with his long-standing commitment to issues of peace and justice enrich his "First Readings" of the scriptures.

The Rev. Elizabeth Krentz-Wee has contributed the "Pastoral Reflections." A fourth or fifth or even sixth generation Lutheran pastor, Elizabeth graduated from Harvard College (B.A.) and Yale Divinity School (M.Div.). She first served Christ the King in Stoughton, Massachusetts, and for the last five years has been pastor of Immanuel Lutheran Church in Attleboro.

Elizabeth serves on the Candidacy Committee of the New England Synod, plays organ and piano, and enjoys sewing for her children. She works hard at balancing her callings as pastor on the one hand and as mother of two small children and spouse of a manager in the computer industry on the other.

Our thanks to Everett and Elizabeth for extending their ministries to include writing on behalf of fellow pastors and preachers. And I thank them for bringing all that they are, with their commitments and interests, their visions and expectations of self and society, to this ministry of writing.

Listening with you for the trumpet of God, and trying with you to stay in sync!

Robert H. Smith
Editor of Preaching Helps

Note: reflections for the Day of Thanksgiving (Canada: October 12, 1992) are on pages 319-20.

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost
October 18, 1992

Psalm 146
Amos 6:1-7
1 Timothy 6:6-16
Luke 16:19-31

FIRST READING

October 18, 1992, is not only the Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost but also the First Sunday after the "Quinientos Años," the 500th anniversary of Columbus' arrival in the Americas—an event seen as a glorious "discovery" by some, as the start of a conquest and destruction of the life and culture of the indigenous peoples by others.

In a response to the draft document for the Fourth Conference of Latin American Bishops (CELAM) to be held at Santo Domingo in October 1992, the Guatemalan bishops wrote: "We believe that the crux of the document from Santo Domingo ought to be the problem of poverty and that the 'preferential option for the poor' ought to continue to be the structural criterion of the life and mission of the church in Latin America." The texts for this Sunday of the church year seem to share that crux.

The rich man in the Gospel feasted sumptuously "day after day." This *kath hemeron* is a characteristic Lukan expression for ongoing activity (compare Lk 9:23, 11:3 with parallels). The rich man *kept on* feasting while Lazarus *kept on* longing to be fed. That characteristic situation in the story's opening (see v. 25a) would meet radical reversal in the rest of the story (v. 25b), a reversal signaled in the opening chapter of this Gospel (1:51-53), in Jesus' inaugural sermon (4:18), and in the Lukan version of the beatitudes (6:20-26).

Note how one's fate at death can be seen through human and divine eyes: *Human perspective*: rich man—buried (with befitting pomp, perhaps with a golden carriage like the one that carried a mobster through the streets of Oakland a few years back); poor man—died, period. *God's perspective*: rich man—buried, period, and in torment in Hades, no "period," no *end* in sight; poor man—carried away by the angels to be with Abraham.

Joseph Fitzmyer comments that it is not "that having wealth in this life leads necessarily to torment in the hereafter, but the failure to make prudent use of it" (cf. Lk 16:9-15). It is not money but the love of money that is the root of all kinds of evil (1 Timothy). Eagerness to be rich is a snare. The point Fitzmyer and Luke and the Guatemalan bishops make is underscored if the Timothy reading is carried beyond v. 16 to include vv. 17-19.

What would get *us* to listen to this story by Jesus? Sending Lazarus back? (How would he get past our fences and guard dogs to knock on the door? And there are more than enough of Lazarus' offspring at our doors right now). Moses and the prophets? (Amos 6:1-7, for example?). What "if someone (how about that Poor, Rejected, Marginated, Non-person Someone who died on our behalf!) rises from the dead"? Would that do it? *Ojala*! (God grant it!). ERK

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

I just read Luke's story of the Rich Man and Lazarus with an uncomfortably full stomach. Not a good idea. My own proximity to the rich man is far too obvious. Does Jesus offer more than hellfire for the satisfied, and heavenly comfort for the hungry?

"Reverend, I am looking for help." The recession has driven more people to come begging. I expect the "help" requested will not be prayer or pastoral counseling (though these are offered), but money. The food is gone, the heating bill unpaid. Someone is about to be evicted.

"What can I do? What should I do?" Both clergy and lay people look for help with these questions. How can we be creative in helping others? As more people come asking for help, it

is easy to get suspicious and judgmental, if only to weed out some we do not want to bother with. How can we help? A Pastor's Discretionary Fund, if in the budget at all, might total $25.

I know a creative elderly gentleman. John came as a teenage immigrant from Scandinavia, built up his own manufacturing business, and finally sold it to his grandsons and retired with a nice profit. But John is no "Dives" (the rich man's traditional name), enjoying his hard-earned money with no thought of those outside his door. When he was 70 years old, he set aside $10,000 as the capital for the pastor's service fund. The interest is all to be given away by each year's end. There are no loans, only gifts. With a mandate to give, giving is easy!

There is someone sitting at our doorstep. Will we step over and past them? Someone has already come back from the dead. What greater sign are we waiting for?

Feast of St. Luke, Evangelist
October 18, 1992

Psalm 124
Isaiah 43:8-13 or Isaiah 35:5-8
2 Timothy 4:5-11
Luke 1:1-4; 24:44-53

A few suggestions for those who will commemorate St. Luke:

1. What are Luke's special concerns? I, for one, am more comfortable preaching on Luke's concern for the poor than encouraging people to proclaim Jesus' name to all nations (Lk 24:46-49). I operate on the assumption that if I am uncomfortable with a text, it is probably time to preach on it. Given this commission, and the whole story of Acts, we might lift up ways our church is helping to reach all nations: a global missions Sunday. Or to bring matters closer to home, whom have we known who were effective evangelists in daily life?

2. While there is no definite link between the Third Gospel and "Luke the beloved physician" mentioned in Colossians, the tradition of the "beloved physician" makes October 18 an ideal day for a focus on healing. Our congregation will be hosting an ecumenical healing service during the afternoon. A service could include the laying on of hands or a recognition of those in the healing professions: doctors, nurses, therapists, hospice volunteers.

3. We might keep in mind the goal Luke set for himself—to present an orderly account—and keep our sermon clear and simple! EMK-W

Reformation Sunday
October 25, 1992

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

FIRST READING

John's Gospel is so simple that my colleague Robert Smith and I use it almost from the first day in our course in introductory Greek; yet it is so profound that its depth is light years beyond the most mature Christian. (Origen had written ten books of his commentary on the Gospel of John when he paused a moment to ask if he was using too many words. At that point he had gotten as far as Jn 1:18!) And in that simple and profound gospel the text picked for Reformation is full of simple and profound words: "continue, my word, my disciples, the truth, free, descendants of Abraham, slave, sin, the Son, the Father."

A strikingly common (and often overlooked) Johannine word is the word "continue" (the verb *meno* is used about forty times in the Gospel of John, about two dozen in 1 John; its frequency is unrecognized because it is variously translated "continue-remain-abide-stay"). A few key passages: Jn 1:32-33; 1:38-39; 5:38; and 2 John 9.

"You will know the truth and the truth will make you free" is true of those who *continue* in Jesus' word, *appropriating* and not just *inherit-*

ing Reformation accents. "We are descendants of Luther" can be as gloriously liberating or as deceptively hollow as "we are descendants of Abraham." Knowing the truth means trusting Jesus Christ (8:32 and 36), which brings us to the key Reformation text, Rom 3:19-28.

The theme of Romans is proclaimed in 1:16-17: the gospel is God's power leading to salvation everyone who believes, both Jew and Greek (=Gentile), for in the gospel God's righteousness, long anticipated and hoped for, is now in the process of being revealed by and for faith, for the one who is righteous on the basis of faith is the one who will live. The revelation of God's righteousness in the present is confirmed by the revelation in the present of God's wrath (1:18), exposing the guilt of all, both Gentile (1:18-32) and Jew (2:1-3:20). This sets the stage for the glorious good news of God's justifying action in Jesus. The background of vv. 25-26 is Leviticus 16, the account of the day of atonement, in which God is understood to be present and to appear in the cloud above the cover of the ark of the covenant (Lev 16:2). The word *hilasterion* in Rom 3:25 is the Greek word for the cover (sometimes called "mercy seat") of the ark. In my view the sense of this word here is not so much expiation (RSV) or sacrifice of atonement (NRSV) as *place* of atonement (NRSV margin), or, better, the place of God's *self-disclosure* as the gracious one. (This is confirmed by the words (v. 25) that this was done *to show or reveal [eis endeixin]* God's righteousness and by the words (v. 26) it was *to show [pros ten endeixin]* at the present time that [God] is righteous and that [God] justifies the one who has faith in Jesus.)

Verse 26 underscores a few of the distinctively Pauline accents in this teaching about justification: 1. the *now* of God's justification ("at the present time"—cf. v. 21) and 2. the priority of *faith* ("the one who has faith in Jesus"—faith is a key word from 3:21-4:25, and thus the springboard word in 5:1 for what is to follow). The Reformation has always stressed this second Pauline accent—by faith—as it has another Pauline distinctive that is mentioned in Rom 4:5, where God is pictured as the one "who justifies *the ungodly*" (more strikingly worded in the TEV: God is the one who "declares the guilty to be innocent"). ERK

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

Reformation Day brings a mixed agenda. What are we trying to do? Remember the drama of Luther posting his theses? Proclaim justification by grace? Reform today's church?

The *worst* Reformation Day services are over-done memorials. We can alienate both long-time Lutherans and curious visitors by a blind idolizing of our past heroes, pivotal and inspired though they may have been. If all the important things happened long ago, what is left for us?

The best Day of Reformation will combine a clear proclamation of the Truth that sets us free with the challenge to keep reforming our institutional church.

We need to hear the story of God's grace stated in simple language. When disaster strikes, we humans seem to naturally ask, "What have I done to deserve this?" By baptism we are already free from the condemnation of sin.

Do our church's practices and teaching proclaim this gospel? As inheritors of a reforming church, we need to be awake to what can tarnish and hide the good news that is our very reason for being. Where do we need to reform our church?

My own congregation has an odd problem. We are a "dress up" church, as more than one visitor has commented. If we make no distinction among those who are justified, this might be news to anyone who comes to my church in jeans. A couple years ago a long-time member dressed up as a bag lady for her part in a chancel drama and proceeded to sit in her regular spot in a pew near the front. Did anyone mean to actively avoid her? Where were those who usually sat close beside her? Exclusion by an unstated dress code is no less real if unintended.

The ability to bravely examine and change our institutions itself depends on the gift of the gospel and the freedom of a Christian. Even our efforts to reform will not pass the test of God's law. Especially when we fail, we depend on God's righteousness to redeem the church of the Reformation. EMK-W

All Saints Day
November 1, 1992

Psalm 34:1-10
Isaiah 26:1-4, 8-9
Revelation 21:9-11, 22-27 (22:1-5)
Matthew 5:1-12

FIRST READING

On this day on which we honor and praise God for all the saints, known and unknown, who have been and are in the community of faith and righteousness—those who have died (the "sainted" so-and-so) and those who right now bear the name of Jesus Christ, our eyes are directed to the Beatitudes (Mt 5:3-12).

The challenge to the church at the conclusion of Matthew's Gospel is to make disciples of all nations, by baptizing them and by teaching them to obey all the things that Jesus has commanded. This latter means all the things Jesus commanded as recorded in Matthew's Gospel, especially in five great bodies of teaching (chapters 5-7, 10, 13, 18, and 24-25).

The Sermon on the Mount (chapters 5-7) is the first and by no means least of the five bodies of teaching, and the center of this center is the Beatitudes in 5:3-12. And if there is a word that is the apex of the center of the center, it is the word that ends the description of the blessed ones (the saints) in the fourth and eighth beatitudes, the word *dikaiosyne*, righteousness.

Dikaiosyne is used once in Luke, not at all in Mark, but several times in Matthew. The very first words out of Jesus' mouth in this Gospel, when John the Baptist hesitates to baptize him, are, "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness" (3:15)—that is, to do all that God requires. In several texts Matthew has the word while the parallels do not: compare Mt 5:6 and 5:10 with Lk 6:22; Mt 6:33 with Lk 12:31. Then, too, only those whose righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees will enter the kingdom of heaven (5:20).

Righteousness in Matthew is the way of life in conformity with the will of God, the way of life that *is to be lived*: teaching them *to obey* everything I have commanded you—28:20; cf. 7:24-26: hearing *and doing*. The Beatitudes are a text for All Saints Day because they describe those who bear the marks of God's way in the world: the meek, merciful, pure in heart, and peacemakers, who for this very reason, this very righteousness, are persecuted.

This way of talking about righteousness may seem in tension with last Sunday's assertion that for Paul God is the one who "declares *the guilty* to be innocent" (Rom 4:5, TEV). Yet Matthew's accent on righteousness as that which we *do* in conformity with the will of God is not foreign to Paul's thought. Paul's God not only declares us righteous but also makes us righteous (and thus expects us *to live* in a new way—see, for example, Romans 6). Moreover, quite apart from Paul's views, what we have stressed as Matthew's accent about righteousness—that it is *our living* in conformity with the will of God—needs to be balanced with another *Matthaean* accent about righteousness, that from beginning to end it is a gift.

As Matthew emphasizes that Christians are to forgive one another (see Matthew 18), something notably hard for saints smug about their own righteousness, he reminds us that our life in God has as its foundation being forgiven an immense debt (18:23-35). And Matthew also reminds us that in the final analysis righteousness is something *God confers at the end*, as a gift. Very likely those who hunger and thirst for righteousness (5:6) are the ones who eagerly await the coming of the kingdom of heaven (5:3, 10), when *God* will *set things right* and finally usher in the reign of justice (righteousness) and love. The only reason we can even begin to live righteously today as we await the day of God's righteousness is that the death and resurrection of Jesus have inaugurated the day for which we wait. ERK

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

We live in a society that is uncomfortable talking about people who have died. Even those who come to worship soon after a death in the family want to preserve appearances. A young widow will fear "falling apart" or will leave the service

because of tears at Holy Communion. On any Sunday, the living will bring the dead with them, held in a fragile framework that the experience of prayer and song can shatter.

It is this relatively common experience that can make All Saints' Day so powerful. Lutherans and Roman Catholics may dialogue about the identity of the "saints;" I confess to being old-fashioned on the first Sunday of November. Every Sunday is a celebration of the resurrection, when we can remember those who have gone before us. And the "saints" of the church include all who are baptized into Christ. Yet in remembering in prayer those who have died in the congregation in the last 12 months, the living community is affirmed and strengthened. This is a day to sing hymns from recent funerals. This second communal remembrance and commendation to God can be very healing.

Where do the texts meet all of this rather traditional piety? In the passages from Revelation, where we are given a vivid painting of the goodness of the life to come. This is a resurrection of the body made concrete. This bricks-and-mortar imagery, this vision of water and trees, assures those who grieve. We can let go of the one we love. The One who is sun and lamp and temple is waiting to receive us all. EMK-W

Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost November 8, 1992

Psalm 121
Genesis 32:22-30
2 Timothy 3:14-4:5
Luke 18:1-8a

FIRST READING

The lessons are about prayer and persistence and about crosses, avoided, endured, and freely chosen. The Gospel focuses on persistence *in prayer*. Prayer is a major theme in Luke. Only this Gospel notes that Jesus is at prayer at certain decisive moments of his ministry (see 3:21; 6:12; 9:18, 28-29; 11:1).

Jesus' model in the story is a judge who cares neither for God nor people, and who acts only to avoid a black eye (v. 5 has the judge granting the persistent woman justice "so that she may not come and give me a black eye"—*hypopiadzo* is a boxing term; the NRSV margin points in this direction by having the judge act to avoid getting slapped in the face). If this thoroughly disagreeable judge will grant the request of this persistent women in order to *avoid*, one might say, a *right cross* under the eye, HOW MUCH MORE will the compassionate God who went to *a cross freely chosen* grant justice quickly to the freely chosen ones who persist in prayer?

2 Timothy is also about persistence (3:14; 4:2,5). The resources for this persistence lie at hand: what you have learned and believed from a totally trustworthy transmitter (3:14b = Paul, of course) and what you have at your disposal in the sacred scriptures (in 2 Timothy this refers to what we now call the Old Testament, though the broader application to the whole of scripture is, of course, apt today), which are inspired by God and thus useful for every task and every time that lies before us.

Persistence is possible because of Paul's teaching, because of the sacred writings, and because of the crucified and risen judge who is on the way (4:1).

Genesis speaks of the incredibly persistent Jacob who strove with humans and with God, who would not leave unblessed, and who limped away wounded, yet victorious.

One final image. The most prominent symbol for Mexico is an eagle sitting on a cactus eating a serpent (in memory of a prophecy that predicted the location of the Aztec city of Tenochtitlán, modern Mexico City). In an art museum in Oaxaca I saw a replay of that image in an etching by Leopoldo Mendez. It shows the eagle nailed to a cross, an indigenous person lying under the cross on the huge open book, deep in thought. While many ecclesiastical voices in 1992 celebrate 500 years of evangelization (under the sign of *the cross*!), Mendez' image of the cross reminds us that some view the history differently, including those who have organized a

campaign called "Five hundred years of indigenous, black and popular resistance." Despite a cross imposed upon them by the conquerors from Europe, the leaders of this campaign are using the 500th anniversary to intensify their struggle for justice for the marginated peoples of the Americas, a campaign that persists despite many crosses along the way. (One example: a dozen years ago a group of campesinos occupied the Spanish embassy in Guatemala City demanding redress for their grievances; the response—the embassy was burned down, killing the protesters. Today one of the strong voices of protest comes from Rigoberta Menchú, daughter of one of the victims of that massacre.)

The message for today's lessons: if despite the imposition of crosses on them by others, these strugglers for justice persist to the end, *how much more* will the One who went to the cross willingly, who will not let us go until we are blessed, persist to the end to bring to us and to the world the love of God. ERK

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

There is an unemployed factory worker in the congregation who tests my theology almost weekly. Grasping my hand as she leaves, Jane pleads for understanding: "Why doesn't God answer my prayer? Why should I come to church? Why can't I get a job?" She comes as close to the importuning widow as anyone I have ever met. All she wants is for God to help her get a job. Or at least tell her if she should try a new career.

What can we ask of God? What can we demand of God? Are there miracles I should be faithfully expecting of God? We formally ask God's blessing on our marriages, our children, our homes. And we pray God will bless our job hunt with success, our struggle with cigarettes or alcohol with fortitude, even our attempt to keep our temper with patience. We think we know what shape a blessing will take. It will result in security or prosperity here on earth. Our marriages will last until death, our children will outlive us, and we will never go hungry.

Jesus' Unjust Judge gives us both assurance and discomfort. If such a judge will relent, we can indeed depend on God, who has only our good in mind. But just as the judge is independent, able to act when he chooses, so we depend on God's choices. *We wish we could force the blessing of God.* What will God consider to be an answer to my prayer? When will God act?

The reading from Timothy hands us a critical question, well worth a sermon in itself.

Why scripture? What is it for? How should we use it? What does *Sola Scriptura* mean? After a presentation on Genesis 1-2, one man said, "For someone who does not think this all happened, you sure do take it seriously!" He noticed I was convinced that the story had something to say to us. How do those present on a Sunday morning hear the readings? Are they merely prelude to the sermon, which could get by without them?

What is the Bible good for? 2 Timothy includes teaching, reproof and correction, and training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient and equipped for every good work. In an age when so many Christians say that the important thing is "to believe something," we hesitate to correct people face to face, even when—especially when—quoting sacred writings!

What are the temptations for those with itching ears today? How can the writings we hold sacred (obviously not only the Hebrew scriptures the text refers to, but also the New Testament) help us deal with the challenges we face?

All this takes for granted that we ourselves read and are instructed and equipped by the Bible. A timely reminder for all of us. EMK-W

Twenty-Third Sunday after Pentecost November 15, 1992

Psalm 34
Deuteronomy 10:12-22
2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18
Luke 18:9-14

FIRST READING

The parable of the Pharisee and the toll collector (a *telones*, v. 10, is someone who collects indirect fees, tolls, tariffs, customs), found only in Luke, presents us with a figure who for some Lutherans (and others) seems to epitomize the only correct approach to God—standing afar off, not even looking up to heaven, beating one's breast [through my fault, my most grievous fault] and saying, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." What is true is that he, and his foil the Pharisee, do represent a strong *Lukan* theme. Luke sets the theme with his introduction to the story, about some who trusted *in themselves that they were righteous* and despised others. How like the words with which Luke introduces the story of the lost sheep, where the Pharisees and scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them" (15:2). How like the words Luke gives the Pharisee upset that Jesus is being anointed by a sinful woman (7:39). How like the elder son and his angry refusal to celebrate with the prodigal (15:30). The prodigal himself sounds like the toll collector: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son" (15:18-19, 21). Thus when Luke's readers hear Jesus say in today's Gospel that the toll collector went down to his home justified rather than the Pharisee, they are not surprised.

The Paul pictured in today's passage from 2 Timothy sounds much more like one who approaches God with bold confidence than like the toll-collector: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith, and thus I can long for the appearing of the righteous judge (2 Tim 4:6-8). While the Pastoral Epistles (1, 2 Timothy and Titus) are very likely not written by Paul himself but by later disciples applying his teaching to new concerns, the picture of Paul presented in this text is not unlike some of Paul's own statements about himself. This, too, may surprise us, since we are used to thinking of Paul as the "wretched man" who does the evil he despises and leaves undone the good he desires (Rom 7:14-25—though note that even in that passage the blame is put not on Paul but on sin—vv. 17, 20). In Phil 3:6 Paul says that with respect to righteousness under the law he was blameless. What Paul counted as loss because of Christ (Phil 3:7) was not a religious life of wretched failure but one of faithful achievement.

God's people in Deut 10:12-22 are encouraged to serve God faithfully and rely in confidence on God's choice and God's blessing, and Psalm 34 is a hymn of quiet yet firm confidence in God's eager openness to hear and receive us.

The point of these remarks is that the averted eye and the smitten breast are characteristic of *one* way of approaching God, a way Luke extols in today's Gospel and in some other texts. A bold and trusting gaze into the eye of the God whose face we have seen in Jesus Christ is characteristic of another way, which we see in 2 Timothy and Psalm 34. For a Christian, what is of the essence for both of these ways (and for all gradations in between) is the recognition that we stand before God not because of what we bring or fail to bring, but because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus and his suffering, death and resurrection (Phil 3:8-10). ERK

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

The more closely we read the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector, the worse it gets. We begin by thinking, "Thank God I am not so conceited and full of myself. I would never have the gall to thank God for not being a tax collector." Besides, who fasts once, much less twice a week?

How about someone who tithes? Finance committees like people who give ten percent, whether it is before or after taxes. It makes the whole congregation look good, pushing up the average pledge. And no one would give that

much, unless they were sincere believers.

As for those people the Pharisee was grateful for not being, would you want to be an adulterer or a thief? Or a rogue or a chiseler like a tax collector of that day, skimming from your own neighbors?

How many of us have thanked God we are responsible parents, unlike those who let their kids run wild? Are glad that we do not tip the bottle too often? Or proud of the sermons we write on Wednesday? We even become self-righteous in thinking we would not be so conceited as the Pharisee was!

Jesus was not simply describing which prayer was better, though we can learn about the value of a simple prayer. It is not the simplicity that is valued; a pompous prayer can be short. Jesus describes the folly of empty pride, of boasting in things that deserve no merit. In this season of thanksgiving, it seems odd to be told the folly of giving thanks for the wrong things. We forget completely what needs to be said in God's presence: the inner recognition of who we are, and who God is.

How should we pray? Come before God as... *ourselves*, created, human, sinful. In so doing, we will receive the gift of forgiveness already prepared for us. We too are sent home justified. EMK-W

Christ the King
November 22, 1992

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

FIRST READING

The last Sunday of the church year is called Christ the King. Perhaps Lk 23:35-43 was chosen as a text for this day because of the inscription on the cross: "This is the King of the Jews" (vv. 37-38). But more basic to the themes of this day and to a strong theme of Luke's Gospel is the exchange in vv. 42-43: "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom" ... "Today you will be with me in Paradise."

In Matthew and Mark, Jesus begins his ministry with the announcement that the long-awaited reign of God is about to come (Mt 4:17; Mk 1:14). Luke omits that statement in the parallel passage. Elsewhere he turns aside the notion that the kingdom is about to arrive. In Lk 19:11ff Jesus denies that his approach to Jerusalem means that God's reign is going to appear immediately, and he tells a parable about what a nobleman's servants are to be doing during the time in which the nobleman goes off to receive royal power. In Acts 1:6-8 Jesus deflects interest in whether it is now time for the kingdom and directs his followers to their task for the present: "Under the Spirit's power, be my witnesses."

So when the penitent thief asks to be remembered when Jesus comes into his kingdom, Jesus once again redirects the focus to the present: "*Today* you will be with me in Paradise." "Today" is the word Jesus uses in the inaugural sermon in Nazareth (Lk 4:16ff: Jesus reads Isaiah's promises about the day of deliverance and then says, "*Today* this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing"). Following the healing of the paralytic, people say, "We have seen amazing things *today*," (5:26). In 19:9 Jesus declares, "*Today* salvation has come to this house" (of Zacchaeus).

In one sense, then, Luke deflects interest in the coming of Jesus as king on some future day (as sure as that coming is) and calls Jesus' followers to live responsibly in the light of the "today" of salvation the world experienced through the ministry of Jesus. Even as Jesus urges his followers to pray for the coming of the kingdom (Lk 11:2), he can describe the kingdom as present already in his exorcisms by the power of God (Lk 11:20).

Gustavo Gutiérrez began a summary article on liberation theology by saying that for a long time in the church the beyond was what mattered. Eternal life was seen exclusively as life in the future, and there was a sharp distinction between the spiritual dimension of life and the rest of life. These emphases still prevail in many parts of the church. By contrast, Latin American liberation theology has focused on God's and the church's interest in the struggles of the present, and God's and the church's interest in the whole of life, including the physical and economic realities we confront every day, and not just some spiritual sphere isolated from the rest of life.

Totally unprofitable is any attempt to decide which is more important, this life *or* the one to come, the physical *or* the spiritual. (Such a choice is right up there with "great taste/less filling.")

Christ the King Sunday is a good day to celebrate the fact that as we wait and pray for the coming of God's reign, when in God's time and by God's power all things shall be made new, we are already experiencing transformation and already being invited to be agents of that transformation in the corner of God's world in which we live, "For the Lamb who was slain has begun his reign. Alleluia." ERK

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

Never assume. Never assume the foundations of faith are secure and need no buttressing. Two recent snapshots:

Discussing the Apostles' creed in confirmation, an eighth grader spontaneously bursts out, "I always wondered how Jesus could be God, *and* the Son of God."

A businessman in the congregation stops by the church late one Saturday morning and pops one of those terribly simple questions. "I have a Jehovah's Witness working for me, and we have been talking. What *is* the Trinity?"

A simple question for him, terrible for me. His colleague would have already showered him with proof texts; he did not want ammunition to fire back. Nor did he want a text book review of what he had studied in confirmation years before. Here was someone looking for a personal, thoughtful witness to faith in the Triune God, particularly the person of Jesus Christ.

The three texts give a wealth of images for Jesus. He is the real shepherd, the wise and just king (Jeremiah), the image of God, first born of creation, head of the church, the beginning, the fullness of God (Colossians), the Messiah of God, the chosen one, the dying ruler with Paradise for a kingdom (Luke).

Why struggle with words to portray God incarnate? Not to overwhelm or further mystify, but find the image we need. For those who cry aloud at the racial injustice in our society, Jeremiah's king may be the only government to trust. For a congregation recovering from a pastor who abused his office through sexual misconduct, the true Shepherd may give hope. And for each of us who perceives the condemnation we deserve, there is an invitation—a promise—of welcome into Paradise.

Like All Saints', this may be a day to lift up the church triumphant, particularly for people who are seeing someone they love die. "Today you will be with me in Paradise." EMK-W

Day of Thanksgiving
Canada: October 12, 1992
USA: November 26, 1992

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

FIRST READING

Psalm 65 is an incredibly beautiful litany of praise to God for blessings to the earth and its inhabitants, including humanity, we who experience forgiveness, fellowship with God and one another, and the satisfying goodness of God's holy temple. For this, "Praise is due to you, O God, in Zion."

The passage from Deuteronomy is a plea to recognize our dependence on God, since we do "not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord." In the text's final verse, every word deserves emphasis, but perhaps especially "You shall bless the Lord your God for the good land that [God] has given...." By contrast we sometimes live as though the verse reads: "*You shall eat your fill...* [of what has been] given *you*." Judging by appearances, our theme song is a slightly edited version of the familiar folk ballad, "This land is my land, this land is my land."

The (overly?) well known Gospel for the day about the ten lepers is about thanking and not thanking ("But the other nine, where are they?"); about healing ("And as they went, they were made clean"); but especially about *seeing*.

Seeing by Jesus: he was on the way to Jerusalem (17:11), having set his face to go to that place of death and life for himself and for the world (9:51; cf. 9:31). Yet when those in need approached (not too close, for they were lepers) and cried out for help, he saw (v. 14) and healed.

Seeing by the Samaritan: ten lepers approached, called out, went, were made clean. But one of them, *When he saw* that he was healed, turned back, praised God loudly, prostrated himself and thanked Jesus. Around us and within us there is healing; there is grace; there are gifts of God and there is God; all around us, all around all ten of us, all ten billion of us. But to *see* is to praise, to prostrate, to thank. And, ultimately, that is to be healed ("your faith has made you well").

Finally, it is a story about a Samaritan. Was none found to return and give praise to God except *this foreigner*? (v. 18). A Samaritan is used as a model of one worthy of approval, as in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:29-37). The implication seems to be that he is one to whom we, because of our animosities and prejudices, would not impute good faith, good action. The Samaritan is an outsider, stranger, foreigner. He is *the other*, of whom each of us tends to be wary. Luke takes interest in God's interest in salvation for all: toll collectors, sinners, Samaritans, Gentiles, women, the world.

Luke invites us to recognize, in the midst of untold blessing and healing, that sometimes the outsider, the one sometimes treated as a non-person, can help us see. If we will let them.

One of Diego Rivera's most famous murals is "Dream of a Sunday Afternoon in Alameda Park." Many figures of Mexico's past and present are there, dreaming about various futures. Many are dressed in finery for this stroll in the park where the elite gather. In two separate parts of the mural, figures representing the indigenous, the campesinos, the simple laborers are being driven away from the "proper" people with whom, presumably, they have no right to associate in Alameda Park. As many groups of the disenfranchised in Latin America try to help the world reflect on the 500 years since Columbus in ways that run counter to the official celebrations of discovery, of evangelization, of the "glorious" melding of two cultures, as these disenfranchised try to share their dreams for a better and more just future, will we drive them away by ignoring them? I am not operating with a naive view that the people Columbus and Cortez met 500 years ago were pure, simple inhabitants of some sinless Eden. The steps of the Aztec *templo mayor* that Cortez found in Tenochtitlán were stained with the blood of human sacrifices. But can the indigenous, marginated people who live with the land and near the land and from the land in gratitude, who have so little and yet who see everything as gift, can they who see teach us who do not seem

to see, that it is time to stop *eating our fill*, time to *see*, and seeing, to *praise and prostrate and thank*? Will we let them? *Ojala*! (God grant it!). ERK

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

Oh, that Samaritan. If no one had come back to thank Jesus, excuses could have been made for all ten. "They are so happy to be made well, they went to join their families they love. They rushed to do their duty with the priests." But the one comes back, and we feel guilty on behalf of the nine. One comes back. Would we have been that one?

God does not need our thanks to be motivated to continue giving. God, the generous giver, trusts us with life itself—our own and others'. The resources of our planet are ours to share, ours to use, ours to exploit, ours to take for granted.

We are the ones who need to be motivated to give, even to giving thanks. Expressing thanks is not particularly natural. Children need to be prodded, "What is the magic word?" We may dislike having to continually acknowledge another's generosity. One man missed his own birthday party, so as not to have to receive any gifts or congratulations.

If our need to give thanks is so obvious, because of God's overwhelming generosity, why do we have a special day of Thanksgiving? We are indeed all too like the nine who did not return. Whether caught up in the feelings of health, in anticipation of rejoining families, of receiving admission back into the community, no excuse is sufficient for omitting thanks. So we set aside a special day. If this reminds you of Mother's Day, perhaps the image of God for Thanksgiving should be maternal. EMK-W

The Church is Not Expendable

William E. Lesher
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In the middle of the nave of St. Paul's Cathedral in London there is a plaque in the floor that honors the memory of the famous architect, Sir Christopher Wren. The plaque reads, "If you are seeking a monument for this man, look around you."

If any of us needs to be renewed or revitalized in our conviction that the church is desperately needed in this modern world, just look around. Fragmentation is the spirit of the times. The murderous and merciless bombing of Sarajeivo—historically a peaceful city of ethnic diversity, culture, and religious tolerance—is, at this writing, the daily front page reminder of the sinful, separated reality of our human condition. South Africa, which a few short months ago seemed after long last to be on the road to a new non-racial democratic future, is again torn asunder by police-provoked slaughter. In our own country in recent weeks a highly questionable court verdict in L.A., the exuberance of a basketball victory that made the Chicago Bulls world champions for a second season, and the simple cancellation of an outdoor rock concert in Boston were events that unmasked the anger and fragmentation of people and groups that lie just beneath the surface of our everyday lives.

There is, of course, nothing new in this present scenario, and certainly nothing theologically unexpected. Sin is, at its most profound root, separation. And we know for a fact, what we wish were not true: that we are, in this life, by nature, separated from God, ourselves, and most conspicuously from one another.

Our secular companions are experiencing the new intensity of our current separations without a theological frame, and some who write articles and editorials are coming to dangerous conclusions. There is talk of a new tribalism afoot in the world. There are explorations into the limits of pluralism. And there are conclusions being reached that multi-cultural efforts won't work because they cut across the grain of human nature. And that is most certainly true.

But what is even more true is that the church of Jesus Christ is called, gathered, and enlightened to defy human nature. The miracle of grace is a personal event in the life of every believer that at the same time is

a public act in the reality of our life together in the church. We are "one in the body and one in the Lord." The church is the world's largest multi-national, trans-cultural, corporate organization. Our mission, according to St. Paul, is to "tear down the middle wall" as Christ did before us and for us.

The church is not expendable. It is essential to God's plan. It is a light in the darkness, and it lives by the promise that the darkness will not overcome it. Christ means reunion. Christ means that what was separated is joined together again: the Creator to the creation, the self to the self, and people to one another.

In this time of heightened fragmentation, separation—and yes, sin—the church is called with special urgency to be a community of reunion. Look around and see how desperately our families, community, and our world need another word: a word that defies the all too stark reality of human nature, a word remarkably appropriate for our time, a word that only the church can speak and demonstrate: a word of reunion in Christ.

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