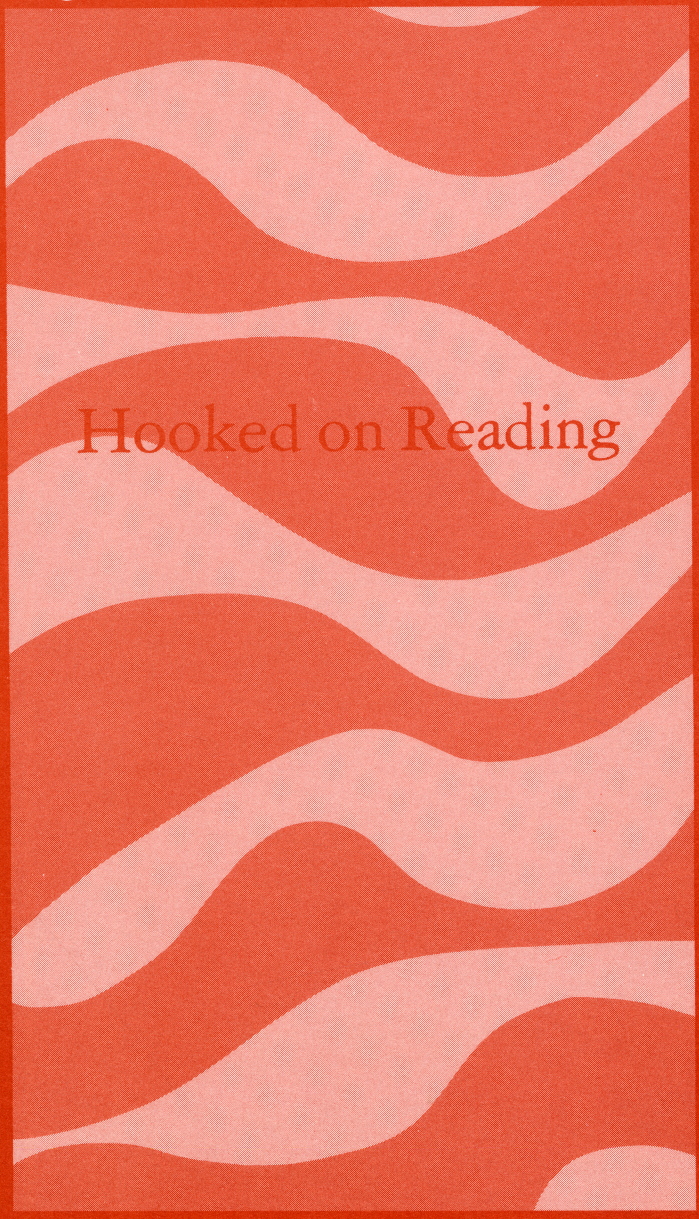
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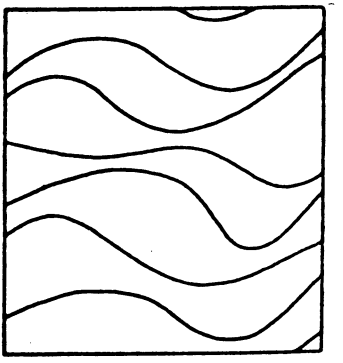
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Hooked on Reading

A radio commercial tells us that a program called "Hooked on Phonics" will roll back the rate of illiteracy in our country. I wish it well.

Readers of this journal have a different problem: How do we read what we read? In the 90s there are few agreed-upon rules for interpretation, and there are new perspectives galore. Do we read documents historically or as literary wholes? What role does our subjectivity play? Women, African-Americans, laity, and clergy bring different experiences and dispositions to the reading table—and walk away from the same texts with quite different readings. It's at once confusing and exciting. Hermeneutics—being hooked on how we read—is *the* question today.

John Reumann asks whether Article 28 of the *Augsburg Confession* is the hermeneutical key to that document, or whether what it says on bishops was part of a compromise package in 1530, that fell to the ground when it was not accepted by the Catholic party. Should we read the *Augsburg Confession* all by itself or only against the background of what Luther or Melanchthon said earlier or later? Is Lutheranism part of the church catholic with a jerry-built doctrine of ministry after the failure of 1530, or are Lutherans, normed by the doctrine of justification, free to define today what they understand bishops to be? Which is better or more in line with the essence of Christianity? historical criticism or the Yale school? Answers to these questions may determine where the ELCA ministry study winds up.

Patricia Beattie Jung addresses the abortion question by asking how we think about pregnancy. Do we compare childbearing to space travel,

with fetuses, like mini astronauts, floating around in the womb? Or is childbearing really analogous to child rearing? The author proposes an organ donation metaphor to help us interpret pregnancy—neither can be required, both are complex and of great consequence. This metaphor takes women's experience with ultimate seriousness and makes the question of self-sacrificial giving, rather than the status of fetal life, to be the decisive issue in the abortion debate.

Ralph W. Klein explores the question of evangelism by retelling Jacob's encounters with God. Our experiences of God, like Jacob's, may be quite diverse. Some experience God in conventional, traditional, or even orthodoxy categories, like Jacob at Bethel. Others see the face of God in extraordinary, otherworldly experiences, as when Jacob wrestled with God or an angel or whoever it was at Penuel. Still others experience God in the gracious face of an estranged sister or brother, a kind of mission in reverse. Whichever way this gift comes to us—and no doubt each of us has duplicated all of Jacob's experiences—the gift comes to be celebrated and shared. Though tradition history would assign each of these Jacob stories to quite different historical or social contexts, the reader of the present text sees the dialectical variety echoing her or his own life experience. No doubt three types of people could be reached by these three divergent experiences of God, but all these people and all these experiences of God need to be welcomed and cherished in the one church.

Howard S. Olson points out the deep African understanding of wholeness. Not "I think; therefore I am," but "I am because we are." For Africans music is not *for* someone, but *with* someone. They do not isolate sick people, but they surround them with family. African students study so much together that it is difficult to define plagiarism. Wholeness means that there is no clear dichotomy between the sacred and the secular. In Jesus as Savior, the one who restores wholeness, Africans find a continuity and a fulfillment of their cultural understandings of wholeness. The wholeness which Christianity offers is a seamless garment that would be spoiled if it were the private possession of one person. The wholeness Christ creates is available to everyone who turns from human brokenness to accept the priceless treasure.

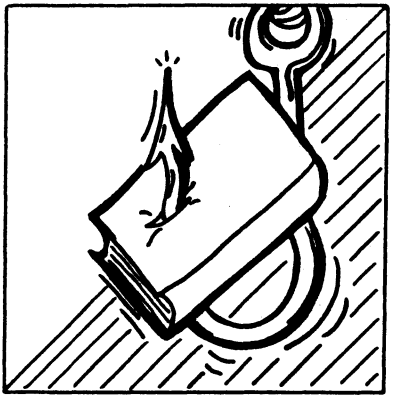
Tom Dorris speaks out for deacons, who model and encourage *diakonia.* They are living reminders of Christ the servant. He hopes the ELCA will embrace the diaconate as a form of the one office of ministry God provides in, with, under, and over against all the baptized servants of God and neighbor.

Kieth A. Gerberding finds that the word "labor" or "toil" defines ministry for Paul, including the ministry of women. As this concept was lost in the early church, and there was an erosion in the understanding of all ministry as lowly service, there also was a loss in the church's appreciation of the ministry of women. Women served in various ministerial capacities in the Pauline writings, though translators and text copyists did their best to denigrate their role or even turn them into men. We recall Junia, an apostle; Phoebe, an authoritative deacon; Nympha, a leader of a house church; and Priscilla, active in theological education.

I suppose if you weren't already hooked on reading, you never would subscribe for *Currents.* Still, does a manuscript mean what its author intended or what its text says? Does the gospel take on new richness when we study next Sunday's lessons with our pericope group, or do we get more out of it alone, by ourselves, at our desks? In what ways does what we bring to the text determine what we find?

Isn't this a great time to be alive in the church?

Ralph W. Klein
Editor



A New Way for Reading Confessional Documents on Bishops and Ministry?

John Reumann
Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia

Has a new way, useful in inter-Lutheran and ecumenical discussion, emerged for reading not only scriptural texts but also confessional and other "canonical" writings? Some recent analyses of the *Augsburg Confession* suggest that this is so. It is important to try to understand the proposed hermeneutic and then to assess it. The attempt here is to explore one such recent example, concerning the role of bishops in the *Augsburg Confession.*

It is agreed, almost without exception, that what Lutherans believe and do should be in accord with Scripture and with the Lutheran Confessions. The issue often is, how to interpret them.

The Constitution of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, in Chapter 2, for example, sets forth a "hierarchy of authorities" that runs thus: the Triune God, Christ, the Gospel, the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, the creeds (Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian), and then the Confessions. Actually the arrangement is even more precise and subtle in using two different verbs:

—this church *confesses* God, Christ, and the gospel (2.01, 2.02, 2.07);

—this church *accepts* the Scriptures, creeds, and Lutheran Confessions (2.03, 2.04, 2.05, 2.06).

And among the confessions accepted, the *Augsburg Confession* is singled out and mentioned first (2.05), while "the other confessional writings" are mentioned only in the next paragraph (2.06), namely the *Apology, Smalcald Articles, Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope*, the Small and Large Catechisms, and the *Formula of Concord.* This distinction is made both on historical and ecumenical grounds: the ELCA acknowledges "as one with it in faith and doctrine all churches that likewise accept the teachings of the *Unaltered Augsburg Confession*," whereas the other documents are termed "further valid interpretations of

Expectations and fears vary about the rigor with which historical criticism lays its hand on treasured writings.

the faith of the church" (2.06). Does this make the *Augsburg Confession* (CA or Confessio Augustana) *alone* the determinative for ecumenical relations?[1]

To one degree or another, practically all Lutherans would similarly emphasize the confessions as norm. Only occasionally is a voice heard, reminding us that it was not always so among all Lutherans (e.g., in Scandinavia, with the *Formula of Concord*, which was regarded as more a "German document;" S. S. Schmucker, at Gettysburg, and his *Definite Synodical Platform* of 1855) or that today's emphasis on the Symbolical Books is especially the result of a 19th-century confessional revival.[2]

It is also generally agreed that the Lutheran Confessions, like all such documents, should be interpreted historically. This emphasis on seeing the documents of 1529-80 in their historical context was clearly articulated in inter-Lutheran discussion in the late 1950s, as in the statement of Theodore G. Tappert, "Because they are historical documents they can be understood only in the light of the concrete, unrepeatable situations out of which they came."[3] This historical setting has, of course, also been recognized when Lutherans have employed their confessions in ecumenical dialogues. To cite just one example, in the initial Lutheran-Reformed dialogue in the United States, it was emphasized that such writings are "historical documents" and one must be aware of their "historical provenance."[4]

But how the historical approach works has long been debated and remains in ferment. Expectations and fears vary about the rigor with which historical criticism lays its hand on treasured writings. Some say that interpretation as an art and science has moved from a period where philosophy controlled it, as up to the end of the 18th century, to a period where history and historical consciousness control all. More recently there has been something of a revolt against history, and some now see interpretation as primarily literary in nature, not historical.[5] In all this, major hermeneutical questions arise.

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[1]Cf., for further discussion, J. Reumann, *Ministries Examined: Laity, Clergy, Women, and Bishops in a Time of Change* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1987), 215.

[2]P. Hefner, "The Real Challenge of the Nineteenth Century," *dialog* 22 (1983):38.

[3]"The Significance of Confessional Subscription," in *Essays on the Lutheran Confessions Basic to Lutheran Cooperation* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, New York: The National Lutheran Council, 1961), 28.

[4]*Marburg Revisited: A Reexamination of Lutheran and Reformed Traditions*, eds. Paul C. Empie and James I. McCord (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1966), 180-81, especially point 6.

[5]Peter W. Macky, "The Coming Revolution: The New Literary Approach to the New Testament," *The Theological Educator* 9 (1979) 32-46, repr. in Donald K. McKim, ed., *A Guide to Contemporary Hermeneutics: Major Trends in Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 263-79.

In posing the interpretative questions which follow, I take up this case study aware of how Lutherans, and not just those engaged in a process on the Task Force for the Study of Ministry, need to face up to root problems in giving attention to "the tradition of the Lutheran church" and "a Lutheran understanding... of... threefold ministerial office," as the mandate for that study puts it.[6]

As is well known, four articles in the *Confessio Augustana* (hereafter "CA") of 1530 touch on the ministry. They are, with the titles later given to each:

Art. 5. The Office of the Ministry (*Vom Predigtamt*) or The Ministry of the Church (*De ministerio ecclesiastico*);

Art. 7. The Church (*Von der Kirche, De ecclesia*);

Art. 14. Order in the Church (*Von Kirchenregiment*) or Ecclesiastical Order (*De ordine ecclesiastico*); and

Art. 28. The Power of Bishops (*Von der Bischofen Gewalt*) or Ecclesiastical Power (*De potestate ecclesiastica*).[7]

It is also worth recalling that articles 5, 7, and 14 are in the section headed "Articles of Faith and Doctrine," which the Lutheran confessors thought would be accepted by their Catholic opponents and the Emperor as in accord with "Holy Scripture or what is common to the Christian church,"[8] but Article 28 comes last of all among the eight items in Part II, where "matters in dispute" are discussed, concerning abuses which have been corrected by the Evangelical churches. These were regarded as more "iffy" with the Roman opponents.

The matter to be focused on is one of debate in recent years: was episcopacy assumed as the norm in the CA, so that Article 28, at the end of the document, is really its climax and hermeneutical key, the goal toward which articles 5, 7, and 14 point—this on the grounds that the CA is trying to show that the Lutheran movement was thoroughly in accord with the catholicity that had marked the church for centuries and because, without episcopal authority, there could be no pastors ordained in Lutheran lands? Or, the alternative: what the CA says on bishops was part of a "package offer" to the authorities in 1530 that fell to the ground when it was not accepted. In particular, the issue revolves around how we are to read a document in light of its historical context—i.e., contemporary conditions in 1530, earlier sources behind the CA, the fuller views expressed elsewhere of those who shaped the confession, and the subsequent history of the issue.[9]

The questions which I ultimately wish to pose can perhaps best be grasped if we pause for a moment to recall how texts are examined nowadays in biblical studies. For it is in connection with the exegesis of Scripture that most seminary students, clergy, and church members come into direct contact with contemporary historical-critical methods. That is to suggest, not that biblical studies are singular, but simply that we may all too little use historical methods openly and directly in examining historical

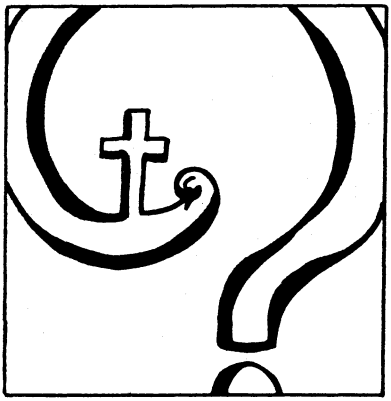
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[6]Continuing Resolution 10.11.A87, b. 1) and 2), in the Constitution and Bylaws and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, *Minutes, ELCA Constituting Convention ... 1987* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1987), 219.

[7]*The Book of Concord*, ed. T. G. Tappert et al (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1959) 31, 32, 36, 81; German and Latin in *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche, Herausgegeben im Gedankjahr der Augsburgischen Konfession 1930* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 10th ed. 1986), 58, 61, 69, 120.

[8]*Book of Concord*, 48.

[9]Brief discussion in Reumann, *Ministries Examined*, 70, 158-61.



texts from later periods. Certainly it is the application of these methods to the Old and New Testaments that has stirred up the most debate, and perhaps the place where procedures and issues become most clear.

In examining an Old or New Testament document it is common to look behind the existing text for sources, behind the sources for oral traditions, and behind all of these at the event itself which the text presents. In such stages, the development of a passage can be sketched. Moving in the other direction from the finished document or book, it is also possible to trace subsequent developments: how this book relates to other ones in the canon and how passages or books have subsequently been interpreted or had influence. Such is the way of historical criticism in its broad trajectory.[10]

In 1976-78 Prof. Wilhelm Maurer, of Erlangen University, published a *Historical Commentary on the Augsburg Confession.*[11] His aim was to show the prior development of the document presented in 1530 to the authorities at Augsburg (pp. 3-4). In so doing, Maurer argued that the history of this development focuses especially on Article 28 and on questions of orders in church and society. While Articles 1-21 on faith and doctrine go back to Luther's own confession of 1528, when he thought he was dying, and to the Schwabach Articles of 1529, the second part of the CA, Articles 22-28, on matters in dispute, have their source in the Torgau Articles of March 1530.

The Torgau Articles were developed by Luther, Melanchthon, and others for a meeting with Elector John of Saxony in late March of 1530 in order to provide a basis for the Protestant presentation at Augsburg. The nine articles discussed at Torgau, a center for the electoral court southeast of Wittenberg, summed up the "Saxon strategy" for the coming sessions. Three areas of evangelical practice were to be defended at all costs: communion in both kinds, abolition of certain abuses in the Mass, and marriage of priests (now in CA 22-24). The trade off was to be acceptance of bishops and of other ordinances, though a strong note affirming their human, rather than divine, origins appears in the Torgau draft with regard to episcopacy and church ordinances. Out of this was to grow Article 28 of the CA, about the power of bishops to preach, forgive sins, and distribute the sacraments but not to teach contrary to the gospel or to abuse the temporal authority which they possess by human right. Article

[10]Cf. J. Reumann, "Methods in Studying the Biblical Text Today," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 40 (1969): 655-81; "Exegetes, Honesty, and the Faith: Biblical Scholarship in Church School Theology," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 5 (1978):16-32.

[11]*Historischer Kommentar zur Confessio Augustana*, 2 vols. (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1976, 1978); *Historical Commentary on the Augsburg Confession*, trans. H. George Anderson (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986).

28 is the longest one in the CA and pivotal in that it was basic to Part II (which stems from the Torgau Articles) but also impinges on the articles of faith in numbers 5 and 14.[12]

Maurer's careful historical study of the different drafts over a ten-week period between the meeting at Torgau and the presentation of the CA at Augsburg was, in turn, made the basis for a 1980 essay on bishops by two members of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue in the United States, the Jesuit scholar, Father Avery Dulles, and Prof. George Lindbeck, a Lutheran theologian, of Yale University.[13] In their joint investigation they argued that one should approach the CA as a whole in light of Article 28, to which previous sections point. One should assume, they say, that the CA meant to retain episcopacy. Not whether there should be bishops but their power is at issue. The Lutheran confessors meant further to show how their positions accorded with the catholic heritage of the church through the ages, in contrast to the Anabaptists who despise the external word (Art. 5). Episcopal authority was needed in Reformation regions so that new pastors could be ordained. Only so could stability be maintained. In CA 14, it is argued, finally, that the statement that only those who are "regularly called" (*rite vocatus*) should preach and administer the sacraments, means ordination (cf. Apology 14.1), and that by bishops.

This position of Lindbeck and Dulles, based on Maurer's historical reconstruction, has been hailed by others, among them Bishop William Lazareth of the Metropolitan New York Synod of the ELCA, in a series of papers and addresses.[14] In calling for "evangelical bishops," Dr. Lazareth urged that we not only "reaffirm what the confessions actually did say" but that we must also affirm "what they consistently would say... here and now." Following Maurer, he argues that "article 28 was on the front burner of the demand for evangelical reforms in 1530," the other 27 articles "added editorially only later to amplify or to support it." He commends Melanchthon's "irenic spirit toward the bishops," which "reflected both respect for the church's venerable episcopal polity in principle, as well as a tactical concession." Thus "the church's historic episcopate is either explicitly affirmed or implicitly presupposed throughout the CA's doctrinal foundations." In positive fashion Lazareth then goes on to spell out:

(1) the gospel "about" Christ's ministry in God's plan of salvation, articles 3 and 4;

(2) the ministry "to" the gospel in Christ's church, articles 5 and 14; and

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[12]Maurer, *Historical Commentary*, 15-38, 59-70.

[13]"Die Bischöfe und der Dienst des Evangeliums: Ein Kommentar zu CA 5, 14 und 28," in *Confessio Augustana Bekenntnis des einen Glaubens: Gemeinsame Untersuchung lutherischer und katholischer Theologen*, ed. H. Meyer et al (Paderborn: Bonifacius-Druckerei, Frankfurt: Otto Lembeck, 1980), 140-67; *Confessing One Faith: A Joint Commentary on the Augsburg Confession by Lutheran and Catholic Theologians*, ed. G. W. Forell and J. F.McCue (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1982), 147-72.

[14]"Evangelical Episcopate," *Lutheran Forum* 22 (Nov. 1988): 13-17; longer text (cited) presented earlier to ELCA bishops; paper for the ELCA Task Force on the Study of Ministry, May 31, 1990; address, "The Ministry of the Word of God: One Divine Office in Various Human Forms," at Colloquium, "A Call to Faithfulness," St. Olaf College, June 5, 1990; ELCA Convocation of Teaching Theologians, August 13, 1990; *Two Forms of Ordained Ministry* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1991). It is fair to note that the several papers and addresses show an increasingly careful nuancing of the Dulles-Lindbeck thesis.

(3) the ministry "by" Christ's church in the world (articles 6 and 16).

On the negative side, "what the CA challenges is the alleged divine right of the post-apostolic differentiation of grades within the ordained ministry." Such distinctions are by human authority only. We are "a church which confessionally recognizes only one pastoral office," in which now women are included, and such pastors are already "the functional equivalents of bishops in their own local congregations." Clergy are the "'line backers' on God's team," behind the "front line" of laity in the world. So goes the Maurer line of interpretation of CA 28, as developed and applied by U.S. Lutherans.

On the other hand, there has been objection to this interpretation on historical grounds, notably in an article by Robert Goeser of Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, Berkeley.[15] Goeser's recounting of the history emphasizes how there had already been at least two Lutheran ordinations in Saxony prior to 1530, one as early as 1525 when Luther engaged in the laying on of hands upon Georg Rörer in Wittenberg. Goeser also emphasizes the political compromise plan which the Saxons were putting forth at Augsburg: bishops retained in exchange for legal recognition for the reform of the Mass, communion in both kinds, and married priests, as source "E" makes clear, a series of articles by Wittenberg theologians, probably composed about March 15-16, 1530.[16]

Goeser specifically contests the view that the first 27 articles in the CA are a "rationale for... the reformers' attitude toward episcopacy" in Art. 28.[17] The whole first section (articles 1-21) had a history long prior to the Torgau draft in 1530; these articles on faith and doctrine go back to Luther's confession of 1528 and the Schwabach Articles in 1529.

Secondly, Goeser rejects the view of Dulles and Lindbeck that the CA assumes the necessity of the episcopacy so that there would be pastors and the power of the keys, including gospel preaching, forgiveness of sins, and administration of the sacraments. Quite the contrary. There had already been ordinations. Drafts of the Torgau Articles assert, "We must obey God rather than men..., bishops are to be deserted who compel men to act contrary to God;" more strongly, bishops who continue to "bind those whom they ordain to godless doctrine and to a life without marriage... must be utterly overthrown."[18]

Thirdly, Goeser objects to the remark that "rejection of bishops" by the reformers "would gravely imperil their claims to catholicity." For "Luther nowhere links catholicity or the ministry of the Word to dependency on episcopal succession."[19]

There are other points of difference, but the chief one may be, fourthly, that Goeser holds articles 14 and 22-28 were "meaningful only so long as the compromise was politically feasible." The trade-off or tactical concession became a dead letter when it was rejected at Augsburg. The political nature of the document must be borne in mind. Only when the compromise

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[15]"The Historic Episcopate and the Lutheran Confessions," *LQ* NS 1 (1987): 214-32. Cf. also Goeser's "Word, Ministry, and Episcopacy according to the Confessions," *LQ* NS 4 (1990): 45-59.

[16]Text E is translated in H. E. Jacobs, *The Book of Concord* (Philadelphia: General Council Publication Board, 1883) 2:92-94: no private masses or masses for pay or for the dead; "there is nothing in heaven or earth that acquires forgiveness of sins, or God's grace, without faith alone in the Word of God...."

[17]Goeser, "Historic Episcopate," 222.

[18]Jacobs, 2:83 and 94.

[19]Goeser, "Historic Episcopate," 227.

was revealed as a failure did the CA become a Lutheran church confession, "precisely within the framework of a confessing church for which episcopacy was not a possibility."[20] So Goeser.

Towards the end of his 1987 article Goeser touches on "the hermeneutical questions" that this debate raises.[21] This is the area of interest for us, and the question must be asked, What is going on here?

One will not grasp the methodology in the essay on CA 28 without taking seriously Prof. Lindbeck's programmatic book, *The Nature of Doctrine* (1984).[22] While many factors enter into his "cultural-linguistic model" for religion and theology, one that is clearly stated in his proposal is that "literary considerations are more important than historical-critical ones" for his approach (p. 123). In articulating a "paradigm shift" in method from history to "story" along literary/narrative, canonical lines he acknowledges indebtedness to Yale colleagues like Hans Frei (12-13, 137 n. 7), though his proposals are not identical with anyone else's at Yale. Particularly pertinent are his view of the Bible as a "vast, loosely structured non-fictional novel" (121, reflecting a statement by David Kelsey about Karl Barth's views) and how Lindbeck finds meaning in the world of the text, not outside it "in the objective realities to which it refers or in the experiences it symbolizes" (114), as in the "cognitive-propositional" and "experiential-expressive" approaches (16) which he rejects. The real world is the one which authoritative texts create, a world which can "absorb the universe" (117). Hence with Frei he opts for the terms "history-like" (*geschichtsähnlich*) and "narrative theology." Hence also the fears of some that "objective reality" is being lost.[23] How does this general approach work out when applied to the CA on bishops?

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[20]Goeser, "Historic Episcopate," 229. For further discussion see Michael Root, "The Augsburg Confession as Ecumenical Proposal: Episcopacy, Luther, and Wilhelm Maurer," *dialog* 28 (1987):223-32; R. Goeser, "Word of God, Church, and Ministry," *dialog* 29 (1990):195-201; and M. Root, "A Reply to Robert Goeser," *dialog* 30 (1991):63-66, chiefly on historical matters and ecumenical implications, rather than hermeneutical issues.

[21]Goeser, "Historic Episcopate," 228.

[22]George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984). See my discussion in "After Historical Criticism, What? Trends in Biblical Interpretation and Ecumenical, Interfaith Dialogues," forthcoming in the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*.

[23]As Avery Dulles put it in "Observations on George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*" (unpublished paper delivered at Yale Divinity School September 14, 1984), "For me, the church's claim to impose a doctrine in the name of revelation implies a claim of conformity to the *real order*, rather than a mere claim or power to regulate language" (italics added; cited in Gabriel Fackre, *The Christian Story*, vol. 2 [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987] 219 n. 7) with Fackre's own comment about the unclarity in the Lindbeck proposal with regard to the relation of "rules for discourse" to "objective reality." The Lindbeck-Dulles essay on the *Augsburg Confession* is indeed not entirely clear on method. Emphasis is placed on "making hermeneutically primary the text itself rather than collateral historical or systematic investigation." But the next sentence seems to stress authorial intent: "What counts above all are the expressed intentions of the confessors," but then it is added, "as manifest in the document" (pp. 158-59). See further *Theology and Dialogue: Essays in Conversation with George Lindbeck*, ed. Bruce D. Marshall (Notre Dame, IN: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1990), esp. 7-102, 149-63, 275-82.

1. Lindbeck's argument on CA 14 and the phrase *rite vocatus* "rests on his notion of a strict interpretation of the CA," namely: "that the *Augsburg Confession* cannot be interpreted by references to the early writings of Luther or Melanchthon," or in light of later confessional statements.[24] The focus for interpretation is on the CA as an existing document, to be understood on its own, apart from later developments, without invoking what its chief authors wrote elsewhere, prior to 1530.[25]

Put in terms of biblical criticism, the CA is here being interpreted as a finished text in its redacted state. The completed document is what counts. However, to ascertain the point or article around which the whole document revolves, a second step has been taken.

2. "Source criticism" is permitted by Lindbeck-Dulles at one point: examination was made into the sources behind CA Article 28 and indeed all of articles 22-28. These sources involved the various drafts of the Torgau Articles. Here, from source criticism, arises the notion that Article 28 on bishops was the first article drafted, around which the rest revolves. Here Maurer's painstaking treatment of the development of the CA is followed, though with little attention to the sources for articles 1-21.

3. "Oral tradition" or earlier "forms" do not exactly enter into the story of the development of the CA, but the use of Luther's earlier utterances or Melanchthon's comments, oral or eventually written, are excluded, methodologically.[26] To this, Goeser objects that it is pertinent what Luther said, for example, in a sermon of 1524: if bishops will ordain only those willing to deny the gospel, then we shall have to ordain evangelical pastors.[27] Or Melanchthon: "we will not allow that the papacy and bishops, monks and priests are the church... the church consists only of those in whom the Word is urged and promulgated."[28] Such evidence about the beliefs and intentions of the authors of the CA and documents behind it the Lindbeck-Dulles essay would exclude, even in doing theology today.

4. The historical events behind the text of the CA do not occupy much space in the Dulles-Lindbeck essay (contrary to Maurer's treatment). The political side of the CA—what in New Testament studies would be called the "social setting"—does not get much space either.

5. There is no disposition in the Lindbeck-Dulles article to understand the CA in light of subsequent events, even those in the summer of 1530, after June 30, let alone beyond that year. There is, indeed, a specific warning against such a procedure[29] because, it is claimed, Lutherans have too often tried to justify the new church structures they had to create after 1530 on the grounds that the CA was silent on such matters; plans to organize the ministry then become adiaphoral—congregational, consistorial, or episcopal types being equally valid. The answer of Lindbeck and Dulles is therefore to ignore subsequent developments and to make the CA text "hermeneutically primary... rather than collateral historical or systematic investigations" of Luther's

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[24]Ibid.

[25]Dulles & Lindbeck, *Confessing One Faith,* 157-58.

[26]Dulles & Lindbeck, *Confessing One Faith,* 158; cf. 152, however, for an exception where the *Large Catechism* and a sermon of Luther's are cited to support a point.

[27]Goeser, "Historic Episcopate," 215, citing WA 15,720:11-14.

[28]Goeser, "Historic Episcopate," citing C.R. I, 766.

[29]Dulles & Lindbeck, *Confessing One Faith,* 157-58.

We are dealing here with a particular and seemingly new type of interpretation, one that is not so much historical as literary.

thought or the confessions as a whole. To quote Lindbeck-Dulles: "The emphasis here is exactly where it was for the original audience, viz., on truth claims or propositions, on what was proposed for acceptance or rejection."[30]

On this fifth point these comments are necessary. The Lindbeck-Dulles move here is something like "canonical criticism" (compare Brevard Childs) in certain approaches to biblical studies. The individual document, hermeneutically sealed, is the authoritative canon, the decisive plateau of meaning. In this case, however, it is not a "canon within the canon," one document among the confessions in the *Book of Concord*, to be explored in its intertextuality with the *Apology* or other writings like the *Treatise*, but the CA *is* the canon. And it is to be read by itself, shorn of historical setting or development, except for the one glimpse at a source, the Torgau Articles, to establish the primacy of Article 28.

By this time it has become apparent that we are dealing here with a particular and seemingly new type of interpretation, one that is not so much historical as literary, one that freezes the process of development at a particular point in 1530. One may ask whether this does not reflect a literary/narrative theology approach to texts from what has sometimes been termed a "Yale School."[31] One can also wonder if it does not come close, unwittingly, to the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod statement in 1967, which insisted that "the authoritative Word for the church today is the canonical Word, not precanonical sources, forms, or traditions."[32]

The use of Maurer's research by Lindbeck and Dulles opens up a new hermeneutical question about how we read our confessions, the CA in this instance. Shall it be done historically or now literarily as "text"? Or both? And they have proposed a new center for the CA—not in Article 4 on Justification; or 3, on Christology; or 3-5, on the Holy Spirit; or even a constellation of articles on God's two ways of ruling the world and the church, through God's left hand and right hand (Articles 7-14 and 16); or "conscience" in Article 20 as "the heart of the CA."[33] Maurer can be cited to show

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[30]Dulles & Lindbeck, *Confessing One Faith*, 159.

[31]Cf. Brevard S. Childs, *The New Testament as Canon: An Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 541-46, Excursus III, "The canonical approach and the 'new Yale theology.'"

[32]Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations, "A Lutheran Stance Towards Contemporary Biblical Studies," The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, p. 9, point C, 1.

[33]Gerhard Ebeling, "Der Lauf des Evangeliums und der Lauf der Welt," in *Vom Amt des Laien in Kirche und Theologie: Festschrift für Gerhard Krause zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. H. Schröer and Gerhard Müller (Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1982) 238-39; cf. CA 20:17-18 (Latin) "This whole teaching is to be referred to that conflict of the terrified conscience, nor can it be understood apart from that conflict."

Ecumenically, are any of our bodies which name the name of Jesus Christ fully "church" without all who call on Jesus as Lord?

how "God's two ways of governing (two kingdoms)" runs through Article 28[34]; indeed, Maurer seems to propose "order" in state and church as the real theme of the CA, on which the doctrine of Justification provides "the new Reformation breakthrough."[35] Rather than any of these, Lindbeck and Dulles propose bishops as the heart of the *Augsburg Confession*. The topic, methods, and hermeneutic deserve further discussion.

In my own judgment, the more one considers the Lindbeck-Dulles essay, the more problematic it becomes on several counts. It reflects, in a quite specific, but sophisticated way, the position found in bits and pieces throughout much recent discussion: that (1) Lutheranism meant to be, and is, today also, but a movement in the church catholic, and (2) its doctrine of the ministry was an emergency one, gradually evolved after 1530. The crippled ship, without bishops at the helm, had to be jury-rigged, in order to sail along, somehow.

As to point (1), the ecclesiological question, it is debatable when Lutheranism shifted from being a "movement" to being a "church." The question is in part historical, in part sociological, but even more theological: what do you mean by "church"? Ecumenically, are any of our bodies which name the name of Jesus Christ fully "church" without all who call on Jesus as Lord? Or can "church" be used of this or that specific manifestation, doctrinally, geographically, structurally, so long as a vision of the whole is retained? In any case, it seems to me that H. E. Jacobs used the term rightly when he spoke of *The Lutheran Movement in England*[36] in the 1530s, but already at Augsburg the confessors were saying, "Our churches teach...." Here the understanding of "church" in CA 7 must be kept in mind, as well as contemporary findings from the New Testament period about what εκκλησια means.

As to (2), it is precisely the New Testament fluidity on ministry and the Reformation view of the church which allowed for a reshaping of existing ministries:

a) as a conservative Reformation, Lutheranism sought to conserve as much of existing structures as did not interfere with the preaching of the gospel;

b) the norm and basis for the Lutheran critique of the church and its structures, all churches, as in all other matters, was justification by faith; and

c) this framework allowed the reformers to operate with a certain pragmatic wisdom, so as to meet needs.

It could follow that Lutherans today are free to define, within such an approach,

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[34] *Historical Commentary*, 64-70, as exemplified in what Luther and Melanchthon wrote elsewhere, 71-89, cf. 89-132 for further ramifications.

[35] Ibid. 232, cf. 231-36.

[36] Philadelphia: General Council Publication House, 1916

what they understand bishops to be—remaining respectful of traditional models and structures, where possible; in light of the function to proclaim the gospel; and understanding bishops in the Lutheran structures to have their own intersystemic validity from the gospel.

In this ecumenical age it is desirable, indeed incumbent, to do this in a way that is as compatible as possible with structures in other churches. But the discouraging note is that it is highly unlikely that Roman Catholic, Anglican, Eastern Orthodox, Methodist, and other churches which have bishops, could agree on what bishops are and act simultaneously with Lutherans to share with each other an office (or role within the one office) of mutually recognized supervision. As Lindbeck and Dulles conclude, there are "open questions and unresolved problems" which remain,[37] between Lutheran and Catholics, and among other denominations. One of these is whether a strict reading of the CA confines its assertions about bishops solely to Roman bishops, and so does not apply to Anglican, Methodist, or other bishops.

But the major hermeneutical problem posed is this: will a non-historical-critical, more literary-narrative approach offer better prospects of solution, if the proposals we have examined commend themselves? Or is Christianity so historically rooted as to preclude such methodology?

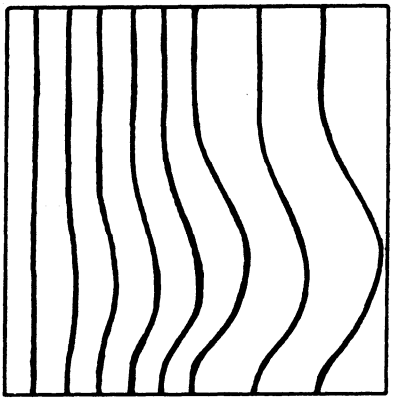
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[37]*Confessing One Faith*, 194.

Reconceiving Pregnancy

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Ethical reflection is usually thought of as a problem-solving enterprise, specifically aimed at the resolution of moral dilemmas. And indeed, this is an important goal of ethical analysis. But ethics also has to do with problem-*setting*, that is, with the assessment of the myths, paradigms, and metaphors that shape our perception of particular moral issues and the human situation in general.



Our perception of, and subsequent approach to, a moral issue is greatly influenced by what lies *behind* our eyes. We have access to the so-called "facts" of the situation *before* us only as they are filtered through and interpreted by the metaphors we bring to the situation. Yet we are surprisingly unconscious and dangerously uncritical of these interpretative frameworks in general. This is especially

evident in the abortion debate within the United States, where people of good will and deep moral convictions "talk right past one another."

In this essay I will illustrate just how significant problem-setting is to the ethical enterprise. To be exact, I will evaluate two of the prevailing metaphors for childbearing, attending with special care to the way these metaphors do—or in this case do not—take seriously women's experience. Then I will propose and defend an alternative metaphor for childbearing. Finally I will sketch some of the implications of this new way of imaging childbearing for the abortion debate.

One quick preliminary point needs to be established. Childbearing is unique among human activities. By this I mean simply, it is not quite like any other human activity. Consequently, *any* metaphorical comparison of it to another activity will fail to illumine all aspects of it and in some respects will distort our understanding of it. This is true of both the prevailing metaphors for childbearing I will criticize and the alternative I will propose. Given the nature of metaphorical thought, such trade-offs are inevitable. Behind any analogical wager is the conviction that what can be gained through the comparison outweighs what is lost. Thus metaphorical adequacy is in this sense always relative or a question of degree. Nevertheless such evaluation is crucial to the moral life.

Space-exploration metaphor

An analysis of current literature on reproduction reveals that there are two primary metaphors behind many of our conceptions of pregnancy. The first of these is what biomedical ethicist Caroline Whitbeck calls the *spaceship/astronaut* metaphor. In this framework fetuses are imaged as mini-astronauts floating about in the "inner" space of the womb, connected by an umbilical lifeline to their "mothership." Such a metaphor is especially prevalent in photographic and video essays, and in some medical accounts of pregnancy. The primary strength of this analogy is obvious: it highlights fetal dependence upon the mother and fetal vulnerability.

The weaknesses of this metaphor are equally obvious. First, mothers are not like objectifiable things, or machines, not even like one so complex as a spaceship. Mothers are persons. As such they ought not be subject to control or manipulation, either by fetal astronauts or legislative ground control centers, without due justification.

Second, fetuses are neither adults nor strangers, as would be your typical astronaut. Fetuses are more like newborn children. They are blood relations like children. Like neonates, they are immature in a myriad of ways. Like newborns, fetuses have voracious appetites and place nearly constant, at times taxing, demands on their caretakers.

Given the serious nature of these two points of disanalogy, one has to wonder why the spaceship/astronaut metaphor continues to prevail in the media and in some medical accounts. Perhaps those who continue to visualize pregnancy in this way are more familiar and comfortable with astronauts and spaceships than they are with infants and women.

Childrearing metaphor

At first glance the second common metaphor for childbearing, *childrearing*, seems to take women's experience much more seriously, though in significant ways this turns out not to be the case. The strengths of

Androcentric metaphors for pregnancy function to keep the control of reproduction out of the hands of women.

this analogy are obvious. Pregnant women are recognized as persons, though they tend to be defined in terms of and reduced to their maternal roles. Fetuses are seen as child-like, especially in the sense that they are defenseless, speechless, and vulnerable. (Interestingly, those who employ this metaphor most frequently tend not to emphasize the extraordinarily demanding nature of children.)

The weaknesses of this model are less obvious. First, though both the child and the fetus are dependent on others for their survival, a child's survival is not tied exclusively to the care of one particular individual. The father, a baby-sitter, or a state-appointed guardian could care for the child as well as the mother. In contrast, human gestation is such that only the mother can sustain the life of the fetus. This is a terribly important point of disanalogy, because the moral responsibility for such life-support is not hers alone. Both as a parent and as a citizen, the mother *shares* in the obligation to sustain fetal life. But when she bears a child to term, she carries more than her fair share, indeed she carries all, of this *joint* parental and social responsibility.[1]

Second, child care usually entails feeding, clothing, sheltering, and interacting with the child. It does not require the *bodily* forms of life support requisite for fetal survival. Even a breast-feeding mother knows that her husband, a baby sitter, or *in extremis* a foster parent could feed her child should her own mental, emotional, physical, or professional health or happiness demand it. Such is not the case for pregnant women. Childbearing is distinct from childrearing in that it requires of women *bodily* self-giving, for which there is at present no artificial substitute.

Given the serious nature of these two points of disanalogy, one has to wonder about why the childrearing metaphor for pregnancy continues to prevail without qualification. Once again the distinctive features of women's experience of pregnancy do not seem to be taken seriously by all those who enter in the abortion debate. Those who employ this metaphor must not know much about childrearing, especially the care of newborns. They must also not be very comfortable with the fact that women have the power to sustain fetal life *alone* and with the *bodily*/physical form of that power.

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[1] Ironically, this insight is not unique to feminist analyses. In his recent apostolic letter, "On the Dignity and Vocation of Women," Pope John Paul II writes: "Although both of them together are parents of their child, *the woman's motherhood constitutes a special 'part' in this shared parenthood*, and the most demanding part. Parenthood—even though it belongs to both—is realized much more fully in the woman, especially in the prenatal period.... It is therefore necessary that *the man* be fully aware that in their shared parenthood he owes *a special debt to the woman* (*Mulieris Dignitatem* [August 15, 1988]:69). Though the insight into the supererogatory nature of every pregnancy is neither unique or new, many feminists break with traditional interpretations of the moral implications of such a realization about gestational motherhood. See footnote 4.

In patriarchal cultures, like our own, women are not recognized as fully human persons, and consequently their distinctive experience is not viewed as potentially normative or decisive.[2] Far from coincidental, such androcentric metaphors for pregnancy are a crucial part of the patriarchal myth, for they function to keep the control of reproduction out of the hands of women. And this is crucial to the maintenance of a patriarchal way of life.

An alternative metaphor: organ donation

In contrast to these two prevailing metaphors for pregnancy, I wish to propose an analogy for childbearing that highlights women's distinctive *experience of* pregnancy, not simply her life supporting *role in* pregnancy. On the basis of the preceding analysis, it is clear that such a metaphor would need to recognize pregnant women as full persons, not baby-making machines or only maternal. It must spotlight the child-like rather than adult-like nature of fetuses both in the voracious character of their demands and in their vulnerability. Such a metaphor would need to emphasize the bodily nature of the life-support offered in pregnancy. It must underscore the way in which childbearing exceeds what can be fairly demanded of any one individual on the basis of joint parental and wider communal obligations to children.

With these requirements in mind, I propose that we consider the suggestion of philosopher Susan Mattingly and think for a while of childbearing as like *organ donation*, especially as it is exemplified by a parent whose bone marrow, kidney, or liver lobe are histocompatible with and vital to the very survival of his own young child. Historically we have tended to think that some kinds of moral activities (e.g., self-sacrifice for the sake of children) are more appropriate to and obligatory for mothers than for fathers. As an extra precaution against the infiltration of subconscious sexist biases, I further suggest that we image this donor-parent as a father at least initially. (Many men have reported to me that thinking about pregnancy in this way helps them enter more imaginatively into the experience of childbearing.)

Like pregnancy, organ donation is clearly a form of bodily life support. When I first began to think about this analogy six years ago, the health risks for both kidney donation and pregnancy were judged on average to be about the same. Since that time scientists have determined that kidney donation is slightly more risky, but the medical risks typical of each are still in the same ball park. The risk of dying faced by a prospective liver lobe donor is close to zero; the rate of post-operative complication is less than 5%. The vocational and emotional costs of childbearing are much greater on average than those associated with organ donation.

I believe when we reconceive of pregnancy as like organ donation we are more

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[2] This is not to argue that *only* women's experience is relevant to the abortion debate, that women's experience is univocal, or that even in its variety it is self-validating. Rather, it is to suggest that any serious account of pregnancy and abortion must take seriously the physical/bodily dimensions of those experiences, to which only women can have access. In this sense such an epistemological perspective is privileged. It is also to suggest, in concurrence with Ronald Green, that those who must bear the direct bodily consequences of a decision should have primary, though not exclusive or necessarily decisive, control over that decision (Ronald Green, "Conferred Rights and the Fetus" in *The Journal of Religious Ethics* [Spring 1974]:55-74).

able to take seriously the experience of pregnant women. Such a reconceptualization fulfills the four requirements specified above. Donor fathers are always recognized as full persons, whose lives include but are not reducible to parenthood. They are not usually viewed as "organ-making machines." We are especially sensitive to the serious and significant health risks which face the potential donor and to the serious costs to his vocation that are implied by such a significant medical procedure. The relationship between the donor-father and child-recipient is understood to be a *gift-relation.* His share of the joint parental and social responsibility to support the life of the child is exceeded by the immunological requirement that he, and he alone, sustain the child through this crisis period.

Bodily life support is extraordinary. To give a kidney, liver lobe, or bone marrow, even to one's own child, is to go beyond the call of parental duty. We do not, nor have we ever, legally required that histocom-patible fathers give a lobe of their liver to their child, even when it is known their child will die from advanced liver disease without it. The civil law has recognized for a long time that dependent children have a moral right to a reasonable portion of their parents' property and wealth, as evidenced in child support requirements. But such rights have not and ought not be extended to a parent's body. This is so because bodies are not mere possessions; they are primordially personal.[3]

Moral implications

By now I'm sure some of the moral implications of such a metaphor for pregnancy have become obvious to you.

1. When childbearing is reframed in this way, the invasive element in women's experience of pregnancy is illuminated. Though bodily gift giving can and perhaps in many instances ought to be encouraged, by definition it cannot be required. Thus, pregnancy ought not be made mandatory; abortion ought not be prohibited. Because (a) in every pregnancy woman carries more than her fair share of the child-support responsibilities; and (b) bodily self-giving ought never be required, even of parents. Just as we do not now legally mandate that a histocompatible donor father give his kidney to his child, even though that child would die from renal failure without it, and just as we do not now require by law that parents run into burning buildings to save their children, if we are to be consistent we cannot require of a mother that she carry her fetus to term.

2. Furthermore, as my proposed metaphor reveals, the decision to bear a child, like that to donate organs, is a complex

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[3] In a 1984 report, "Abortion in Perspective," the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod noted that in those rare situations where maternal life was gravely endangered abortion was morally permissible. They noted in that regard: "Even in such circumstances a mother may choose to risk her own life as an act of love, but such an act of self-giving cannot be required. It must be freely given, not imposed" (35). Two questions arise. When is the threat of maternal death sufficiently high to render mandating pregnancy problematic? When the odds are 90/10? 50/50? Why cannot pregnancy be mandated in such circumstances? I am arguing that the gravity of the risks faced by women in such circumstances is not the decisive factor. The life-threatening character of these situations merely dramatizes the *bodily* character of the life *giving* intrinsic to every pregnancy. This is the crucial difference which explains why we ought to garner wages for the sake of recovering delinquent child support payments but not prohibit abortion.

decision through which the gift-giver attempts to serve and balance a number of competing values. Though this may be obvious, a brief rehearsal of the competing responsibilities faced by our potential donor-father may prove useful. The donor's general physical and emotional health and life-situation, the value of and likely impact of donation upon his life-plan (including present as well as future vocational callings and family and social life ramifications), the extent to which the community (family, church, and townspeople) will support (both financially and emotionally) the donor and his other dependents, the value of the recipient's life as well as the recipient's best interests (which are not in all cases obviously served by extending that child's life), and any special responsibilities of a contractual origin that the donor may have to either the recipient or others—all of these factors are normally considered relevant to a decision regarding organ donation.

When childbearing is seen as an analogous activity, these same factors are seen as likewise morally relevant to a woman's decision regarding pregnancy. Social scientist Theodore Ooms, who listens carefully to women speak about their childbearing and abortion decisions, notes that the language of "care, responsibilities, and relationship" is emphasized by *all* these women.

Obviously there is considerable room for conflict among the values outlined above. It is not always possible to balance them. In some circumstances the goods in question may be mutually exclusive. When this occurs, morally legitimate concerns must be sacrificed for the sake of other values. Thus abortion, like the refusal to donate an organ, is never a "simple" valuation of a single factor, such as the value of fetal life or maternal health. Pregnancies become problematic when no way of balancing the various responsibilities outlined above can be found. Whether terminated or not, these pregnancies never have morally "happy" endings. At best in such tragic circumstances, one aims to follow the least evil course of action.

Pregnancies become problematic when no way of balancing the various responsibilities can be found.

3. This construal of childbearing reveals that images of women as whimsically seeking abortions must be denounced as false images of women. They are products of misogyny. Exclusive focus on the value and vulnerability of fetal life and phrases like "abortion on demand" and "abortion for mere convenience" obscure the heavy and potentially conflicting demands nascent life can put on pregnant women. Those who take women's experience seriously could never describe an abortion, whether spontaneous or induced, as a matter of little consequence. Though women are certainly capable of cold-blooded ruthlessness, the decision to induce abortion is almost always much more ambiguous and complex.

4. It follows as well that women ought not be deceived about or veiled from the developmental reality of fetal life, a realistic assessment of the maternal health risks, and vocation costs, or from the truth about

any other factor relevant to the decision. Both ignorance and paternalism rob women of the opportunity to face their situation and their decision as moral adults with integrity, courage, and self-respect.

5. When pregnancy is so reconceived, the heart of the moral problem regarding abortion changes. The key question is no longer: what moral status should we ascribe to fetal life? Instead, the moral question becomes: Should we encourage or discourage such self-sacrificial giving on the part of women who face problematic pregnancies? At the heart of the moral problem is a theological issue. This essay has not so much solved the abortion problem, as it has redefined it.

A theological exploration of the ethic of self-sacrifice, particularly of the habitual self-sacrifice of women, is a topic for another paper. However, let me sketch briefly some of the questions which might be raised in such an analyses. On the one hand, is not bodily self-giving celebrated in the Eucharist? Would not a theology of the cross call women to such sacrificial activity? Could not childbearing under such circumstances be a prophetic witness against our culture's flight from suffering and sacrifice, and against its endorsement of crass egoism?[4]

On the other hand, can not sin be experienced as self-abnegation, especially by many women in our culture? Do we expect more sacrificial behavior from women than from men, especially in regard to children? Ought we not be suspicious of attempts to sanctify the "crucifixion" of women? Can meeting only the needs of others be a way of evading responsibility for one's own life and development? Does not pregnancy itself illumine for us the interconnection (rather than opposition) of self- and other-love?

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[4] This is precisely the interpretation of gestational motherhood offered by Pope John Paul II. He describes it as a "special kind of prophetism" (*Mulieris Dignitatem*, 108) and "that 'genius' which belongs to women" (112). He explicitly links gestational motherhood to the "self-emptying" of the Paschal Mystery (72).

Celebrating and Sharing the Gift: Reflections on Jacob, Israel's Ancestor

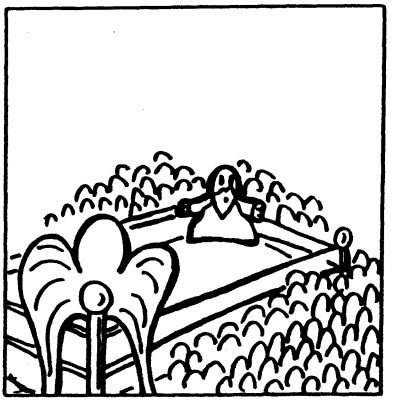
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Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

To do evangelism is to speak or embody to other people the gracious message of God; it is to celebrate and to share the gift. Generosity pervades this theme: *God's* generosity in giving us the gift, and *our own* generosity in acknowledging and celebrating the giver, and in handing on the gift by word or deed to those all around us.

We hold evangelism conferences today because we have grown shy, or complacent, or even callous about sharing that gift. All too often we confuse advertising with sharing, numerical growth with conversion, or that which we possess with the gift. When we have conferences or workshops that include segments about celebrating and sharing the gift with African-American, Asian, Hispanic, gay and lesbian, and Native American communities, we are admitting that too often the church's evangelism has been only the perpetuation of our culture, our race, our lifestyle, and our denomination. We and the people of our parishes need training in speaking the good news and in ministering within a culture other than our own if we are to see and celebrate the gifts others have, and if our words and actions are going to make any sense at all to them. But most of all we need to receive the gift as gift, to see how the words and actions of God flood in upon us in unexpected and undeserved ways that are God's good news for our desperate situations. Before we can confess the gift for others, we need to experience again the gospel as a fresh and unexpected gift. It is the gift that will *empower* and motivate us; it is the gift that will *send* us to speak and embody that gift to others.

To learn what the gift is, and the varieties of shapes in which it comes, I invite you to study with me three accounts of Jacob in the book of Genesis: his dream at

Bethel (Genesis 28), his wrestling with God at Penuel (Genesis 32), and his reunion with his brother Esau (Genesis 33). Each of these accounts focuses on what Samuel Terrien has described as the elusive presence of God. The presence of God is elusive because it eludes all our attempts to make it routine, predictable, or controllable. Each story exposes us to unique aspects of the gift, unique qualities of the receiver, and unique features in the interface between gift and receiver.



Jacob at Bethel

On Jacob's trip from Beersheba to Haran, he stopped at sunset at the old sanctuary of Bethel. After turning a rock from the place into a makeshift pillow, he lay down and had a wonderful dream filled with both pictures and words. What he saw depicted was a ladder, or better, a ramp or staircase. One end was planted on the ground; the other end reached up into the sky. Standing beside Jacob was Yahweh (Gen 28:13)—or was he seated at the top of staircase (Gen 28:12)? In any case, Yahweh repeated to Jacob the ancestral promise with its twin gifts: the gift of the land and the gift of multiple descendants. These descendants of Jacob would spread to every corner of the land: west, east, north, and south. Moreover, all the families of the earth—all nations!—would obtain a blessing through Jacob and his descendants.

Hans Walter Wolff writes: "Israel intermingles with the nations: this is the manner by which Yahweh himself brings about fulfillment of the blessing.... The subsequent Jacob-Laban cycle brings further illustrations. Now the Aramean Laban confesses to Jacob, in 30:27, 'I have learned that Yahweh has blessed me because of you.' In verse 31 Jacob takes up the catchword: 'You had little before I came... and Yahweh has blessed you since I have been here.' This time the blessing comes to the nations in the abundance of herds; with his skill as a shepherd Jacob effects a blessing among the Arameans.... At the end there exists here, too, a covenant of peace between Jacob and Laban (31:51f.)" (*The Vitality of Old Testament Traditions*, 58-59). Jacob, God's elect child, brings material blessings to his most bitter rival.

The promise continues: "I will be with you." Can you imagine a more simple or profound way to express the gift? That Wholly Other One, whom we call God, whose moral excellence stands in sharp contrast to Jacob's sin and our own, promises divine accompaniment. There can be no criticism, no alienation, if God goes along on Jacob's trip, with acceptance and providence. Yes, God will maintain this care for Jacob—I will keep you and I will bring you back to this land. God will not abandon him until God accomplishes everything promised to all the ancestors.

When Jacob woke up he was astonished. He had not known that Yahweh would be in this place; here he had experienced the terrifying and fascinating mys-

tery. He celebrated this gift with well-known words: "This is nothing but the house of God and the gate of heaven." His former pillow became a standing stone, on which he poured oil. He changed the name of this place to mark its changed status: now it would be called Bethel—house of God; formerly it was called Luz.

Jacob's dedication of this site was his celebration of the gift. And then he promised to share: he made a vow that if God would protect him, give him food and clothing, and return him safely home, then Yahweh would be his God and he would tithe everything given to him by God. His vow repeats for himself and for us the substance of God's own promise to him.

How do we interpret such a text? We could see it as a collection of etiologies, that is, stories told to explain how certain customs arose and why they were considered binding on readers of the story. Thus, this story states that Bethel, one of two great sanctuaries of the Northern kingdom, was a worship site for Jacob/Israel, the great ancestor of the faith, after whom the people Israel is named. Some have seen Jacob's anointing of the stone as the initiation of a rite later observed at the Bethel sanctuary. Still others claim that this story supports payment of a tithe to the Bethel sanctuary, a stewardship plan mentioned centuries later by the great prophet Amos (4:4). The etiology of all etiologies, of course, is the one which explains how the site came to be called Bethel in the first place. These etiologies may explain in part why the story was remembered and retold over the centuries in Israel, but these etiologies are details of interpretation, not the mother lode.

Many scholars see here a mixture of the old Pentateuchal sources J and E, with J claiming vv. 10-11a, 13-16, and 19a and E vv. 11b-12, 17-18, 20-21a, and 22. There may be truth here as well, though recent students of the Pentateuch are becoming increasingly wary of breaking up literary paragraphs into hypothetical sources. Are we to understand the contrast between the names Yahweh and Elohim and between Yahweh's standing directly by Jacob and his enthronement at the top of a staircase as different details from separate sources, or as contrasting nuances in a single account? Whatever its pre history in oral tradition or as parallel sources, the story is now related is a whole.

In this final form of the text we see Jacob experiencing the elusive presence of God. He meets him eerily, in a dream, and sees an alternative picture of God that emphasizes his transcendence and the mediating role of angels. This God gives him promises germane to the life of an ancient peasant: land, descendants, protection, return to his homeland, not to mention a commission to share his blessing with all the families of the earth.

In this final form, and even in its earlier context in J, this Jacob is something other than a hero of the faith: he is a deceiver, who cheated his brother Esau out of his inheritance and who was running for his life because of the furor in his family of origin when he stopped off at Bethel. He was the kind of person most despised in our families and in our congregations, greedily grasping for all he could get of his father's will. Only his mother was able to save his life and send him to seek refuge with her brother Laban. She urged him to stay there until Esau would cool off. Jacob is no pietist, praying himself to sleep, modeling receptivity toward divine revelation. What he saw and heard was sheer undeserved gift. He responded to this gift by celebrating it and by erecting a pillar and promising to build a new temple. He also promised to share his gift by committing himself financially to the sanctuary and by announcing that this

In appearing to Jacob, God appeared to one who was totally undeserving. This appearance empowered him to be faithful and brought about a complete change of heart.

spot where he had experienced God was the house of God and the gate of heaven.

Jacob saw and heard God—and lived to tell others about it. In appearing to him, God appeared to one who was totally undeserving. This appearance empowered him to be faithful and brought about a complete change of heart. What he *spoke* at Bethel he *embodied* in Syria. His presence with his corrupt father-in-law Laban brought with it great prosperity for his wife's family of origin. Both his speech at Bethel and his benefactions in Syria were the word of God communicated to others. He modeled the missionary role.

Genesis 32: Jacob at Peniel

Read again this wonderful story:

During the night Jacob got up, took his two wives, his two concubines, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. He took them and sent them across the stream; he sent across all he had.

Jacob was left by himself, and a "human figure" wrestled with him until the break of day. When this person saw that he was unable to win, he touched the socket of Jacob's thigh-joint, and the socket of his thigh-joint was dislocated as he wrestled with the "human figure."

The "human figure" said, "Let me go for dawn is breaking."

Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

The "human figure" asked him, "What is your name?"

He said, "Jacob."

The "human figure" responded, "No longer shall your name be pronounced Jacob, but Israel, for you have wrestled with God and with human beings, and you have won."

Jacob then insisted, "Tell me your name."

He answered, "Why do you ask for my name?" Still he blessed him there.

Jacob called the name of that place Peniel, for he thought, "I have seen God face to face, and my life has been spared."

The sun rose for him as he passed Penuel. He was limping because of his thigh. That is why the Israelites to this day do not eat the sinew of the socket of the thigh-joint because the human one had struck Jacob on that sinew. (Gen 32:22-32)

This text is eerie. Here we have another story that takes place at or near a sanctuary, this time a place called Penuel, meaning "face of God." Jacob, the ancestor of Israel, finds himself alone with a fierce antagonist with whom he wrestles all night long. Is this antagonist a human being, as v. 25 seems to say, or is this antagonist the God Yahweh, as we might conclude from the fact that he extends a blessing to Jacob and sovereignly refuses to disclose his own name. Even the interpretation of the name Israel by the antagonist hints at the divine character of the antagonist: "You have

wrestled with God—with me!—and with human beings, and you have won."

But something seems wrong from a historical perspective in concluding that this antagonist is God. Divine-human wrestling matches are not likely to end in draws or in the seeming victory of the human partner. Moreover, the antagonist feels compelled to get away at sun-up, almost as if he could not stand the light of day. He also seems to be a dirty fighter, who dislocated the hip of Jacob when he could not get away from his grasp. These eerie or even demonic characteristics have persuaded many that the antagonist in this story at some earlier point in the tradition was a demon, who guarded the ford of the river Jabbok, could not stand the full disclosure of daylight, was nearly bested by Jacob, but who finally won a victory by magically throwing Jacob's hip out of joint.

The story is also shot through with etiological elements, the kind of short narrative that answers the childlike question "Why?"

—Why do we Israelites not eat the sciatic nerve (*nervus ischiadicus*) of animals, a taboo not noted elsewhere in Scripture? Answer: Because that nerve had been damaged in an eerie, nocturnal battle.

—Why was it that our great ancestor Jacob, who might be imagined as a perfect specimen of the human race, was remembered as having a disabling limp? Answer: That was because his hip was severely damaged in the process of a wrestling match with a human-demon-deity.

—Why is it that we are called Israel, when our most important ancestor was named Jacob? And what does that name mean anyway? Answer: Jacob became Israel by the grace of the mysterious, wrestling stranger, who went on to interpret the name Israel as signifying that Jacob had wrestled with God and with human beings and had won.[1] Significantly, Jacob became Israel as he reentered the Holy Land at the Jabbok river. The land is never incidental to Israel's existence or self-understanding.

—Finally, why does the famous trans-Jordanian cultic site have a name like Penuel (face of God), and how did this site get linked to our own heritage? Answer: The place became Penuel or Peniel because Jacob renamed the site after his eerie encounter with the deity: I have seen God "face to face" and yet my life has been spared. Never mind that Exod 33:20 cites a divine oracle that no one can see the face of God and live. Never mind that Moses was allowed to see only God's back parts and not his face (Exod 33:21-23). Both Bethel and Penuel were important worship sites for Israel because they had played important roles in the life of Jacob.

But neither a strategy of historical reconstruction, that sees this story as a dim memory of a fight between Jacob and a river hag, nor an explanation of the etiological trivia covers all the interpretive bases. The story can also be seen as a reflection on the relative supremacy of God and of the subordinate yet heroic role of Jacob, as a study of the three conversational exchanges will make clear.

In the first exchange, Jacob is clearly the stronger:

> The "human figure" said, "Let me go for dawn is breaking."
> Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

Jacob not only declines the desperate demand of his antagonist; he also makes his

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[1]Modern scholars still puzzle over the etymology of the word Israel, with the best educated guess centering on the meaning "God contests" [for them] or "May God contest" [for them].

counter proposal: There will be freedom for the antagonist only if he blesses Jacob. Jacob had extorted a blessing from his father, and now he uses the desperate situation of his antagonist to seek an additional blessing.

In the second conversational exchange, the antagonist is clearly stronger:

> The "human figure" asked Jacob, "What is your name?"
> He said, "Jacob."
> The "human figure" responded, "No longer shall your name be pronounced Jacob, but Israel, for you have wrestled with God and with human beings, and you have won."

The one who gives a name is clearly superior, yet the antagonist acknowledges the heroic dimensions of Jacob's nocturnal battle: he had wrestled with God and humans and "won." Jacob may have hoped for the blessing of more children or more material goods; instead he received a new identity as Israel.

The third conversational exchange complicates our assessment of who was the victor: Jacob, who initiates this conversation, then insisted,

> "Tell me your name."
> The antagonist answered, "*Why* do you ask for my name?" Still he blessed him there.

The antagonist's indignant question, "Why do you ask for my name?" is a none too subtle refusal to disclose his name. Just as the angel refused to disclose its name to Manoah, Samson's father (Judg 13:17-18), so the divine figure here affirms that God is not someone to be controlled, manipulated, or pushed around—even by a strong ancestor figure. The name Yahweh is not revealed until the time of Moses. But the resolution to the contest between Jacob and the antagonist is complicated: "Still he [the antagonist] blessed him [Jacob] there." Jacob was not cursed. Rather, he emerged from this encounter vindicated or blessed. As the subsequent account will make clear, he lives with new power and new freedom, but also with new weakness—he limps forever after. Frederick Buechner has called this event The Magnificent Defeat. Perhaps the strength of Jacob is made perfect in this weakness.

> What seems most real and most impressive to us may be so colored by our cultural parochialism that others will see in it only *our* claim to the numinous, and not their own.

What are we to make of this encounter with the gift? "How awesome is this place" had been Jacob's appraisal at Bethel. How even more awesome is this wrestling match with a supernatural figure. Jacob had stepped on dangerous territory: he had seen God face to face, and yet lived to tell about it.

He lived to tell about it, to celebrate it and to share it. And yet we encounter here a problem that also has modern repercussions. Our deepest encounter with God is sometimes almost ineffable, almost inexpressible. We can celebrate it and share it, but it may not be the encounter with God that others will find meaningful. How im-

portant this is in cross-cultural communication, in witnessing among a community alien from our own. What seems most real and most impressive to us may be so colored by our cultural parochialism that others will see in it only *our* claim to the numinous, *our* impressive experience, and not their own. Those who recited this tradition and brought it to its present form tried to bring it closer to an orthodox standard. They talked not of an antagonistic river demon, but of a man who wrestled with Jacob, or they identified the antagonist with Godself. We all are uncomfortable with numinous encounters that are unpredictable or not carefully protected by the familiar contours of revelation.

The Jacob of this account at Penuel is not the sneak thief running for his life after cheating his brother, as was the Jacob at Bethel. He is a mature figure, returning home after 21 years, after his mother apparently had died, and after he had survived the wily cheating of his uncle and father-in-law Laban. He is the importunate Jacob, holding onto the gift, demanding a blessing, keeping a strong lock on his antagonist. His prevailing over the antagonist is defeat as well as victory. Interpreters have often seen Jacob's wrestling as a model of the righteous pray-er. The prophet Hosea remarked:

> He strove with the angel and
> prevailed,
> he wept and sought his favor.
> (Hos 12:4a).

The apocryphal book of Wisdom observes:

> When a righteous man (Jacob) fled his
> brother's wrath,
> Wisdom guided him on straight
> paths...
> she kept him safe from those who lay
> in wait for him;
> in his arduous contest she gave him
> the victory,
> so that he might learn that godliness is
> more powerful than anything.
> (Wis 10:10-12).

Without question the character of Jacob is transformed through this event. Earlier he had deceived his father and cheated his brother; he had been locked in a dog-eat-dog struggle with his equally crafty father-in-law. After this event he sues for peace with Esau (Genesis 33) and condemns his sons Simeon and Levi for treating the inhabitants of Shechem violently and unfaithfully (Genesis 34). This encounter with God resulted in radical transformation.

Genesis 33: Esau as the face of God

The third encounter with God in the Jacob stories follows immediately after the struggle at Penuel in the story of Jacob's reconciliation with Esau. While the first encounter had happened during a dream and the second at night, the third encounter takes place in broad daylight. No sooner had Jacob left Penuel than he caught sight of Esau coming with 400 men. Jacob had two wives, two concubines, and 11 sons and 1 daughter, according to the context. These 17 people of Jacob were outnumbered 23.5 to 1 by the people of Esau, and all but one person in Jacob's entourage was a female or a child. Jacob prepared for the worst.

At the front of his company he placed his two concubines with their children; next came Leah with her 7 children; last of all came his favorite Rachel, with their son Joseph. Benjamin had not yet been born. If the encounter with Esau would go badly, Rachel and Joseph would be the last to be lost.

Jacob did not hide out at the rear. Rather, he went in front of his entourage and bowed

himself to the ground seven times as he approached his brother. Esau's reaction was unpredictable and dramatic: Esau ran to meet him, embraced him, fell on his neck, and kissed him. Both cried.

"Who are all these people with you?" Esau asked.

"The children whom God has graciously granted me," Jacob responded. Claus Westermann notes that his children were not merely the blessing of the creator; they were signs of God's gracious presence. God's favor upon Jacob had determined what had happened to him in the last twenty-one years.

After Jacob did his obeisance, the concubines and their children drew near and bowed low, as did Leah and her children, and finally also Rachel and Joseph.

"What is the purpose of all this band of people?" Esau demanded.

"To find favor in your eyes," was the reply.

Esau responded generously: "I have plenty, my brother. You keep whatever is yours."

These words come from the mouth of a wounded brother. It was Esau, after all, who had lost out on the inheritance through the stealth of Rebekah and Jacob. Esau had pitifully asked his father at that time, "Have you not reserved a blessing for me?" (Gen 27:36). And the only blessing he had received from Isaac might as well have been a curse:

> Behold, away from the fatness of the earth shall your dwelling be,
> and away from the dew of heaven on high.
> By your sword you shall live,
> and you shall serve your brother....
> (Gen 27:39-40)

Esau had hated Jacob then and had vowed to kill him as soon as his father had died.

But now Esau responded generously: "I have plenty, my brother. You keep whatever is yours." Esau did not want a handout, a bribe, charity, or welfare. Jacob approached Esau with political propriety, and Esau said, "I don't need anything." Jacob had coveted these gifts so much that he had muscled his way into sole possession of them. Now when he is willing to share them, his brother brushes them off as unneeded.

Jacob was not willing to settle for such unilateral generosity. "Since I have found favor in your eyes, please accept my present. In seeing your face it has been like seeing the face of God since you have received me with such generosity."

For Jacob seeing the face of his generous and forgiving brother was like seeing the face of God. He had expected hostility and arranged his family for the worst possible disaster. He was met with forgiveness and acceptance. When Jacob had earlier sent a series of gifts to Esau, he expressed the hope he would get to see Esau's face and that Esau might accept Jacob's face favorably (Gen 32:1-21). He had not imagined what seeing the face of Esau would mean. The moment of reconciliation with Esau—traditional father of the Edomites, that most hated of peoples in most Old Testament traditions—that moment of reconciliation with Esau was like seeing the face of God. Jacob had greeted Esau ceremoniously, with all the protocol of appearing at a royal hearing: he bowed down seven times, he used self-deprecating forms of speech, and he presented gifts of homage. His formal actions surround and contrast with the more forthright and spontaneous actions of Esau, who merely greeted Jacob as a long-lost brother. Which of the two showed love? Which of the two demonstrated reconciliation? The formality of Jacob seems cold and aloof in contrast with the true, heart-felt

love of Esau. By his generosity Esau revealed something new about God.

Implications for our evangelism

What is the *gift* we celebrate and share? That is the question each evangelist must ask. Is it the God of orthodoxy, properly enthroned at a great distance, at the top of a mighty staircase, with angels shuttling back and forth in proper liturgical form and vestment, and with God repeating the promises of land, children, and providence to the poor, miserable, run-away sinner, who is Jacob or you and I? Yes, that is the way the gift comes to many of us. It came to us in traditional categories, in law and gospel, to people trained within the cultural climate of Christendom. It is a meaningful and powerful gift. It is the one that has nurtured and sustained me. It is the gift *celebrated* and *shared* in our liturgy and our creeds. It is the controlling vision, the canonical touchstone, the story we must teach our children. But it is not the only gift.

What is the gift we celebrate and share? Is it the unconventional and undocumentable revelation of God, in unusual and uncomfortable guise, with questionable pedigree, like the human-demon-angel-God who wrestled with Jacob? For Jacob and his heirs this moment disclosed so clearly the face of God that he named the site "face of God" or Penuel. For some this might seem like a theology of glory rather than of the cross. It may well be that the Bible and the church have regarded such encounters warily and considered them dangerous and nonmainstream. And yet, for charismatics and evangelicals in our day, in countless ways and in untold numbers, they have learned that God loves them and cares for them and redeems them through Jesus Christ. They have learned this in ways that may never be our own, but whose validity for them—and for many among us—is no less sure that the ways in which God's love has become known among us.

The passion for inclusiveness in the ELCA is not so much because we have so much to give "them," but because "they" have so much to give us.

What is the gift we celebrate and share? There is also mission in reverse, evangelism from the outsider, forgiveness from the once hate-filled but now generous Esau. Our missiologists urge upon us these days a spirit of hospitality and acceptance, a willingness and eagerness to learn from the two-thirds world and from cultures other than our own. The passion for inclusiveness in the ELCA is not so much because we have so much to give "them," but because "they" have so much to give us: different experiences, different ways to express and articulate the faith, different ways to display obedience, different ways to celebrate and share. The gift can come through an Edomite, from the abused, from the hated, from the despised, from those who have been ripped off by the establishment. They receive us so warmly. To encounter them is to encounter the face of God. To learn from

other cultures is not to seek other Gods, but to learn more about our God from those who have experienced or discovered this God in separation from us or even when oppressed by us. This God is our God and can become so more and more. Jacob proceeded on his way after his reconciliation with Esau until he arrived at Shechem. There he set up an altar dedicated not to Qosh, god of the Edomites, but to El, the God of the people Israel. The God of tradition and of orthodoxy can become better known through the experiences and confession of those different from ourselves.

Genesis 33 represents Jacob confessing his sin and Esau absolving him, though neither brother talks about sin or forgiveness. To do mission is to speak and embody the message of God to others. In Jacob's gifts to Esau he practices restitution. Esau could have responded with hostility, anger, warfare—after all, he had 400 men, a 23.5 to 1 advantage.

Three words set the theme for this essay: gift, celebrate, and share.

I have suggested that focusing on the *gift* is the clue to renewed evangelism since that gift has the power to enable us to speak and embody the good news, and because that gift itself sends us. We do not do evangelism because the church says we should, or because our guilt forces us to. The old stories of Jacob demonstrate that the gift can come in a variety of ways, each appropriate to a given condition in life. Despite the variety of ways in which we experience the gift, our many voices lead to one great song.

Celebrate has a ring of joy to it, but it also connotes praise to God for the gift. But what happens when we praise God? I suppose God benefits from it, but when we praise God we announce God's benefactions to a narrower or wider community. Praise differs in this way from thanks. I can thank you for a gift one-to-one. When I praise you, when I celebrate your or God's goodness, I do that so that also others may hear.

And finally, the word *share*. Every religious experience is at root a missionary experience, an evangelistic experience. When one experiences God, one wants to let others know about it. We are so dazzled by the market mentality that we often confuse sharing with the results of sharing, we confuse sharing with church growth.

To paraphrase St. Paul (1 Cor 3:6): I want to celebrate and share the gift; I want to tell others about it and embody its implications for interpersonal and societal wholeness in my life.

I trust God to give the increase.

A Seamless Garment—African Understandings of Wholeness

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In the fascinating challenge of honest cross-cultural communication, mutual enrichment is inevitable. One aspect, among many, of African thought and practice which has etched my personality ineradicably is the African Traditional understanding of wholeness. This holistic awareness manifests itself philosophically, politically, socially, and religiously. Such a theoretical and practical grasp of wholeness uniquely enables Africans to resonate with, and be receptive to, the Christian revelation of wholeness in Christ Jesus.

Philosophically

"I am because we are" is a philosophy expressed throughout Africa. In the Xhosa language of South Africa one encounters the saying, "A person has personhood because of persons." Contrarily a person alone is depersonalized. It is not true that the individual alone is considered of little worth, rather the individual is of immense worth by virtue of membership in the human family. The "we" which enhances the worth of the "I" is in turn enriched by the multitude of individuals of which it is constituted. This philosophy invites concern for the general weal, for the commonwealth can be no better than its citizens. Furthermore, to the degree that the human family is good, members of the family participate in that goodness. The practical consequence of this philosophy is a spirit of cooperation rather than competition.

Any number of African proverbs echoes this philosophy. "Only the gathered fingers beat the drum." "One finger alone does not kill a louse." "In unity there is strength."

Alex Haley was driven by the urge to recover his roots, without which he felt like a motherless child. Inverting the unconscious humor of Yogi Berra who said, "If

you don't know where you are going, you might not get there," Haley and the African might say, "If you don't know where you've come from, you don't know where you are," or "If you don't know whom you have come from, you don't know who you are." In fact in *Roots* Kizzy made it clear that she could not marry Chicken George because "he has forgotten where he came from and who he is."

The African family, too, manifests wholeness. In the Western nuclear family or single parent family there is minimal social undergirding. In the extended family one is surrounded by a supportive network of fathers, mothers, and assorted kinfolk, even children born out of wedlock. This family, in turn, is part of a community, and the community includes the living, the living-dead, and the unborn. Mercy Amba Oduyoye, an articulate theologian of Nigeria, writes,

> Africans recognize life as life-in-community. We can truly know ourselves if we remain true to our community, past and present. The concept of individual success or failure is secondary. The ethnic group, the village, the locality, are crucial in one's estimation of oneself. Our nature as beings-in-relation is a two-way relation: with God and with our fellow human beings.[1]

Desmond Tutu expresses it this way: "The African understands in his bones, as it were, the meaning of corporate personality."[2]

One day in the course of linguistic research I experienced profoundly the African sense of the indivisibility of the human race in what to me was a most unexpected place. I was curious to study the phonology of one of the two "click" languages found in Tanzania, this one popularly called *Kindiga*. I asked an elder of this hunting-gathering people what his ethnic self-designation was. He replied, "I am a *Hadza*." Continuing, I inquired what he might call me, assuming that it would be something like white man or stranger or even enemy. His astounding reply was, "You are a *Hadza*." Then I asked, "What are you and I together called?" He said, "We are *Hadzapii*" (the plural of *Hadza*). In essence, then, this elder was saying, "I am a person. You are a person. We are persons." Often one thinks that a small, remote, beleaguered ethnic group confronting possible extinction would be very xenophobic. This man, on the contrary, revealed his holistic understanding of the human family. Never have I been so honored as to be accepted on my first encounter with a total stranger as one with him in human solidarity, irrespective of our vast cultural differences.

Not only does the African feel a wholeness with the human family, but senses a oneness with nature itself, a "cosmic oneness" as John V. Taylor puts it.[3] The Swahili word for human being is *mwananchi*, a child of the earth. Dr. George Tinker told us that this view is shared by Native Americans. Their frequent use of a circle reveals their primordial sense of unbrokenness. In their traditional religious rites they stand in a circle. As Christians they join hands in a circle, but as Traditionalists they did not consider it necessary to join hands, for the soil on which they stood in a circle joined

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[1] Mercy Oduyoye, "The Value of African Religious Beliefs and Practices for Christian Theology" in *African Theology en Route*, edited by Kofi Appiah-Kubi and Sergio Torres (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1979), 110ff.

[2] Desmond M. Tutu, "Whither African Theology?" in *Christianity in Independent Africa*, edited by Fashole-Luke, Gray, Hastings, Tasie (London: Rex Collings, 1978), 366.

[3] John V. Taylor, *Primal Vision* (London: SCM Press, 1963), 72.

them in a mutual tie with the common earth as children of the soil.

Kwesi A. Dickson asserts that the African shares kinship with nature, but nature is not considered an object of worship but a part of God's creative activity. In discussing the Israelitic view of land he writes, "The land, then was the basis of the people's identity. There is no thought of land *itself* being divine, or having divinity in it. It is simply the land that God gave them. Thus God and Nature are not confused; Nature... is created by God.... The land, in African as well as Israelite thought, is the basis of group consciousness."[4]

From a South African perspective Gabriel Setiloane reminds us, "A child's umbilical cord is buried into the soil, into the same soil in which his ancestors are buried, thus linking him to them where they are. If he is removed permanently from that place the cord which ties him to them is broken."[5]

Politically

Although Tanzania has over 120 distinct ethnic groups, in the quest for liberation from colonialism it set aside its ethnic priorities to achieve wholeness as a nation. For the sake of freedom and national cohesion it was no longer kosher to emphasize one's ethnic origin, because all were to consider themselves Tanzanians. Julius Nyerere, Tanzania's first president, championed the use of Swahili as a unifying political tool, and espoused *Ujamaa* (familyhood) as a uniting political philosophy for the entire country. Although *Ujamaa* did not succeed as an economic program, it nevertheless created an imperishable sense of human dignity, equality, and wholeness in the nation.

Nyerere, as an astute Christian politician, was concerned not only with national wholeness but with international wholeness as well. He spelled out carefully how the intrinsic wholeness of the human family was being jeopardized by the growing economic disparity between the North and the South. To seek justice in international commerce he proposed a New International Economic Order. He advocated an end to unilateral tariffs set by northern nations on the manufactured goods of southern nations, discontinuation of aid as a political weapon, urged a self-imposed ceiling on the wealth of nations and individuals, warned of the exacerbation of world hunger by multinational corporations with their exclusive dedication to the generation of profit, and cautioned against the insistence on one's "national security" through the amassing of weapons of destruction.[6]

A clear example of the African understanding and practice of wholeness in the political sphere was witnessed on worldwide television when Nelson Mandela was released from prison. After 27 years of confinement Mandela could have, with ample justification, claimed a personal victory over the evil of apartheid. Instead, at his release he walked out of prison radiating a spirit both indomitable and unbroken, without the slightest trace of arrogance or gloating. In one of his first interviews he publicly expressed his gratitude for the solidarity he had experienced with his own

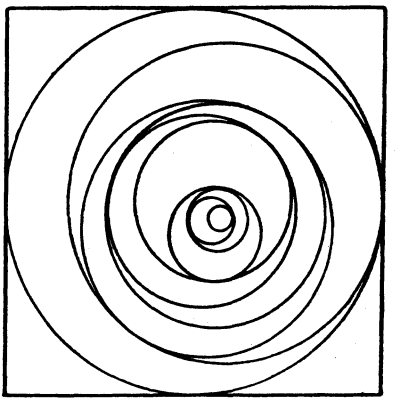
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[4] Kwesi A. Dickson, *Theology in Africa* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1984), 165ff.

[5] Gabriel Setiloane, "How the Traditional World-View Persists in the Christianity of the Sotho-Tswana," in *Christianity in Independent Africa*, edited by Fashole-Luke, Gray, Hastings, Tasie (London: Rex Collings, 1978), 410.

[6] Laurenti Magesa, "Nyerere's Ethical Thought on International Relations," Parts I and II in *Africa Theological Journal* 16:3 (1987), 216-230; 17:1 (1988), 33-47.

people and the international community throughout his struggle. When Charlene Hunter Gault of the MacNeil/Lehrer Newshour interviewed Mandela, she tried to get him to spell out his personal ambitions and fantasies in the forthcoming transfer of power. He repeatedly refused to respond in strictly personal terms. He pointed out that whatever his future might be, it would be determined by the African National Congress and the people as a whole. The cynic might say that this was simply political discretion. However, I am convinced that his reply sprang not from modesty or prudence but from his underlying commitment to the principle of corporate personality. In fact, he openly said that if Tambo or any other ANC leader were given a national leadership role he would find that personally fulfilling, for in that leadership he too would be leading.



Socially

Each clan has such a solidarity that a clan member can expect approval and support from the clan in such things as dowry, adjudication, and the payment of fines. One of my African faculty colleagues told me, "If you get on the outs with me, it will not just be with me, but with my whole clan." He added, "If you are in good favor with me, you will also be in good favor with the entire clan."

Many ethnic groups are organized according to age groups consisting of those in one's initiation cluster. The sense of cohesion in these age groupings is so strong that the age set is more important than one's particular clan and functions with solidarity throughout one's entire adult life.

Social solidarity is particularly obvious in times of rites of passage, danger, or death. When a couple gets married, for example, it is really a merger of two families, not just two individuals. Thus the marriage has a sound support system of two whole families who have a vested interest in the success and harmony of the marriage. If an individual is endangered by theft or violence, that person will sound a call for help. It is incumbent on every neighbor within earshot to come immediately to give aid and protection. Failure to do so entails appropriate discipline.

When death occurs in the community social wholeness manifests itself in many ways. All the neighbors come not only to express their condolences but to give practical assistance. The men dig the grave, the women bring food, water, and firewood. Neighbors remain with the bereaved throughout the night and for several days thereafter. At the burial itself people take turns helping to fill in the grave and secure the site with stones. (The cooperative filling of the grave was observed even at the burial of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., here in America.) Nor does death dissolve the African sense of wholeness. Kwesi Dickson says in fact that "The African believes that death binds up relationships in society, re-

vitalizing the living and underscoring their sense of community."[7] The recently dead are called the "living dead" for as long as they are remembered, perhaps for as long as five to seven generations. The living dead are considered a vital part of the community and function as agents in the preservation of harmony and wholeness.

Eating together is another evidence of social wholeness around the world, but especially so in Africa. Hospitality is both a great opportunity and a precious duty, and few traits are more highly prized in African society. Food is considered a gift from God to be shared. Friend and stranger alike experience the same gracious hospitality. When one eats in the traditional manner, it is with the fingers and out of a common vessel. The mutual concern of each for all is expressed in ceremonial hand washing before eating. To ensure hygiene everyone does not wash in the same water, but water is poured on the hands of each individual separately.

Daily work provides another evidence of wholeness. In the past, at least, it was customary for many tasks to be undertaken together. Houses were built cooperatively with a big feast celebrated when the building was completed. Some tasks are done in beautiful symphonic consort. When fields are cultivated by hand, all the hoes are swung in unison, and bodies bend and unbend like waves of wheat swept by the wind. Women when fetching water or gathering firewood usually go in a group, often in a long undulating single file. Pounding grain with a pestle in a mortar is done by two women together in synchronic alteration.

African music gives aesthetic expression to the traditional sense of wholeness. Music is not some pleasant diversion but is integral to African life, accompanying most activities of work, play, and education. African music has profound social dimensions. Basically their music is not *for* someone, but *with* someone; not for entertainment, but for participation. Much of their traditional music is antiphonal, involving a leader and group which responds. The leader does not remain silent, divorcing himself from the response, but continues to sing as part of the whole group. The very act of singing itself reflects wholeness, for one does not sing just with the voice but involves the whole body. The singers sway or clap hands in spontaneous synchrony. Wholeness is further exemplified in the complicated blend of different and simultaneous rhythms by various drummers.

Illness and therapy also reflect the African understanding of wholeness. Western medical practice of isolating a sick person in a hospital room is not the African way to induce healing. The sick one is surrounded by loved ones. Even in modern hospitals, relatives prefer to sleep in the company of the patient despite the fact that this may mean sleeping on the floor. Wholeness is shown even in the description of an ailment. In Swahili one does not say, "My head aches," or "I broke my arm." Rather one says, "I ache in my head," or "I sustained a fracture in my arm." In other words, the whole body suffers with its members.

Teaching in Africa must accommodate to the propensity of students to study together. Study is undertaken in groups, papers are prepared cooperatively, and students give each other trial examinations. So intense is the mutual aid that it becomes difficult to ascertain what constitutes plagiarism. In any event the goal of all this cooperation is not for a single person to excel in academic achievement, but to have the entire group succeed. Wholeness is shattered if one person fails.

[7] Dickson, *Theology in Africa*, 196.

Perhaps the preeminent evidence of wholeness in African society is experienced at the time of birth. We have already spoken about wholeness entailed in the birth of a nation. Now our attention will be centered on the birth of a child. After a brief leave in the States my wife and I returned to Tanzania. On our very first Sunday back, I was asked to baptize a child of one of our theological students. For the reception which followed, a neighbor lady who had baked bread for the celebration led us in a prayer of blessing according to the tradition that the one who prepares the food also asks the blessing. In her prayer she said, "Bless *our* baby and her parents." It was a moving reminder that we were back in a culture where a child is a member of the entire embracing community. John Mbiti states the same thing in a more comprehensive way:

> In African societies, the birth of a child is a process which begins long before the child's arrival in this world and continues long thereafter. It is not just a single event which can be recorded on a particular date. Nature brings the child into the world, but society creates the child into a social being, a corporate person. For it is the community which must protect the child, feed it, bring it up, educate it and in many other ways incorporate it into the wider community.... The birth of a child is, therefore, the concern not only of the parents but of many relatives including the living and the departed. Kinship plays an important role here, so that a child cannot be exclusively "my child" but only "our child."[8]

African culture knows no artificial dichotomy of sacred and secular, for all of life is sacred. Life in Africa is set within a religious paradigm.

Religiously

The fact that many African languages have no word for "religion" may strike one as odd. Actually this seeming void is mute testimony to the pervasiveness of religion which permeates their whole culture. The African has been called "incurably religious." African culture knows no artificial dichotomy of sacred and secular, for all of life is sacred. Life in Africa is set within a religious paradigm. To be sure, the sacred can be profaned, but that is a desecration of what is essentially sacred. While it may be going a bit far to assert, as some have done, that there are no atheists in Africa, it is true that Africans tend to find a Death of God theology ludicrous.

One could cite many traditional examples of the religious concern to maintain wholeness and exorcise everything which is disruptive of harmony. The practice of ancestor veneration with its attendant sacrificial system is an ancient rite which facilitates wholeness. It is undeniable that there

[8] John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heineman, 1969), 110.

are in Africa individuals and powers which are inimical to social wholeness. The custom of "smelling out" the sorcerer, the imposition of ordeals to determine who is a witch, and the ostracizing of one acknowledged to be a witch are all efforts to maintain or restore wholeness where it has been breached.

Perhaps the practice of reconciliation among the Maasai will be a sufficient example of religious concern for wholeness. In African Traditional thought reconciliation is extremely important. The Maasai word for reconciliation, significantly enough, is *osotua* which means the umbilical cord. Without reconciliation people would perish just as an embryo would die unattached to its mother. Reconciliation is a life-sustaining bond with the Creator and one's neighbor. Africans have much to teach us about reconciliation. If feuding between two clans leads to homicide, a sacrificial rite is required to restore harmony and satisfy social justice. Imprisonment does not reconcile. An elder from each of the two clans involved meet to arrange a rite of reconciliation.

> A cow and its suckling calf from each clan are brought to the reconciliation site. Similarly a mother and her infant child from each clan attend.... The two cows will exchange calves, and the mothers will exchange infants for a spell. Finally the two elders exchange the blankets which they are wearing, and each will draw blood from his hand which the other will lick and swallow. The reconciliation is declared completed, and as a proof of it a steer is slaughtered and everyone feasts joyfully. At last they wend their way home singing a song of reconciliation. These clans are now so close that henceforth their youth cannot marry, for marriage is exogamous, but these have now been made one. How rich a heritage compared with the cold pronouncements of our judicial system.[9]

Wholeness in the Christian tradition

In view of traditional African understandings of wholeness it is not surprising that many find it easy to espouse Christianity. In God's wisdom the peoples of Africa have not been left without a witness (Acts 14:17), and the way has been well prepared for the African to embrace Christianity in all its fullness.

If our concern is confined here to just the theme of wholeness, it is obvious that there is much in the witness of Scriptures and in the life of Christ with which the African can identify.

Jesus is given names which reveal his concern for wholeness. The Greek verb *sozein* means to make whole as in the case of the woman with the hemorrhage (Mt 9:22; Mk 5:34; Lk 8:48) and Bartimaeus (Mk 10:52) and the Samaritan leper (Lk 17:19). So then when Jesus is addressed as Savior (*Soter*, Lk 2:11; Jn 4:42; Acts 13:23; Eph 5:23) he is being called the One who restores wholeness.

In Mt 1:23 the author tells how the angel's message to Joseph in a dream was the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy that Mary's son was to be called Emmanuel, God with us. The very incarnation and the designation of Jesus as Emmanuel are a logical extension of the African concept of life as community. It is true that in the traditional myths of many African ethnic groups the Creator is considered remote due to human disobedience. However, it is also true that in a funeral lamentation of the Nyilamba people, for example, they sing, "Creator, you are lost and we don't know

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[9] Dean A. Peterson, *Christian Theology in an African Context—Reflections on an Encounter* (unpublished manuscript, 1989), 87.

where to find you." This is patent acknowledgement of the yearning for the restoration of wholeness between the Creator and the human family. Thus African culture can more easily appropriate the idea of Christ as God with us than of Christ as a distant ruler.

The teachings of Jesus are replete with his commitment to wholeness. He tells how the shepherd leaves the 99 sheep on the hillside to go search for the one lost sheep (Mt 18:12). He also admits to a lack of wholeness until sheep not yet of the flock heed his voice, and then there will be one flock and one shepherd (Jn 10:6). In the imagery of the vine and the branches Jesus teaches that without the wholeness between the two, the branch remains barren and incapable of doing anything (Jn 15:5). Jesus desires the same kind of wholeness among the disciples that there is between Christ and God (Jn 17:11). Jesus declares that he has prayed for Simon that his faith might remain whole when Satan demanded to have him in order to sift him like wheat (Lk 22:31-32). Paul says that Jesus intercedes for us with the Father (Rom 8:34), and 1 Jn 2:1 says basically the same thing, that Jesus Christ the righteous is our advocate with the Father, so that our wholeness might not be destroyed.

The New Testament is likewise full of metaphors of Christian wholeness. Those who believe that Jesus is Lord and Savior are called the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:27). Our diversity does not nullify our wholeness, and though we are many and have different functions we are one body in Christ (Rom 12:5). The beautiful hymn in Colossians honoring Christ declares that in him all things cohere (1:17). It is Christ who creates wholeness, and his grace is the centripetal force that gives life a unifying center. It is apart from this holistic centrality that we are eccentric, and life loses its wholeness as the force of competing interests pulls us apart. A colloquial tribute is to say of one that that person has it "all together." This is the wholeness that the Christo-centric life affords. Paul echoes the words of Jesus who said, "Abide in me and I in you" (Jn 15:4) when he speaks about Christ being in us (Rom 8:10) and about our being in Christ (2 Cor 5:17). It is this wholeness that reveals not only who we are, but more importantly *whose* we are. In this revelation we come to recognize our quintessential selves.

The sacrament of the Eucharist is a matchless testimony to the wholeness of the family of believers, who join together in a rite of sacred eating and drinking. The sacrament of Baptism is also a celebration of wholeness. The individual is baptized into the body of Christ, the church. This sacrament is a congregational rite to which the congregation gives approval and also welcomes into the family of believers the newly baptized.

In these few examples of wholeness in the Christian tradition Africans find a continuity and fulfillment of their cultural understandings of wholeness.

The wholeness which Christianity affords is also a seamless garment, but one potentially more splendid still because it is not crafted by our own efforts. It is not a seamless garment over which we need cast lots, as though it could ever be the private possession of one person alone. The wholeness which Christ creates is a free gift available to everyone who turns from human brokenness to accept this priceless treasure.

Reflections on the Diaconate in the ELCA

Tom Dorris
Geneva, Switzerland

Tom Dorris is an ELCA deacon rostered in the Metro New York Synod, employed as a journalist—editor of Ecumenical Press Service—at the World Council of Churches, and called to serve as deacon of the English-speaking congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Geneva.

Sometimes, after I have explained a bit about what a deacon is, I am asked if or when I plan to become a pastor (which I don't). The implication is plain: given my background and experience, such a move 'up' to 'real' or 'full' ministry would be a logical step for me to take.

Clearly, deacons don't quite fit the current U.S. Lutheran ministerial categories. And unfamiliarity and misunderstanding with and about them may breed discomfort, if not hostility.

On the other hand, as misfits, deacons might help subvert that too-common, two-class, clergy-laity notion of a divided church. They could help our new Lutheran church show forth a new model—actually a rather old model—stressing the one-class servanthood of all the baptized. In this model, everyone in the church is a servant, for to be a servant of God and of neighbor is part of the price one pays when one is baptized.

To be sure, a relative few focus a major part of their baptism-mandated servanthood on being servants of the church, that is, servants of the servants of God (to use what should not be a job description reserved to the Pope).

But though God through the church calls the baptized to serve in the ministry God provides for the church (through the *Augsburg Confession*), a starting emphasis on the servanthood of all as a corollary of baptism can help subvert tendencies toward classes of ecclesiastical power, privilege, and worth.

Historically, and in most traditions, deacons were and are part of the corps of servants of the church. Over the centuries and depending on circumstances and needs, and on better or worse theology and order, deacons have been and done a great variety of things. But at the root of their ministry have remained notions of service/servanthood traceable to the Greek words (*diakonos*/

diakonia/diakoneo) which come to us in English as deacon/diaconate.

The ELCA has inherited a few dozen deacons—26 on a roster which came from the AELC, nine more 'hidden' on ex-ALC/LCA rosters with other names, perhaps a score more not on any official list because of quirks in our rostering system. These deacons are one reason an ELCA task force is busily studying ministry—for some in the ELCA are unwilling, unable, or unsure how to make deacons fit in to ministerial arrangements they are perhaps over familiar with.

In his *dialog* article "Theologians, Theological Faculties, and the ELCA Study of Ministry," George Lindbeck offers a concise summary of the place of such deacons in the office of the ministry:

> The kind of deacons that I am talking about are like pastors in that they are called to what is in principle life-time commitment to the public and representative ministry of the Word in teaching and service on behalf of the church; but they are not called to pastoral or episcopal leadership of Christian communities.

Why have deacons? For one thing, they help get diaconal things done in and on behalf of the church. For another, they take special care to model and encourage *diakonia*, so their fellow baptized servants can better serve in the vocational arenas to which God calls them.

In and on behalf of the church, deacons combine liturgical service with social service which may take many forms—fighting injustice, teaching, visiting the sick, administering, etc. They do so as living icons—sacramental reminders—of Christ the Servant, of the Lord who redefines greatness by ranking the last first.

As servants of the church, deacons are accountable and available to the institutional church in ways most of the baptized are not and should not be. For example, they have less right to say no when the church asks them to do something. Historically, that accountability has been reflected in special connections between bishops and deacons.

To sketch in this way a vision of a renewed diaconate for the church in the United States at the end of the 20th century is not to suggest that deacons always act in accord with it. Nothing and nobody in the church is unstained by sin. Historically and today, deacons too succumb to temptation, and betray their vocation—though surely no more than do other church people.

Why would the ELCA not want to have such a renewed diaconate in the years after 1994? It is ecumenically appealing, as this summation from the 1982 text from the World Council of Churches on baptism, eucharist, and ministry (BEM) suggests:

> Deacons represent to the Church its calling as servant in the world. By struggling in Christ's name with the myriad needs of societies and persons, deacons exemplify the interdependence of worship and service in the Church's life. They exercise responsibility in the worship of the congregation: for example, by reading the scriptures, preaching, and leading the people in prayer. They help in the teaching of the congregation. They exercise a ministry of love within the community. They fulfill certain administrative tasks and may be elected to responsibilities for governance.

Given the ELCA commitment in its Continuing Resolution 10.11.A87 to try to articulate "a Lutheran understanding and adaptation of the threefold ministerial office of bishop, pastor, and deacon, and its ecumenical implication," one expects the burden of proof to be on those who would leave the diaconate out of the ministerial office in the ELCA.

In and on behalf of the church, deacons combine liturgical service with social service which may take many forms.

Most of the rest of the church in the United States ordains deacons. Lutherans in other parts of the world ordain deacons. Perhaps these other parts of the body of Christ are mistaken to do so. But in such a context, it is opponents, not supporters, of the diaconate in the ELCA who are clinging to an eccentric position.

Eccentrics, of course, are sometimes right. But they should not be exempt from an obligation to offer some significant evidence that our special ELCA situation makes their rejectionist stance the better one.

I write as a deacon of the ELCA. Others ought and can speak for themselves. But it seems to me that our quirky past in terms of rosters has obscured the fact that many—even most or all—people on each frozen roster are really part of what one could call the ELCA diaconate. Surely this is true of the three rosters of deaconesses, whose many decades of diaconal service in predecessor bodies continue now in the ELCA. But do not the other three rosters—ex-AELC teachers, ex-ALC commissioned church staff, ex-LCA lay professional leaders—include scores of servants of the church along the lines sketched here?

Given a basic diaconal commonality among most on the seven frozen rosters, why should important, but secondary, issues keep them apart?

For example, so far as I know, no ex-AELC deacons are paid by the church for their diaconal ministry. And while we would not understand ourselves as 'part-time deacons,' we are not 'full-time church workers' in the sense most on other rosters are. So, for ex-AELC deacons, salary scales, fringe benefits, and tax laws are not a direct concern.

Similarly, through we spent lengthy periods in diaconal formation, and were carefully examined before being certified and consecrated for diaconal ministry, that certification has not been linked to educational/professional standards in the way it has been for many on other rosters.

Because questions about employment standards and professional qualifications matter, were the ELCA diaconate unified, it would make sense, for instance, to keep track of which deacons are paid by the church for their diaconal service, and whether full or part time.

It would also make sense to have educational/professional criteria whereby some deacons could be certified for particular tasks—as teachers, musicians, secretaries, librarians, administrators, counselors, etc.—just as some pastors are now certified as pastoral counselors, or qualified to teach theology.

Since objections are sometimes raised at precisely this point, it is probably good to restate what might seem obvious: to recognize that some who do diaconal things have been called to do them as public and representative ministers of the church—and are thus accountable to it for their ministry—does not mean every teacher or church secretary who is a baptized servant of God is ipso facto a servant of the church as well.



One unified ELCA diaconate would not preclude an intentional community for some, as we now have in the ELCA deaconess community.

Nor would it mean that every current associate in ministry would have to be a deacon. Not everyone employed by the church is or ought to be a servant of the church. But with regard to all whose vocation includes church employment, whether or not they are rostered, the church has a clear obligation to be a model employer in terms of salary scales, continuing education, standards of certification, appropriate recognition, etc.

Let us, then, distinguish two related but different sets of issues. One has to do with public/representative ministry. The other has to do with educational/professional qualifications and employment practices.

If the ELCA is clear about that distinction, perhaps it can live out the invitation of the continuing resolution, and gratefully embrace the diaconate as a form of the one office of ministry God has provided in, with, under, and over against all the baptized servants of God and neighbor.

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Women Who Toil in Ministry, Even as Paul

Kieth A. Gerberding
Southgate, Michigan

Much has been written explaining the saying concerning women that is attributed to Paul in 1 Cor 14:34-35. That passage seems to deny to women a speaking, leading role in church life. Similarly, Paul's comments with reference to the role of women in worship in 1 Corinthians 11 have received considerable scrutiny. But insufficient attention has been paid to other words of Paul which indicate that Paul recognized and accepted the leading, ministering function of women in the church.

One word in particular points to Paul's approval of the pastoral work of women. That word, *kopiaō/kopos*, is usually translated "to labor/toil." *Kopiaō/kopos* (hereafter abbreviated "k."), along with a related word, *ergazomai*, "to work," display Paul's understanding of ministry. K. is a favorite word of Paul for his own ministry. And K. is a term that Paul applies to the ministry of others, including women. K. represents the burden-bearing, suffering service for the gospel which characterizes the ministry of Paul and other Christian workers.

Paul used a variety of terms for ministers, including apostle, teacher, prophet, healer, helper, administrator, servant, and even "servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God." There is one occurrence in Paul's writings of the term "bishops" (Phil 1:1), though it does not carry the same meaning it would later acquire in the church. There is no indication in Paul of any desire to recognize or establish specific offices of ministry. He outlines no hierarchical chain of command with rank or degree of importance. Even the term "apostle" in Paul did not refer to those specific persons who were called by and served Christ. Paul included himself, Apollos, and others (Rom 12:87; 2 Cor 11:13) in the category of apostles.

Paul's concept of ministry is that of service, and he points to the life of Jesus as one of service (Rom 15:8). Jesus is depicted in the Gospels as the suffering servant, who taught his disciples that their ministry was to be like his own, a sacrificial service of others. Paul views his own ministry as one of service (2 Cor 4:1, 6:3-4, 11:8,23; 1 Cor

3:5). Even when Paul defended his right to be an apostle, he thought of the function of an apostle as that of service (Rom 11:13).

A word for common labor, and more

Comparing himself with other apostles, Paul wrote that "On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them..." (1 Cor 15:10). Paul complained to the Galatians that "I am afraid I have labored over you in vain" (Gal 4:11). The words "worked harder" in 1 Cor 15:10 and the verb "labored" in Gal 4:11 are translations of the verb *kopiaō*. This word was appropriated by Paul for his own ministry and that of others.

In secular Greek K. was a word used to refer to common labor or toil. K. appears on a tombstone in praise of a gardener who reached his final resting place "after he had labored much."

Paul chose k. to refer both to his manual labor and to the labor of ministry. 1 Cor 4:12 refers to the former: "And we labor, working with our own hands." Other references to manual labor occur in 1 Thess 2:9 and 2 Thess 3:8. But for Paul there is a thin line between labor as manual labor in order that Paul might preach, and labor as the actual toil of preaching/evangelizing/pastoring. Paul moves easily from k. as manual labor to the ministerial aspects of his work. Paul often uses k. to refer to his own pastoral work (1 Cor 3:8, 15:10; 2 Cor 11:23,27; Gal 4:11; Phil 2:16; Col 1:29; 1 Thess 3:5).

Women who also toil

Paul chose k. as a term for ministry not only for himself, but also for others in the early church. Included are Apollos and other apostles (1 Cor 3:8; 15:10), "every fellow worker and laborer" (1 Cor 16:16), and the Corinthians themselves (1 Cor 15:58). Writing to the Christians at Thessalonica, Paul commends them for their "labor of love" (1 Thess 1:3), for they became "imitators of us and of the Lord" (v. 6), and "the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia" (v. 8). Paul also calls upon the Thessalonians "to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you" (1 Thess 5:12), a passage to which attention will be given below.

In Romans 16 Paul uses k. of women in ministry: "Greet Mary, who has worked hard among you" (v. 6), and "Greet those workers in the Lord, Tryphaena and Tryphosa. Greet the beloved Persis, who has worked hard in the Lord" (v. 12). Paul applies his own preferred term for ministry to these women. He refers to the women's toil in ministry with the word that he employed for his own missionary activity, preaching, proclaiming, teaching, admonishing, and evangelizing.

The "work" of the ministry—a similar term

Paul's use of k. to indicate the labor of ministry is complemented by his use of a similar term, "to work/work" (*ergazomai/ergon*); and also *ergatēs*, "worker" and *sunergeō*, "to work together," *sunergos*, "co-worker." Hereafter these shall be referred to as "e."

One form of e. has particular significance for the topic of women in ministry according to St. Paul. Paul speaks of other ministers as being his co-workers. The apostle utilized several terms to refer to co-workers (fellow-soldier, Phil 2:25, Philemon 2; yoke-fellow, Phil 4:3; fellow-slave, Col

1:7, 4:7; fellow-captive, Rom 16:7; fellow-striver, Phil 4:3). But most common in Paul, and most unmistakably referring to ministers/missionaries is *sunergos* (co-worker). Among Paul's co-workers are Urbanus (Rom 16:9), Apollos (1 Cor 3:9), Titus (2 Cor 8:23), Epaphroditus (Phil 2:25), Aristarchus, Mark and Jesus Justus (Col 4:11), and Timothy (1 Thess 3:2, Rom 16:21), who is doing the work of the Lord (1 Cor 16:10).

There are still other co-workers of Paul who are doing the ministerial work of the Lord. In Romans 16:3 Paul writes, "Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus." Prisca is mentioned first—before her husband co-worker Aquila. Modern commentators suggest that this woman was the more important of the two missionaries. But modern interpreters are relatively reticent in this assertion as compared to the opinion of John Chrysostom, who lived in C.E. 337-407. Leonard Swidler notes that Chrysostom often spoke very negatively of women, but concerning this passage Chrysostom wrote:

> It is worth examining Paul's motive, when he greets them, for putting Priscilla before her husband. Indeed, he did not say: "Salute Aquila and Priscilla;" but rather, "Salute Priscilla and Aquila" (Rom 16:3). He did not do so without reason: the wife must have had, I think, greater piety than her husband. This is not a simple conjecture; its confirmation is evident in Acts. Apollos was an eloquent man, well versed in Scripture, but he know only the baptism of John; this woman took him, instructed him in the way of God, and made of him an accomplished teacher.[1]

Prisca was evidently a missionary in her own right, along with her husband. She was a co-worker of Paul, though not dependent on Paul for her role or position. Paul could



say of her, as he did of Timothy, that she "is doing the work of the Lord, as I am" (1 Cor 16:10).

Paul refers to two other women who are co-workers, Euodia and Syntyche (Phil 4:2-3). Paul says that they struggled "side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers." Euodia and Syntyche are addressed as ministerial leaders of the community. J. P. Sampley amplifies:

> Further, Euodia and Syntyche are not just any two people in the Philippian congregation; they are fellow workers (*sunergoi*) with Paul and Clement (4:3). They have *sunēthlēsan moi*, "fought at my side," in the gospel. Apparently they too are missionaries of some sort and perhaps, like Paul, they should be understood as having been representatives of the *societas* in the spreading of the gospel.[2]

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[1] Quoted in Leonard Swidler, *Biblical Affirmations of Women* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1979), 298.

[2] J. Paul Sampley, *Pauline Partnership in Christ* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 63.

Paul considers Junia to be "prominent" among the apostles.... She was probably not the only woman apostle.

If in fact Paul utilizes k. and e. to refer to the ministerial functioning of women, then what is said of other ministers must apply also to these women. In 1 Corinthians 16 Paul urges his sisters and brothers to "be subject to such who have devoted themselves to the service of the saints and to every fellow worker and laborer." This would mean that Paul's readers are admonished to be subject to those women in their midst serving as ministers.

Paul asks the Thessalonians "to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work" (1 Thess 5:12). Such recognition and esteem would be expected also for the women who work and labor in the Lord—proclaiming, preaching, admonishing, teaching, and leading.

Other Pauline notices of women in ministry

There are several references, in addition to what has been explicated above, that point to Paul's recognition of women serving in various ministerial capacities.

Junia, Apostle. A most interesting passage is Romans 16:7: "Greet Andronicus and Junias, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners; they are men of note among the apostles, and they were in Christ before me" (RSV). The name translated Junias is in the accusative form (Junian) and could represent either Junias (masculine) or Junia (feminine). Most translators have assumed that the name was masculine, but the New Revised Standard Version has Junia. The word "men," and the "men" of "kinsmen" in the RSV translation, are not in the Greek text.

There are several reasons why the name should be Junia, not Junias. "Junia" is a well attested name in the Greek and Latin inscriptions and literature of the time. "Junias," on the other hand, does not occur.

Furthermore, the writings of the patristic era show that the name was understood to be that of a woman, "Junia." The most notable example of this understanding comes from John Chrysostom:

> There is something great about being an apostle.... But to be pre-eminent among the apostles—think what marvelous praise that is. They were pre-eminent by virtue of their work and their honest tasks. How great the wisdom of this woman must have been for her to have been found worthy of the title apostle.[3]

Bernadette Brooten adds:

> John Chrysostom was not alone in the ancient church in taking the name to be

[3] Commentary on Romans, Homily 32. Quoted in Susan Heine, *Women and Early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1987), 42.

> feminine. The earliest commentator on Romans 16:7, Origen of Alexandria (c. 185-253/254), took the name to be feminine..., as did Jerome (340/50-419/20), Hatto of Vercelli (924-961), Theophylact (c. 1050-c. 1108), and Peter Abelard (1079-1142). In fact, to the best of my knowledge, no commentator on the text until Aegidius of Rome (1245-1316) took the name to be masculine.[4]

Paul considers Junia to be "prominent" among the apostles. The "apostles" are those whom God called and sent to witness to the risen Lord, including not only the original Twelve but also Paul, Apollos, Barnabas, James, and others. Junia, who with Andronicus was a Christian missionary even before Paul was, is recognized by Paul as being an apostle, and a prominent one at that. She was probably not the only woman apostle.

Phoebe, Deacon. The RSV translates Rom 16:1: "I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deaconess of the church at Cenchreae...." The Greek word translated "deaconess" is *diakonos*, without any feminine case ending which would necessitate the translation "deaconess" instead of "deacon."

If Phoebe is a deacon like other ministers of Paul's acquaintance, why do translators describe her as "deaconess" in Romans 16? Gryson notes that many scholars confuse Romans 16 with a later development in the church that formed a separation between the order of deacon (males) and deaconess. Gryson concludes that when Paul describes Phoebe as a *diakonos* Paul is referring to a specific service which is becoming an office.[5] Swidler shows that the term "deaconess" first appeared in a late fourth century document, the Apostolic Constitutions. Moreover, this document also included quotations from an earlier writing that used "deacon" of women with the feminine article, "the (woman) deacon." Gryson produces evidence that woman deacons were known in the early centuries of Christianity, showing that Clement of Alexandria (late second century) clearly referred to woman deacons, and that Origen, a student of Clement, argued concerning the point, in his comments on Rom 16:1:

> This text teaches with the authority of the Apostle that even women are instituted deacons in the Church.... And thus this text teaches at the same time two things: that there are, as we have already said, women deacons in the Church, and that women, who have given assistance to so many people and who by their good works deserve to be praised by the Apostle, ought to be accepted in the diaconate.[6]

Rom 16:1 should be translated, "Phoebe, a deacon of the church at Cenchreae," with the understanding that she functioned as a minister of that congregation.

In Rom 16:2 Paul says of Phoebe that "she has been a helper [RSV] of many and of myself as well." The word translated "helper" occurs only here in the New Testament, and can be translated "protectress," "patroness," or "helper" according to a leading New Testament lexicon. The NRSV has "benefactor."

J. Massyngberde Ford, in her study on this passage, shows that the term in Rom

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[4] Bernadette Brooten, "Junia... Outstanding among the Apostles (Romans 16:7)," in Leonard and Arlene Swidler, editors, *Women Priests:* A Catholic Commentary on the Vatican Declaration (New York: Paulist, 1977), 141.

[5] Roger Gryson, *The Ministry of Women in the Early Church* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1976), 3-4.

[6] Pages 30, 134.

16:2 (*prostatis*) is used in the Old Testament for persons in authority, and that use is certainly at the fore in later Jewish writings. This use of the term to indicate a person in authority makes of Phoebe far more than what we might think of as "a helper." She was a leading minister in the church of Cenchreae.

Later developments

One might suppose that Paul's choice of *kopiaō*/*kopos* (to labor/toil) to describe his own ministry and that of others might well have led to k. becoming a technical word for ministry in the early church after the time of Paul. Paul's use of k. is appropriated in 1 Tim 4:10, and in 5:17: "Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching." But though the author of 1 Timothy kept the term, he lost the spirit of Paul as far as women in ministry is concerned. He denied to women any position of teaching, or any position of "authority over men" (1 Tim 2:11). A bishop is assumed by the author of 1 Timothy to be male (3:2).

Ernst Käsemann finds that other Pauline teachings in addition to his understanding of ministry were dissipated in the next generation of the church. He feels that Paul's doctrine on justification was significantly weakened and that the change in the view of ministry and the community was a concomitant factor in the changed understanding of justification.[7]

Perceiving the same tendency, Swidler shows that in Rom 5:12-14 and in 1 Cor 15:21-22, Adam, as the first person, is charged with the first sin in the Garden of Eden. But Paul's "first Adam–last Adam (Christ)" typology loses out to another interpretation in 1 Tim 2:14: "and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor." The author of 1 Timothy may have been influenced by current Jewish teaching blaming Eve for the descent into sin and death.[8]

The period of the Apostolic Fathers (ca. 90-150) shows little use of k. in the Pauline sense of ministry. The term does occur in several places. The Shepherd of Mermas employs the term in describing the ministry of the Son of God: "And he himself cleansed their sins, labouring much and undergoing much toil; for no vineyard can be dug without toil or labour" (HS V, 6,2; cf. verse 6; and IX, 24, 2-3). The term occurs with reference to the ministry of any person in Barnabas 19:10: "...either labouring by speech, and going out to exhort, and striving to save souls by the word...." Again, in the letter of Ignatius to Polycarp, Polycarp is urged to "Bear the sicknesses of all as a perfect athlete. Where the toil (*kopos*) is greatest, is the greatest gain" (I,3). The letter is addressed to Polycarp as bishop, and Ignatius encourages Polycarp to "Vindicate your office with all diligence" (I,2). So k. is used of the official ministry of a church leader. However, we see another development at work in this letter. K. occurs in VI,1, where Ignatius asks the people to "Labour with one another (*sungkopiate*), struggle together (*sunathleite*), run together...." But this encouragement is preceded by a reference to an emerging hierarchical domination: "Give heed to the bishop, that God may also give heed to you. I am devoted to those who

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[7] Ernst Käsemann, "Ministry and Community in the New Testament," in *Essays on New Testament Themes* (London: SCM Press, 1964), 85.

[8] See Swidler, *Biblical Affirmations of Women*, 323-24.

We have evidence that women continued to be active in ministry in the second century.

are subject to the bishop, presbyters, and deacons." The toiling, sweat and tears word can be used of the serving of the laity, but the hierarchy is elevated above them. The exaltation of the hierarchical offices spelled doom for a term which emphasized sacrificial service in the ministry of the gospel.

If there was an erosion in the understanding of ministry as lowly service, there was also a loss in the church's appreciation of the ministry of women. We have evidence that women continued to be active in ministry in the second century. The "Acts of Paul and Thecla" is the story of a woman who taught, baptized, and preached. The story, originating in Asia Minor, persisted despite the active opposition of such leaders as Tertullian. This persistence demonstrates the popular opinion that there were charismatic women active in leadership roles in the church.

This study cannot chart in detail the path of the erosion of Paul's appreciation of women in ministry, beyond what has been suggested. Textual critical study, however, is an area for further investigation. Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza explains the textual tradition connected with Paul's greeting to "Nympha and the church in her house" (Col 4:15).

The accusative form of the name can refer to a man with the name Nymphas or to a woman whose name was Nympha. If one accents the variant reading of Codex Vaticanus, some miniscules, and the Syriac translation—"and the church in her (*autēs*) house" then the greetings refer to a woman who is the leader of a house church. If one reads with the Egyptian text "their" (*auton*) house, then the greeting would either refer to Nymphas and his wife or Nympha(s) and his/her friends. The Western and Byzantine textual witnesses in turn consider the person to be a man because they read the masculine pronoun "his" (*autou*) house. The feminine reading is the more difficult reading and the masculine form can easily be explained as a correction of the female name since it was considered improbable or undesirable that a woman have such a position of leadership.[9]

The changes in the textual traditions of the writings of Paul would be a fascinating area of study for further research into changes in the Pauline understanding of ministry, and in particular of women in ministry.

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[9] Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 51. The NRSV reads Nympha.

(This article is a condensation of a more detailed study available from the author.)

A Book Worth Discussing: *A Buddhist Critique of the Christian Concept of God**

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This book deals with the God-problem which underlies the differences between Christian and Buddhist teaching. The book is important since most Christians never think about Buddhist-Christian relations, despite the growing number of Buddhist centers of study and meditation all over the U.S. and Canada, not only in New York or San Francisco. The book is also important because, when Christians do think of Buddhists, they may fold them in with theists as fellow religionists. But the Buddha was not a theist, and he ascribed only limited value to theistic religions, which he deemed unsatisfying but not necessarily bad. Hence it may be a bit of a shock to the folks at St. Ambrose Lutheran Church to learn that their Buddhist neighbors do not believe in God, which of course leads to questions like, "how can they be ethical if they don't believe in God?" and other first-level issues.

This book goes straightaway to one core problem in Buddhist-Christian relations, which is not Jesus as the Christ but the very notion of God. Many Christians think you can't have a world-view (though they may not use the term "world-view") apart from general belief in God, even if the God they believe in bears little resemblance to the one Jesus preached and embodied. To confront God as problem can be refreshing and transformative. At the very least it opens avenues of conversation and thought which may be more fruitful than the simple assumption of "God" common in most churches.

This is the first American edition of a book originally published in Sri Lanka in 1974. The book was not subsequently revised, though that would be useful. The author did write a new preface wherein he wishes he had emphasized even more the

*By Gunapala Dharmasiri. Antioch, CA: Golden Leaves Publishing Co., 1988. xxi and 313 pages. Cloth $42.85; Paper $19.95.

harmful aspects of the God-concept, especially with regard to issues of authority and leadership in institutional religion. He also says he believes that God-oriented religion is to blame for the destructive relationship between humans and animals.

I mean no jab at the author to mention my exasperation at finding on almost every page of his book at least one typographic error and one or more misused commas; try to overlook these things. Let the press be warned that they need better proofreaders and copy editors.

The book will help dispel some favorite illusions folks hold against Buddhism. First of these is the illusion that Buddhism is a religion for solitaries and has no use for community; Mr. Dharmasiri disabuses us of this quaint notion by showing us that the Buddha insisted on the centrality of the Sangha (a rough equivalent of Greek Christian *ekklesia*) in his political and economic thought. The second illusion is that Christianity is this-worldly and Buddhism is other-worldly. Could it be that cultural hubris or a touch of xenophobia made us adopt this position? Again, Mr. Dharmasiri would upend the tables. He accuses Christianity of other-worldliness whereas Buddhism, precisely because it disavows theism, can build an ethic which is both ecologically sound and interpersonally relevant for this life. The third illusion is that Buddha teaches a path the conclusion of which is the experience of Nirvana, and which may be roughly analogous to what many Christians expect in "heaven." No, no, says Mr. Dharmasiri: Nirvana is not an experience, it cannot be labeled as such because Nirvana, strictly speaking, is *beyond* all experience. Nirvana is the cessation of all craving, including the craving for experience, religious or otherwise.

Is it just nostalgia that makes me put this book down with an aching feeling of dissatisfaction, a hole in the psyche that all of his argumentation cannot fill with new meaning? Am I simply too tied in with the Christian community, too identified with a long history of saints and sinners under the sign of the cross, to be able to extricate myself from the circumstances and think my way free to a new position?

On the other hand, it may be that our friendly critic Dharmasiri has hit many nails on the head, but none that finishes the job against theism understood in the light of Christ. The same spirit that animated Barth rises in me as I put the book down, and a NO! presses out to the curve of my lips. I hear no malevolent NO within me; it is not the NO of the reluctant dinosaur gaping into the yawning pit of extinction. It is the NO of the witness of Jesus, the no of a thousand incursions of surprise into my life which I may or may not choose to identify as the Holy Spirit, the no which is bounded by the yes of the resurrection.

Let me say this straight: I am always one step away from atheism; theistic arguments never captivate me emotionally or intellectually. Our thought finally eludes description, definition, and categorization. We get hold of some of life but not all of it, and we only describe what we see from our vantage point.

The whole enterprise is slightly maddening, because it is so difficult to put what you believe in words. Speech is unable fully to comprehend the dialectics of meaning. In the moment I make affirmation of belief in God, simultaneously I watch that affirmation decompose because it cannot remain true except in the moment. Or this: whatever I say about God becomes untrue in the next moment because God the Personal cannot ever be finally contained in verbal definition; hence each affirmation must contain within it the dialectics of negation in order for a meaning to arise in the

mind of the hearer which is not an imposed, but a discovered, meaning. As an aside, this need for an eternal dialectic is the great problem of preaching, too.

Nonetheless we in the West not only desire to put our insight about God in words, but we have a biblical mandate thereunto. This creates an internal double-bind situation: on one hand, nothing I say about God is final or ultimate, because the words always capture, if anything, what just was, and God *is* eternally. But on the other hand I am compelled to assist in the event of God's enfleshment or enverbalizing (please forgive the neologisms; I need them), since the witness of Scripture is that this is how, and how alone, God enters our dimension of reality.

So I can say I don't "believe in God" and still believe that another realm or dimension of reality can and may suffuse my ordinary reality with universal, perhaps 'transcendent' meaning. In this case, my statement that I don't believe in God is an attempt, however crude, to remain humble in the face of a reality which I cannot contain in words. We are so rooted in our Hebrew spiritual background that we may not be at ease with words and names for God.

Yet we in the church live in a community of memory, identity, and hope; and so we remember the stories of faith in order that the reality they once captured may become an inner resource by which we perceive the same reality when we are once again in it, or it is in us.

I agree with Mr. Dharmasiri when he says that most so-called "religious experience" may easily be explained in other terms and often disappears into thin air when one seeks definition. Silly preachers have sermonized in my hearing that they saw God on vacation in the Rockies. I want to raise my hand and say, "Can you sharpen that a bit for me; *where* did you see God?" Mr. Dharmasiri also points out that the accoutrements of "religious experience" can be synthesized through the use of drugs like LSD, so we can hardly call such experience unique or relegate it to the sphere of religiosity. We won't be finding "God" so easily through the route of experience.

Dharmasiri forces me to recognize that we treat the Bible as what David Tracy calls "a classic text," which holds meaning for us because we bring a reverence to it which governs our interpretation. That's good. We Christians should be straightforward in admitting that, for us, Jesus becomes Messiah, in a sense, when we avow him our allegiance, in the light of which certain patterns for life open up and others close—thereby rendering an ethic which might overcome the hazards of theistic religion pointed out in his introduction. Revelation is never *carte blanche*; everything must be taken or left in the light of our understanding, our wrestling with the text in its historic context as we live in the midst of our own. Of course a little of this goes a long way, and you can go down some blind alleys without safeguards to this way of thought.

What Mr. Dharmasiri doesn't seem to understand is that Christian faith is a risk, and perhaps Christians in the current soggy milieu of American religion have also forgotten that. It is a risk to claim Jesus as Messiah; it is a risk to claim that Jesus reveals God; it is a risk to claim that 'God' is. But that 'God' exists has never been the ultimate question; only the God in relationship, known in the midst of the human condition, is worthy of discussion, let alone faith. This risk of faith is, in a way unknown to us, matched by the mystery of God's call and election into the faith which Jesus proclaimed. I do not know why I am a Christian, in the end; I can point to Baptism as initiation into the faith, I can point to Holy

Communion as the meal of sustenance in grace and faith, I can point to confession and forgiveness as direct address to me wherein I hear my estrangement overcome, I can point to all of this and yet even this pointing will remain but my finger pointing at the moon. I can answer the question *why?* rationally, but I still won't know why I am a Christian at the deepest level of my being. That answer is embraced in an ultimate consummation the contours of which I can only guess. It is this sense of being drawn forth to the future of God which Mr. Dharmasiri does not, perhaps can not, understand.

In Buddhism, there is no eschaton; world and persons and things are aimed toward no omega-point, no denouement, no 'grand assize' to use the term from John Keble's benchmark sermon. I've always been attracted to Buddhism, especially through the *via negativa* of the Zen tradition, but I find Buddhism's lack of drive toward fulfillment unfulfilling. The moment is the locus for redemption, it is true, and I concur with the view of, say, Tauler and *Theologica Germanica*, that the dualism of our existence is overcome by God in Christ, and then known through mental or cordial contemplation. But my age is different from theirs; we have more than our share of right-brain approaches to life; now, critical judgment and left-brain analysis are crucial to our balance. Part of the current judgment I bring to my world is how each part of it makes sense and holds long-term significance. I would argue that it is in part because Christians forgot this connection between cause and effect, karma if you will, that we are in the sorry fix we're in ecologically. Dharmasiri argues that theistic religion judges between the worth of the person and the lesser worth of the creation. I need more proof than he offers me, especially since he traces this lack of concern for the creation to *Judaism*, of all things, with its eternal insistence on the goodness of creation and the stewardship of humanity. At the same time, he fails to see that the distinction between levels of creation is an evolutionary insight in which higher need not mean better, but means rather more equipped with potential for spiritual life.

Dharmasiri argues that "God" may be used as a symbol for anything under the rubric of experience, and he is correct. We should not run from this deepest criticism of our theistic ground of faith. At the same time he argues that experience is the ground, according to the Buddha, for proving the world's relevance. So we return, in the end, to experience interpreted in two different ways. And for such an interpretation to become valid for me, I must become convinced of its relevance by further investigation. Christian faith is quite as capable of empirical study as is Buddhism, and the test of its validity the same: does the world as we experience it yield meaning when seen through this lens? I think in both cases the answer must be YES, but we must go on to observe clearly the *differences* such perceptions will create in the world. And to ask about their truthfulness. "God" may become the symbol for any sort of fantasy, but we witness to the power of revelation to correct the imagination in the light of Christ, who saves the appearances by showing them to be spiritually grounded.

This final comment takes us, in due course, beyond the boundaries of a book review and into the very marrow of life and work.

Book Reviews

THE END OF AMERICAN HISTORY: DEMOCRACY, CAPITALISM, AND THE METAPHOR OF TWO WORLDS IN ANGLO-AMERICAN HISTORICAL WRITING, 1880-1980. By David W. Noble. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985. iv and 166 pages. Paper. $14.95.

This important contribution to debates about Reinhold Niebuhr has been surprisingly neglected by religious scholars, perhaps because its "home base" is American Studies and historiography. Noble relates Niebuhr to major U.S. historians and criticizes them for using progressive (or "American") jeremiads—for assuming a special national destiny and interpreting all counter-evidence as temporary backsliding which would lead to future success. Noble shows how the dominant U.S. historians during the early twentieth century, Frederick Jackson Turner and Charles Beard, wrote explicitly progressive historical narratives (roughly analogous to the social gospel). He traces Niebuhr's well-known critique of such progressive thinking, then goes on to show how Niebuhr's postwar thinking also celebrated a revitalized form of progressivism: an international expansion of "democratic capitalism" defeating totalitarianism and "backwardness." This was an *ironic* progressive jeremiad, loudly protesting its "realistic" anti-progressivism—but Noble effectively turns Niebuhr's argument back on itself, following William Appleman Williams' more consistent critique of expansionist global liberalism. For Williams, as for many of Niebuhr's colleagues who moved toward liberation theologies in the 1960s and 1970s, Niebuhrian insights at their best lead toward alternative religious-communitarian commitments which escape the logic of progressivism in its current global capitalist manifestation. This escape "ends American history," for Noble, because it represents a convincing critique of a central tradition in U.S. historiography and religious-political rhetoric. Noble's argument is dense, but anyone interested in Niebuhr or U.S. civil religion should grapple with it.

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STRIVING TOGETHER: A WAY FORWARD IN CHRISTIAN–MUSLIM RELATIONS. By Charles Kimball. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991. xv and 132 pages. Paper. $8.95.

Among the explosion of books that have been appearing in recent years on interfaith dialogue and Christian theologies of religion and the religions, surprisingly few have dealt specifically with the relationship between Christians and Muslims. Ironically, the recent history and nature of the evolving relationship between the world's two largest faith communities have remained quite a well-kept secret to most members of the communities themselves. This book attempts to lift the veil just a bit by focusing on the needs of interested non-specialists, like church study groups and seminary students. His aims are clearly modest and non-academic. He claims not to be giving definitive answers, but only providing "helpful parameters." Unfortunately, his achievements may even be more modest than his aims. He often is more successful in identifying popular trends than he is in carefully defining or setting theological parameters.

For instance, Kimball's survey chapters on understanding Islam and the history of Christian-Muslim relations are succinct, readable, and generally accurate. Still, his passionate desire to help steer the church away from its ongoing collision course with Islam leaves him open to questionable theological and historical judgments. He flatly asserts that "Muslims worship the same God as Christians and Jews" without even indicating, much less arguing, the kinds of theological issues implicit in such a statement. If

it really is the case that Christians share this profound common ground with Muslims, then Kimball is obliged to show why this is so. Similarly, he downplays the very real political and religious threat that Islam has posed to the church for over a millennium. The church's tendency to skepticism and wariness toward Islam is too easily dismissed by simply referring to it as "bias, rooted in inaccurate and invidious caricature." In line with this thinking is his tendency to exaggerate the distance we've really travelled in the 19th and 20th centuries. After all, only since the West has become the world's dominant player, and thus insulated from the reach of Islamic power, has it felt that it could afford such a sanguine view of Islam. This is simply not the case for most churches still under Muslim domination, even today.

The longest chapter, and perhaps the most pivotal, is Kimball's own contribution to the current debate on Christian particularity and religious pluralism. Regrettably, for such a delicate, highly-nuanced and rapidly-changing theological problem, this section paints with too old and too broad a brush. This is true even of Kimball's own choice as the theological 'way forward'; the post-Vatican II developments in Roman Catholicism. His one-sided presentation of the post-Conciliar period as 'inclusivist' captures little of the unresolved tensions and struggles within contemporary Catholicism regarding how to relate mission to interfaith dialogue. He is, however, on much firmer ground in his chapter on the dialogue movement itself, especially in his summary of the different dimensions of dialogue and in its recent history.

Even with its overall lack of theological sophistication and its too-brief survey and analysis of Muslim views toward Christianity and interfaith dialogue, *Striving Together* will undoubtedly, and deservedly, succeed in making the Christian options toward the challenge of Islam more accessible and understandable on the parish level. In keeping with its avowed aims, it is not heavily footnoted, yet it still manages to provide some helpful and judicious assessments of other books and articles in the field for those who which to go further. This is a book no congregation ought to be without. Given the increasing growth and changing demographics of the American Muslim community over the next decade, grappling with books like this will no longer seem like an exotic curiosity. It is already becoming a day-to-day necessity for lay and clergy alike.

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THE TRINITY OF LOVE: A THEOLOGY OF THE CHRISTIAN GOD. By Anthony Kelly, CSSR. Vol. 4 in the New Theology Series, edited by Peter C. Phan. Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1989. 272 pages. Paper. $16.95.

Kelly begins by defining the starting point, context, preconceptions, and various techniques of Trinitarian discourse. He explores the primary scriptural and early church sources for the development of Trinitarian language and meaning. Then, he systematizes the data and connects it and the Trinity with contemporary Christian experience and various theological themes such as image of God, revelation, grace, church, etc.

After making connections between contemporary experience and the Trinitarian data, Kelly presents a brief overview of the classical Thomistic notion of God as sheer Be-ing and the psychological analogy. He argues that the psychological analogy is useful for contemporary experience. However, understanding God as sheer Be-ing is not useful. A better application of the analogy is God as Being-in-Love. The God who is Being-in-Love is the grounding, structuring, and fulfilling of both the personal life and the world in its psychological and political development. Kelly argues that the way we understand and implement any notion of the Trinity does indeed make a significant difference in both perspective and outcome for the individual and the world. The Trinitarian analogy of Being-in-Love provides an openness, orientation, and model for conversation and a possible new way of living with other religions and the various feminist and liberation critique.

Kelly writes in the preface, "My contribution seems to be more in the domain of making connections... than in fresh or even startling new hypotheses." Kelly is correct. There are no

new hypotheses, nor are there any new connections. While the connections have been made before, Kelly presents his own emphasis.

Kelly's writing style and presentation is often difficult to follow. Clarification is frequently needed. Kelly needs to specify with whom or what he is taking issue. The several typographical errors are distracting. I do not recommend this book, except as a secondary introduction to Trinitarian reflection.

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JEWS AND CHRISTIANS: THE MYTH OF A COMMON TRADITION. By Jacob Neusner. London and New York: SCM and Trinity Press International, 1991. xi and 196 pages. Paper. $14.95.

So here is Neusner, again, writing about Jews and Christians. The nutshell of the book: Jews (called "Judaists") and Christians have totally different religions. Jews don't believe in the "Old Testament" (so-called) but are mainly interested in Torah as interpreted, first, through Mishnah and then latterly though Talmud: it's Bavli (the Judaic acronym for the Babylonian Talmud) versus Bible. The rabbis saved Jewish faith for the latter day. Jews are mainly concerned with a way of life, with ethics and how you can live from day to day.

Christians originally had some relationship to Jesus; after all he was a Jew. But very early the two faiths diverged, with the "daughter" religion becoming completely separate and non-aligned (perhaps an estranged child, like a prodigal maybe, as Markus Barth would say?) to the "mother." For Christians, the Hebrew Bible became the Old Testament, a pre-text to the New Testament, which is all about how Jesus took on shape as the Christ and which is particularly concerned with the Body of Christ. Any attempt to identify Jesus, say, as a charismatic Hasid is completely erroneous and causes a lot of mischief (take that, Geza Vermes) and the notion of a theology of the Jewish-Christian reality is misguided (so go the three volumes of Paul van Buren!). Franz Rosenzweig's attempt at a two-covenantal theory is a "feeble attempt."

Christianity, now a wholly separate faith, is concerned with family issues, like how to become and remain the body of Christ in, but not of, the world. Not issues for Jews to identify with. Total incomprehension marks the relationship between us from the end of century one, C.E.

As for Jewish-Christian dialogue, let's start all over again: let's admit we have nothing in common and try to understand from within the hermeneutical circle (this from Cardinal Ratzinger, no less) how each of us means what we mean. Then maybe we can contribute to world peace. Fascinating. How *does* he write so much? JCR

Briefly Noted

THE SONG OF SONGS: A NEW TRANSLATION AND INTERPRETATION. By Marcia Falk. Illustrated by Barry Moser (Harper & Row, $18.95). F. understands the Song of Songs as an anthology of 31 short love poems, conveying a thoroughly nonsexist view of heterosexual love. Her attempt is to produce the best translation since the KJV, and her sensual, highly interpretive version is indeed a thing of beauty (the wood engravings help). When the man compares his beloved to a "mare among stallions [1:9; NRSV: a mare among Pharaoh's chariots]," he is not saying she is just as beautiful as a regal horse, but also as tempting, distracting, and potentially dangerous as a single mare among many stallions. Note, however, the omission of Pharaoh in her translation and the recasting of the line to make it clear to a modern audience. Her "Will you disrobe me with your stares?" (1:6) catches the erotic quality she pursues. But compare the very same verse in the NRSV: "Do not gaze at me because I am dark." RWK

THEOLOGICAL DICTIONARY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT. Vol VI. Edited by G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren (Eerdmans, $39.95). Here are studies of 55 words, all beginning with the letter yod, and including such significant words as day, reprove, give birth to, Jacob, Jerusalem, Israel, sit/dwell, save, and be upright. The best etymology of "Israel" suggests a meaning of El reigns or El is supreme. Almost all of the 24-page discussion of Israel deals with how the term is used in the Old Testament rather than with its uncertain etymology. Those whose Hebrew skills are quite limited can still profit immensely from such a work as this. 16 volumes are now planned for this OT "Kittel." RWK

GALATIANS. Word Biblical Commentary 41. By Richard N. Longnecker (Word, $24.99); **EPHESIANS.** Word Biblical Commentary 42. By Andrew Lincoln (Word, $24.99). Longnecker identifies the significance of his work on Galatians as follows: stress on Hellenistic epistolary conventions, eclectic treatment of Greco-Roman rhetorical features, highlighting of Jewish themes and exegetical procedures, and an Antiochian style of interpretation. Lincoln, too, keeps his eye on the rhetorical purpose of the flow of thought, though he attributes (with many others) authorship to someone later than Paul. The author attempts to reinforce the common values which establish his readers' identity as Gentile Christians who belong to the church and to persuade them to change their behavior to that which clearly reflects their identity. Both of these volumes are substantive and welcome additions to the literature on Paul. RWK

EZEKIEL 20-48. Word Biblical Commentary 29. By Leslie C. Allen (Word, $24.99). William H. Brownlee authored the commentary on Ezekiel 1-19 in this series, but died before he could complete the second volume. A. differs from B. in believing that Ezekiel prophesied from Babylon, and he steers a middle course between the diachronic efforts of Zimmerli (Hermeneia) and the synchronic work of Greenberg (Anchor Bible). A. excells in textual criticism and in detecting the structural makeup of the text though I found his theological interpretations in the "Explanation" section a bit flat. A. is now working on a revision of Ezekiel 1-19. When completed, his two volume commentary will be among the best available on this important exilic prophet. RWK

MANY TABLES. THE EUCHARIST IN THE NEW TESTAMENT AND LITURGY TODAY. By Dennis E. Smith and Hal E. Taussig (Trinity Press International and SCM, $12.95). The authors open up the options for the understanding and, more importantly, the ritualization of the Eucharist from two angles: Greco-Roman banquet materials and the New Testament banquet. The resulting hypothesis is that each community of Christians shaped its own meal in response to and out of local 'language' and cultural pattern in order to create boundaries and designate its own communal status. This hypothesis is then turned into five creative suggestions for today's congregations. A healthy chapter on ritual in the light of theories of Victor Turner and Jonathan Z. Smith leads us into the final chapter, which contains six model liturgies. JCR

THE CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF JUDAISM, VOL. 2. THE HELLENISTIC AGE. Edited by W. D. Davies and Louis Finkelstein (Cambridge University Press, $85). The eighteen chapters in this volume deal in a variety of ways with the interpenetration of Judaism and Hellenism in the last pre-Christian centuries. Judaism in this period, in fact, survived only because it borrowed much from Hellenism and used it in its own interests. There are fine treatments of the history and archaeology of the period, attention to individual leaders (Antiochus IV and the Maccabees and Hasmonaeans), and surveys of the literature, both in Hebrew-Aramaic and in Greek, that flowed from Judaism. There is also strikingly uneven quality in the essays and some that are quite out of date. The article on the "men of the Great Synagogue" (identified as a Pharisaic supreme court begun at the time of Nehe-miah—is "Pharisaic" an anachronism in the time of Nehemiah?) has nothing in its bibliography after 1969. The article on the Hebrew-Aramaic literature places Chronicles-Ezra-Nehemiah in the Hellenistic period and is

innocent of the vigorous debate in the 80s about the unity of these three books and of the prominent proposals to date Chronicles to the 6th or the 4th centuries instead of the 3rd. No wonder. The bibliography stops at 1981, and most of it is considerably older. On Zechariah 9-14 there is no mention of Hanson's very important (and controversial) proposal of 1975. The article on the Septuagint was submitted in 1977. Despite these striking weaknesses, there is much in this book that will serve as a standard reference for decades to come. RWK

DINAH'S REBELLION: A BIBLICAL PARABLE FOR OUR TIME. By Ita Sheres (Crossroad, $17.95). S. reads the story of Dinah (Genesis 34) from a feminist perspective and as an alternate, more accommodating model for a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian problem. To achieve her laudable goals, however, she has to reconstruct the text radically and ignore what the words say. Shechem, who raped Dinah according to the Bible, turns out in this retelling to be a nice guy, and the rape is attributed to post-exilic redactors (Deuteronomists), whose modern counterparts are hard-line Zionists shaped by the Holocaust. The rape was added by the redactors as instant punishment for Dinah's disobeying the rules spelled out by the men of the tribe. "Dinah" posed a sexual and political threat because she was ready to intermarry and integrate with the Hivites. Originally the story supposedly described innocent love between two young people who were ready to merge culturally, politically, and religiously. Shechem's tenderness is a reminder to S. of equality that may have been more prevalent in Canaanite and other cultures that embraced the cult of the goddess, and she speaks frequently of the dark side of monotheistic faith. But this praise for goddess worship is created by ignoring the fact that Shechem's "tenderness" is his ironic response to raping Dinah! Rabbi Meir Kahane, recently murdered, is interpreted by the author as the modern incarnation of the vengeful Simeon and Levi. The "real" Dinah, in this reconstruction, was nurtured by the (good) moon worship of Haran and is a model for modern-day Israeli women who try to form a pacifistic group with an agenda of Palestinian accommodation. All this is biased ideology, not exegesis, and her grasp of the literary critical issues in the Pentateuch is also tenuous at best (Genesis 3 is assigned to D). *Caveat emptor.* RWK

THE ILLUSTRATED ATLAS OF JERUSALEM. By Dan Bahat. With Chaim T. Robinson (Simon and Schuster, $85). Though only 152 pages long, this book is a lavish depiction of the history of Jerusalem through pictures, line drawings, maps, and isometric reconstructions of buildings—400 of the illustrations are in color. The dozens of maps always show the walls of the Old City (erected in the 16th century) in the background, which provides very helpful orientation for those who have been to Jerusalem. The accompanying text guides the reader from the first settlement (about 3,000 BCE) to the current situation after the Six-Day War (the last 42 years are the work of R.). About 20% of the book is devoted to the biblical period, knowledge of which has been greatly increased during the last 20 years of archaeological research. B. discusses and illustrates the significance of Hezekiah's wall in the 8th century, which ran through the present Jewish Quarter, and the significant gains in our knowledge of the temple mount in New Testament times. While there is general consensus that the Church of the Holy Sepulcher marks the authentic region of the death and burial of Jesus, many other sites from his life are still open to question (there are three possibilities for the Praetorium), largely because of a three-century gap in evidence after his life. The detail devoted to post-New Testament Jerusalem (two thirds of the book) is appropriate for the contributions of the Byzantine, Arab, and Crusader periods, and it will provide modern travelers with solid information about the buildings and the city they will actually see. RWK

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Preaching Helps

Nineteenth Sunday After Pentecost—Christ the King, Series B

Defining Pentecost

Maybe "defining Pentecost" is an oxymoron. After all, "defining" means setting limits (l. *finis* = end or limit) or staking out the boundaries.

Can we really delimit Pentecost, set boundaries to it? That sounds like trying to hem in or wall off the Holy Spirit.

No doubt it happens. A few of the days we celebrate at the end of the Pentecost season call to mind some of the specific ways it happens.

Reformation Day should remind us of the ambivalence of all church structures. It has happened with alarming regularity through the centuries that churchly arrangements have hemmed in the holy and have stone-walled the Spirit. It takes constant vigilance with plenty of prayer and hard work to ensure that church workers and church structures do not quench the Spirit but instead operate as channels for the flow of the Spirit into the lives of the people of God.

Sunday by Sunday we are reminded that both illness and health, both vitality and death can lead us into temptation, so that we fail to see the Hand of God and the Breath of God. Why is it that health does not always burst forth in songs of gratitude (Thanksgiving Day)? And death can be a curtain falling like a wet blanket on people's lives, snuffing out the flame of faith. Yet All Saints' Day proclaims the power of the Spirit even over death and beyond death.

The Spirit will not be defined or delimited. Through all our days we will live in the season of Pentecost, even when we do not hear the Spirit's exhalations or feel the Spirit's breathing in and breathing out. Pentecost continues, in spite of our personal or corporate doubts and denials.

The only real limit to the Season of Pentecost is set by what Luther called "the dear last day," that day upon which we set our hearts each year as November draws near a close. Only the Last Day will really "define Pentecost."

Until then the Spirit presses in, and we point folks to the stirrings. Helping us in the task of tracking the wind of the Spirit are two preachers who live a thousand miles from one another.

The Rev. Stacy Boorn has contributed the First Readings for this issue. I know her as an outstanding amateur photographer, but other gifts of hers moved me to invite her to write for Preaching Helps. For one thing, in the midst of her (other) pastoral duties she continues to search the scriptures in the original Greek and Hebrew. And she is involved in other works of churchly translation. For just over two years now she has been pastor at Grace Lutheran Church in Richmond, California. During this time Grace has become an increasingly bilingual congregation. 60 Laotian refugees have been baptized at Grace this year. A chorus of 23 Laotian children from Grace sang at the closing worship of the Sierra Pacific Synod Assembly in May, a joy for those children and their parents as well as for the delegates to the assembly.

The author of the Pastoral Reflections this month is the Rev. Carl D. Walker, D.Min., pastor of Glory of God Lutheran Church in Wheat Ridge, Colorado. After twenty years as a pastor, Carl had a three month sabbatical in the fall of 1990. Part of his sabbatical he spent in the company of Benedictine monks, and for one week he was in residence here at PLTS, where he and I got reacquainted. One of the things Carl says he has been learning these days is how to pray better and how to be more focused and disciplined in his prayer and in his ministry. He has been recommending Eugene Petersons' book, *The Contemplative Pastor*, and I pass on his recommendation to you.

Thanks to Stacy and Carl for their contributions to our contemplations, and best wishes to all of you, as you pray and preach your ways through Pentecost.

Undefinedly yours,

Robert H. Smith
Editor of Preaching Helps

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost
September 29, 1991

Psalm 135:1-7, 13-14
Numbers 11:4-6, 10-16, 24-29
James 4:7-12 (13–5:6)
Mark 9:38-50

FIRST READING

The Gospel text begins with the disciple John reporting how the disciples attempted to forbid someone from casting out demons in Jesus' name. Earlier in the chapter (9:18) the disciples were not able to cast out an unclean spirit in a boy. Do the disciples wish to silence the unknown exorcist out of envy and jealousy? Did they wish to limit the "disciple-clergy-called-and-ordained club?"

The verses prior to the text can be read as an attack on the ambitions of the disciples (vv. 33-37). In verses 38-41 the disciples try to claim exclusive rights to "authority," and the text encompasses the dispute over the relationship of persons within the Christian community to each other. What are the necessary qualifications for a person to be part of the community? Perhaps the disciples were already struggling to compile their version of "Visions and Expectations for Ordained Ministers"?

Jesus had just told them what such qualifications should be: "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me." We need to note the prominent use and mention of children and childlike qualities in chapters 9 and 10 of Mark. The children/little ones are those little in esteem, importance, influence, and power. We often pay as much attention to them each day as we do to microscopic things (verse 42 uses the term "micros").

The disciples' objection to the "unknown" exorcist is not to his action but the fact that "he was not following us." This does not suggest that that person was not following Jesus Christ in whose name the deeds were done. The disciples are advocating for a narrow exclusiveness while Jesus is proclaiming a broad inclusiveness. This seems to be an issue always in tension within the organized structures of those who follow Jesus.

This same exclusive attitude of the disciples is voiced in their objection to the children—those of little or no esteem, importance, influence, and power. The disciples are placing themselves in the position of determining who can and who cannot have access to Jesus. Many of the Gospel texts from Mark for these last Sundays of Pentecost carry themes of people being rejected and excluded. This rejection is a direct rejection of Jesus.

James (4:1-12) elaborates on the possible source and results of the exclusive attitudes shown by the disciples both today and in the Gospel lesson. And we are reminded that there is only *one* who is able to destroy and save!

Perhaps the link between Mark 9:38-41 and 42-50 is the contrast between serving others on the one hand and denying them access to Jesus on the other. The word for hell is derived from the Hebrew word for the "Valley of Hinnom." This

was a place south of Jerusalem where human sacrifices offered to Molech had been made. It was desecrated by King Josiah and turned into the city dump. The disciples try to "dump" the unknown exorcist, the one not following them, and they get warned about the possibility of ending up in the dump themselves! SB

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

The Old Testament and Gospel lessons have in common "unauthorized personnel" performing duties reserved for insiders only. In both cases Moses and Jesus are expected to forbid the uncertified from presuming to do the Lord's work. Conventional wisdom has it that there is great danger in letting just anybody speak or act for God. But Moses and Jesus, seeing beyond conventional wisdom and the jealousy of the guild, recognize that the spirit blows where it wills. God works in ways we would never imagine. When someone takes the initiative to do what we should have been doing all along, we may feel threatened, but God is not. "Would that all the Lord's people were prophets!" It is always so tempting to consider ourselves and our own systems of knowing and operating as the best. And it is easy to consider others with different backgrounds or training, with less experience, or other denominations or faiths, as somehow less competent or even further from God's truth than we are.

Reginald Fuller once said, "In what we affirm we are almost always right and in what we condemn we are almost always wrong." It seems to be human nature to use judgment of others for self-protection or self-aggrandizement. Sometimes we condemn simply out of our own ignorance. It is clear in these lessons that the Holy Spirit does not check membership or education credentials as closely as we do. Isn't it ironic that so often our ecclesiology is used to exclude folks, while our Lord seemed intent on including as many as possible? What seems to be of highest value to God is not administrative control, but rather that which sets free.

And then this matter of millstones round the neck, cutting off hands and feet and plucking out eyes. Strong words! Death by drowning was especially detestable to the Jews, who were never known for being seaworthy. Other religions did practice self-mutilation, but it was never advocated in Israel. In a film some years ago, an intense and driven father searches relentlessly for his grown son who has just killed another man. The father carries a sharp hatchet with him, and his purpose is to find his son and cut off his right hand so that his son will not burn in hell. This is certainly not what Jesus had in mind. The body or any part of it is not to be despised, but in the most radical terms Jesus here emphasizes the importance of obedience to God. How we treat each other, especially the vulnerable, is of utmost concern to God. CDW

St. Michael and All Angels September 29, 1991

Psalm 103:1-5, 20-22
Daniel 10:10-14; 12:1-3
Revelation 12:7-12
Luke 10:17-20

Chapters 10-12 of Daniel purportedly depict a revolution led by a heavenly being in the third year of Cyrus. Actually these chapters give details of the history of the Selucid period through the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes.

Chapter 12:1 tells how God uses Michael to restore Israel. The verses prior to this point give the author's contemporary history from a Jewish point of view. Michael becomes the champion of Israel, showing that God still loves the people and chooses to intervene on their behalf.

Revelation 12:7-12 depicts Michael living in the heavenly world and defending the cause of God and good. Michael and his angels are victorious and cast the evil one to the earth. A few centuries separate the writer of Daniel and the writer of Revelation, but both choose to highlight hope for a persecuted and endangered people of God in the power of a heavenly figure.

The notion of a patron angel for each nation has roots in Jewish tradition. Deuteronomy 29:26 suggests that God has given each nation a subordinate deity. Perhaps in all of this there is the

profound idea that God's "left handed kingdom" is set in place.

In one of the Dead Sea Scrolls ("The War of the Sons of Light with the Sons of Darkness") Michael is mentioned as the patron angel of Israel.

Daniel ends with a vision of the future including "everlasting life." Here we find mention of those that have their names in the "Book," and verse 4 in chapter 12, which is not included in the lectionary, pictures the sealing up of the book. Jesus apparently refers to that book in the Gospel.

When the 70 return, Jesus declares that they and their actions have caused Satan to topple over and fall like lightning from the sky. They did not need a patron angel-saint to work before them.

Having power to topple Satan does not, however, guarantee salvation. One's name must be written in the book of life, just as the names of citizens were maintained on official lists in ancient municipalities. Relationship to God is everything. SB

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost
October 6, 1991

Psalm 128
Genesis 2:18-24
Hebrews 2:9-11 (12-18)
Mark 10:2-26

FIRST READING

The pericope leaves out verse one, which sets Jesus' conversation in the context of the "crowds." For the most part in Mark's Gospel the crowds are not an obstacle to Jesus' ministry. Mark notes the contrast between the popularity of Jesus with the masses and the back-biting hostility of the religious hierarchy. The Pharisees here wish to put Jesus to the test. With that introduction, the topic of divorce and marriage serves as a wedge to open up a greater question: Will Jesus set himself above the Law of Moses?

Are there two pericopes here or one? If one addresses only the right and wrongness of divorce, then verses 13-16 may get neglected. The conflict between Jesus and the authorities takes place in public settings. Almost all conflicts between Jesus and the disciples occur in private, keeping the disciples "for" and "with" Jesus.

There was considerable dispute among the Pharisees and religious leaders of Jesus' time over the kinds of issues that made divorce allowable. Jesus does not respond with what is "allowed" but what is "commanded." What was commanded by Moses was even preceded by what was desired and created by God: that humans have lasting, meaningful, and committed relationships. Jesus puts God's creative intent above the law of Moses.

In Jewish legal custom only a man could initiate the divorce process, but in the Roman system a woman had the right to begin the process. Perhaps verse 12 is included because as the early church moved into the gentile world it needed to respond to new legal situations and standards. The Pharisees were mocking their own system by asking, "How much can we get away with?"

Access to God's love, mercy, and blessings are not a matter of staying within the limits of the law, even when stretched, but receiving the realm, the "kingdom" of God, like a child. Here, too, Jesus is talking about relationships—lasting, meaningful, and committed. We receive our relationship with God (like children, who in Jesus' day lacked any rights whatsoever) as a gift of grace, not as a result of keeping law.

In Genesis 2 the woman is created as an "ezer." This Hebrew word means one who is "an assistance suitable to" or "appropriate for" the one helped. This is not to be reduced by patriarchal interpretations to a mere "help-mate" who has a secondary role to the male.

"Ezer" is a word used to speak of God's direct assistance to human beings. It is used only twice, specifically applied to Eve, in reference to human beings. "Ezer" helps identify the kind of lasting relationship that is not to be entered into lightly. Committed relationships. divorce, and Jesus' response take on specific meanings in the light of God as our "ezer" from whom comes our salvation. SB

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

After hearing Jesus' hard words regarding divorce and remarriage you can be certain the people will be listening carefully to what the preacher has to say today. In our society scarcely anyone escapes the pain of divorce. If we have not been through it ourselves, then it has been our parents or our children or our brother or sister or our friends. Most of us also know of remarriages that have been quite successful. Do we now completely disregard what Jesus plainly says here? Some Christian groups maintain a hard line. According to them remarriage cannot be sanctioned by the church as long as the former spouse is alive. Some Lutherans will remember a time when the "guilty" party was ostracized from the congregation. Our attitudes have changed over the years. Have we sold out to our culture?

It is important to note who asks the question in this exchange with Jesus and for what purpose. The Pharisees don't really want to know what he thinks. They are trying to test and trip him. Jesus makes the point that Moses was actually making allowances for human weakness. God's original intention, however, is very clear: "Let no one put asunder." If you are counting on your own righteousnesses, then please note that God demands perfection.

Jesus has very different words for those who ask the same question but know they are sinners in need of forgiveness. Remember the account of the woman caught in adultery who was about to be stoned by a self-righteous crowd? There Jesus' word was "go and sin no more." By the grace of God no sin is unforgivable regardless how far we stray from the original intention. For sinners there is always another chance.

It is most appropriate that both Matthew and Mark follow this question about divorce with the account of the blessing of the little children. Children had very little status in the ancient world. The Pharisees approached Jesus convinced of their correctness and worth, but the children came with no claims at all. But they do have a marvelous capacity to receive. The truth is seen in the contrast. The kingdom of God is available to those who come with empty hands and are ready to receive.

Clearly, God intends the marriage relationship to be faithful and life-long. The integrity of that relationship is essential for the nurture of children and stability in human society. But sometimes marriage doesn't work. The problems cannot be resolved. Then we must face the painful truth that maintaining the marriage may be a destructive choice. At that point we are asked to deal with each other with compassion.

Those of us who are not divorced need to remember that we also are less than God intended in our relationship. Even in the best of marriages we hurt and sin and need forgiveness. The Pharisees' mistake was that they thought themselves better. The children came offering not their goodness but simply trusting in his love and acceptance. And Jesus blessed them. CDW

Twenty-First Sunday after Pentecost
October 13, 1991

Psalm 90:12-17
Amos 5:6-7, 10-15
Hebrews 3:1-6
Mark 10:17-27 (28-30)

FIRST READING

We all know Amos as the prophet who speaks for the poor, the exploited, the oppressed. God's people Israel, once oppressed themselves, had become oppressors selling the poor "for a pair of shoes." Yahweh here (like Jesus in the Gospel) is not speaking to an irreligious society but rather to the very people of God who have come to treasure their riches, endangering their relationship both with other people and with God.

In verse 7 Amos uses his favorite terms for what Yahweh requires of Israel: "justice and righteousness." Because they are oppressing the weak, these qualities are nowhere to be found. Seeking good does not mean doing good in the sense of keeping the commandments, as the inquirer in the Gospel reading would understand. Seeking good means seeking Yahweh.

Amos holds up a mirror so that his audience can see that its corporate image is a contradiction to righteousness. The most crucial institution in Israel's life was the court in the gates. There the weak and the poor were defended and given rights. The failure of these courts was a reflection of what was happening at all levels of society. The powerful and the rich corrupted this system and used it to oppress and enslave the needy and take away their land.

Justice (*mispat*) is the judicial process of establishing before the courts who is in the right. When the court has fully and honestly done its duty *mispat* is the result. Justice is the fruit of *sedaqa*—righteousness. James Luther Mays explains *sedaqa* as "the quality of life displayed by those who live up to the norms inherent in a given relationship and thereby do right by the other person or persons involved. The two most important spheres for righteousness were the relationship between Yahweh and Israel defined in the covenant and expressed in the cult, and the relationship of people in the social order of the folk" (*Amos*. Westminster Press, 92-93).

Against this background and history Jesus says, "How hard it will be for those who have riches to enter the realm/kingdom of God." The misuse of wealth for ancient Israel got them in trouble, and the unwillingness to share wealth leads the person in the Gospel text to a sorrowful path away from Jesus.

Confidence in God and trust in earthly possessions appear as mutually exclusive concepts.

There is only one time where the Ten Commandments are quoted by Jesus (Mt 19:16-22; Mk 10:17-22; Lk 18:18-30). Each listing is different, and none includes all ten. Keeping the commandments does not make one worthy of eternal life or of the title "good." That title belongs to God, as Amos and Jesus proclaimed. To keep the commandments is to live as a member of the people of the covenant and as a child of God. In Mark 10:24 Jesus refers to his audience as "children." As in the previous week, we hear again that the "realm/kingdom" of God belongs to the children. SB

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

About this time of year *Forbes Magazine* publishes its annual list of the wealthiest people in the U.S. and how much they are "worth." The man on top is usually worth over two billion, trailed by others who have several hundred millions to their name. That people could have such riches at their disposal seems incredible to most of us and we wonder: "how did they get it?"... "how do they manage it?" and perhaps, "why them and not me?" The power and choices available to such people are almost beyond our comprehension.

A rich man comes running to Jesus with his urgent question, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" These days there seems to be considerable interest in what happens after death. Recent popular films, such as "Defending Your Life," have dealt with the subject. It does not seem, however, that modern people are truly anxious about the matter. The modern spiritual question is not "Am I saved?" but "what will make my life meaningful here and now?" This is the pressing question for increasing numbers and especially for those who find affluence spiritually empty.

Like the man in the Gospel, many today would say they have tried traditional, mainline religion, but something is still missing. They have not found inner peace or confidence in the love of God. What else must I do? Their quest leads them to explore a tremendous variety of religious traditions, gurus, methods and exercises that promise spiritual depth.

Even if the question has changed somewhat today, Jesus' answer is the same. "You lack one thing... go sell... give... follow me." Actually the problem is not wealth, and the answer is not poverty. What the man lacked was radical dependence on God. His trust was in what he thought he had arranged for himself.

What Luther said over five hundred years ago is still true. Our attachment to what we think gives us security may be the most insidious of all false gods. The most dangerous times for us spiritually are not times of want and crisis, but when things are going quite well.

Jesus said it is more difficult for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. The disciples gasped. "Then how is it possible?" Jesus replied bluntly,

"With human beings it is not possible, but with God all things are possible." That is precisely what this man and so many today cannot see. It is God who has made possible *all* there is. With love in his eyes, Jesus says: get rid of your deadly baggage and follow me. CDW

Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost October 20, 1991

Psalm 91:9-16
Isaiah 53:10-12
Hebrews 4:9-16
Mark 10:35-45

FIRST READING

Following Jesus' third passion prediction James and John become involved in seeking prestige and honor. Jesus underscores that discipleship is not gauged by authority and power but in terms of one's ability to serve others.

James and John are seeking to sit "one on the right and one on the left" of Jesus. This phrase occurs also in 15:27 referring to the robbers that were crucified with Jesus. Jesus does not grant ordinary prestige. All he can promise are strife and persecution. Jesus coming into his glory means the cross.

The disciples are constantly faced with learning what kind of authority this Jesus is offering to them. Being connected with Christ does not mesh with efforts to maintain an old system of honor and authority.

Matthew has the mother of James and John seeking seats of honor for her sons, while Mark simply says it was the two themselves who made the request. These seats of honor would, in the minds of the disciples, give them great "authority." Honor is revealed only after suffering (38-39) and it is God, not Jesus (v. 40), who determines such ranking. True honor means serving and not ruling (vv. 42-44).

These verses also address the question of ruling and authority within the church. High rank in the church is not a matter of glory and power but service. Ultimately Jesus serves us by dying our death sentence on the cross. Christ gives up his life as a ransom for many. Mark will record Jesus saying over the Eucharistic cup, "This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for *the many*." Mark is constantly showing Jesus' *inclusivity* in contrast to the disciples' *exclusiveness*. James' and John's bid to exclusive seats in ruling power points one more time to their misunderstanding of Jesus' own authority.

The word "ransom" comes from the same Greek word from which we get the word "redemption." The words of Isaiah 53:10-12 are the last verses of the fourth Servant Song. Here the servant is declared the offering for sin. The servant, now Jesus, makes "many" to be accounted righteous by pouring out his soul to death.

Hebrews 4:9-16 reminds us that Jesus, our great high priest, is one who can sympathize with us because he has gone through all our sufferings and has tasted every temptation and known our weaknesses. From Christ enthroned on the cross we receive "mercy and find grace." SB

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

We can thank James and John for showing us ourselves so clearly in this Gospel. This truly is human nature. One of our most basic needs from infancy on is to be considered special. It is natural and even necessary for survival for babies to demand central attention and be oblivious to the needs of others. Most of us, however, never completely outgrow the tendency to think ourselves especially important. There is even a psychological theory that attributes virtually all anger to feelings of not getting what we think we are entitled to.

James and John decided that they deserved some special niche in the kingdom of God, and they were bold enough to ask for it. Jesus replied that it was not up to him to grant their request. Besides, he said, "you have no idea what you're asking for." They quickly agreed to drink from the cup confronting Jesus, while Jesus himself

prayed desperately to have it taken from him. They did not understand that to endure his baptism meant to suffer and to be continually at odds with the status quo, the culture, the powers that be, just as Jesus was. The other disciples, overhearing the request for special recognition, soon revealed their own ignorance as well. They griped, "Why should they get favors over us? Aren't we just as special?"

What about power and position in the kingdom of God? Do we need to review those hard words of Jesus: "The first shall be last." "The meek shall inherit the earth." "Anyone who seeks to save his life will lose it." The kingdom is not exactly what you would think. It is not like human systems. In the kingdom the great are the servants of all the others, and the Christ is himself the supreme example of this paradox.

In our hearts we know the truth of Jesus' words. Members, pastors, and bishops who consistently and faithfully serve without needing to call attention to themselves are the truly great. Someone has said, "There is no limit to what one can accomplish, if you don't care who gets the credit." I am least effective when I am concerned about pleasing others so that they will think well of me. I am most effective when I am motivated by another's best interest. I suspect the greatest are seldom recognized or widely known at all. But that's okay. The truly great know who is first and who, indeed, deserves all credit. CDW

Twenty-Third Sunday after Pentecost October 27, 1991

Psalm 126
Jeremiah 31:7-9
Hebrews 5:1-10
Mark 10:46-52

The story of Bartimaeus is recorded also by Matthew (20:29-34 and 9:27-31) and Luke (18:35-43). Only Mark, however, names Bartimaeus and identifies him as the "son of Timaeus." Perhaps Mark wants us to know that the one crying for mercy with the ancient liturgical phrase and messianic identification ("Son of David, have mercy upon me") is someone's dear child.

Unnamed people tend to be discarded rather easily and can be treated as something other than a valued human being. Only Mark has the blind Bartimaeus add the name "Jesus" to his cry for mercy to "the Son of David." So the "son of Bartimaeus" is seeking help from the "Son of David." At the end of the passion account we remember that the centurion identifies Jesus as "Son of God." All the people requesting healing have been unnamed in Mark's Gospel (except Jairus who came seeking healing for his daughter, Mk 5:22-23).

When we have before us a name, a personal and specific connecting link to a family, it is not so easy to dismiss and silence a person. Yet those who genuinely seek and cry out for God's mercy cannot be silenced. It wasn't society that wanted to quiet Bartimaeus but the disciples! Are they the forerunners of the institutional church?

Often we brush this thought aside and defend the disciples as ones who wanted to protect Jesus from those who would constantly bother him, not unlike urban church door keepers who try to guard the pastor from being pestered by those constantly knocking on the door looking for a dollar. How do we silence the many voices calling for mercy? To do *hesed* ("mercy") was and is the very core of Jesus' ministry.

Prior to his encounter with Jesus, Bartimaeus was sitting on the roadside. Now that his sight has been restored (today's Psalm, 126, is a prayer for the restoration of one's fortunes), Bartimaeus joins Jesus on the "Way." Immediately after this event Jesus marches up to Jerusalem walking to the cross. Mercy for Bartimaeus means a call to discipleship that gave him sight and insight into the cross. Bartimaeus, like the disciples, had been called by Jesus.

When Jesus granted Bartimaeus' prayer, he said, "Go your way, your faith has made you well." Restored to sight, Bartimaeus follows Jesus. The threefold repetition of "call" (10:49) emphasizes Jesus' initiative to save and heal. Like the disciples Bartimaeus is named and called. Bartimaeus, like the disciples, responds in faith. Except for the demons, only the disciples in the

voice of Peter have been able to recognize and proclaim Jesus' divine identity (8:29). According to Jeremiah, the blind are part of the remnant of Israel that God has saved (31:8). SB

Reformation Day
October 31, 1991

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

FIRST READING

The heart of the Reformation message comes in Romans 3:28 where St. Paul writes, "We hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works of the law." Paul's use of "justify" (δικαιόω) most often refers to a person being acquitted. Pronounced and treated as righteous by God, a person really is δίκαιος.

The verb also carries the intent of being made free, or set free. Here is the connecting point with the Gospel text: "If the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed." Jesus was referring to freedom from the slavery of sin.

First Jesus says the truth will set you free, and then he says the Son will set you free. Jesus himself is the revelation of truth (cf. 14:6). Nowhere in the Old Testament do we find a concept about truth setting one free. This highlights a contrast between the revelation of Jesus and that of the law. Paul presents the gospel and faith in the context of struggles over law and righteousness.

The Reformation was a freeing experience for Martin Luther, and these texts carry that same word of liberation from sin and death as we realize in our lives that we are justified by faith. In Romans 3:21-31 Paul uses the word "faith" seven times. God's saving righteousness for us restores our relationship with God and makes us new beings. God's righteousness is available through faith (πίστεως) in Jesus Christ for all persons who believe (πιστεύοντας). Paul goes on to say that any possibility of boasting on our part is excluded.

Verses 24-26 interpret Jesus' sacrificial death as the making known of God's covenant—fidelity with those who have broken covenant. Jeremiah declares, "But they on their part broke my covenant, although I for my part was their Lord." Jeremiah 31:31 is the only reference to a new covenant in the Old Testament.

Two groups saw themselves as living the new covenant. The first was a sectarian group from Qumran who called themselves "men of the New Covenant." But for them that meant more legalistic tendencies. The other group was the Christian community who saw the new covenant develop with the birth of the church and the confessing movement that proclaimed Jesus as Lord.

Psalm 46 found its most worthy Christian echo in Martin Luther's hymn, "*Ein Feste Burg ist Unser Gott.*" Strength and courage and joy spring from trust and faith in God. This God is very near and is the one who has helped in the past. The psalm focuses on a God who was and is and is to come. This God, says the psalm three times, is with us. The very image of God is converted in the psalm from the initial presentation as a warrior-God to a ruler of a divine world-kingdom of peace. SB

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

On a calm summer afternoon two men climb into the gondola of a hot air balloon. They turn up the flame, loose the ropes, and slowly rise above the trees. Watching the peaceful scenery below, they do not notice dark thunder clouds forming above them. Suddenly there is a violent up-draft and they are swept above the clouds and blown by strong winds, first in one direction and then another. After two hours of completely uncontrolled flight the storm abates so they can finally lower themselves below the cloud cover to see the ground. It is completely unfamiliar terrain. They have been carried way off course. They notice a man in a field directly below and they call out, "Where are we?" The man replies, "You are in a balloon!" In the gondola there is a pause and then

one looks at the other and says, "That man is a preacher." The other questions, "How could you know that?" "Because he told us the absolute truth, and it was completely irrelevant."

Every thoughtful pastor is sensitive to this danger. There are all sorts of truths that we can share, but there is one that is always central and relevant, and it is the truth Jesus speaks of today. It is the truth that was rediscovered at the time of the Reformation. Unfortunately this truth is particularly difficult to believe and to communicate, because it cuts against our human grain. It is a fundamental truth that the only real freedom we can experience comes as a gift of God through the Son and is not something we arrange for ourselves. Why is it so difficult to believe that our worth and freedom come from outside us as pure gift? In order to maintain the illusion of control even good Lutherans veer toward the law for self-confidence and security. Jesus was talking with Jews "who had believed in him," yet their trust was in their heritage and theological tradition.

Like them, we don't recognize bondage when we see it. The truth that frees is not theological pedigree but the unexpected, undeserved and almost unbelievable love of God in person in human history. This is truth we struggle to face because it is so scary. We are not in control. The Son alone has made us free. That's where we are! CDW

All Saints Day
November 1, 1991

Psalm 34:1-10
Isaiah 26:1-4, 8-9, 12-13, 19-21
Revelation 21:9-11, 22-27 (22:1-5)
Matthew 5:1-12

FIRST READING

The Psalmist (34:8-10) experiences the reality of God's goodness and loving care through all senses ("taste and see") and is inspired to sing of the blessedness that those find who take their refuge in God. These are "saints," that is, godly or holy ones who receive God's goodness by being in communion with God.

The Beatitudes echo the thought that the "blessed ones" are those who receive the goodness of God. The gifts of God are for the people of God: the kingdom of heaven, comfort, the inheritance of the earth, satisfaction for hunger and thirst, mercy, the presence of God, being called children of God, a great reward in heaven.

The gospel proclamation is found loud and clear in the psalm: "the Lord delivered and the Lord saved."

The Beatitudes open the Sermon on the Mount, as the Decalogue stands at the head of the Covenant Laws of Exodus 20:23–23:19. The rest of the Sermon on the Mount can be considered the application of the Beatitudes.

All of the qualities of those who are declared "blessed" by Jesus are actually qualities of the personhood of Jesus. Blessed (μακάριοι) are they. That is, they receive freely and as a privilege the divine favor of God. Matthew does not even include the woes so prominent in Luke.

Isaiah 26 begins with a prophetic song that looks toward the fall of the world's power and the beginning of the time of salvation. Matthew makes the point that there will be great gifts of God yet to come for God's people who exhibit the qualities of Jesus, and yet he says that "the kingdom of God" is already theirs. The realm and rule of God has entered this age with Jesus.

Blessed already, God's saints look to a future of even fuller blessing in complete communion with God. SB

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Twenty-Fourth Sunday after Pentecost November 3, 1991

Psalm 119:1-16
Deuteronomy 6:1-9
Hebrews 7:23-28
Mark 12:28-34

FIRST READING

Jesus not only understood the Deuteronomistic historian but exemplifies a life of "Torah" living. The Gospels have over 70 quotations from the book of Deuteronomy alone. Jesus gives credence to this tradition with the quotation of the "Shema," as the positive form of the Decalogue.

Verses 1-3 of Deuteronomy 6 belong with the verses in chapter 5 that deal with Moses as the mediator of the Decalogue, and verses 4-9 belong with the next section, 6:4-25. This is a call for Israel to love the Lord alone upon entering the land. Israel will encounter a land that is teeming with "gods." We are reminded of Luther's definition of a god: "That to which your heart clings and entrusts itself is, I say, really your god" (*Large Catechism*, the First Commandment).

The translation of the Shema is easily rendered, "Hear O Israel, Yahweh is our God, Yahweh alone!" Love here is not a romantic love but one of deeply affectionate loyalty directed to the one who deserves that love. This love becomes apparent in the carrying out of the commandments so that the dimensions of the love may be comprehended. God's people sensed that the essence of their religion was found in verse 5, and later Judaism repeated the Shema twice daily. Shema is the Hebrew word of the opening sentence: "Hear." The metaphor in verse 8 eventually became a literal command.

Moses warns Israel, about to enter the land, to love Yahweh alone. Israel must not divide its loyalty to include the local gods who promised prosperity. We have all kinds of "gods" that make equal contemporary promises.

Mark says it was a scribe who put the question to Jesus about the greatest commandment. Matthew has the question coming from pharisees, and Luke calls the inquirer a lawyer. But only Mark has the response of the questioner to Jesus' reply: "You are right, teacher!" Is this the first time an opponent concedes that Jesus has a right understanding of the law?

Jesus shows us with his own lifestyle what it means to love God. It is making that love real in the actions taken toward and on behalf of others. What is most important is not that Jesus said these words, but that Jesus *lived* these words. Jesus accepted and loved human beings despised by others. He obeyed God's will all the way to the cross. To this inquirer Jesus said, "you are not far from the realm/kingdom of God."

When singing or reciting Psalm 119:1-16 it would be helpful to remind the congregation that the word "commandments" and "law" are not simply the Ten Commandments. These words have in view the whole will and wisdom revealed by God. SB

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

This is the only place in Mark where the Sadducees, scribes, and Jesus are in complete agreement. They agree on the "shema" which is a clear and profound summation of Israel's faith and the proper human response to the one God. Here's the whole of the law simply put: "Love God above all else and love your neighbor as your self." And the experts agree!

The human problem is that we continually forget the most central and basic truths. It was a problem for God's people of old, and it is our most serious spiritual problem today. The suggestions in Deuteronomy probably seem excessive to us: "Teach this diligently to your children, talk of them while you are sitting around, when you take a walk, when you lie down or when you get up, and put them on your hands, your forehead and your door posts so you never forget." St. Benedict instructed his monks to gather for prayer at least seven times each day so there would be "habitual recollection" of the one true God. Such behavior may seem extreme or even compulsive to us, but somehow we too need to remember daily that which is central to all of life. Do we unconsciously keep our schedules full so we don't have time to think?

The pastor's task is simply to point people to God. This task is related to the ancient "shema" and the clear words of Jesus in today's Gospel. The pastor speaks the name of God where it might be forgotten and relates it to all of human activity and life. In a sense the task is to persistently call people to repent, that is, to continually return their attention to the one who is truly God because it is so easy to forget.

The celebration of All Saints' Day can also help us keep matters in proper perspective. A tourist in Poland once visited the famous Rabbi Hafez Hayyim and was invited into the intimacy of his home. As he entered he realized that the house was virtually empty except for one room which was filled with books and in a corner one table and a simple bench. The tourist asked the rabbi, "Where is your furniture?" The rabbi replied, "Where is yours?" The tourist stuttered somewhat surprised, "But I'm only a visitor here!" The rabbi replied quickly with a smile, "So am I." CDW

Twenty-Fifth Sunday after Pentecost November 10, 1991

Psalm 107:1-3, 33-43
1 Kings 17:8-16
Hebrews 9:24-28
Mark 12:41-44

FIRST READING

1 Kings 17 begins the story of Elijah. From here on the book of Kings is significantly dominated by the stories of the "prophets." The prophets themselves, not the kings, are the ones who are shaping the history of Israel and defining God's mighty acts! Elijah appears abruptly on the scene, symbolic of the way in which God's word enters the royal narratives.

Verses 8-24 juxtapose the prophet with a widow. The widow is a foreigner, which simply amplifies her worthlessness. God commands the prophet to go to the gate of the city where a widow will feed him. At the gate of the city, where justice was sought for the poor, Elijah calls to the woman much like Jesus with the Samaritan woman at the well.

The woman, who has not enough food for her and her son, is challenged to give first to the messenger of God. Elijah must depend on the gifts of this "nobody-woman." Her response is to give from the top of what she has. When she does, the God of Elijah provides for many days. The powerful word that gives the widow the courage to respond generously and in hope is, "Fear not." These are the typical words that introduce an oracle of salvation. Where this word is present there is enough of what is needed.

The king worked at keeping the poor people poor, but the word of God shatters the hopelessness of the people and empowers them to challenge the oppressive systems.

The widow in the Gospel lesson also is empowered out of her poverty to give of her all. How wonderful and how amazing that these women, deemed nothing by society, teach us the meaning of living with the freeing power of the gospel.

Just prior to Jesus' telling the story of the poor widow at the treasury, we are warned of the pride and false humility exemplified in the scribes who like to parade before others and manage to plunder the widows' houses. They are not much different from the kings whom the prophets exposed.

A foreign widow in the days of Elijah and a poor widow in Jerusalem in the time of Jesus, both cheerful givers. These are the ones to whom the saving word of God is being revealed. It may be tempting to make this only a story of stewardship to encourage people to give proportionately, and there is some truth in such an exegesis of the text. But far more powerful is the freeing energy of the gospel that works in the lives of these two women to bring them hope and wholeness with compassion as they with their very presence challenge oppressive powers and situations.

The story of the widow giving her all is a wonderful prelude to the passion of Jesus which is about to begin. The Christ will give his all on the cross. "Jesus put away sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Heb 9:25). SB

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

These are two stories of poor widows that I remember clearly from early childhood. The generous giving of the two women so close to the edge themselves, deeply impressed me. It warmed my heart to hear about the woman who gave her last penny amidst the high-rollers who made a show of putting large offerings in the thirteen trumpet-shaped receptacles. I remember being told their big heavy coins made attention-getting sound as they rattled down the metal tubes. Her two "leptons" or "thin ones" were so small they could not be heard. As a child I didn't have much to give either. Every Sunday I brought a single nickel, but I could see others putting larger coins and even big bills in the plate. It warmed my heart to think that Jesus valued little offerings too.

In the Old Testament story I identified with the son, and I wondered how he felt when his mother gave the last pancake to a strange man. Of course, what was really impressive is that the food supply never completely ran out. The concept of a never ending supply is intriguing. Actually, for most of us, has our jar ever been empty?

How do these stories touch us today? It is not unusual for people to experience a slight twinge of guilt in the face of such selfless giving. In comparison we are all stingy. Sometimes guilt is the appropriate feeling, but it is not helpful just to stay there. The best response to guilt is to regard it as a signal that something is wrong and needs to be corrected—the sooner the better.

The point here, however, is that human and divine ideas of what's precious can be very different. What is precious to God is complete trust. Faith led these vulnerable widows to risk. They seemed to know their utter dependence on God. The more property we possess, the more distance there seems to be between us and the true source. The stuff we possess seems to obscure our view of a generous and lavish creator. We are not self-made or self-sustaining, and we don't need to be. That's what these wonderful widows would teach us. CDW

Twenty-Sixth Sunday after Pentecost November 17, 1991

Psalm 16
Daniel 12:1-3
Hebrews 10:11-18
Mark 13:1-13

FIRST READING

When Jesus and his disciples came out of the temple, one of the disciples marveled at the beauty of the architecture. Indeed, from the outside it must have been a magnificent sight. But from the stories of Jesus' interaction within the walls after he entered the city and taught in the temple we see the kind of things that went on inside. In the temple Jesus drove out the money changers. In the temple the chief priests and the scribes challenged Jesus' authority. In the temple they sought to entrap Jesus with his own words. In the temple only the poor widow gave from her heart. In the temple the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to arrest Jesus and put him to death.

Yes, how wonderful are the stones, and how wonderful are the buildings, from the outside. The great temple, started by Herod the Great and still incomplete in Jesus' day, will be destroyed in 70 C.E. Jesus' foretelling of the destruction of the temple begins "the little apocalypse" (Mark 13). This chapter interrupts the flow of the narration of the life and death of Jesus.

The disciples ask a twofold question: "When will this be, and what will be the signs when these things are all to be accomplished?"

Daniel shows that apocalyptic writing arises when the community or nation is in a crisis or tribulation. How will sorrow and hardship give way to peace and triumph? Wars on earth are not what inaugurate the "kingdom/realm of God," rather they merely anticipate times of "woes." Mark's immediate audience, like Daniel's, is facing the reality of persecution and hard times for the sake of the gospel. Central to the reading are the words of Mark 13: "And the gospel must first be preached to all nations."

Perhaps it is too difficult for a society that has never suffered on account of Jesus and the gospel to relate to that possibility. We do not experience persecution. Our problems seem rather to be apathy and abuse of the faith. Jesus speaks of false prophets who are not anti-Christians, of "deceiving" the people. This word (*planao*) is translated in the RSV as "lead astray" and is used several times in Revelation. Not stones but only the gospel of God's grace is the place where people can stand in peace and wholeness, facing the terrors of a world which does not know God.

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

Jesus here forecasts terrible happenings. These "wonderful stones" the disciple referred to were huge, some measuring 37-1/2 feet by 18 feet by 12 feet. What awesome power could possibly scatter them, and when would all this happen? Jesus does not answer their question but instead warns them about anyone who would. Terrible things are going to happen in nature and among nations, but it is just the beginning. People will betray the closest of human bonds, and disciples will be beaten and hated. When that happens, Jesus says, they should not worry about what to say in their own defense, but they should depend on the Holy Spirit.

The book of Daniel comes out of such a time in the history of God's people. Mark's readers were probably aware that in the dark days leading up to the Maccabean revolt, Jews were executed for faithfully observing the law. Some were even killed while saying their prayers. The war with Rome leading to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. was another such time.

Before the fighting started in the Gulf War some speculated that we were seeing the nations gathering for the battle of Armageddon. (They seem to be unaware that in Revelation 19 there is no battle at all but rather a show of victory for the King of Kings.) At work and school we all associate with those who believe in "the rapture" and who profess to see the end right around the corner. A few even claim to know the precise date. Such speculation diverts our attention from living full lives as Christians in the world as it is. Inventive and fascinating as they are, the continually updated interpretations of the Apocalypse (to keep it current with political changes) are worse than misleading. People tend to think there's nothing more to be done, become defensive and isolated, and wait in a corner for the inevitable to unfold. Jesus says this is not the time to disengage.

Terrible things have happened to God's people in the past, and they will occur again. In the United States we have been largely spared, but the church certainly has been regarded as the enemy in Central America, Namibia, South Africa, Liberia, and the Soviet Union. We also have seen incredibly courageous and faithful witness rising from these churches. We know about Oscar Romero, but thousands of others have faithfully endured to the end without our knowing their names or their stories. We take comfort in what we do know: God is near, and history will end at the throne of God. CDW

Thanksgiving Day
November 28, 1991

Psalm 65
Deuteronomy 8:1-11
Philippians 4:6-20
Luke 17:11-19

FIRST READING

The Gospel text begins with the reminder that Jesus is "on the way" to Jerusalem.

Luke views the story of the lepers as an illustration of Israel's misunderstanding about the messianic benefits as something that was "owed" God's people. The nine hurried to Jerusalem to fulfill their religious obligation. The Samaritan, perhaps not compelled by the immediacy of temple tradition, took the initiative to return and give praises to God and thanks to the one who healed him.

Lepers were forbidden to enter villages or towns, so they stood off in the distance to seek Jesus' aid. Since they could not enter the village (Lev 13:46), they most likely encountered Jesus

at the gate. Remembering in ancient Israel that *mispat* (justice) was sought for the poor and outcast at the city gate, it is appropriate that they meet the Messiah there.

The text does not pinpoint the exact moment of their healing. It happened "as they went." And one of them "returned praising God." This is the same response that Luke records concerning the shepherds after they had seen the infant savior (Luke 2).

The appointed Psalm for the day (65) is a Thanksgiving Psalm offered for a good harvest. According to Ps 30:10-12 the proper response to mercy is offering *todah* (thanksgiving). It is not simply that the nine did not give a "thank you" to Jesus. They failed to keep the religious and liturgical rite of offering praise and glory to God. They had asked for mercy and they were given mercy, and praise is the proper response. Note that Luke's Gospel begins (1:14) and ends (24:52) with praise.

The Samaritan-outsider-leper is told that his faith has made him well. The word for "make well" is σῴζω, which is usually translated as "save." This Samaritan was "made well" in the ultimate sense. He received healing for all his brokenness. Salvation to him has come!

One of the major themes of Luke's Gospel can be seen in Jesus' universal outreach. This Samaritan leper becomes a model of faith for all Israel and all of us. Matthew and Mark also report healings of lepers. But Luke's story is unique in its advocacy for the outcast and the oppressed. SB

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

Two presidents in our history refused to issue Thanksgiving holiday proclamations during their terms of office. Thomas Jefferson and James Madison were not ingrates; they simply did not believe it was government's place to advise citizens regarding their personal attitudes. They made a valid point. Genuine gratitude is rarely induced at the suggestion of another. Many will observe the table-side rituals of this day with shallow appreciation if not indifference.

Expressions of thankfulness spring forth spontaneously when a receiver becomes aware of gifts and a giver and the difference they make.

"As they went, they were cleansed." But only one of them became aware and returned to thank. The others were dull to what was happening. Or perhaps they figured they were entitled to good health, and it was about time!

I am continually amazed that the truly grateful people I know are also the ones who have usually suffered the most. Etty Hillesum, a Jewess from Holland who died in Auschwitz on November 30, 1943, has helped me understand this in the book *An Interrupted Life*. From the concentration camp she writes, "As life becomes harder and more threatening, it also becomes richer, because the fewer expectations we have, the more the good things of life become unexpected gifts which we receive with gratitude."

Christians do not need presidential proclamations to remind them to be thankful. Thanksgiving is not the theme of just one day out of 365. Gratitude is the appropriate response to every new day of grace. We regularly celebrate a meal of thanksgiving—Eucharist—which heals us as we go. The gift we receive is the giver himself, and what an incredible difference it makes. We come away not stuffed, but filled.

We cannot give people an attitude of gratitude, but we can help them remember. That was the purpose of today's word from Deuteronomy. Only when we are fully aware (again) can we turn to respond with joyful thanksgiving. "Lord, deliver us from dullness to your presence and your gifts, and from deafness to your call!" CDW

Christ the King
November 24, 1991

Psalm 93
Daniel 7:13-14
Revelation 1:4b-8
John 18:33-37

FIRST READING

Psalm 93 sets the tone of the day proclaiming, "Yahweh reigns." God's reigning begins with God's establishment/creation of the world (v. 1). The creator is enthroned from everlasting. The connection of creation to enthronement can be traced to a Babylonian source, where each new year was celebrated as the anniversary of God's victory over the powers of chaos at creation. We celebrate God's enthronement not at the new year, but at the very end of the church year.

Jesus proclaims that the dominion of God is not derived from this "cosmos-world." All of the Gospels agree on Pilate's first words to Jesus: "Are you the king of the Jews?"

The title "King" is difficult to understand in our democratically oriented churches and society. And for many people the word "king" carries sexist implications and is full of overtones of oppression and domination. But in the day of the Roman governorship it expressed the hope and expectation of a liberator sent by God. When Jerusalem hailed Jesus as "king," the word meant "redeemer" and "savior" from all oppression.

Jesus becomes "king" not by conquering people but by letting himself be trampled underfoot. He will in the strange strategy of God become their king not to dominate and abuse but to empower and set free. Jesus' enthronement takes place at the cross. At his crucifixion Jesus reveals the truth of God most vividly and powerfully. SB

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

For most of us our experience with kings and kingdoms is limited to fairy tales and the expressions we have heard in Sunday school and church. It is difficult to connect these images with modern life, and substitute words like "dominion" and "reign" help little. Even those well-acquainted with the reigns of kings and queens have difficulty comprehending the kingdom of God. Pilate, who served a king himself, was certainly confused. John pictures him literally caught in the middle between the Jews on the outside of the praetorium and Jesus on the inside. Totally perplexed, Pilate moves back and forth between the Jews and Jesus, unable to understand either one. Of Jesus, he asks, "If your kingship is not of this world, then what is it?

Throughout his ministry Jesus spoke of the kingdom and often used parables to explain it to his followers. The disciples never seemed to understand any better than Pilate. What is clear is that the kingdom of God is not just "other worldly." It is of an entirely different order altogether. It is not something for the future but is already in our midst (Lk 17:21). It has to do with recognizing where ultimate power resides and with submitting to the rule of God in our inmost being and in all our relationships. God's kingdom is not coercive but has to do with compassion, forgiveness, and the courage to speak the truth. Jesus himself continually demonstrated the nature of the kingdom.

Christ's is certainly a disputed sovereignty. One could assume from a quick look around the world that whoever is in charge either doesn't care or lacks the power to do something about it. Jesus often made the point that things are not as they seem. A woman once wrote to Flip Wilson asking why he had given his children a bulldog as a pet. Flip's response: "So they would see that ugly face and discover all this love behind it and never take anything at face value in the future."

Karl Barth said there are two temptations for the waiting church: (1) that it over-estimate itself, and (2) that it under-estimate itself. He's right! We are today confused by the kingdom and the lack of power and glory so we sometimes try to create our own. It is easy to forget that our task is not to be successful but to be faithful. The kingdom of God is among us in compassion and forgiveness, in the truth of God in a world that prefers its lies. Finally, a reminder from James Baldwin: "Our crown has already been bought and paid for, all we have to do is wear it." CDW

Reflections on the Aftermath of Global Conflict

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Recently I served as a respondent at a conference by the same title that heads this article. The sessions were bi-focal. Part of the time was spent on the history of bilateral and multilateral efforts to limit armaments around the world. The rest of the time was directed on the Middle East, the history of Christian/Islamic relations, and the aftermath of the Gulf Crisis. The discussion was at the same time disturbing and challenging, and evoked the following responses from me.

1. From a theological perspective, global conflict is inevitable, given the sinful nature of human beings. The Gulf Crisis is a humbling example of this point. As many have observed, this was a war fought in our living rooms. It was short, intense, made for TV, and fully exploited by CNN. Who can forget following the path of a "smart" bomb, through the lens of a camera mounted on the nose, down the chimney or in the front door of its pre-selected target? A subsequent UN report called the destruction on the ground "apocalyptic in scope" and declared that Iraq has been bombed back to a pre-industrial state.

Yet, such intimate knowledge of the extent and intensity of the destruction that has been wrought and the subsequent reports of the human toll, especially among children, has resulted in no comparable outpouring of empathy for the victims of this tragic affair. Paul Tillich describes this aspect of the nature of sin in a particularly poignant passage in his book of sermons, entitled "Shaking of the Foundations." Several decades ago, he wrote these words that are hauntingly relevant in the aftermath of the Gulf Crisis:

> But let us consider ourselves, and what we feel, when we read, this morning and tonight, that in some sections of Europe [or Iraq] all the children under the age of three are sick or dying, or that in some

> sections of Asia millions without homes are freezing and starving to death. The strangeness of life to life is evident in the strange fact that we can know all this, and yet can live today, this morning, tonight, as though we were completely ignorant. And I refer to the most sensitive people amongst us. In both humankind and nature, Life is separated from life.

2. Religion is a major cause of global conflict. This is a well known and lamentable fact. Yet all the world religions have well defined laws of hospitality to guide contact with the stranger in their midst. The laws are ancient in origin and provided for those relatively rare occasions when a person of foreign origin was encountered in former times. But now that encounter is constant. People of different faiths are in daily contact in many parts of the world and, to an increasing degree, in our country. There is an urgent need for all religions, including Christianity, to examine and expand the teaching of hospitality toward devout followers of other faiths, to accommodate the conditions of the modern world.

3. Grace on the global scene means precisely what it means in our personal lives: re-uniting, re-union, and reconciliation of that which is divided or estranged. It is doubtful if there can be peace on earth until or unless there is reconciliation among the religions of the world. For this reason, interfaith dialog has become an urgent and essential part of Christian witness. We must work to prevent a sharp distinction between interfaith dialog and evangelization. Evangelism seeks every opportunity to tell the story and to share the faith. It calls forth our most creative energies to communicate the mighty deeds of God in Jesus Christ. Yet evangelism relies not on clever tactics or rhetorical appeals, but on the Holy Spirit to convert the hearts of others. Dialog provides one kind of chance to make such a witness. Motivated by the urgency to seek peace and pursue it, dialog is an especially appropriate and timely way to witness to our faith.

4. What might our response be in congregations to the aftermath of global conflict, most recently in the Middle East? Congregations should be aware and informed about two strong initiatives that are being taken by the Division for Global Mission (ELCA) to bridge some of the separation that characterizes our lives on the global stage. The Partner Synod Program now relates all 65 synods of the ELCA to a church body somewhere else in the world. Initial contacts are beginning. It will take time for the fruits of these global partnerships to affect life in every congregation, but learning can begin now, support can be given to the efforts, and horizons can be widened.

A second DGM priority is to pursue an emphasis on Islam. There are several reasons for this. Muslims and Christians are among the most estranged people in today's world. Their religions have much in common and, among the other world religions, Islam is the fastest growing in the United States.

Congregations could place special emphasis in the years ahead on studying other world religions. As people of God, it should be of special concern to us to know how people of other faiths answer the ultimate questions of life. Increasingly, this is not a conceptual exercise only, but an opportunity to know what our neighbors believe, what controls and gives meaning to their lives, and how we can engage with them in discussions that explore the religious dimensions of our lives and provide an opportunity for us to witness to our faith. In many places, study can lead to local contact be-

tween congregations and other religious bodies from whom we are presently estranged. Such contact will need to be undertaken with caution, careful preparation and, in most instances, with the assistance of people who have had some experience in interfaith discussions.

But the goals are clear and urgent: to break down the walls that separate us, to seek understanding and to correct misunderstandings, and to tell about the God who is revealed in Jesus Christ. Any endeavors of this kind should be undergirded by fervent prayer for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, that we might be instruments of God's peace in a world of global conflict.

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