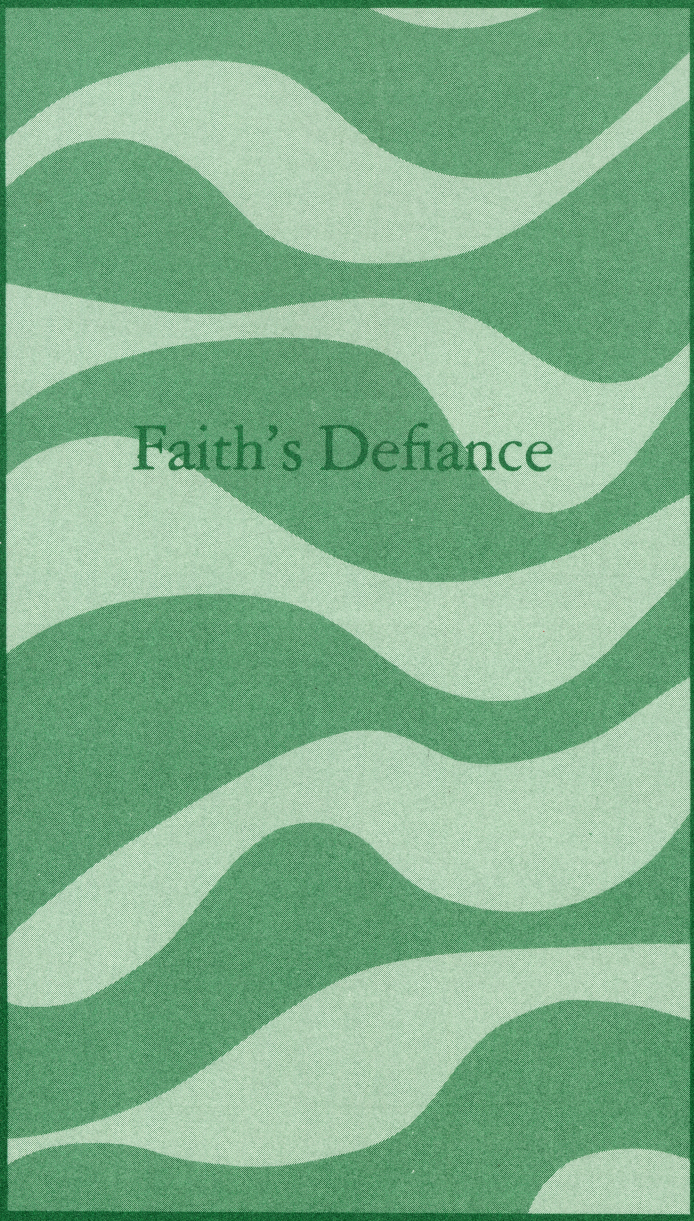
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Contents

Faith's Defiance 162
Ralph W. Klein

How Social is the Gospel? Some Twentieth Century Answers 166
Craig L. Nessan

How Social is the Gospel? A Response 176
Nancy A. Hess

Christian Thinking about Life after Death 179
Jerry K. Robbins

Implications for the Ministry of Bishops: A Study of the Lutheran Confessions and the Rite of Installation of a Bishop 184
Randall R. Lee

Christ(ening) 196
Robert W. Bertram

Science as Wisdom 198
George L. Murphy

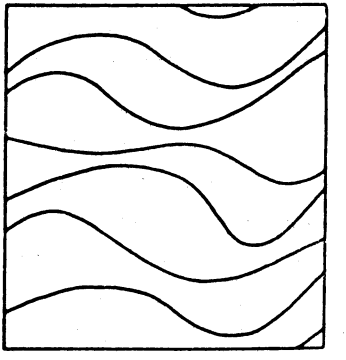
Luther's Exposition of John 17 204
Dennis A. Laskey

Let All Things Their Creator Bless 209
Paul Westermeyer

Book Reviews 216

Must We Continue to Wound the Ones We Love?
Roger Fjeld
Inside back cover

Drawings by Michael J. Murschel



Preaching Helps 225
Series B
Eighth Sunday after Pentecost—Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Faith's Defiance

When the LBW shortened "Jesus, Priceless Treasure" to three stanzas, it omitted these remarkable lines: "Satan, I defy thee; Death, I now decry thee; Fear, I bid thee cease...."

We need such defiance, and we need to hear of such defiance. Recently, I received a newsletter from a young couple serving on the church's mission frontier. It told of how the man functions as a missionary auditor and tries to understand his work as important as preaching or delivering health care, and of how the woman has spent the last two years teaching English on a volunteer basis, organizing trips for visitors, and trying to fit in somewhere, somehow. Her willingness to help has not always been readily accepted even in the church; her talents have largely been unused. Prices for corn have jumped four times in six months in their country, and AIDS has already left 30,000 orphaned. The newsletter ended defiantly, I thought: "In Christ's Service."

While this couple "sings of peace," the world will not harm them nor its threats alarm them. In deep frustration, these non-traditional missionaries work side by side with native-born colleagues to tend the sheep, feed the flock, and carry out the great commission. Defiantly.

Craig L. Nessan attempts to build a bridge between liberation theology and its critics, who fear that the gospel's transcendent origin and its eschatological fulfillment are getting lost. He reviews the ways in which Walter Rauschenbusch, Karl Barth, Gustav Wingren, and Schubert Ogden have tried to discover how social issues and the gospel mix. In his view, Ogden offers the best solution: redemption is the

work of God alone, but God invites human participation in God's emancipating work. In an invited response, **Nancy A. Hess** turns our attention to Wingren, who removes the political dimension from the gospel (God's redemptive activity) and assigns it to the realm of law (God's creative activity). The interpretation of the law as God's intent for life and health comes to us through the eyes of faith. On the basis of Wingren, she addresses probing questions to both liberation theologians and their critics.

Jerry K. Robbins asks us to consider the afterlife hope of ordinary believers. Their case for everlasting life begins with a knowledge of God as eternal, powerful, and loving. Their defiant faith defends its hope of heaven by pointing to the individual and corporate renewal in the Holy Spirit that they have experienced. To go to heaven is to be forever with the Lord and to be with all the friends and family who are included in the whole host of heaven. Everlasting life for them has recognizable continuity with the life they now know. Believers rely on God for the last moment because they have learned to depend on God for all the moments of life.

Randall R. Lee won the Piepkorn Prize last year with an essay on the Lutheran Confessions and the rite of installation of a bishop. He sees bishops exercising functions of the pastoral office rather than moving up to another grade on a hierarchical ladder. The installation rite would be stronger if it made the bishop more of a teacher and a guardian of apostolicity, and if it found a larger role for the Spirit. He suggests that we should elect our bishops by having the nominating committee match the needs of the synod with the gifts of the would-be bishop, much as call committees do in local congregations. He also asks why such calls should not be life-long.

Robert W. Bertram presents twenty-three theses on christology and the naming of God. The glory of the Trinity is that the God on whom all things depend is likewise the Child who depends. The Son, too, is Godself, and not in spite of but because of his dependence. By assuming the servile childhood of fallen humanity, God the Child replaced the bad name which dependence had acquired with the "name which is above

every name." We experience liberation and maturity as the Holying Spirit re-images us as divine dependents.

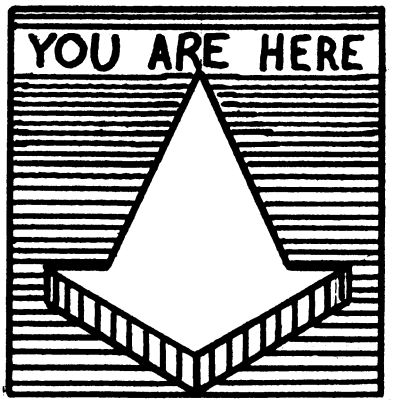
George L. Murphy states that belief in the goodness of God's creation, in the rationality of creation, and in its distinction from the Creator were important factors in the rise of science. Still the Bible insists that genuine human wisdom comes first of all not from what people can find out about the world, but from what God reveals to them. The divine wisdom of Christ crucified provides the framework without which all the wonderful comprehension of the world which science can achieve is ultimately pointless. He proposes a chiasmic cosmology: the creator-ruler is seen as the one who is placed crosswise in the universe.

Dennis A. Laskey reviews a series of sermons on John 17, which Luther preached in 1528. Some nuggets: Prayer gives honor to God in thanksgiving, enumerates our blessings, and places before God our necessities. Those who claim knowledge of God apart from Christ are dealing only with a God of their own making. Christ's unity with his people provides the basis for the unity of the church. The Father's sending of the Son leaves nothing for us to behold but an immeasurable and inexhaustible ocean of love and mercy.

Paul Westermeyer calls for well-prepared worship that is based on our tradition, blends that tradition with contemporary concerns, and relates to the ultimate future. Since God in Christ has won the battle, a whole new life is ours and will be ours for the taking. The *Benedicite* and the hymn "All Creatures of our God and King" imply that you cannot bless the Creator without respecting the Creator's creation. The whole creation, even parts of it that may disturb us, are called to bless the Lord. If someone sings off key and out of rhythm, don't pay too much attention to the sounds. If you do, you may miss the music.

Defiance is often defined by the rare "Here I stand" or the dramatic daring of the Augsburg Confessors, whose legacy we celebrate each June 25. But for me it is also defined by the service of nameless women and men who love the Lord, who want to serve wherever and however they can, and who believe that _____(your place) is that place right now.

As the missionary newsletter put it, "Perhaps the whole point is that the Gospel of Christ has been entrusted for 2000 years to frail, erring, sinful human beings." Defiance is also defined by those who affirm the "life of the world to come" on the basis of their (extra) ordinary faith. They really understand that God's great power guards every hour.



In Christ's Service,

Ralph W. Klein
Editor

How Social is the Gospel? Some Twentieth Century Answers

Craig L. Nessan
Cape Girardeau, Missouri

One of the most productive and, for many critics, questionable claims of Latin American liberation theology has been its application of "the gospel" to what it names "social sinfulness." Liberation theologians argue that the gospel of Jesus Christ must in our time address the social and political problems of hunger, substandard medical care, exploitative working relations, inadequate housing and living conditions, etc. For them, the gospel reveals that such conditions are not the will of God but instead the consequence of exploitative political, economic, and legal structures. The salvation engendered by the gospel, they argue, is integral, addressing sinfulness not only on the level of the individual but also that of society. Liberation theologians discover biblical warrant for this understanding of the gospel as they interpret the meaning of the exodus, the message of the prophets, and the concern of Jesus for the poor.[1]

Gustavo Gutierrez succinctly articulates liberation theology's affirmation of the gospel's social dimension:

> We mean that the annunciation of the Gospel, precisely insofar as it is a message of total love, has an inescapable political dimension, because it is addressed to people who live within a fabric of social relationships, which, in our case, keep them in a subhuman condition.[2]

Gutierrez is acutely aware of how this ur derstanding is susceptible to the charge c "humanizing," "temporalizing," or "polit cizing" the gospel.[3] He warns, howeve

---

[1] See Jon Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads: A Latin American Approach*, trans. John Drury (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1978), 50-61, for an explication of how Jesus' proclamation of God's kingdom addresses both the personal and social dimensions of sir

[2] Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation*, trans. Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1973), 270.

[3] For the following cf. Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 270-72.

that non-recognition of the gospel's political impact has resulted in the use of the Christian message to protect privileged interest in the status quo.

To guard against the gospel's "submersion into the purely historical realm," a new spirituality must emerge, "the new preaching of a Christian message which is incarnated—not lost—in our here and now."[4] While there is risk involved in such an approach, a living proclamation of the gospel within the context of the poor

> will indicate that in every achievement of brotherhood and justice among men there is a step toward total communion. By the same token, it will indicate the incomplete and provisional character of any and every human achievement.[5]

The gospel of Jesus Christ is made real in specific achievements of justice, though within the course of human history such realizations are always provisional, never final.

The insistence upon the social impact of the gospel made by liberation theology has been challenged on many fronts. "The Hartford Declaration," issued in 1975, set the tone for this criticism of liberation theology when in its tenth, eleventh, and twelfth themes it declared the following as "false and debilitating to the Church's life and work":[6]

> Theme 10: The world must set the agenda for the Church. Social, political, and economic programs to improve the quality of life are ultimately normative for the Church's mission in the world.
>
> Theme 11: An emphasis on God's transcendence is at least a hindrance to, and perhaps incompatible with, Christian social concern and action.
>
> Theme 12: The struggle for a better humanity will bring about the kingdom of God.

One of the authors and signers of "The Hartford Declaration," Richard John Neuhaus, has in numerous publications stridently criticized liberation theology for politicizing the gospel and reducing the kingdom of God to an historically imminent category.[7]

Others applying this criticism to liberation theology have included Peter L. Berger, James V. Schaal, and Carl E. Braaten.[8] For example, Braaten writes:

> In liberation theology the "gospel" represents the ideal state of affairs, which hopefully will come about some day and for which we ought to fight with all our might and main. The gospel is captured by ideology. We hear about the *demands* of the gospel which prescribe for Christians the kind of liberating praxis to which they ought to commit themselves. The future kingdom comes about through a synergism of divine grace and good works, in this case the right kind of political praxis.[9]

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[4] Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 271.

[5] Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 272.

[6] "The Hartford Declaration," *Theology Today* 32 (April 1975):94.

[7] Cf. Richard John Neuhaus, "Liberation as Program and Promise: On Refusing to Settle for Less," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 2 (April–June 1975):90-99, 152-158. This is a criticism Neuhaus has continued in numerous later publications.

[8] See Peter L. Berger, "Different Gospels: The Social Sources of Apostasy," in *American Apostasy: The Triumph of "Other" Gospels*, ed. Richard John Neuhaus (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989); James V. Schaal, *Liberation Theology in Latin America* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982); and Carl E. Braaten, *The Flaming Center: A Theology of the Christian Mission* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 148-58.

[9] Carl E. Braaten, *Principles of Lutheran Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 107.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is made real in specific achievements of justice, though such realizations are provisional, not final.

The very gospel which Gutierrez claims must include the political dimension is, in the estimation of these critics, reduced to the political. Both the transcendent origin of the gospel and the eschatological fulfillment of the gospel are shortchanged.

This criticism of liberation theology has become the focus of debate not only among theologians but also within wider circles of the church. Among Roman Catholics, the *Instruction on Certain Aspects of the "Theology of Liberation"* issued in 1984 by the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith ignited an intense discussion of the legitimacy of liberation theology's interpretation of the gospel. The silencing of Leonardo Boff by the Vatican was but one consequence of the attempt by the Roman Catholic church to curb a perceived politicizing of the gospel.[10] Within the Lutheran church, the question has been raised regarding the propriety of employing funds from the Hunger Appeal for advocacy within the political process. The question regarding the social dimensions of the gospel is one with manifold consequences within the self-understanding and self-expression of the church.

The conflict between the liberationist interpretation of the gospel and its critics can be examined from numerous angles. One key issue involves how adequately the critics have understood the position of liberation theologians like Gutierrez. Even more crucial is to evaluate how consistent both of their positions are in expressing what the New Testament means by "gospel." The purpose of this essay is more modest, however. Here to be examined are four twentieth-century answers to the question, "How Social is the Gospel?" The viewpoints of Walter Rauschenbusch, Karl Barth, Gustaf Wingren, and Schubert Ogden can shed additional light on this conflict.

The name Walter Rauschenbusch has in time become virtually synonymous with the social gospel movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Rauschenbusch shaped his theology of the social gospel under the influence of his experience as minister on the edge of "Hell's Kitchen" in New York City. In his last book, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, Rauschenbusch argued for the necessity of a social gospel to address the sinfulness of the social order that is commensurate to the individualistic gospel which answers the sinfulness of the individual heart.[11] Such a gospel Rauschenbusch grounds in "the Hebrew faith which Jesus himself held."[12] When Jesus proclaims the kingdom of God, intended was a "higher social order in which new ethical standards would become prac-

[10] Cf. Harvey Cox, *The Silencing of Leonardo Boff: The Vatican and the Future of World Christianity* (Oak Park, IL: Meyer Stone, 1988).

[11] See Walter Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1945), 5.

[12] Rauschenbusch, *A Theology*, 24.

ticable."[13] Under the process of the Hellenization of Christianity, alien influences transformed this social gospel by making it individualistic. The ethical content of the kingdom of God for society was set aside in this process.

Rauschenbusch seeks not to negate the importance of salvation for the individual but rather to incorporate it within the larger horizon of the social gospel.[14] Operating with a definition of sin as selfishness, Rauschenbusch describes the conversion of the sinner from self-centeredness to concern for the neighbor. Insofar as Jesus identified himself with the hungry, naked, and lonely ones (Mt 25:31-46), the Christian will stand in solidarity with these neighbors in particular.

Rauschenbusch also raises the significance of the social gospel in countering what he calls "super-personal social forces," for example, the negative effects which he perceives to derive from capitalism.[15] The law of Christ can empower not only individuals but even states to turn from the motives of selfishness and greed to those of altruism and equity.

> The salvation of the super-personal beings is by coming under the law of Christ. The fundamental step of repentance and conversion for professions and organizations is to give up monopoly power and the incomes derived from legalized extortion, and to come under the law of service, content with a fair income for honest work. The corresponding step in the case of governments and political oligarchies, both in monarchies and in capitalistic semi-democracies, is to submit to real democracy. Therewith they step out of the kingdom of Evil into the kingdom of God.[16]

It is the function of the church to bring this social gospel to bear upon both individuals and super-personal beings (i.e., organizations, businesses, states).

The theological notion at the heart of Rauschenbusch's social gospel is the kingdom of God. Where the kingdom of God is restored to the central place it held in the teachings of Jesus, the social gospel will be a dynamic force in transforming individuals, the church, and the entire social order into a community ordered by the will of God.

> Since love is the supreme law of Christ, the kingdom of God implies a progressive reign of love in human affairs. We can see its advance wherever the free will of love supersedes the use of force and legal coercion as a regulative of the social order. This involves the redemption of society from political autocracies and economic oligarchies; the substitution of redemptive for vindictive penology; the abolition of constraint through hunger as part of the industrial system; and the abolition of war as the supreme expression of hate and the completest cessation of freedom.[17]

History progresses by fractional realizations of the kingdom of God until the hour of history's end.

Perhaps no twentieth-century theologian reacted so critically to turn-of-the-century liberal theology (of which Rauschenbusch could be cited as a major example) than Karl Barth. Nevertheless, although grounded on a significantly different line of argument, Barth too defends the impact of the gospel in the socio-political sphere.

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[13] Rauschenbusch, *A Theology*, 24.

[14] See Rauschenbusch, *A Theology*, 95-109.

[15] See Rauschenbusch, *A Theology*, 110-17.

[16] Rauschenbusch, *A Theology*, 117.

[17] Rauschenbusch, *A Theology*, 142-43.

In his essay, "Gospel and Law," Barth reverses the traditional order of these two theological categories.[18] He does so in order to stress the priority of God's word of gospel. The content of this gospel, for Barth, is the grace God has revealed to humankind in Jesus Christ. This gospel works to counter human sinfulness which Barth typifies as autocracy and godlessness, human aversion and flight from the goodness of God's grace.

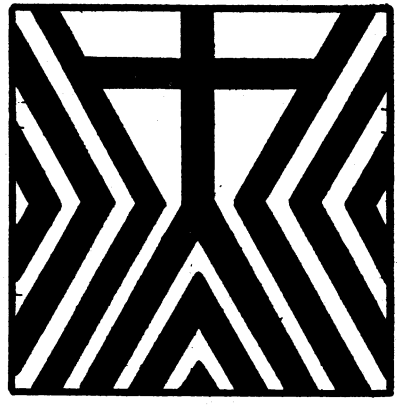
It is in linking the law of God to this gospel that Barth makes provision for the social dimension within his understanding of the gospel. Barth's concise expression of the relationship between gospel and law is:

> ...the Law is nothing else than the necessary *form of the Gospel*, whose content is grace.[19]

For Barth, the law functions as an indicative arising out of the gospel. God's law, known as divine gift, is comprehensible only to those who have already encountered the gospel of grace shown to humanity in Jesus Christ. The truth that Jesus Christ has already fulfilled the law opens up the possibility not only of human belief in Jesus Christ but even the possibility of human obedience and conformity to God's law. Such obedience and conformity to God's law is nothing less than the work and gift of the Holy Spirit.

The law of God emerging from the gospel is not only for individuals but inherently political. For Barth as for Rauschenbusch, the New Testament phrase "the kingdom of God," insofar as it describes a *kingdom*, is full of political ramifications.[20] The fullest description of the political nature of the gospel of the kingdom is located in Barth's essay, "The Christian Community and the Civil Community":

> The gospel which proclaims the king and the kingdom that is now hidden but will one day be revealed is political from the very outset, and if it is preached to real (Christian and non-Christian) men on the basis of a right interpretation of the Scriptures, it will necessarily be prophetically political. Explications and applications of its political content in an unmistakable direction will inevitably take place (whether in direct or indirect illumination of the political problems of the day) where the Christian community is gathered together in the service of this gospel. Whether this happens or not will depend on the preachers, but not only on them. It is a bad sign when Christians are frightened by "political" sermons—as if Christian preaching could be anything but political. And if it were not political, how would it show that it is the salt and the light of the



[18] Karl Barth, "Gospel and Law," trans. A. M. Hall, in *Community, State and Church: Three Essays*, ed. Will Herberg (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1968), 71-100.

[19] Barth, "Gospel and Law," 80.

[20] Barth, "Church and State," trans. G. Ronald Howe, in *Community, State and Church*, 124.

> world? The Christian Church that is aware of its political responsibility will demand political preaching; and it will interpret it politically even if it contains no direct reference to politics.[21]

The background for Barth's development of the political nature of the gospel is his own involvement in the Confessing Church movement in opposition to the ideology and politics of Hitler's Germany. It was Barth's contention that the church has the responsibility to be the model and prototype of an authentic state. This role of the church vis-à-vis the state is echoed in the fifth thesis from the *Barmen Theological Declaration*:

> The Church acknowledges the benefaction of this divine ordinance with a thankful, reverent heart. It reminds men of God's kingdom, God's Commandment and justice, and thereby of the responsibility of governors and governed alike. It trusts and obeys the power of the Word by which God sustains all things.[22]

The gospel, according to Barth, contains within itself the precepts of the law which can properly order all of life, including the socio-political order. It is the task of the church to make witness in word and deed to the standards of God's law by which the political order is measured. That God speaks to humanity at all, whether as gospel or as law, is in itself grace.

Swedish theologian Gustaf Wingren conceives the relationship between law and gospel to be radically different from Barth. In fact, Wingren's understanding of law and gospel was formulated in conscious opposition to Barth's proposal.[23] Wingren defends the classical order of law first, then gospel—with a strict distinguishing between the function of each.[24] Basing this distinction upon the theology of Martin Luther, Wingren develops the category of law as the proper arena for a discussion of politics. God rules the political order, Christians and non-Christians alike, through the power of the law. The demand of God for justice is knowable to all people through the proper use of reason. In its first (or civil) use, the law structures human society, compelling obedience under fear of punishment. Just laws, enacted by the state, serve God's purpose of ordering civil society. In its second (or theological) use, the law points out the inability of perfect human obedience to the divine will. The sinner stands accused by God for all shortcomings under the measurement of the law. Again, Wingren holds that the law, both in its civil and theological functions, is applicable to all persons apart from any encounter with the gospel. It is through created human reason, that politics operates to enact laws for the governing of human affairs apart from any unique Christian contribution.

The function of the gospel, by contrast, is to restore those accused by the law of God to new life.

> This Gospel is the kerygma which was preached in all the world after the resurrection, and for those who hear and accept it, it is both life—resurrection—and death—the putting to death of the old nature.... The Gospel as the good

---

[21] Barth, "The Christian Community and the Civil Community," in *Community, State and Church*, 184-85.

[22] Quoted in Barth, "The Christian Community," 189.

[23] Cf. Gustaf Wingren, *Theology in Conflict: Nygren, Barth, Bultmann*, trans. Eric H. Wahlstrom (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1958).

[24] For the following see Gustaf Wingren, *Creation and Law*, trans. Ross Mackenzie (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1958).

> news of the forgiveness of sins is a word preached in the face of sin and the dominion of law throughout the world.[25]

This gospel is the new and different work God has brought to pass through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Does Wingren see any relationship between the gospel and politics? Yes, but it is one that is quite indirect, working through the individual who has been justified by the Christian gospel. The individual who trusts in the redemption of God in Jesus Christ becomes freed from self-concern and *for* genuine concern for the neighbor. One arena, though not the major one, where this love for the neighbor finds expression is the political.

> The sphere in which a distinction is made between the demands made upon us by our fellow-men is not primarily parliament, government, or other legislative organ, but the relationship which the Christian has to his neighbor, that is to say in a relatively personal relationship which will vary in each case. Political matters are a special instance of this basic norm and a democratic society broadens the *mise en scene* by giving us more neighbors, but it is still the same reality with which we are dealing.[26]

Whereas the relationship of the gospel to politics is indirect, depending on the individual's chosen expression of neighbor-love, the relationship of the law to politics is most direct. All persons, not only Christians, are under the mandate of God to establish just laws. According to Wingren, no legal system is absolute but each requires constant revision under the criterion of love for the neighbor. This is especially urgent in view of the disparity between rich and poor nations in the modern world.[27]

The theology of Schubert M. Ogden has been deeply influenced by Bultmann, process thought, and, in recent years, the challenge of liberation theology. For Ogden, the central Christian doctrine requiring clarification in the twentieth century is the doctrine of God. It is through a reformulation of the doctrine of God as Redeemer and Emancipator that Ogden attempts to solve the relationship between the gospel and the socio-political relevance of the Christian faith.

Ogden, like Wingren, draws from the theology of Luther in seeking to understand the relationship of the gospel to things political. Ogden, however, draws exclusively from Luther's treatise *The Freedom of a Christian* in his elaboration of the two types of freedom in which the Christian exists, freedom "from" and freedom "for."[28] Ogden criticizes the theologies of liberation for confusing these "two essentially different though closely related, forms of liberation."[29] Ogden's formulation of their correct relationship reads as follows:

> ...faith in God is indeed the existence of freedom in the twofold sense that it is both existence *in* freedom and existence *for* freedom. Because faith is utter trust in God's love as well as utter loyalty to him and his cause, it is both the negative freedom *from* all things and the positive freedom *for* all things—to love and serve them by so speaking and acting as to respond to all their creaturely needs. In

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[25] Wingren, *Gospel and Church*, trans. Ross Mackenzie (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964), 111.

[26] Wingren, *Gospel and Church*, 217.

[27] Wingren, *Creation and Gospel: The New Situation in European Theology* (New York: Edwin Mellen, 1979), 120-24.

[28] Schubert M. Ogden, *Faith and Freedom: Toward a Theology of Liberation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), 58-62.

[29] Ogden, *Faith and Freedom*, 36.

As Emancipator, God invites human participation in extending "salvation" (not redemption) to all people.

> this respect faith is existence in freedom, and so a *liberated* existence—an existence liberated by God's redeeming love. But because faith is utter loyalty to God and his cause as well as utter trust in him, it is also existence *for* freedom, and so also a *liberating* existence—an existence devoted to so bearing witness to God's love by all that we say and do as to optimize the limits of others' freedom in whatever ways this can be done.[30]

The human being is passive with regard to the accomplishment of the first type of freedom. It is fully dependent upon the prerogative of God's redeeming love. With regard to the second form of freedom, however, the human being becomes activated by God's love and God's cause to work for the liberation of all those who are unfree. Such unfreedom includes socio-political bondage which calls forth political engagement.[31]

Ogden grounds this distinction between freedom "from" and freedom "for" in a reinterpretation of the doctrine of God. As Redeemer, God establishes the foundation of human freedom "from bondage to sin, as well as from the bondage of transience and death."[32] This work of redemption is God's work alone, salvation by grace accepted by faith. As Emancipator, however, God invites human participation in extending "salvation" (not redemption) to all people. For Ogden "the most important way in which we participate in God's work of emancipation is to labor for fundamental social and cultural change—the kind of structural or systematic change in the very order of our society and culture that is clearly necessary if each and every person is to be the active subject of his or her history instead of merely its passive object."[33] The gospel is related to the socio-political dimension, according to Ogden, in the same way God's redemptive work is related to God's emancipatory work. Both are of God. Both are necessary, yet distinguishable.

What conclusions can be drawn from the thought of these four theologians for the recent criticism posed against liberation theology's explication of the gospel? First, recalling the positions of those as diverse as Rauschenbusch and Barth should counter the accusation that liberation theologians have introduced a new innovation by incorporating the socio-political dimension into their understanding of the gospel. Numerous other modern theologians following the lead of Kant (e.g., Albrecht Ritschl) have held the ethical dimension of Christianity to be of paramount importance, also in its social and political impulses.

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[30] Ogden, *Faith and Freedom*, 64.

[31] Cf. Ogden, *The Point of Christology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982), 166-68.

[32] Ogden, *Faith and Freedom*, 87.

[33] Ogden, *Faith and Freedom*, 93f.

Secondly, there appears to be a significant divergence of opinion regarding the correct interpretation of the New Testament idea of the "kingdom of God" in this debate. Those who stress the gospel's social dimension emphasize that the kingdom of God is a *kingdom* through which God is ruling already in the present. These theologians, e.g., Rauschenbusch, Barth, Gutierrez, are willing to employ the kingdom of God as an imminent category. Those who criticize the gospel's social dimension point instead toward the kingdom's *eschatological* character. They argue that the kingdom is future, transcendent, and, thus, totally under the divine initiative. Between these two positions there is fundamental disagreement regarding the "already-not-yet" nature of God's kingdom. Dialogue concerning the theological use of the kingdom of God idea is necessary if this point of contention is to be resolved.

Thirdly, each of the four theologians here examined shed light on the debate between liberation theology and its critics. In contrast to Rauschenbusch, most liberation theologians are more nuanced and cautious regarding a temporal realization of the kingdom of God. Gutierrez, for example, while stressing the socio-political relevance of the gospel, repeatedly indicates that all gains in justice remain "incomplete and provisional." Rauschenbusch seldom attaches such reservations to his expectations of the growth of the kingdom.

In the theology of Barth, it is *God* who acts in the capacity of divine politician. Human politics are to merely reflect the political priorities of God's kingdom. Such a position can provide a constant check and criterion on all human politics, while at the same time insisting upon the importance of politics to God. Barth generally remains vague, however, as to how God's politics should translate into specific political proposals. Liberation theology, with reference to the biblical narrative, shares to a certain degree Barth's understanding of God as politician. Liberation theologians go much further than Barth, however, by attempting to mediate such divine politics into the complexities of Latin American society. In attempting such mediation, liberation theology is vulnerable to the criticism of "politicizing" the gospel. Without such concrete mediation, however, political theology appears to remain mere rhetoric.

Of the four theologians examined in this article, the critics of liberation theology seem to have most in common with Wingren. Neuhaus and Braaten share Wingren's insistence upon a clear distinction between law and gospel. For them, while politics are important, it belongs to the realm of the law operating through human reason. The gospel does not speak directly into this realm but rather indirectly through the justification of individual sinners who are freed to love their neighbor. One expression of neighbor love is the political.

Wingren's understanding of the gospel differs significantly from that of liberation theology. Whereas for Wingren any political consequences deriving from the gospel are most indirect, mediated through the form of neighbor-love chosen by the justified individual, for liberation theology the political consequences of the gospel (understood as the efficacious rule of God over all of life, especially today over politics) are immediate. There can be no agreement regarding the social relevance of the gospel when there remain such decisive differences in defining the gospel itself.

Currently one finds claims to the sanction of "the gospel" on all sides of the liberation theology controversy without adequate articulation of what is meant by this category. One cannot simply assume consensus about the meaning of the gospel.

Does the gospel alter only the relationship between God and the individual? Or, does the gospel also transform relationships between persons?

It is time for theologians to thoroughly examine their use of the term. Investigations of its exegetical roots and its various meanings over the course of history may shed new light on its contemporary theological significance.

Schubert Ogden, in his differentiation between the gospel as redemption and as emancipation, offers a proposal which seems to give consideration to the arguments of both liberation theology and its critics. By distinguishing between a passive and an active moment within God's salvific work, redemption is guarded as the work of God alone while inviting human participation in God's emancipating work of bringing an increase in freedom to all those oppressed by the chains of injustice.

Once again, the question is raised regarding the very definition of the gospel. Does the gospel pertain only to the passive moment Ogden names redemption? Or, does the active moment he names emancipation also legitimately belong to the character of the gospel? Posing the question somewhat differently, does the gospel alter only the relationship between God and the individual? Or, does the gospel also transform relationships between persons? How do the following elements fit together in one's definition of the gospel—God's loving us, our loving God, and our loving one another? The division between liberation theology and its critics regarding the question, "How social is the gospel?" can only be bridged by answering such questions.

How Social is the Gospel? A Response

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The passion with which Lutheran theologians cling to the distinction between law and gospel is one of the most significant barriers to their acceptance of liberation theology as a legitimate form of theology. Craig Nessan claims that one way to break this barrier is to answer the question, "How social is the gospel?"

The critics of liberation theology claim that by including the political dimension in the gospel, transcendence and the eschatological fulfillment of the gospel are neglected. Liberation theologians argue that by removing the political dimension from the gospel we neglect immanence and realized eschatology. Nessan states that both sides need to clarify their definition of the gospel and then answer the question, "How social is the gospel?"

He articulates accurately and succinctly the viewpoints of four twentieth-century theologians who may give possible answers to the question posed. Barth, Rauschenbusch, and Ogden seem to allow for the inclusion of the socio-political sphere in the gospel. Gustaf Wingren appears to offer little assistance in answering the question posed by Nessan. Wingren removes the political dimension from the gospel and places it in the world of the law.

If one accepts Nessan's question as being valid for both sides, then indeed Wingren's position is the least helpful. I would argue, however, that the question is inadequate because it is biased. The question comes from the critics of liberation theology and forces liberation theologians into apologetics.

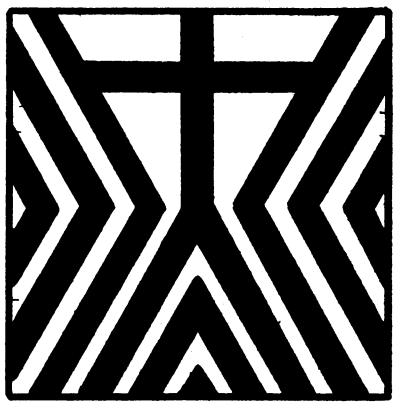
Nessan rightly argues that "one key issue involves how adequately the critics have understood the position of liberation theologians." A cursory reading of liberation theology would indeed lead the reader to believe that the gospel has been collapsed into the law thereby negating the liberating word for those who are labeled the "oppressors." In this scheme the gospel becomes "good news" for some and "bad news" for others. Lutheran critics have good cause to question this from a gospel perspective.

When the gospel becomes a club it turns into the law. This is where Wingren's perspective becomes helpful to liberation theologies.

Rather than critiquing the form and content of their gospel, it is more appropriate to urge liberation theologians to articulate more clearly their understanding of the law. A careful reading of liberation theologies reveals an implied understanding that God's universal creative and liberating activity is a given. The gospel frees us to know God's intention and to participate in God's purpose for all of creation. This is evidenced in the emphasis upon the Exodus as paradigmatic of God's intent to liberate and create life. Creation and shalom are also significant for these theologians. The shift that needs to be made in liberation theologies is from using the law as merely a paradigm to understanding it as God's ongoing creative activity now.

The question, "How social is the gospel?" has already been clearly answered by liberation theologians. There is only one history, not two (sacred and secular). Liberation, which is the freedom given by Christ, empowers Christians to be involved in this one history which includes shaping human destiny. The socio-political dimension of the gospel is not brought about apart from the power or the intention of God. The problem with this answer is that it packs too much into the gospel. This muddles the distinction between righteousness before God and righteousness before creation. Justification and ethical behavior become so intertwined that some detect works righteousness.

On the other side of the argument, the zealous protection of the gospel has led Christians to be weak in socio-political praxis. If God is only transcendent, and salvation is only in the future, then what real power does the gospel have for me right



now? What keeps me from hedonism and/or apathy? In this context Nessan rightly claims that there needs to be work done at clarifying what is meant by the gospel.

Nessan suggests that Schubert Ogden's categories of redemption and emancipation as passive and active moments within God's salvific work are helpful bridge-building tools. While in theory this does protect God's work of redemption, in practice we are still left with the same nagging questions. The gospel continues to have two functions: to redeem and to invite.

To break barriers and bridge the gap between these two positions it may be more helpful then to ask liberation theologians, "How social is the law?" By working toward an answer they may be able to liberate the gospel. To the critics of liberation theology we then can ask, "How social is the gospel?" As they develop an answer the law may be liberated.

Wingren's insistence upon bringing political action back to the realm of the law is helpful to both sides of the gorge. The law is God's creative activity. The gospel is God's redemptive activity through Jesus Christ. The interpretation of the law as

When we Christians act politically, we do it with a theocentric focus because we now have eyes to see God's will for creation, namely, life and health.

God's intent for life and health comes to us through the eyes of faith, under the power of the Holy Spirit. It is God who does the work of liberation in the political sphere with us and in spite of us! (This is evidenced in good works performed by non-Christians.)

Liberation theologies see the gospel as that which gives us power over the principalities that thwart God's intent for life and health. This empowering gospel proclaims that God's plan (the law) is not defeated, and this is what gives the gospel its social dimension. Our work in the political sphere is the proclamation of that "good news." This is not an antithetical position to Wingren who claims that the law is God's universal word and that the gospel is God's specific word. The gospel gives meaning to what is already written in our hearts. When we Christians act politically, we do it with a theocentric focus because we now have eyes to see God's will for creation, namely, life and health.

On the one hand God's transcendence and eschatological fulfillment (which is at stake for the critics of liberation theology) is addressed by Wingren's understanding of the law as God's unrecognized demand that keeps operating until it is silenced permanently at the end when it is no longer needed. This law will work to create life for *all* God's creation. On the other hand, immanence and realized eschatology (which is at stake for liberation theologians) is addressed by Wingren's understanding of the gospel as that which gives me life now and which frees me from preoccupation with my salvation. This allows me to focus on my neighbor and assist in God's creative activity.

If liberation theology is going to respond adequately to its critics it needs to articulate more clearly its understanding of the law. If the Lutheran critics are going to respond more helpfully to liberation theologies they need to define the gospel so that it includes the social dimension. Wingren is one twentieth century theologian who invites dialogue on both sides. This is one place where bridge-building can begin.

Christian Thinking about Life after Death

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"Can you be sure of eternal life?" the advertisement tantalizes, adding its own underlining for emphasis. It is a sensational offer bound to attract the attention of many. While there is much to be dreamed and little to be known about the afterlife, the human spirit stretches hopefully to peer beyond the curtain of the grave.

Some visionaries promise firm footing for those who wander in the lofty realms of afterlife speculation. One version appeals to the notion of the immortality of the soul, the capability of an immaterial self to survive the death of the body. Another argues that if justice is to be done, the good rewarded and evil punished, an afterlife is necessary. Others point to near-death reports and paranormal phenomena as evidence of life after death.

While all these approaches can be made from a Christian vantage point, and sometimes are, none of them quite captures the uniqueness and fullness of the Christian stance. This fact was impressed upon me recently while visiting a terminally ill woman in our community. A senior member of a local church, her faith and devotion were well known. We had prayed together many times through sickness and grief. Now we faced the last enemy. I struggled for the right words to kindle an honest hope. As had happened before, however, it was *her* faith that came to the rescue. On a bookshelf near her bed and plainly in her view was a placard which read, "God is greater than any problem you have." For this woman, these were the words of eternal life. She had no doubt that *God* would take care of her. The certainty of her hope was rooted and grounded in a childlike trust that looked only to the power of God to rescue her.

The straightforward faith of this woman might be dismissed as theologically uninteresting. In fact, it contains hints of substantial religious content and apologetic clout. Though not often explicated, the faith of ordinary believers constitutes a distinctive and persuasive case for eternal life.

The afterlife hope of ordinary believers rests on a rich concept of God and the reality of a spiritual relationship to God. Frederick Buechner has described how he learned to trust God with his death just as with his life: "I know no more now than I ever did about the far side of death as the last letting-go of all, but I begin to know that I do not need to

know and that I do not need to be afraid of not knowing. God knows. That is all that matters."[1]

The hope of ordinary believers begins and ends with God. It is because God is eternal, loving, and powerful that Christians entertain hope in an afterlife. Believers look to God as the Alpha and Omega, the everlasting Lord who is "maker of heaven and earth." This never-perishing God brings a world into being solely out of the fullness of divine love. God nurtures, guides, and protects this creation, wishing that no part of the fellowship that has been established will be lost. Furthermore, this God has the capability to preserve that which the divine power has created. Jesus and Paul presented no other "argument" for life after death than the "power of God." Believers know that God can generate a world out of nothing, make princes out of peasants and saints out of sinners. God can even change the lowly body of human beings to be like Jesus' glorious body, through the power by which God subdues all things.

On this base, Christian faith builds its hope. In his classic study, *And the Life Everlasting*, John Baillie has said, "It is in the conjunction with God that the promise of eternal life resides."[2] While the medieval church claimed that persons shared the divine attribute of eternity through the image of God within them, modern believers make the connection through an intentional association that has the nature of a relationship. In contemporary Christian thinking, association with God is a personal relationship with many of the markings that characterize human interaction. The definitive example of this is Jesus, who lived his life in intimate association with the Father, a fellowship God preserved beyond the grave by raising him from the dead.

The eternal nature of God and the example of Jesus' life do not assure eternal life. Faith understands that, finally, it is God's grace toward persons which forges the link to eternal life through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, as this is received by faith. By God's favor, persons are created for fellowship with their Maker. The garden story of Genesis and the psalmist's spiritual prescriptions for a healthy life underscore the importance of honoring that fellowship. The biblical notion of the soul places the spiritual self at the center of personhood. By God's grace, Jesus is given to the world in order to help others cultivate their relationship to the Father. He is the "way" to the Father, the reconciling Savior whose redeeming work reaches its quintessential form in his resurrection. His victory over the grave does not merely vindicate his life and teachings, but makes eternal life available to others as well. As in life he enabled people to come to the Father, so in resurrection he prepares a place for them to be with God forever.

Ordinary faith defends its hope of heaven by pointing to individual and corporate renewal in the Holy Spirit. Regarding the Easter message, John Brokhoff writes that Christians today "need to examine, interpret and understand the evidence that exists in our time. What is the evidence? There is the evidence of the church. As the body of Christ, the church's existence is evidence that Christ is alive."[3]

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[1] Frederick Buechner, "All's Lost, All's Found," *The Christian Century*, Vol. 97, No. 9 (March 12, 1980):284.

[2] John Baillie, *And the Life Everlasting* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1933), 163.

[3] John R. Brokhoff, "Mourning Has Broken," *The Lutheran*, Vol. 22, No. 8 (April 18, 1984):6.



While a Christian apologetic for the afterlife does not ignore so-called "secular" arguments, it builds on a different point. Believing in the reality of an afterlife through the resurrection of Jesus, ordinary faith then shores up its Easter faith by appeal to lives that have been transformed and resurrected in the present time. In this maneuver, modern Christians recover the apologetic style of the early church. The late John Robinson reminds us that in biblical times the most important evidence for Jesus' resurrection was not the empty tomb or the appearances of Jesus, but the disciples' "awareness of the living Christ," evident in transformed lives and the very existence of the church.[4]

Though the first believers did not collapse their hope of a future kingdom into the present, they did believe it was possible to have an "earnest" of that event. Paul assured the fledgling believers that they could secure a foothold on eternal life while still in the body. The God who has prepared "a house... eternal in the heavens" (2 Cor 5:1) also has provided the "Spirit as a guarantee" (2 Cor 5:5). "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit which dwells in you" (Rom 8:11).

It was thought possible to anticipate life with God in the future through spiritual development in the present. God prepares us for that final, ultimate change by working penultimate changes in the present. Paul could say that as a preview of the future, "our inner nature is being renewed every day" (2 Cor 4:16), and that we all "are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another" (2 Cor 3:18). John puts this in behavioral terms, suggesting that wherever there is love among the brethren, there persons already have "passed out of death into life" (1 Jn 3:14).

A particularly compelling anticipation of eternal life was the experience of self-denial on behalf of the gospel. Through a mystical-moral union with Christ in baptism and in his suffering, a person could rise with Christ to a new life presently and eternally. While the ultimate victory was "hid with Christ" (Col 3:3) to "be revealed in the last time" (1 Pet 1:5), it was a triumph with stunning antecedent in the transformed lives of those newly obedient to Christ.

The extraordinary "logic" of the early church characterizes faith today. When believers justify their hope of heaven, they usually do so by pointing to the present reality of faith and love in the Christian community. The living church itself is a miracle of resurrection. It is a fellowship daily raised from disbelief and despair to faith and trust, a community in which renewal through the Holy Spirit is constantly coaxed, created, and celebrated. It is a fellowship continuously called back from

[4] J. A. T. Robinson, "Resurrection in the NT," *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, 4 vols. (New York: Abingdon, 1962), 4:48-49.

death-dealing ways to life-affirming ministry. Its hope is nurtured by the power of God already at work in its midst. Morton Kelsey has captured the peculiarly Christian form of demonstration when he writes, "When men and women live in Christ who is Love incarnate, they allow the reality which Christ incarnated to operate in and through their lives. Those who live in this way *build a kind of permanence into their lives* which extends into a mysterious and continued growth in a life to come"[5] (italics mine).

The ordinary faith of believers that God will manage their resurrection and that their relation to God in the present is assurance for the future contains several important tenets about the afterlife.

For one thing, to think of eternal life under the rubric of relationship says that life after death is fully individual life. Christian theology rejects the picture of heaven as a realm of pure undifferentiated divinity in which persons are absorbed as a drop of water in a vast ocean. Though God may be "all in all" in heaven, it is not the case that everything is only God. The Christian vision anticipates full personal existence in heaven, life as distinct centers of consciousness with bodily existence of some sort.

Ordinary faith necessitates this understanding of heaven. Resurrection that emerges from and issues in relationship with God requires that the parties to the relationship be distinct individuals. Though a relationship modifies individuality, it cannot begin without it. Persons must be able to say, "I," before they can say, "I love you." Believers understand their situation as persons "standing before God." They picture themselves in the presence of God much in the same manner that they are present to others, i.e., in bodily form. They anticipate knowing God and being known by God, experiences that connote communication among discrete, singular individuals.

Also, if everlasting life is constituted by relationship with God, we can hope that it will be a communal life. Christian thought about heaven projects a corporate life beyond death. Believers pray that God will keep them in fellowship with all the saints and will preserve them with "all the company of heaven." Typical faith anticipates a reunion with loved ones. Biblical and theological imagery pictures heaven as a commonwealth, kingdom, or city where the faithful dwell together in peace.

The Christian vision anticipates full personal existence in heaven.

The hope for a social existence in heaven is affirmed by those who think in terms of relationship to God. Ordinary faith looks forward to fellowship with God in heaven. To "go to heaven" is to be "forever with the Lord." But not only the Lord. The throne of God is like the hub of a great wheel. Those who gather around the throne are brought together with each other. The closer they are to the throne, the nearer they are drawn to one another. As sons and

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5 Morton Kelsey, *Afterlife: The Other Side of Dying* (New York: Paulist, 1979), 255.

daughters of the same God, the eternally living are brothers and sisters of the same family.

Both religious piety and common sense place high value on an afterlife that has some semblance to earthly life. It is simply inconceivable to the spiritually sensitive that God would let perish the bond of fidelity and devotion between God and believers established on earth. That relationship must continue in some recognizable form or the notion of "life" after death is meaningless. It is also reasonable to expect a certain degree of continuity between this life and the next. The afterlife must be sufficiently similar to earthly life to be a meaningful sequel. At the least, personal identity must be preserved. If the post-mortem person is not sufficiently identifiable as the pre-mortem person, then there is no real survival of the person involved.

Ordinary faith maintains that God preserves persons in fellowship with God on both sides of death. Paul is convinced that nothing can separate us from the love of God (Rom 8:38-39). But death seems to dissipate our personhood. For the believer, however, persons are constituted by a myriad of factors, including his or her relationship to God. A person is what his or her relationship *vis-à-vis* God is. Therefore, so long as that relationship is preserved, so is continuity and identity. God does not let death shatter that relationship. The God who spans the chasm of death meets the person in life and beyond death, thereby guaranteeing a meaningful existence. If God be for us, death has lost its sting and a meaningful life is assured.

How are Christians to give account of the hope that is in them? The peculiar logic of faith places the power and love of God, known in the resurrection of Jesus, at the center of its vision. Believers rely on God for the last moment because they have learned to depend on God for all the moments of their lives. As Heinrich Zahrnt so eloquently says,

> Christian belief in eternal life follows quite logically from belief in the God proclaimed by Jesus Christ; it forms merely the perspective of the latter drawn out to infinity. When all the guarantees, supports and bridges break down by which we strive to secure our life, when we lose all the ground from under our feet and sink into complete unconsciousness, from which we can no longer relate to any of our fellow human beings and none of them can relate to us, then faith becomes total, then it is revealed as what it always is or should be by its very nature: *reliance on God alone* and consequently faith in life and death.[6]

So long as believers stand on this side of death, there can be no certainty about what follows. But there can be the assurance that the God who has begun a good work in us in this life will not let that be lost, but will bring it to completion in the next.

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[6] Quoted in Hans Küng, *Eternal Life? Life after Death as a Medical, Philosophical, and Theological Problem*, trans. Edward Quinn (New York: Doubleday, 1984), 173.

Implications for the Ministry of Bishops

A Study of the Lutheran Confessions and the Rite of Installation of a Bishop

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The committee assigned to engage in the five-year Study on Ministry on behalf of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America must address a number of traditionally thorny theological issues related to the church's ministry. Among the mandates given to this committee is to sketch the dimensions of the ministry exercised by those who are given oversight for the congregations of a particular region of the church. Lutherans in the United States generally accepted the nomenclature of bishop to describe this individual in 1980. The acceptance of this term and a general understanding of the ministry of a bishop were soon followed by the publication of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* by the World Council of Churches and by a consensus report on the nature of the episcopal office issued by the Lutheran World Federation,[1] both of which helped American Lutherans expand their understanding of this office. Nevertheless, a precise definition of that office and of that ministry for the American Lutheran context awaits the outcome of the five-year study.

As we search for the understanding of this office that will guide our polity in the ELCA, we naturally turn to the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions for direction. The practice of others in the world-wide Lutheran family will also serve to guide these discussions, as will the ecumenical context, especially as it is articulated in *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* and in the results of bilateral dialogues conducted internationally and in the United States. Here we are the recipients of the legacy of Arthur Carl Piepkorn who was an active participant in the Lutheran–Roman Catholic dialogues in America. Piepkorn contributed extensively to the bilateral conversations on ministry, and especially the ministry of

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[1] *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*. Faith and Order Paper No. 111 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1983), and *The Lutheran Understanding of the the Episcopal Office. Lutheran World Federation Studies* (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation Department of Studies, 1983).

bishops, as he articulated the position of the Lutheran Confessions on this issue shortly before his death in 1973.

An often neglected resource for illuminating the church's understanding of a particular theological issue, however, is the church's liturgy. The principle *lex orandi est lex credendi* (the rule of prayer is the rule of belief) has long been acknowledged as an operative principle in the development of the church's doctrine. Consequently, further assistance in developing a contemporary understanding of the episcopal office can be gleaned through an analysis of the rite by which a person assumes the office of bishop.

The purpose of this essay is to examine both the position of the Lutheran Confessions on the episcopate and the elements of the rite of Installation of a Bishop in *Occasional Services*, the companion to the *Lutheran Book of Worship*, published in 1982. What contemporary theological understanding of the office of bishop is ritually expressed here? How well does this rite articulate the position of the Lutheran Confessions about the role of bishops in the church? What implications can be drawn from this understanding for our present practice in selecting bishops and in assigning the priorities of their ministries? In other words, "What kind of bishop is assumed by the Confessions? What kind of bishop does the rite of the church give us?"

The Confessional witness

The classic Lutheran definition of the office of the bishop is articulated in Article XXVIII of the *Augsburg Confession*: "Our teachers assert that according to the Gospel the power of keys or the power of bishops is a power and command of God to preach the Gospel, to forgive and retain sins, and to administer and distribute the sacraments" (AC XXVIII.5). It is important to discern the issue articulated in this statement. For the reformers the issue was not whether the church could legitimately be governed by bishops. Rather, the question being addressed was, given the office of bishop, what authority should a bishop possess? Avery Dulles and George Lindbeck have demonstrated that on this issue the *Augsburg Confession* sounded so traditional that the Roman Catholic *Confutation* accepted this point as being in accord with canon law and the tradition of the church.[2]

Another significant feature of this pronouncement is the fact that the episcopacy is defined by the *Augsburg Confession* in terms very similar to those describing the holy ministry in general. Those who are regularly called by the church are called to preach the gospel and administer the sacraments (AC 7). Thus Piepkorn maintains that the ministry of Word and sacraments is committed to bishops as bishops, but that it is only *these* functions which are bestowed on bishops "according to the Gospel," that is, by divine right (*jure divino*).[3] There is thus "a single ministerial office instituted by God and therefore *de jure divino*, and, in

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[2]Avery Dulles and George Lindbeck, "Bishops and the Ministry of the Gospel," in *Confessing One Faith: A Joint Commentary on the Augsburg Confession by Lutheran and Catholic Theologians*, edited by George Wolfgang Forell and James F. McCue (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1982), 149.

[3]Arthur Carl Piepkorn, "The Sacred Ministry and Holy Ordination in the Symbolical Books of the Lutheran Church," in *Lutherans and Roman Catholics in Dialogue – IV, Eucharist and Ministry*, edited by Paul C. Empie and T. Austin Murphy (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1978), 103.

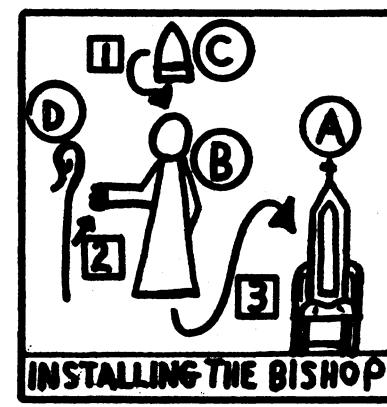
the full sense, essentially necessary to the church."[4]

These functions assigned to the pastoral office are founded first of all in the command of Christ to the church to proclaim the gospel in its purity and rightly to administer the holy sacraments (AC 5). This is of the essence of the ministerial office, and consequently all who hold this office are expected to continue their calling to preach and to preside in the liturgical assembly. Bishops are likewise called to exercise these functions insofar as their ministry is an expression of the pastoral ministry in general.

In addition, the bishop is assigned the task of guarding the teaching of the church. Eric Gritsch has demonstrated that this function of the bishop (or superintendent, general superintendent, or dean—a variety of terms was used in the 16th century) developed almost immediately after the Peace of Augsburg in 1555.[5] The dimensions of this responsibility are described by Ulrich Kühn as follows:

> An inalienable mark of the Church is that in it the gospel is 'taught' by people called to do this. Beyond this the Lutheran Reformation recognizes a form of the control of teaching to be seen to by the bishops. According to Article 28 of the Augsburg Confession among the duties of bishops is 'to judge teaching and reject that which is against the gospel.'[6]

In assigning a teaching function to the episcopate, however, the reformers did not assume bishops had the right of sole authority for the church's teaching or the guarantee of "indefectibility" as is dogmatically applied to the magisterium of the Roman Catholic church. The special role of the bishop for the reformers is the bishop's capability "for becoming a sign of great evangelical importance when it acts in obedience to the



Word"[7]—that is, a bishop exercises a vital and evangelical role in the life of the church and for the unity of the church by guarding the church's apostolic witness.

In this sense the bishop also has the right and authority (albeit an authority belonging to the *church* and exercised by the bishop) to make regulations "so that everything in the churches is done in good order" (AC XXVIII.30). This includes the right to establish regulations for the government of

[4]Dulles and Lindbeck, "Bishops and the Ministry," 166.

[5]Eric W. Gritsch, "Lutheran Teaching Authority: Past and Present," in *Lutherans and Roman Catholics in Dialogue –VI, Teaching Authority and Infallibility in the Church,* edited by Paul C. Empie, T. Austin Murphy, and Joseph A. Burgess (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1978), 141.

[6]Ulrich Kühn, "How Does the Church Remain in the Truth?: A Lutheran Response," in *Concilium: Religion in the Eighties, Who Has the Say in the Church,* edited by Jürgen Moltmann and Hans Küng (New York: The Seabury Press, 1983), 23.

[7]Dulles and Lindbeck, "Bishops and the Ministry," 165.

the church and for the good ordering of worship. The bishops may not, however, make these regulations a stipulation for faith or maintain that compliance with such canons earns forgiveness of sins (AC XXVIII.34).

This regulating function must not, however, be divorced from the bishop's responsibility of preaching the gospel and celebrating the sacraments. Indeed, the two roles are actually little more than two sides of the same calling. Gritsch writes:

> The function of Lutheran teaching authority is to engage in a hermeneutical process whereby the purity of the gospel (always understood in terms of the principal article of faith as the promise of salvation without human merit) is maintained in the Church and impurities are removed. Thus the teaching office (*magisterium*) is essentially a preaching office (*Predigtamt*). Luther and the Lutheran Confessions assert that God instituted 'the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments' Office (*Amt*) in this context as an ordered function on the part of persons.[8]

Indeed, Kühn maintains that the confessors take this dual responsibility seriously enough to assert in Article XXVIII that the bishop's ministry and authority in the individual churches is established by this means, thereby serving the laudable function of establishing unity and a common sharing of the faith within a given region.[9] This is the only place the Confessions take up the church's ancient concern that the bishop serve as a symbol for and presence of the unity of the entire church.

As noted above, the Lutheran Symbols also ascribe to the bishop the duty of administering the power of the keys, that is, the power to judge faith and life and to exclude from the Christian community those whose doctrine is contrary to the gospel. The boundaries of this authority are never articulated in the Confessions. It may be assumed, however, that this power will be exercised in accordance with the gospel, that is, as an extension of the proclamation of the Word and the celebration of the sacraments (AC XXVIII.8). Historical evidence demonstrates that the bishop/superintendent of the German churches in the middle of the sixteenth century exercised this authority in both kerygmatic and juridical ways.[10]

Of extreme importance for the reformers was the temporal power wielded by many members of the episcopate during the sixteenth century. The controversies underlying this concern are complex and reach deeply into the history of the church. Surprisingly, the Confessions allow the bishops to retain their medieval powers, and even allow them to wield the temporal sword (that is, use coercive means) to discharge their civil responsibilities. What the bishop may not do is confuse the two kingdoms by invading "the function of the other," and "should not set up and depose kings, should not annul temporal laws or undermine obedience to the government, should not make or prescribe to the temporal power laws concerning worldly matters" (AC XXVIII.13). Thus, if the bishop holds both a spiritual and a temporal responsibility (as was customary in the medieval world) the bishop may exercise the rights pertaining to those realms only insofar as the two realms do not become confused.

The most controversial issue facing the reformers, however, was the differentiation

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[8]Gritsch, "Lutheran Teaching Authority," 140.

[9]Kühn, "How Does the Church Remain in the Truth?" 26.

[10]Dulles and Lindbeck, "Bishops and the Ministry," 149.

between those powers exercised by the bishop *de jure divino* (by divine right) and those exercised solely *de jure humano* (by human right). Melanchthon writes:

> The Gospel requires of those who preside over the churches that they preach the Gospel, remit sins, administer the sacraments, and, in addition, exercise jurisdiction, that is, excommunicate those who are guilty of notorious crimes and absolve those who repent. By the confession of all, even of our adversaries, it is evident that this power belongs by divine right to all who preside over the churches, whether they are called pastors, presbyters, or bishops.
>
> (Treatise 60)

These powers ascribed to all incumbents of the holy ministry are given directly by God. Edmund Schlink explains:

> The Confessions know of no superior church administration having a divine commission different from the pastorate. The one church power is active in different forms, or in other words, bishop and pastor are two functions of the same office.[11]

Thus, the confessors have no intention of calling into question the legitimate power and authority of the holy ministry. What becomes troublesome for the reformers is the distinction that arises between the grades of bishop and pastor. While recognizing that such hierarchical distinctions are considered inevitable in a social institution such as the church, these distinctions are established by human authority, as Jerome and others taught (Tr. 63-66). Piepkorn summarizes:

> The symbolical books never call into question the existence of the sacred ministry itself by divine right (*jure divino*). What they do call into question is the postapostolic differentiation of grades within it by the separation of the presbyterate from the episcopate and, by implication, the subsequent introduction of the initially lay office of deacon into the major orders of the sacred ministry. These developments, they insist, exist only by human right (*jure humano*).[12]

Rather than consider this development spurious, however, the confessors also recognize the activity of the Spirit in this historical evolution. Thus, while the historic episcopate is a human order, it is indeed more than that,[13] something Lutherans have often neglected in their history. The *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* articulates the "deep desire" of the reformers to maintain church polity and the ranks of the ecclesiastical hierarchy (Ap XIV.1), recognizing in them a helpful way to order the church's life. The ideal "is a universal episcopalism in which all bishops are equal in office, united in doctrine, belief, sacraments, prayer, and works of love (SA 11,4,9)."[14]

Thus the reformers recognized the biblical warrants for the establishment of the episcopal office and continued to accept the efficacy of this office by human right. The difficulty encountered during the Reformation was finding evangelical bishops who would exercise their authority in a gospel-centered way. This became particularly critical when the churches of the Reformation sought to ordain new pastors. In the absence of prelates willing to continue

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[11]Edmund Schlink, *Theology of the Lutheran Confessions*, trans. by Paul F. Koehneke and Herbert J.A. Bouman (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1961), 250.

[12]Piepkorn, "The Sacred Ministry and Holy Ordination," 109.

[13]Dulles and Lindbeck, "Bishops and the Ministry," 166.

[14]Piepkorn, "The Sacred Ministry and Holy Ordination," 110.

The difficulty encountered during the Reformation was finding evangelical bishops who would exercise authority in a gospel-centered way.

the orderly transmission of the office of Word and sacrament in the traditional way, the reformers felt compelled to move on their own to ensure the ongoing work of the pastoral ministry. But, as Carl Braaten has pointed out, this was a state of emergency among the churches of the Reformation – a state of emergency which later Lutherans turned into a state of normalcy.[15] Braaten argues that in this ecumenical age, it is time to bring the emergency to an end so American Lutherans can share in the fullness of ministry implied by the episcopal office.

The rite for the Installation of a Bishop

We turn our attention now to an analysis of the rite for the Installation of a Bishop in *Occasional Services.* Again the primary question is, what kind of bishop does the rite give us? That is, what does the rite communicate within the liturgical assembly about the office of bishop, what expectations of a bishop are enumerated in this rite, and finally, does the rite reflect the Confessional understanding of the office outlined above?

The first clue to the understanding of the bishop's office comes with the title given to the rite. A bishop is to be "installed" in North America, implying that whatever is being done in this rite is essentially no different than what is done in the installation of a pastor. This is in sharp contradistinction to the Roman Catholic and Episcopal traditions in which the bishop is ordained. Evidently the committee charged with the responsibility for drafting the rite struggled with this issue of nomenclature. What in October 1979 was referred to as the "consecration" of the bishop became later "induction" (December 1979) and finally "installation" (May 1981).[16]

The evolution of the nomenclature coincides with the decision of the Task Force on Occasional Services to accept 12 theses presented by one of its sub-committees in December 1979. Thesis 12 states:

> Induction to the Office of Church/Synod/District President or Bishop is recognition and reception into a ministry of oversight and care for the church in a specific geographical area of judicatory.[17]

This is to maintain, of course, with the witness of the Lutheran Confessions, that a bishop is not another grade on an hierarchical ladder, but a function of the pastoral

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[15]Carl E. Braaten, "The New Lutheran Church and its Ministry," in *The New Church Debate: Issues Facing American Lutheranism,* edited by Carl E. Braaten (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 6-7.

[16]Minutes of the meeting of the Task Force on Occasional Services, October 5, 1979, December 6-8, 1979, and May 21-22, 1981.

[17]Task Force on Occasional Services: Subcommittee III. Position Paper: "Ministry and Ordination," December 6, 1979.

office. While the analysis above indicates that a bishop's ministry is indeed more than simply a ministry of oversight in a specific geographical area, that understanding alone would be sufficient to consider the rite an installation of one already ordained to the ministry of Word and sacraments.

> A bishop is not another grade on an hierarchical ladder, but a function of the pastoral office.

This understanding continues to be played out when the rite of Installation of a Bishop is compared with the rite for the Installation of a Pastor. Both rites proceed from the presentation of the pastor/bishop-elect to certification of the call to office, to a brief address outlining the duties of that office, to questions asking whether the candidate will accept the office. This is followed in both rites by a call for acceptance of the installation by the congregation, to the commitment of the office, to a special blessing, to the Prayer of the Church, followed by a final blessing and presentation of the newly installed to the congregation. As with the installation of the pastor, there is no invocation of the Holy Spirit and no laying on of hands in the installation rite for a bishop, nor does the bishop kneel for the bestowal of the office.

A more detailed look at the component parts of the rite reveals an understanding of the office of bishop as a pastoral office. Unlike the Episcopal and Roman Catholic rites, there is no certification of the bishop's election; there is simply a presentation of one who has been elected and called (p. 218). At this point in the Roman and Episcopal rites, the assent of the people is required before the liturgy may continue, a remnant of the early church when candidates were chosen by the congregation. The only similar feature of the Lutheran rite is the questioning of the people, who are asked whether they will accept the ministry of this person about to be installed and whether they will support that ministry through their prayers (p. 222). One may also assume that the acclamation (with applause, p. 222) serves this function in the Lutheran rite as well. There is, however, no formal attempt to ask for the congregation's assent, which is apparently assumed since all candidates for installation as bishop would have been duly elected to their office.

The rite proceeds to the examination of the candidate which is accomplished through the use of five passages of Scripture. Through them the office of bishop is described as one of discipline and offering the forgiveness of sins (Jn 20:21-23), one of missionary activity (Mt 28:18-20), one of guidance and pastoral care (Ac 20:28), and one of proclaiming the truth (2 Tim 2:15 and 2 Tim 1:13-14).

A description of the duties of the office is also contained in the questions addressed to the bishop-elect. The bishop-elect is asked to assume pastoral responsibility for the pastors and congregations of the judicatory, that is, is the office accepted. The questions proceed to a declaration of Confessional subscription (presumably to insure right teaching), and third, to the question asked in both ordination and the instal-

lation of a pastor, whether one's lifestyle will conform spiritually and morally to the standards of the church. The bishop-elect is then asked to give faithful witness to the world. Finally, the bishop-elect is asked to support the ministries of the pastors and congregations of the judicatory. With the exception of the final question, these questions are essentially those addressed to a pastor-elect before installation in the congregation.

Following the "examination" of the people, the office is committed with the same formula in both rites, after which the newly installed kneels (for the first time in the service) to receive the same blessing. The only other significant difference between the two rites is in the selection of Scripture passages used in the final instruction of the candidates. The rite for the Installation of a Bishop assumes that a responsibility for "the flock" is entrusted which is absent from the rite of Installation of a Pastor.

From the very structure of the rite and its similarity to the rite of Installation of a Pastor, it is apparent that the office of bishop is conceived as a function of the pastoral ministry, the primary consideration of the Lutheran Confessions. The bishop's role as pastor of the pastors and congregations of the judicatory is also emphasized in the rite. The necessity for the bishop to be a missionary (thus demonstrating a concern for the work of the greater church) is also stressed, and the role of the bishop as a teacher and guardian of the faith is at least alluded to.

In what respect then can the rite be said to differentiate the functions of the bishop from those of the parish pastor? The most significant signal in this regard is in the delivery of instruments, an ancient practice that is an integral part of both the Roman and Episcopal rites. While no such investiture is *assumed* by the Lutheran rite, it is permissible to bestow a pectoral cross on the newly installed bishop (p. 221). In some respects this is a curious innovation in the Lutheran rite, first because a pectoral cross is not bestowed in other traditions at a bishop's installation, and second because the wearing of a pectoral cross is not universally regarded in Lutheranism as a symbol of the episcopal office. A more helpful symbol might well have been carried over from the Episcopal tradition in which a Bible is presented to the newly installed bishop, emphasizing the ministry of Word and sacraments which the bishop exercises as a pastor and for which the bishop now assumes the responsibility of oversight.

From an ecumenical standpoint, the larger issue to be addressed is the role, or lack of it, for the Holy Spirit in this rite. Presumably there is no call for the gifts of the Spirit and no laying on of hands because the bishop is simply fulfilling another kind of function of the pastoral ministry for which gifts of the Spirit were bestowed at ordination. The rite from *Occasional Services* does employ a passage from Scripture encouraging the bishop to "rekindle the gift of God that is within you," which is apparently to be taken as a word of encouragement to the newly installed bishop to pray for the Spirit's guidance. Yet even the reformers utilized a rite in which the Holy Spirit was invoked with the laying on of hands. Within a conceptual framework that viewed a bishop chiefly as a pastor, there was still a recognition by the reformers that other gifts of the Holy Spirit were needed for exercising oversight and guarding the apostolicity of the church, a recognition which has been lost in this rite.

Another element virtually absent from the current Lutheran rite is any reference to the idea that the bishop is a guardian of the apostolicity of the church. One could make the case, of course, that the scriptural pas-

sages providing the instruction for the bishop-elect fulfill this function since they address the task of speaking and teaching the truth which has been entrusted to the Christian community. The bishop-elect's promise to preach and teach in accordance with Scripture and the Confessions might also be construed as addressing this concern. Yet, the concept of apostolicity is not specifically articulated. In some respects this is not surprising since American Lutherans have traditionally been fearful of speaking of apostolicity lest it somehow be equated with the historic apostolic succession. Yet the Lutheran Confessions are clear in stipulating that one of the functions of a bishop is to guard the apostolic teaching of the church, a concern which could be more clearly articulated in the rite of installation.

Finally it must be noted that the ecumenical understanding of the office of bishop as a symbol of the church's unity is absent from this rite. A subtle suggestion of this role is made by stipulating that the color of the day is red for the installation of a bishop. Since red is a color used to designate services of the whole church (such as church conventions or ordinations), a case can be made that the installation of a bishop is perceived as having a more "universal" import—that it is an event in the life of the whole church. While the notion that a bishop symbolizes unity with the whole church is not specifically addressed by the Lutheran Confessions, this concept was fundamental to the understanding of the early church and could well be more fully expressed in our present conception of this office.

In summary, the rite for Installation of a Bishop presently in use among North American Lutherans stresses the pastoral dimensions of the episcopal office. The teaching function of this ministry, a vital concern of the Confessions, is not as clearly articulated in this rite, and the Confessional concern that the bishop be a guardian of the apostolicity of the church is virtually absent. The rite distinguishes the office of bishop from that of pastor by very subtle means, in the content of the questions at the examination, in the selection of scriptural passages at the instruction, through the bestowal of the pectoral cross, and in the use of red as the color of the day. Clearly, however, the rite forcefully conveys the central assertion of the Confessions that a bishop is chiefly a pastor of the church, a person called to exercise the church's one ministry of Word and sacraments.

Implications for contemporary practice

We have noted that both the Lutheran Confessions and the rite for the Installation of a Bishop clearly emphasize an understanding of the bishop as a pastor of the church. As pastors, bishops preach, preside at the celebration of the sacraments, exercise the Office of the Keys, judge doctrine, and provide for the proclamation of the gospel to those who have not heard the good news. These responsibilities are established by God even though the office of bishop itself is a human design, conceived to assist the church in ordering its ministry. To that end, a bishop promises to provide pastoral care for the pastors and congregations in a specific area, including responsibilities for administering the cooperative programs that enhance the ministries of those congregations and their people.

This understanding regarding the office of the bishop has implications for the kinds of expectations American Lutherans place on their bishops, how bishops will spend their time, and how bishops are se-

As the pastor for the pastors and congregations of a synod, the bishop must be a model for preaching and presiding at worship.

lected. The ELCA Constitution for Synods enumerates some 18 different responsibilities for a synodical bishop (†S8.12 and S8.13.), some of them related to an understanding of the bishop as the synod's pastor, but the vast majority of them reflecting administrative concerns. Preaching the Word and celebrating the sacraments, and serving as a teacher of the church, are only two of those 18 responsibilities.

If, however, we are to take the Confessions and the rite of Installation of a Bishop seriously, then we must be willing to encourage our bishops to be concerned primarily with those things that concern pastors, namely preaching the Word and celebrating the sacraments. As a pastor of the church, and as the pastor for the pastors and congregations of a synod, the bishop must be a model for preaching and presiding at worship. Our bishops should be encouraged to exercise those responsibilities of ministry not only in synod-wide events, but in pastoral visitations to parishes, and even on festival days when a visitation to a parish is not likely to be scheduled. Bishops are *first* called to preach the gospel and administer the sacraments because bishops are pastors. We should signal our bishops that while all their other responsibilities mandated by constitutions and by simple organizational necessity are important, no task takes precedence over *regularly* preaching and presiding at worship.

Two other implications flow from a renewed understanding of a bishop as a pastor of the church, these relating to the selection of a bishop and the term of office.[18] Normally American Lutheran congregations engage in serious self-analysis when a pastoral vacancy occurs, and the pastor who is called is generally selected from a pool of candidates who submit resumés, undergo lengthy interviews, and often preach in the calling congregation. We take seriously the necessity of analyzing the ministries of congregations and the strengths of pastors, and then relating them in order to "fit" these ministries appropriately.

Yet no such procedure exists when a synod selects a bishop. At most, synodical assembly members are allowed only a short question-and-answer period with several candidates at a time; elections for bishops are often concluded in one day, without ample opportunity for reflection on the needs of the synod, to hear a candidate's vision for the ministry of the synod, or even to pray for

[18]These two issues are a part of the recommendations offered by the international Anglican-Lutheran Dialogues as published in *The Niagara Report: Report of the Anglican-Lutheran Consultation on Episcope*, 1987 (London: Church House Publishing, 1988). While these two suggestions are offered in the report, they are offered primarily as a way to enable Lutherans to recapture a fuller understanding of the apostolic nature of the episcopal office. These suggestions are offered here as well as logical conclusions to understanding the office of the bishop chiefly from a pastoral point of view.

> We need to struggle with our understanding of the gifts of the Holy Spirit needed to conduct this ministry.

the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Instituting a procedure similar to that followed by a congregation in search of a pastor seems reasonable for synods seeking a bishop. A "call committee" could be formed to assess the ministry strengths and needs of the synod, to interview candidates, and to recommend a candidate to the synod assembly which could hear that candidate preach and respond to questions. A vote would follow, after adequate time for reflection and prayer.

Second, an assessment should be made to determine whether American Lutherans would better be served by installing their synodical bishops for life. A bishop is called to service in the church, in the same way a pastor is called for service in a congregation or institution of the church. Our theology of the call to pastoral ministry states that one is called to this ministry until another call is received or until resignation, retirement, or death intervenes. Bishops are called to a ministry of service and leadership, not simply to fill a bureaucratic position. Our concept of call to the ministry of Word and sacraments is undermined by a system in which a person is simply elected to a term of office rather than installed in a ministry until he or she is called to another ministry of service.

A final implication derived from this analysis is that American Lutherans need to make room for an expanded teaching role for the bishops in our deliberations over theological, political, and moral issues. The Confessions understand a bishop to be one who judges teaching, primarily in order to reject "that which is against the gospel." This is not simply acknowledging a bishop's authority to make regulations for the sake of good order in the church; a bishop discerns and announces what is faithful to the gospel and what is not. While the bishop is not the only person serving the church in this way, a bishop has the right and the responsibility to judge what is taught by others within the church and to help shape the church's positions on contemporary issues. This implies that the bishops will always serve an integral role in assessing the adequacy of social ministry statements or theological positions that are to be considered, debated, and approved by synodical or churchwide assemblies.

As Lutherans in America study the church's ministry and make proposals for ordering the church's life based on that study, we are conscious of the contributions of Arthur Carl Piepkorn. His extensive knowledge of the Lutheran Symbols and his interest in the church's liturgy are the foci of a legacy which continues to shape our understanding of many aspects of the church's life.

Piepkorn articulated an evangelical catholic doctrine of the holy ministry. With his help, American Lutherans have shaped an understanding of the office of bishop in a pastoral mold and have given expression to that understanding in liturgical forms which appropriately convey this theological understanding. The church proclaims the gospel whenever it gathers for worship. This happens in a concentrated way when

this proclamation is focused in liturgies which set apart certain individuals for the church's ministry of Word and sacraments.

The rite for the Installation of a Bishop is in many respects a conservative expression of an evangelical understanding of this office. At the same time, this rite is immeasurably radical, for it clearly articulates that bishops function among us as ministers of Word and sacraments, as teachers and guardians of the faith, and not simply as "corporate administrators." From an ecumenical point of view, our understanding of this office could expand to include a fuller appreciation of the bishop as a symbol of the unity of the church catholic; we need also to struggle with our understanding of the gifts of the Holy Spirit needed to conduct this ministry. But finally, our practice in seeking out, installing, and helping our bishops prioritize their many responsibilities could benefit from serious reflection on what it means for a bishop to be a pastor. As the church struggles with these and many other issues related to its ministry, it will build on the foundations which Piepkorn laid in his teaching ministry.

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Christ(ening)

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1. One of the most elementary needs from a christology today is that it should help people to know God by name.

2. What makes that difficult is not only that traditional names for God have by the attrition of time lost their original power to convey the One who goes by those names. Worse than that, those names have been systematically conjured with for partisan and evil purposes.

3. The result is, the divine titles acquire a *bad* name, alienating people from God, and so encourage blasphemy.

4. A notorious example, thanks to the current exposures of paternalism and patriarchy, is the name "Father." But there is abroad another, more insidious aversion to God as "Son," and not because of that name's maleness but because of its childness.

5. The very struggle nowadays over the name of the first member of the Trinity, namely whether God should be "Father" or "Mother," may reflect more than gender concerns. It may betray also that whatever the gender it is God the parent whom we consider most godlike, because most powerful, and therefore most akin to our own aspirations. Maybe, maybe not.

6. In any case isn't it the very glory of the Trinity that God, on whom all things indeed depend, is likewise God the Child who depends, God's own "begotten" Offspring—Offspring, not creature—yet not for that reason any less God?

7. And isn't the whole project of the Trinity directed toward recreating us not as God's parents surely, or even as one another's parents, but as God's children and as sisters and brothers of God the Child and so of one another?

8. To that end wasn't it the Son alone, not the Father or the Spirit, who became incarnate as one of us, and still is? But then the question, Might God be a mother, is modest compared to the one Nestorius asked in disbelief, Can God *have* a mother—a human one at that—as we do? (A human father, patriarchalists should note, was considered dispensable.)

9. The christological need, in other words, is to renew Arianism's reminder that the Son is "subordinate" to the Father but, rather than argue from that to "subordinationism," affirm with orthodoxy that the Son too is Godself, and not in spite of but because of his dependence.

10. The trouble is, the rank injustices in our society associated with dependence and dependency make it harder than ever to appreciate this God the Child, "the One who depends," as Gregory of Nyssa called him. But our aversion, then, strikes at the very heart of the Trinity and thus of the gospel.

11. The remedy is not in improvising new and more "meaningful" names for God.

Would that it were that easy. Names are less chosen than given, especially in the case of God.

12. But the more daunting difficulty is this: the trouble is not with the names themselves but with the sick world from which those names have contracted their pejorative associations.

13. That is why the task of helping us know God by name devolves, first, upon christology. The names for God, by now so discolored and demonized, need to be "christened," anointed (Greek: *christos*), hallowed, healed.

14. Those bad names—for instance, the name "dependent" or the name "child," now equated with slavishness and therefore as unworthy of deity—have been made bad not merely by our thought, by the connotations we give them mentally. If that were all, they would need hallowing only in how we imagine them. That would be a project for pneumatology.

15. No, names can become principalities and powers, semi-objective structures developing a life of their own. True, they may not function outside our use of them, but they are not merely our creations, nor is it within our power nor within the mission of the Holying Spirit alone to re-create or christen them. We may "have" this or that name but it also "has" us. It possesses, "holds title" to us.

16. Naming and entitling, like eating and drinking, marrying and parenting, life and death, time and space must first of all have been "assumed" into the death and resurrection of Christ. Else how are they to be overcome and replaced by his whole new order of social and cosmic possibilities, where dependents are descendants and no longer slaves, free heirs of the Creator's home?

17. So it is that, in Jesus the Christ, God the free and glorious Child assumed the servile childhood of fallen humanity, "taking the form of a slave, being born in the likeness of human beings," and through that "happy exchange" replaced the bad name which dependence had acquired with "the name which is above every name."

18. It is into that renovated Name, "the strong Name of the Trinity," that slavish dependents are then christened baptismally, into a new dependence which is liberating and makes a difference, also upon God.

19. In baptism the old dependents undergo a transfer of title, their former possessors are exorcised, and their new Possessor, whose namesakes they become, is acknowledged and begun to be enjoyed.

20. Theologically the scene has shifted from christology to the doctrine of the Trinity and, on our side, to baptism and the Holying Spirit.

21. Once more, it was not that God's Name, in this case God's Name as "Son" or "Child," was not "holy in itself but rather," as Luther notes, "that it may be holy also for us."

22. "For us" includes also "for our imaginations." Not the least of the gifts of the Holying Spirit is a hallowed or christened imagination. It may well be as Sandra Schneiders claims, that we are limited in what we can imagine about God by the images we have of ourselves.

23. More than that, not only do we *have* images of ourselves and hence of God, we are meant to *be* images of God. It is that re-imaging of us as junior deities, as divine dependents which the Holying Spirit begins at baptism and thereby, ever since, animates how we re-imagine both ourselves and God: God the Child and us as his sisters and brothers—the supreme liberation and maturity.

Science as Wisdom

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If St. Paul were to ask today, "Where is the wise person?" a scientist would probably step forward. It would be an honor to be able to claim the place of the "wise" in the biblical tradition. But Paul's use of the "wisdom" concept in 1 Corinthians puts one who wants to claim that honorable title in danger of being declared foolish in the light of *God's* wisdom. This tension marks the present attempt to understand the place of science in the light of Christian theology by using the biblical wisdom tradition.

The natural sciences play major roles in our world, and for many people what is "true" is almost identical with what is scientifically demonstrable. The theologian who wants to meet people "where they are" must therefore ask about the place of the objects, methods, and contents of the natural sciences within the Christian view of reality. And if our theology is biblical, that means we must ask about the place of the natural sciences within the biblical view of reality.

At first glance such a question might seem terribly anachronistic simply because the natural sciences as we know them were not practiced in the culture in which the Bible was written. And we would have to agree in rejecting any attempt to find detailed scientific information or guides for scientific methodology in the Bible.[1] The Bible is neither an encyclopedia of scientific data nor a manual of scientific procedure. A person can do science quite well without knowing anything at all about Scripture.

Our question, however, is not how to get science out of the Bible. Rather, it has to do with the place of humanity's scientific activity of knowing the world in the context of the biblical revelation about God's relationship with the world. Since the Bible affirms the goodness and order of the universe (Gen 1:31, Isa 45:18), since humanity was intended to "have dominion" over the earth (Gen 1:26), it would be surprising if science had no place at all within the field of human activity which Scripture envisions. (Note that even such "secular" activities as wood- and metal-working can have a special "religious" function, as in Ex 31:1-5.) The fact that modern science arose only within a culture influenced by the biblical worldview reinforces the natural alliance of the Bible and science.[2]

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[1] An example of such an approach is James Reid, *God, The Atom, and the Universe* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1968).

[2] Stanley L. Jaki, *The Road of Science and the Ways to God* (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1978). Colin A. Russell, *Cross-Currents: Interactions between Science and Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985). George L. Murphy, "Western Science," *The University Bookman* XX (1980), 92.

There are many ways in which we might try to answer this question about the place of science and its relationship with theology. I propose that one fruitful approach is to think of the natural sciences in terms of the biblical wisdom tradition. That tradition has a scope adequate for the topic, and is sufficiently nuanced to be able to allow for an appreciative but still critical evaluation of scientific work. In the next section we will briefly survey the wisdom tradition, and then we will consider science in its light.

The Wisdom tradition[3]

From very ancient times throughout the Near East we find "wisdom literature" and important roles played by "wise" men and women. There is a significant overlap here between the ideas of Israel and of its neighbors. In the literature of Israel, King Solomon plays the role of the "patron saint" of wisdom, and the books of Sirach and Wisdom, as well as part of Proverbs, were attributed to him. It is important to note that, in the story of Solomon's dream in 1 Kings 3, wisdom is described as a gift of God, and not simply as a great human achievement.

"Wisdom" has many connotations in this tradition. There are the ideas of human skill, cleverness, ethical conduct, and piety, as well as ideas of wisdom in relationship with the universe and/or God.[4] In Wisdom 7, for example, the statements about Wisdom range from her role in teaching "the varieties of plants and the virtues of roots" (7:20) to the description of her as "a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of his goodness" (7:26).

Wisdom can play the role of an ordering principle in the universe, "the primeval world order,"[5] analogous to the concept of natural law in the western Christian tradition. Von Rad, in a chapter titled "The Self-Revelation of Creation,"[6] argues that this is the major element in passages like Proverbs 8, Job 28, and Sirach 24. Through Wisdom creation speaks of God to the wise person. Thus there is a kind of natural theology associated with Wisdom: God is made known through the creation. But it must be remembered that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Prov 9:10, and cf. Job 28:28). Thus a human being cannot, through some "wisdom" independent of God, ascend to a knowledge of God. In fact, as Proverbs 1:24-31 describes graphically, Wisdom will withdraw from one who disregards her and does not "choose the fear of the Lord" (v. 29). Like Solomon, one who is wise possesses wisdom entirely as a gift of God.

Thus Wisdom is not simply a quality possessed by human beings, or a way of describing the operations of the human mind. It is something which has an objective existence outside humanity. This objectification of Wisdom paves the way for a concept of Wisdom as a personalized or "hypostasized" being. Such a personification becomes clear in Proverbs 8, where the origin and role of Lady Wisdom are treated. The personification continues in the intertestamental literature, Sirach 24, Enoch 42,

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[3] For general surveys see *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, 1962 ed., s.v. "Wisdom" by S. H. Blank. *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Supplementary Volume, 1976 ed., s.v. "Wisdom in the OT" by J. L. Crenshaw and "Wisdom in the NT" by H. Conzelman. Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel* (New York: Abingdon, 1972).

[4] *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 1965 ed., s.v. "σοφία κτλ," by Ulrich Wilckens and Georg Fohrer.

[5] von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 161.

[6] von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 144-76.

and the Wisdom of Solomon providing major examples.

In the New Testament the wisdom tradition is used in various ways. Luke 7:35, Matthew 11:2-19, Luke 11:49, Matthew 23:34, and 1 Corinthians 1:30 suggest the idea of Jesus as a representative of the Wisdom of God, or even as Incarnate Wisdom.[7] Such an identification was widely assumed by the early church,[8] and finds expression in our worship today in the first of the Advent "O Antiphons."[9] Recently Matthew Fox has argued for a recovery of the concept of Christ as Holy Wisdom in western Christianity.[10]

Paul also develops another aspect of the wisdom tradition. In the Old Testament we usually have the simple and obvious antithesis of "the wise" and "the fool," as in Proverbs. In 1 Corinthians 1 and 2, however, Paul, perhaps in conflict with groups of gnostics stressing their own special "wisdom," contrasts the wisdom of God, which the world considers foolish, with the wisdom of the world which God *makes* foolish. Here it is Christ, and especially Christ crucified, who is shown to be the Wisdom of God. 1 Corinthians 1:18-31 sets out as clearly as possible the difference between true and false wisdom, between what Luther would later call the theology of the cross and the theology of glory.

Before concluding this sketch of the wisdom tradition it is necessary also to say something about an important biblical concept which in many ways parallels that of Wisdom, the idea of the *Word* of God. The prophetic "Word of Yahweh" has a strongly objective character—it "makes things happen" (Jer 23:29, Ez 11:13, Am 8:11-14, Isa 55:10-11).[11] In spite of this objectivity, Word is nowhere in the Old Testament personified in the way that Wisdom is in Proverbs 8. But we may note a change in the Wisdom of Solomon, where the destruction of the first-born of Egypt is described as the work of the Word of God, "like a relentless warrior" (Wis 18:15 NEB). The Word is, of course, the concept used in the prologue of John's Gospel to speak of the pre-existence and incarnation of Christ (Jn 1:1-18), and Revelation 19:11-13 seems to pick up the image of the warrior Word from the Book of Wisdom.

Wisdom and Word are closely associated in some places in the intertestamental literature (Wis 9:1-2, 2 Enoch 33:4). Near the beginning of the Christian era the emphasis seems to have shifted from Wisdom to Word, as we see both in Philo and in the Gospel of John. For Philo, at least, this may be due to the idea that a masculine Word seemed preferable to a feminine Wisdom—for when the latter is personified, it is always as *Lady* Wisdom.[12] The feminine character of Wisdom may also have made it a difficult concept to use to speak of the person and work of Jesus. The fact that Christ is still described in the New Testament—albeit in an almost submerged fashion—in terms which are suggestive of the wisdom tradi-

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[7] M. Jack Suggs, *Wisdom, Christology, and Law in Matthew's Gospel* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1970), ch. II.

[8] Note, e.g., the many citations of Proverbs 8 in the works of St. Athanasius in Vol. IV of *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, ed. Archibald Robertson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980 reprint), 586.

[9] *Lutheran Book of Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1978), 174.

[10] Matthew Fox, *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988).

[11] Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), Vol. II, 91.

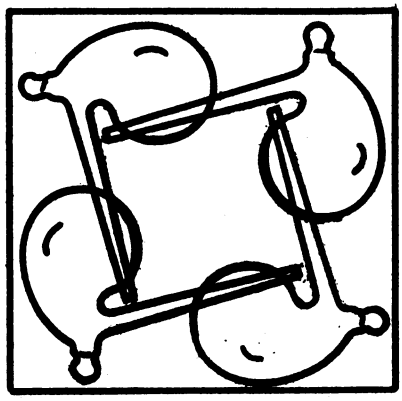
[12] Joan Chamerlain Engelsman, *The Feminine Dimension of the Divine* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979), 106-139.

tion is then especially interesting, and suggests that the implications of the wisdom concept for Christian theology deserve further exploration.

Science in the light of Wisdom

We may begin by reflecting upon the origins of science. I have already quoted one of the better-known biblical statements about wisdom which states that its beginning is the fear of the Lord. Now it is certainly *not* possible to argue that the fear of the Lord is a prerequisite for every individual who wants to pursue science successfully. Both the commonly known fact that some prominent scientists are atheists and the implication of the Christian tradition itself that the world is knowable "though God were not given"[13] argue against such an idea. But on the historical level matters are a little different. As I have already pointed out, it was no accident that modern science arose only within a culture shaped by the Judaeo-Christian tradition. Belief in the goodness of God's creation (so that the universe is *worth* knowing), in the rationality of the creation (so that it *can* be known by reason), and in its distinction from the Creator (so that there is no sacrilege in investigation of the world) were important factors in the rise of science, and the early scientists had absorbed these ideas from the biblical tradition. Whatever might be said about the ways in which science *might* have developed, it is simply an empirical fact that, as far as the historical development of science was concerned, the fear of the Lord *was* the beginning of wisdom.[14]

Wisdom is also pictured in the tradition as associated with the beginning of the universe which men and women are able to study. After speaking of all God's creatures,



Psalm 104 declares, "In wisdom hast thou made them all" (v. 24). We might simply say, with the Good News translation, "How wisely you made them all!" But the connection of wisdom with creation involves something more than an adjectival description of God's work. Wisdom comes to be spoken of as a personal associate, or even instrument, of God's creative activity.

In the best-known passage of this type, Proverbs 8:22-31, Wisdom is spoken of as being present at the creation of the world. There is uncertainty about a rare but critical Hebrew word (*'amon*) in v. 30 which might mean "master workman," "little child," "confidante," or "co-ordinator."[15] Wisdom is pictured either as God's co-worker or "as a child playing in its father's workshop."[16]

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[13] George L. Murphy, "The Paradox of Mediated Creation *Ex Nihilo*," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 39 (1987), 221.

[14] See the references listed under Note 2.

[15] See, e.g., the note on the verse in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, ed. Herbert G. May and Bruce M. Metzger (New York: Oxford, 1977), 778 (O.T.).

[16] *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 1965 ed., s.v. "σοφία κτλ, B. The Old Testament," by Georg Fohrer.

We have already noted von Rad's characterization of Wisdom as "the primeval world order." It corresponds in important ways to the *pattern* of the universe which is described in approximate ways by the natural laws with which the natural sciences deal. These laws should not be regarded merely as a disconnected collection of rules which matter is forced to obey. Rather, as relativity and quantum theory have shown us, matter is itself a representation of pattern. We can make no meaningful distinction between substance and structure, between matter and the pattern which matter represents.[17] The universe cannot exist without this pattern—or in biblical language, without Wisdom.

To that extent there is a good deal of correspondence between the thought of Israel's wisdom literature and the overall picture of the world which we get from modern science. To associate this "primeval world order" with a Creator God is not a step which modern science compels us to take, though it is something assumed at the outset in the wisdom tradition. The step of explicitly Christian faith is taken in Colossians 1:15-20. Here, though the term "wisdom" is not used, Christ is described as this "primeval world order": "He is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Col 1:17—cf. also Sir 43:26). And this of course parallels what is said using the Word concept in John 1:1-3.

Thus the universe, the object of the scientist's study, is described in the Bible in terms of Wisdom. What about scientific methodology? As we have already noted, there is little point in trying to find any explicit guide to scientific procedure in the Bible. But the frame of mind recommended in the wisdom tradition comes closer than anything else in Scripture to what is required for science. The basic honesty of measurement demanded in Proverbs 11:1 refers originally to commerce, but is absolutely fundamental to natural science. And in The Wisdom of Solomon, many of the activities we now associate with the natural sciences come through Wisdom.

> For it is [God] who gave me unerring knowledge of what exists,
> to know the structure of the world and the activity of the elements;
> the beginning and end and middle of times,
> the alternations of the solstices and the changes of the seasons,
> the cycles of the year and the constellations of the stars,
> the natures of animals and the tempers of wild beasts,
> the powers of spirits [or winds] and the reasonings of men,
> the varieties of plants and the virtues of roots;
> I learned both what is secret and what is manifest,
> for wisdom, the fashioner of all things, taught me.
> (Wis 7:17-22)

The object and limits of science

Science enables people to know things about the universe. Those who are conversant with the rationality which pervades the world may understand the world. But science is not of itself able to lead to the knowledge that God is the creator of the universe. The Bible insists that genuine human wisdom comes first of all not from what people can find out about the world but from what God reveals to them.

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17 Werner Heisenberg, *Physics and Beyond* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972). George L. Murphy, "A Positive Approach to Creation," *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* 32 (1980), 230.

"The wisdom of the world"—wisdom divorced from God's revelation—is thus shown by God to be foolishness. That is the thrust of Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians 1 and 2. In order to have genuine wisdom one must *begin* from the self-revelation of the divine Wisdom in Christ crucified. This does not provide new *information* about the physical universe—new scientific *facts*—but it does provide the framework without which all the wonderful comprehension of the world which science can achieve is ultimately "pointless."[18] The person who *begins* with God's revelation in the cross and resurrection of Christ may be able to understand physical aspects of the universe no better than a non-Christian. But the Christian may come to discern the crucified One as the God who is active in the world. Thus we come toward a view which I have called "chiasmic cosmology," in which the creator and ruler is seen as the One who is "placed crosswise in the universe."[19]

In the light of the cross we may begin to see why the pursuit of knowledge can have something deathlike about it. A person has to be prepared to make sacrifices for genuine wisdom. In a verse preceding the ones just quoted from Wisdom, the writer says:

> I loved her more than health and beauty,
> and I chose to have her rather than light,
> because her radiance never ceases.
> (Wis 7:10)

Socrates spoke of philosophy as a preparation for death,[20] and the history of science provides us with examples of men and women who made the sacrifice of their own lives in the pursuit of science.[21] The *Challenger* astronauts perhaps come to mind here. Christians may see in such things hints of the cross—of the crucified Wisdom of God.

"When Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods; and his heart was not wholly true to the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father" (1 Kg 11:4). "Wisdom" which is cut off from the true Wisdom of God is ultimately foolishness which brings about destruction. Science by itself is not able to provide any ethical guidance for the ways in which the technological fruits of science should be used. And so in Friedrich Dürrenmatt's play *The Physicists* it is quite appropriate that it is finally "poor King Solomon" who represents the scientists whose work has been unleashed upon the world. "And somewhere round a small, yellow, nameless star there circles, pointlessly, everlastingly, the radioactive earth."[22]

No matter how much this wisdom of the world might be able to prolong life, no matter what conveniences it might provide, wisdom divorced from the wisdom of God is ultimately without hope. But science and technology may be genuine wisdom, may be God-given means through which we may exercise our stewardship of creation, if they are seen in their proper relationship with Christ crucified, "whom God made our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption; therefore as it is written, 'Let him who boasts, boast of the Lord'" (1 Cor 1:30-31).

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[18] Steven Weinberg, *The First Three Minutes* (New York: Bantam, 1979), 144.

[19] George L. Murphy, "Chiasmic Cosmology: A Response to Fred Van Dyke," *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* 38 (1986), 124.

[20] Plato, "Phaedo" in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961), 46.

[21] George L. Murphy, "Science and Martyrdom," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 41 (1989), 31.

[22] Friedrich Dürrenmatt, *The Physicists* (New York: Grove Press, 1962), 93-94.

Luther's Exposition of John 17

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In 1528 Luther delivered a series of sermons on the text of John 17, the "high priestly prayer" of Jesus. These sermons were preached weekly from August 8 until October 31 in the city church of Wittenberg. The parish pastor, Johannes Bugenhagen, was away seeing to the course of the reform of Braunschweig and Hamburg.[1]

The "Preface" for the published edition of these sermons indicates that Luther had approved of their publication under the editorship of his "dear friend" Caspar Cruciger in 1530. Luther offered them to "all the beloved members of Christ" as a "crumb and cup of cold water," useful for "godly Christians who hunger and thirst after righteousness."[2] Subsequently, these sermons appeared in later sixteenth century editions of Luther's collected works, as well as in more modern collections.

In the early decades of the nineteenth century, the Rev. Henry B. Cole (of Clare Hall, Cambridge) issued a number of volumes of translations of Luther's writings in English. Volume II of an 1824 edition of *Luther's Works* contains the only English language translation of Cruciger's edition of Luther's 1528 series of sermons on John 17.

In 1528 Luther was embroiled in the heat of the controversy with the Swiss reformers regarding the nature of Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper and was trying to establish the Reformation within Electoral Saxony on a firmer footing. He published in 1528 his *Great Commentary on the Lord's Supper* and was also working on the formulations which would produce his two Catechisms in 1529.

The text of John 17 gave Luther occasion to comment on a number of themes:

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[1] Martin Luther, *D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Weimar: Hermann Boehlaus Nachfolger, 1883-), 28, 70ff. *D. Martin Luthers sammtliche Schriften* (St. Louis, 1880-1910), 8, 745 ff.

[2] Martin Luther, *Select Works of Martin Luther*, 4 vols. trans. Henry B. Cole (London: T. Bensley, 1824-1826), II, p. 3.

the relationship of Christ to God, the relationship of grace/faith and works, the nature of the unity of the Body of Christ, and Christian sanctification. Although John 17 did not prompt Luther to deal directly with the sacraments and ministry, one can see material relevant to these loci as well in the *Esposition*. Although the Swiss were most often the targets of Luther's polemic during this period of his career, Luther also addressed the papal church, as well as those whom he called "fanatics."

That Jesus prayed aloud, using physical gestures, was interpreted by Luther as a warning against the iconoclastic tendencies of his opponents who disapproved of the use of such "extreme things" in prayer. Luther saw the whole of this prayer as a model and warrant for Christian prayer. Prayer is therefore not optional for believers, for without prayer "faith cannot subsist or endure." Prayer is to consist of three principal parts: that we give honor to God in thanksgiving, that we enumerate before God our knowledge of his blessings, and that we place before God our necessities.

Luther turned next to issues relating to John's concept of glorification. He contrasted the human perception of the death of Christ with the actual effects of Christ's death. The glorification of Christ was accomplished when "the Father raised him again from the dead, laid the devil at his feet, and made him King and Lord over all the creatures."

Luther argued here from a "high" christological position: the Son possesses all the attributes of the Father. Thus, Jesus is that one person by whose preaching the Father is to be known and honored. It is the mission of the Son to proclaim the Father, to make him known, and in this proclamation the Father is glorified. For Luther, the cross is the means of Christ's *and* God's glorification. The issue of the mutual glorification of the Father and the Son was one to which Luther would often return in these sermons. The christology of this passage was used by Luther to condemn all who would deny Christ's divinity or oneness with God the Father.

In language anticipating his Catechisms, Luther asserted that those who deny to Christ the divinity of the Father or who claim knowledge of God apart from Christ are to be condemned. To find God anywhere else but in Christ was, for Luther, idolatry. Here is how he put it:

> And the same is going on today; for everyone forms to himself a God according to his own imagination, under various kinds of false worship of God and each under a form of godliness; not to mention those open and atrocious blasphemies against God with which the world is wholly filled, wherefore, there is the greatest need to pray that the Father may be glorified; that is that he may be known by the preaching of the Gospel, and be thereby honored as he desires and ought to be honored; that all erroneous doctrines and false worshippings of God, together with all human traditions and dreams, may cease and be abolished; and that the Gospel alone may prevail and shine.

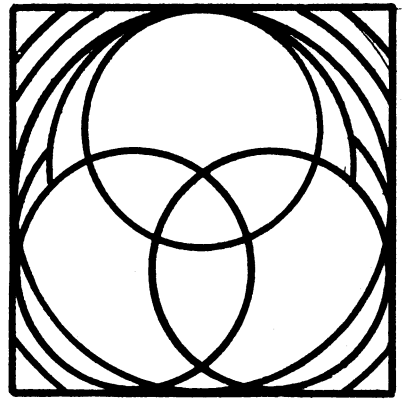
In summary, then, Luther proclaimed that God is only known, revealed, and glorified in Christ, the Son. Further, God is only served, thanked, praised, extolled, and magnified in giving glory to Christ. Luther argued that those who would speculate about the hidden nature of God and claim knowledge of God apart from the mediation of Christ were dealing only with a god of their own making.

The theme of the natural unity of the Father and the Son was part of Luther's theological understanding from early on. It is interesting that Luther still preached in such detail his views concerning the

knowledge of God through the mediation of Christ. Again and again, as the text dictated, Luther emphasized this relation.

He treated John 17:3 at great length: "And this is eternal life, that they might know thee, the one true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent."

What is eternal life and how does one receive it? Luther answered that human reason cannot understand even the least article of faith without the Word of God. Since it is Christ who makes eternal life possible for believers, and since only God can actually grant eternal life, Christ must be God. Eternal life comes to those who know the Father, through the ministry of the Son.



What is to be understood by "whom thou hast sent"? Luther answered:

> Consider thou and fully weigh the reason why Christ came, and what he did for the world—he came down from heaven, and was made man, that he might finish the work which the Father gave him to do (as you will find he himself hereafter saith); that is, that he might take the sins of the whole world upon himself, and might die to blot them out, and to appease the wrath of the Father; and that he might in his own person overcome death and the devil, and redeem us unto himself.

This "sending down" of the Son to and for each of us gives the Christian confidence of the Father's favor. The "sending of the Son" demonstrates God's will and mind, "so as to leave nothing for us to behold but an immeasurable and inexhaustible ocean of love and mercy."

Knowledge of God's love and favor is not a work. Works are things we "do," but knowledge is a thing we "receive." Luther declared those teachers as false who proclaimed a naked knowledge of God outside of Christ. He saw this especially in the doctrines of the pope and of the monks. Luther wrote: "Here is the point of contention and controversy, wherein we dissent from the doctrine of the pope—he has taken away from us this *Knowledge*, and will not leave it pure and uncorrupted." But Luther further asserted that if the pope would leave this knowledge uncorrupted he would never say one word against him. In light of current discussions between Lutherans and Roman Catholics regarding the doctrine of justification by grace through faith, this remark of Luther's is an instructive assertion.

Luther made a distinction between earthly and heavenly works, based upon their different states and conditions. Our human problem is that we want to offer earthly works when only heavenly works can suffice. Since we cannot provide heavenly works, as only the Christ can offer those heavenly works, earthly works remain null and void for salvation. Because he believed that neither the papists nor the fanatics were willing to rely solely on the knowledge of Christ as the mediator of human salvation, he concluded that both have lost the word and the knowledge together.

At verse 11, Luther followed the text into a new set of ideas. He posed the question, "How comes it to pass that Christ says, 'I go to my Father,' when he must (as God) still be in the world?" Citing writings from the Hebrew Scriptures, especially Psalm 139, Luther affirmed the presence of God throughout creation. If God is so omnipresent, how, then, could Christ say that he was going out of the world? Luther answered:

> This question may be answered and in two ways. In one way, according to frothy, human wisdom, that he has ascended upon high, and sits above as in a swallows' nest.... But I, according to the Scripture, give this answer, and say that 'in the world' means to be in its external and sensible state, that is, to enjoy this life which the world enjoys, which is called the natural life in which we eat, drink, sleep, labor, and take care of our families; in a word, in which we make use of the world; and all things necessary unto this life.... Therefore he (Christ) no longer lives a life after the manner of this world; that is, he no longer is in a corporal life, which is to be supported by meat, drink, and other corporal necessities.

In this way Luther argued Christ's "ubiquity," his everywhereness. It was with this understanding that Luther countered the Swiss, who insisted that Christ could not be naturally present in the Lord's Supper because he was naturally located in heaven. Luther insisted: "We are to declare and to believe, that God is present wherever you call upon him, in prison, in the waters, in the fire, and in all afflictions and necessities."

The major focus of the sermons rested upon the exposition of the verse "that they may be one as we are." It was a matter of grave concern to Luther that this text had been so distorted by many parties and sects in the church's history. He cited the Arians, for example, who argued that since no two people share the same essence and nature, therefore Christ and God cannot do so. But Christ argued out of a unity of essence, that just as Christ and God are one "thing," so Christians are to be one "thing." Luther appealed to Paul's "body of Christ" imagery from 1 Corinthians 10 and 12.

When one member of the body is attacked or suffers any ill, spiritual or physical, the whole of the body is there for help and consolation. What keeps this union of Christ's people intact is "by abiding in that Word we have received from Christ. Christ considers whatever happens unto us as happening to him: and he holds that watchful care over us, that neither the world nor the devil can overcome us, nor injure us by any evil however great."

The idea that Christ's unity with his people provides the basis for the unity of the Christian church was much on Luther's mind at this time in his career. It was a central focus of Luther's struggle with the Swiss reformers and formed a large part of his argumentation in his *Great Confession on the Lord's Supper* of 1528.[3]

The last significant focus of Luther's concern in these sermons was "sanctification." Commenting upon verses 17-18, "Having been justified by the Word of Christ, how is the Christian to live?" Luther answered:

> But we say, that we are to hear that word from the mouth of Christ only. He that hears and believes this, has rightly the truth of God which sanctifies without

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[3] Dennis A. Laskey, "In Faith and Fervent Love: The Concept of *Communio* in Luther's Understanding of the Lord's Supper," unpublished Th.D. dissertation, The Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, 1983.

> any hypocritical show: for if you believe his word, then you can hold fast no hope or confidence in your own reason and wisdom, nor in your strength and works; nor can you arrogate to yourself any holiness because of them, as to be able to avail before God. Therefore, those that are of this mind cannot be proud and arrogant; for they can find nothing in themselves, on account of which they can boast. And you see, that unfeigned humility always follows where there is unfeigned faith. And, true patience and love to the fellow believers upon true humility. When we are under the influence of this, we despise no one, we serve and are kind to all; and whatever evil comes upon us, we endure it with a patient mind; we are not wrathful, nor do we revenge injuries, when we meet ingratitude, perfidy, grief, ignoring, and reproach.

Luther beautifully described how good works flow naturally from true knowledge and love of God as ascertained in the word and person of Christ. Our sanctification is precisely that of Christ—he makes holy those who cleave to his holiness.

Although many more treasures might be mined from this exquisite *Esposition*, suffice these selections to indicate the richness and breadth of Luther's reaction to this text. The biblical text controlled the progress of Luther's arguments, but it did not confine them. In John 17 Luther found the whole of the gospel message as the Word of Christ proclaimed to the world, revealing the nature and will of the Father.

Robert H. Fischer, to whom this essay is dedicated, likes to say of Luther that when you touch any part of his thought you will find all of his thought. Such is certainly true of his *Esposition*. This reading report intends to lead others to mine this writing of Luther, and to discover in Cole's translations further access into the mind of the Reformer.

> And this is the reason why Christians, and especially ministers ought to desire a longer life; which we, together with Christ, ought to ask of God for them; for it is of the greatest importance that they should have their lives prolonged as much as possible.... For it is a laborious and arduous task, with all our labors, devotedness, and diligence, to keep the Word among a few; and a wonder it is, that it does not come to destruction utterly, and that all do not go over to the devil together.

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Let All Things Their Creator Bless

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Bless

Let's start at the end and work backwards. The verb "bless" comes at the end of the imperative, "Let All Things Their Creator Bless," presumably for emphasis. So let's start where the emphasis falls, with the verb "bless."

If you look up "bless" in the *Oxford English Dictionary*,[1] you discover that it has Teutonic roots and apparently comes from the word for "blood," or perhaps from the word for "sacrifice." The word's derivation, therefore, suggests that "to bless" means "to mark (or affect in some way) with blood (or sacrifice)," that is, "to consecrate" or "to make holy."

But this original sense of the word was greatly modified when, in the history of the English language, "bless" was chosen to translate the Latin word "benedicere" and the Greek word εὐλογεῖν. Those words originally had the meaning, "to speak well of," "to eulogize," or "to praise." The Latin and Greek words were themselves modified when they were chosen to translate the Hebrew word *bok*. *Bok* means "to kneel," "to bend the knee," "to worship," or "to praise."

"Bless," then, is one of those words that is very rich in meaning. Its roots and history include the Hebrew "to bend the knee," the Greek and Latin "to speak well of," and the Teutonic "to mark with blood."

Who is blessed?

Let all those meanings hang there for a moment. To clarify them we need to ask who is to be blessed. So we back up in the imperative we are considering to the second last word, "Creator." "Let all things their

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[1] *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 229-30.

Creator bless." Who is to be blessed? The Creator. The source of all things. That may seem obvious to some people. But it's not obvious at all to much of our culture. We who may think it is obvious are often carried along by the culture and by our own ingrown human tendencies, so that we too obviously forget the obvious—that the Creator is to be blessed. It is well therefore to ponder for a moment what blessing the Creator might mean. It turns out to be a radical notion.

1. Knowing whom we are to bless clarifies the meaning of "bless." "To bless" God is "to bend the knee" before God. That earliest meaning of the word in its Hebrew sense is what we are dealing with here. The Latin and Greek ideas of "to speak well of" or "to praise" also get us close to the critical issue. It is these meanings which clearly overtake the Teutonic sense of the word "bless." God the Creator is holy. Nothing we can do with blood or sacrifice can make holy or holier what already is as holy as can be. All we can do is "bend the knee" and acknowledge the holiness that is there—the holiness of the massive power at the center of the universe that creates and sustains everything that is, which is the source of all the galaxies and all the "boundless curves of [time and] space."[2] This meaning is so powerful that the English word "to bless," when it refers to blessing God, comes to mean not "marking off" or "consecrating," but "extolling," "praising," "calling holy" or "calling worthy of reverence"—"bending the knee."

2. Knowing that the Creator is to be blessed also means knowing something about how the universe is structured and where we fit. The Creator *is* the Creator. We are not. We are to bless God, not the other way around. The proper posture is on our knees. Or, to say the same thing a little differently, when we worship God we truly *are* what we are. To be truly human is to worship. Bard Thompson told his worship classes that the word "worship" comes from the Anglo-Saxon word "weorthan" which means "worthship" and may be related to the verb "to be." That is, worship is the activity of highest human worth. When we worship we truly "are." To bless the Creator is literally "to be."

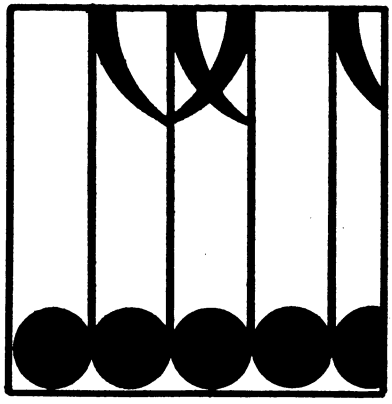
It is not surprising then that the characteristic Hebrew forms of prayer and praise are, "Bless the Lord, O my soul," or, "You are blessed, O Lord, because you have...." Psalm 103 is a good example. So is the repeated Sabbath blessing used in the Seder.[3]

3. To bless the Creator not only clarifies our relationship with the Creator; it also clarifies our relationship with the creation. You can't bless the Creator without respecting the Creator's creation. Concerns for justice and the environment are the inevitable result of blessing God the Creator. To care about people on the short end of the stick—migrant workers, the poor, the homeless; to work for justice for blacks in South Africa or here in the United States; to try to eliminate sexism; to do something about pesticides, pollution, acid rain, clean water, lakes, oceans, and tropical rain forests; to struggle for peace with all the problems of nuclear weapons which can destroy the planet; or to care about the needs of our next door neighbor: all of this is not simply the concern of some special interest group or groups. It is the inevitable result of blessing the Creator. The special interest groups in the world who concern themselves with any of these matters are really the church's children. We have spawned them by letting

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[2] Albert F. Bayly, "Lord of the Boundless Curves of Space" (Edinborough: St. Andrew Press, 1975).

[3] *The Passover Celebration* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Program, 1980), 23.



loose in the world this radical notion that God is to be blessed, and therefore the whole creation is worthy of our concern and care.

4. The problem, of course, is that we don't do any of these things very well—as all of us are painfully aware. We forget about blessing the Creator and get derailed with trivial pursuits. We wind up blessing ourselves and our own ingrown wills and desires so that the proper order of things keeps getting skewed. We forget both the Creator and the creation, as if we could go it alone without any concern for the wholeness of things, or as if we and we alone were the whole or the center of the universe.

Fortunately for us God turns the whole business around. God realizes that we can never truly bless the source of all being. God realizes that we can never really care for the creation as we ought to. So, mystery of mysteries, God blesses us.

God creates us and sets the very image of the Creator in us, and God sustains us. That already means marvelous blessings. But God does even more. God walks among us, in Christ becomes one of us. In the life, death, and resurrection of Christ we are blessed beyond our wildest dreams. The blessing we cannot ever really do toward God, God does toward us. Blessing now is turned upside down and takes on the Teutonic meaning: God consecrates us, makes us holy. While we can only ascribe to God the holiness God already has, God clothes us with an alien holiness and graces us so that we are made new. Everything is turned upside down so that we are now freed to bless the Creator and freed to serve the creation. The barriers we cannot remove have been removed by God. God freely makes us what we were intended to be. We are freed for worship and blessing God, and for serving God's good creation.

Worship itself illustrates the way God turns things around. We think that at worship we come to bless God. Actually in worship we receive God's blessing in Word and Sacrament which makes it possible for us to bless God.

Who blesses?

The next question is who is to do the blessing. It's clear already that we are. But the imperative says more than that: "Let *all things* their creator bless"—not just us, but all things.

The imperative we are considering is the first line of the last stanza of St. Francis' hymn, "All Creatures of Our God and King."[4] That hymn is variously called the "Canticle of the Sun," the "Sun Song," the "Hymn of the Creation," or the "Song of All the Creatures." Whatever its title, stanza by stanza it calls on the whole creation to bless God: the sun, the moon, the wind, the

[4] *Lutheran Book of Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1978), Hymn 527.

clouds, the morning, the evening, water, fire, the earth, fruits and flowers, everyone of tender heart, those who bear pain and sorrow (like St. Francis when he wrote the hymn: sick, temporarily blind, in a hut infested by field mice during the fierce heat of the summer of 1225), and death.

> The blessing we cannot ever really do toward God, God does toward us.

The hymn was apparently suggested to St. Francis by the *Benedicite*,[5] that marvelous Hebrew hymn that probably comes from about 150 BCE. In the *Benedicite* the "things" St. Francis mentions are all there, plus many more. Everything is called to bless the Lord: heavens, angels, waters, powers, sun and moon, stars, rain and dew, winds, fire and heat, cold and warmth, snow, nights and days, light and darkness, ice and frosts, lightnings and clouds, mountains and hills, everything that grows, seas and rivers, springs, whales and everything that moves in the waters, wild birds, animals and cattle, people, Israel, priests of the Lord, slaves of the Lord, spirits and souls of the upright, and the holy and humble of heart.

What's the point of piling up all these things of creation, one after the other? What's the point of punctuating each "thing" with the refrain, "Bless the Lord; praise and magnify God forever"? There are several points.

First, this is something like repetition in the Eastern Orthodox liturgy, which our Western mindset finds hard to grasp because our language of worship and our culture are so geared to what is terse and quick. To pile up phrase upon phrase is more like the kingly court of the oriental monarch than the legal language of our Western liturgies. You don't rush in the presence of the king. You take your time. You relate to the king on the terms of the king and his court. You say the same thing over and over with slight variations so you get some sense of the richness of the message. We're not only talking here about a literary device. We're talking about letting things sink in slowly and deliberately, with patience, and savoring and enjoying the whole process.

Second, what is it that's sinking in? A sense of perspective, a sense of the whole. We are not the whole of creation. We are part of it. We are not the only part that needs to bless the Lord. The whole creation needs to do it. The ancient sense of the universe as spheres within spheres which make music as they spin, with our music a reflection of this far greater music of the spheres, is not such a bad picture. It keeps things in perspective and doesn't delude us into thinking we are the only creations. It suggests not only that there is more to the creation than humanity and that there is more praising going on than we humans can do on our own, but also makes the point that if we don't do it, the rocks themselves will cry out, and so will the whole universe!

Third, most obviously, the whole creation is dependent on the Creator. The universe and all its things—animate and inanimate—are not some self-sufficient

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[5] *LBW*, Canticle 18.

realm spinning out of control through space with no source and goal. The whole business into the deepest galaxies of space comes from God, is sustained by God, and owes its gratitude to God. "Let *all things* their Creator bless."

Fourth, "all things" means not only the things we like to see and hear. It means all things—even monotones. George Ives was the father of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century American composer Charles Ives. George was a fine musician, a bandmaster and congregational song leader who had perfect pitch. At worship services John Bell, the best stonemason in Danbury, Connecticut, bellowed off key. When someone asked George how he could stand that, he said,

> Old John is a supreme musician. Look into his face and hear the music of the ages. Don't pay too much attention to the sounds. If you do, you may miss the music.[6]

That is not an excuse for musicians to sing or play out of rhythm or out of tune! It does suggest, however, that the whole creation—even parts of it and people in it that may disturb us (you can let John Bell the stonemason stand for your own pet peeve or the person associated with it)—are all called to bless the Lord. And we are all to affirm the blessing of the others as a part of the whole which is in part what corporate worship is about.

Worship

Worship doesn't make good press. You can't cover worship in the news media very easily for two reasons. First, because it's a multi-media event, it is hard to get at. Like a family meal, it is hard to report. You have to be there and be part of the family to understand it. Second, worship does not involve the kind of simplistic conflict that is grist for the news media. So, if you rely on the secular press for your understanding of worship, you get the impression that it's one of the least important things human beings do.

But, on any given weekend, about 47 million people will be at worship services in this country. I have taught courses in worship where we have visited various worshiping communities—from Jewish synagogues to Eastern Orthodox churches to Roman Catholic churches and monasteries to all varieties of Protestant groups. What always amazes my students and me is the vitality of worship and how important it is to the people who do it week by week. The visits my classes have made all make it clear that the news media does not really give a very good picture of the society as a whole. The news media is very selective in what it reports.

But statistics and the news media don't really help us in the final analysis. Even if those 47 million worshipers were suddenly to evaporate, even if only two or three (or no worshipers) were gathered together, worship would still be the most important of human activities. Why? Because, whether we know it or not or admit it or not, the Creator did create the creation. And, whether we know it or not or admit it or not, the role of the creation is to bless the Creator. To affirm our true worth in the cosmos is to worship. That is, worship is indeed the most important thing we human beings do.

We who are Christians presumably know that, or course. But we don't always act like we know it. In my visits to various

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[6] Henry and Sidney Cowell, *Charles Ives and His Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), 24.

churches, I have not only found vitality; I have also found lethargy and creeping death. The amazing thing is that the people find meaning in their worship even when we leaders plan poorly or don't seem to care. God grants us grace even when we mess things up. We need to be thankful for that, but it's no excuse for perpetuating bad planning or a lack of caring about what is our most important human activity.

Why is it that we often plan worship poorly or not at all? Part of the reason is not malicious or bad. It's that worship is habitual, one of the things we do regularly. That's not bad. Worship should be in part habitual. We are habitual beings who should not have to think about every move we make. Habit frees us to do other things. There are no olympics, no great musicians, no excellence in any human endeavors without habit. That's as true in worship as in everything else.

But pure habit without thought is just as bad as no habit at all. What is worth doing is worth preparing, thinking about, spending time with. Good worship is a healthy balance of the habitual and the thoughtfully-prepared. One without the other is a formula for failure. That is why careful worship planning is so critical. We are not dealing here with trivial pursuits, but with the essence of life and meaning.

Implications

There are three implications for our worship.

1. We need to know our tradition. We are not the first worshiping Christians who ever lived. There are twenty centuries of resources and Christian sisters and brothers to keep faith with. They have done things and tried things that worked and didn't work. We have a responsibility to read the minutes of the past meetings to find out what went well, what did not go well, what carried the message, and how we keep faith with our sisters and brothers of past times and places.

Fortunately the minutes of the past meeting are imbedded for us in lively fashion in our *Lutheran Book of Worship*. The central service of Word and Sacrament is there. The morning and evening offices are there. The forms of prayer and praise are there, with the Psalter and a wide ecumenical spread of hymns. We have the tradition, and we need to attend to it. One of the worst tendencies of contemporary Christians is to act as if we can thumb our noses at the past. We do so at our own and the world's peril. We need to resist the temptation, and attending with serious care to the *Lutheran Book of Worship* is one of the best safeguards.

2. We need to blend a concern for the contemporary with our care for the tradition. Our worship needs to be related to the past, but also to be authentic in the present. That means it needs to relate to our culture in the most profound way, not in superficial ways. It's difficult to know precisely what that always means because different local churches perceive the issues differently, relate to different neighborhoods, have different problems, and need to struggle on their own terrain. But there are two points about this that are clear.

One is that the *Lutheran Book of Worship* is again a marvelous resource. Its editors struggled to put the liturgy and hymns and music in our tongue so our worship can be authentically ours. So we need to apply ourselves again to the marvelous resource we have. But we also need to realize that the older the book gets, the less it is related to us in the present. It could not include the hymns that were written just yesterday or changes in language usage since it was

printed. That's why hymnals and books of worship must constantly be updated. I'm not arguing for an immediate revision of the *LBW*. I think it still has many years of useful life. I am suggesting, however, that we always have to be alert to other resources and needs, and that we have to use them sensitively.

Second, probably the most critical issues of our age are related to peace and justice. And the problem is not just peace and justice between my neighbor and me. The problem is peace and justice in the global village of the world and beyond. It has to do with the ecosystem, with systemic injustice that involves collisions between groups who did not even know they were on a collision course, with both blatant and subtle sexism and racism, with world peace and how to get a handle on forces that seem way beyond our control. "Let all things their Creator bless" is precisely about these things. We need to let them find their expression in their natural habitat—Christian worship.

One point where they cause some of the worst grief and pain at the moment is in our debates over language. These may seem like simple semantic problems about something not too important, such as the gender of a pronoun. Actually, such concerns reflect very deep issues of idolatry and justice. They also reflect the flux of our culture. We need to be responsive to all of that and to approach the issues with care and concern, and to struggle together with them on behalf of the whole world.

3. Our worship has to relate to the goal, the future. We may not know how we will get there yet. The route may not always be clear. We have to go out like Abraham and Sarah, not knowing where we're going. But the end point is clear. The goal is a promise that God in Christ has won the battle, and new life—a whole new realm of being unlike the old—is ours and will be ours for the taking. The goal is the consummation where God in Christ will greet us. Our worship needs to ring with the resurrection life that stands above history and at the end of history. It needs to express that jubilation, not in superficial ways, but in ways that are appropriate to the depth of resurrection life.

In short, if our worship is faithful, it will relate to the past, the present, and the future. Worship has to do with the whole, the whole of God's creatures in all of time and space, blessing the Creator.

Lutheran responsibility

One final word needs to be added. We who are Lutherans have a special responsibility. We are not better (or worse) than any other Christian body, but each group within the whole of Christ's body has a special responsibility to the whole. We as Lutherans are positioned at the Protestant-Catholic nexus. We live at that crossroad. That's why it is so difficult to describe us easily, but that's also why we have a special responsibility. We include both Protestant and Catholic elements. That gives us a unique sense of the whole, it gives us a unique sense of what worship is and how music and the arts are integral to it, and it gives us a unique responsibility to contribute our gifts to the ecumenical community and to the world. If we do it well, we model, "Let all things their Creator bless."

Book Reviews

FRIENDSHIP AND THE MORAL LIFE. By Paul J. Wadell, C.P. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989. 189 pages. Paper. $10.95.

In a world afflicted by general mobility, constant transition, pervasive hectic, and high anonymity in public life, most of us are yearning for friendships. Especially pastors often feel very lonely in the middle of a life filled with people. What they usually lack more than anything else is a couple of good friends. Yet together with many of our friends we have lost the essential understanding of what friendship is all about and what it requires and entails as a way of life.

Roman Catholic theologian Paul Wadell gives us a both timely *and* untimely exploration of how our understanding of the moral life takes shape when friendship is at its center. After starting autobiographically with his experience of friendship, Wadell moves into two chapters on Aristotle in which he shows how this philosopher understood friendship to be an intrinsic good, since it is the relationship in which people come to understand and participate in the purpose for which life is given. Then he moves on and shows in a conversation with Kierkegaard, Nygren, Barth, and Augustine that Christian love (agape) and friendship as preferential love are not necessarily in contradiction to each other if friendship is centered in Christ. The focal chapter unfolds Thomas Aquinas' understanding of charity as friendship with God. In the final chapter he unfolds friendship as a model for the moral life in everyday life—and thereby shows that it also is a moral problem to be without good friends!

Wadell presents both a distinctly Catholic and yet intentionally ecumenical perspective. The lucid clarity in his presentation of Aristotle and Aquinas also makes his book a very useful introduction to the ethical thought of two eminent thinkers vastly unknown on this side of the Reformation divide. The political and social implications of Wadell's insights can easily be overlooked. Yet it should be noted that his account seems to imply a fundamental critique of life under the conditions of modernity which makes friendships so unlikely—if not impossible.

Wadell helps us understand friendship not only as integral part of the moral life, but why it is so central for those of us involved in the practice of ministry. Written in an engaging and straightforward style, this book helps to re-appreciate the gift of friendship—first and foremost friendship with God!—and its centrality for a life which deserves to be called good.

Reinhard Hütter
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

SUFFERING: A CAREGIVER'S GUIDE. By John L. Maes. Nashville: Abingdon, 1990. 176 pages. Paper. $12.95.

Using the language of "existential philosophy, practical theology, and clinical description," professional caregiver John Maes has written this book to make sense of suffering. Prompted by personal tragedy and forty years of work as a pastor-therapist-teacher "to help heal myself and others from the sufferings and the sorrows of life," Maes' effort is framed within his belief that "healing and growth occur within and ultimately because of divine grace."

The first three chapters deal with the nature, quality, and many faces of suffering. Unlike pain which is physical, specific, and of short duration, suffering is a state of mental/emotional stress that results from many causes, including pain, loneliness, and a sense of alienation from God. The heart of suffering is spiritual, the despair that accompanies a failure of faith. How well a person copes with suffering depends on level of self-esteem, acceptance of sinfulness, belief in God, and the human support received. Suffering occurs with anxiety and apprehension,

with loss of loved ones, job, or health, with remorse over past failures or sins, and with physical pain, a very complex form of suffering.

The last three chapters present the "caregiver's view of the sufferer." Four case studies of sufferers illustrate the four factors important for coping described earlier. A chapter on how to respond to the sufferer provides a description of the sufferer's adaptive style, strategies to help, and advice for the care of caregivers. Finally, the author suggests conditions that can help make our suffering meaningful, including flexibility in values, religious beliefs, and perception.

Maes has written an excellent handbook to help the caregiver better understand the situation of the sufferer. His analysis and explanation of suffering people is informative and useful. If there is any shortcoming in this book it is a failure to make any theological sense of suffering. In spite of Maes' belief that suffering and healing have spiritual roots, and his interest in finding meaning in suffering, he offers very little explicit religious counsel. However, the suggestion that God is present in the compassion of the believing caregiver hints of an activist theodicy of major significance.

Jerry K. Robbins
Morgantown, West Virginia

RE-IMAGINING THE PARISH. By Patrick J. Brennan. New York: Crossroad, 1990. x and 143 pages. Cloth. $14.95.

If we could use our imagination to re-image the church, what would it look like? That is the question Patrick J. Brennan raises in this book. Brennan advocates a return to the traditional ecclesiology of the first through third centuries C.E. Traditional ecclesiology is based on the supreme leadership of Jesus Christ and the church as the agent of the kingdom. Brennan contends that the current traditionalistic ecclesiology is built as an hierarchical system with the church being an end in itself. The result is a system that is "alienating at root in that it flies in the face of baptismal spirituality and healthy sacramental theology."

Part One of the book states the case for a return to traditional ecclesiology which is a balancing of the *ecclesia* (whole church gatherings) with *Koinonia* (small fellowship groupings). From this principle, Brennan discusses the whole range of small group movements—base communities, the work of Fritz Lobinger in Africa, Cho-Hurston cell groups, Cowan-Lee justice movements, OIKOS, Parish Renewal Ministries, Little Rock Scriptural Study, and Chicago Parish Spirituality. The commonality in these movements is the formation of small groups for spiritual care and mission which feed into the whole congregation.

Part Two analyzes adult faith development, adult turning points, and the adult learning praxis. These are key elements in the formation of small groups.

In Part Three, Brennan examines the potential of small groups for ministering to whole families. Through the various stages of life, small groups are valuable tools in effective ministry.

Re-Imagining the Parish provides a solid base in ecclesiology for the small group movement. It is packed full of models for small groups in the congregation. Small groups are not just a fad, but they are solidly rooted in traditional ecclesiology. From this healthy ecclesiology small groups enable the church to be renewed in its mission as an agent of the kingdom.

Gary L. Panko
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A BLACK FUTURE? JESUS AND SALVATION IN SOUTH AFRICA. By Ronald Nicholson. Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990. xii and 265 pages. Paper. $18.95.

Written by a Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Natal in South Africa, this volume attempts "to build some sort of bridge between the theology of Europe and America and the theology of the Third World" (xi). The question Nicholson poses is not so much whether traditional theology is true but whether it is

helpful. Specifically, he imagines a poor, oppressed black South African named Sipho as a test case, and at every point he asks what view of Jesus and salvation might be most relevant to such a person.

In Part One, Nicholson outlines the traditional western view of Jesus as both human and divine. He observes that claims for the divinity of Jesus arose in response to soteriological views that required it. In Part Two, he traces the traditional views of salvation: substitutionary atonement; victory over sin, death, and the devil; the idea of sacrifice; and the theory of moral influence. Nicholson argues that the first three of these views of salvation arose at a time when the predominant soteriological need was for reconciliation with God through penitence. In the contemporary world, theories which focus on repentance apply most appropriately to those who are oppressors. By contrast, the exemplary theory, in certain forms, is somewhat more relevant to the needs of those who are oppressed. Furthermore, the exemplary theory of salvation does not require that Jesus be considered ontologically divine.

In Part Three, Nicholson looks at salvation from the point of view of liberation theology and black theology, which tend to equate salvation with liberation from poverty and oppression. Nicholson agrees that liberation from poverty and oppression are important and constitutive dimensions of salvation but doubts if black people in South Africa will achieve those goals in the near future. Therefore, he asks what salvation might mean to someone in the midst of oppression. Here Nicholson argues that salvation can best be understood as that which empowers a person under oppression to overcome self-denigration, helplessness, and hopelessness. The Gospels of Luke and Mark especially show Jesus as one who cares about the poor, opposes the powerful, and dies because of his identification with the oppressed, thereby "representing both the purposes of God and the potential of humankind" (244). Such a soteriology of empowerment treats Jesus as divine in the sense of "being filled with the Spirit of God to a very special degree" (244).

This volume is very helpful in sorting out the nature and value of various theories of salvation and their relation to Christology. In his reflections, Nicholson might have drawn upon the New Testament view of Jesus as "commissioned agent" whereby Jesus remains fully human yet also fully represents God. In any case, the author relentlessly pursues with honesty and incisiveness what views of Jesus will be most relevant and helpful to those who are oppressed. Pastors, teachers, and students should find this book insightful and challenging.

David Rhoads
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

RUDOLF BULTMANN. INTERPRETING FAITH FOR THE MODERN ERA. By Roger Johnson. The Making of Modern Theology 2. 19th and 20th Century Texts. General Editor: John de Gruchy. London: Collins, 1987. 346 Pages. Cloth. $19.95.

There is a brief introduction which is quite adequate. It discusses the formation of and the main themes in Bultmann's theology. However, it almost completely omits references to some of his major works, like the *Commentary on John* (and other commentaries) and *Theology of the New Testament*, although "The Message of Jesus" (the beginning of Bultmann's *Theology of the New Testament*) is printed in the volume. While it is true that the major themes are found in essays, an introduction to Bultmann's thought should certainly discuss these major works since they are the mature fruit of the thoughts and concepts found in the individual essays.

Each article or excerpt has its own introduction which describes well the context and setting in which the different essays or lectures were written or delivered.

One is always struck by the fact that Bultmann's thinking is consistent and practically changeless throughout his long writing career. This is obvious, e.g., in a comparison of the article on Paul, printed in the book, with the section on Paul in Bultmann's *Theology of the New Testament*, not reprinted here.

Bultmann's qualities are apparent to the attentive reader. His rigorous thinking wherever it may lead him is admirable. He is sincerely

devoted to the New Testament and is anxious to determine its meaning and message, not only for the time of the writings but for Bultmann's own time. And these essays speak still even to our time. In all his work, perhaps especially in his sermons, Bultmann was devoted to the church. Although he was not ordained, he intended to serve the church with his insights and with his sermons.

Of special interest is the short essay, "The Task of Theology in the Present Situation," for it shows how Bultmann warned against the Nazi philosophy at an early time.

I am not sure Johnson is correct in saying on p. 137 that Bultmann here (in the essay "The Problem of Hermeneutics") repudiates an existential understanding of exegesis as he had proposed in his 1925 essay. I don't see it there.

It is due to the nature of the volume in collecting various translations of Bultmann's works that the translation of German or Greek terms is not completely consistent. E.g., *υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου* is translated as "Man" in "Kerygma" and as "Son of Man" in "The Message of Jesus."

The volume as a whole gives good insights into Bultmann's thinking and can be recommended for reading by people who are skeptical about Bultmann. Admirers of Bultmann will find their own pleasures in reading this collection.

Wilhelm C. Linss
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

POSTMODERN THEOLOGY. Edited by Frederic B. Burnham. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989. ix and 117 pages. Paper. $16.95.

The volume is the revised and edited papers from the 1987 Trinity Institute's national conference, "The Church in a Postmodern Age," sponsored by the Parish of Trinity Church, New York City. Contributors are Diogenes Allen, Princeton Theological Seminary; Robert Bellah, University of California at Berkeley; Frederic Burnham, director of Trinity Institute; George Lindbeck, Yale University; James Miller, Carnegie-Mellon University and Chatham College; Sandra Schneiders, Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley; and Rowan Williams, Oxford University.

Each presenter wrestles with the Christian tradition(s) in a postmodern worldview. In broad terms, the papers address epistemological concerns with respect to cultural-linguistic systems and their power to create meaningful realities. Miller's article outlines succinctly the governing conceptual constructs of the pre-modern, modern, and postmodern eras. The postmodern world is a "dynamic nexus," evolving in an ongoing creative process in which human beings are active participants. In this context, language does not describe an objective, static reality but rather supports a particular perspective of reality. Such an understanding of language shifts knowing to a cultural-historically dependent basis. Miller reinterprets the traditional Christian doctrinal categories of creation, "man," incarnation, and eschatology in light of a postmodern scientific worldview and epistemology.

Allen basically argues for the possibility and need for the experience of God in this post-Christian, postmodern age. His necessity for God is occasioned by the collapse of western society's philosophical and scientific bases for the exclusion of a God. The acceptance of a world which is not self-contained permits the possible reality of God, according to Allen. Allen then goes on to argue for the necessity of God using the anthropic principle derived from recent cosmological observations. Allen concludes with a demonstration of the inadequacy of a view of justice without the experience of God using the Good Samaritan story. Evil is removed only by contact with "what is pure and good."

For Lindbeck the language and imagination of the Bible has shaped western society to date, and no other linguistic heritage has replaced its pervasive domination and power to undergird our culture or to weld our imagination. Lindbeck calls the church to undertake a cultural ministry in order to save our culture from collapse. The resurgence of biblical literacy and biblical imagination would open to us, once again, the multivocal meanings resident in the parables, sagas, myths, and stories of the Bible. The impoverished state of public discourse would

become re-infused with the richness of a shared imaginative and conceptual vocabulary and syntax. The churches must relearn the language of Zion to heal our fractured society. No other language will save us or lead us into a future with compassion and care.

It is precisely a sincere and serious concern for the Bible's ability to provide spiritual nourishment which is the focus of Schneiders' chapter. With the advent of historical criticism, biblical texts became the domain of the specialized scholar, receding further and further from the grasp of the ordinary Christian. Schneiders has hope for postmodern biblical scholarship which understands revelation not so much as definitive knowledge, but rather as deeper and richer encounters with the texts in participatory dialogue. Since "language is the medium through which the event of transformative understanding takes place," Schneiders sees less hope for the use and content of scripture as a resource for the oppressed. The oppressive use of scripture by dominant classes and the overwhelming patriarchalism in the content of scripture promotes and reinforces cultural norms of male-generic patterns of ownership, power, and domination.

A recovery of biblical language and Christian practice would heal the fact/feeling separation produced by modernity, an age which gave priority to the metalanguage of science with its factual world of reality. With the recognition that the difference between fact and fiction is governed by how it operates in the "made" world of living humans, biblical language is another metalanguage in the living practice of Christian community. Using the Beatitudes as an example, Bellah demonstrates how the Word creates a worldview just as sure as scientific language does.

For Williams, the "world of scripture" cannot be segregated from encounters and conversation of a radical pluralist postmodern society. It is only when we enter into authentic public discourse in our cultural settings that the church can proclaim transformative judgment and can receive necessary transformative judgment. The church's claim to open a world of fuller life is earned by her realization that she is but one voice in the construction of meanings. The church must be willing to be transformed as it participates in the transformation of this world.

This book is a valuable beginning point from which to evaluate Christian scripture and tradition as viable and continuing transformative contributions to our understanding of God and our life together.

Clara E. Wong
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

THE FEMININE UNCONVENTIONAL: FOUR SUBVERSIVE FIGURES IN ISRAEL'S TRADITION. By André LaCocque. Overtures to Biblical Theology. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990. xvi and 144 pages. Paper. $8.95.

The *Overtures* series has hit the nail on the head again. André LaCocque works with protest literature; his particular corpus is concerned with the issue of women and their place in Israelite society. LaCocque suspects, with writers like Carol Meyers, that Israel was at foundation an egalitarian society, women on a par with men. The four stories he will deal with, then, are bold expressions of reasserting that position. They are the tales of Susanna in the Additions to Daniel, Judith of the Apocrypha, and Esther and Ruth of the Hebrew canon.

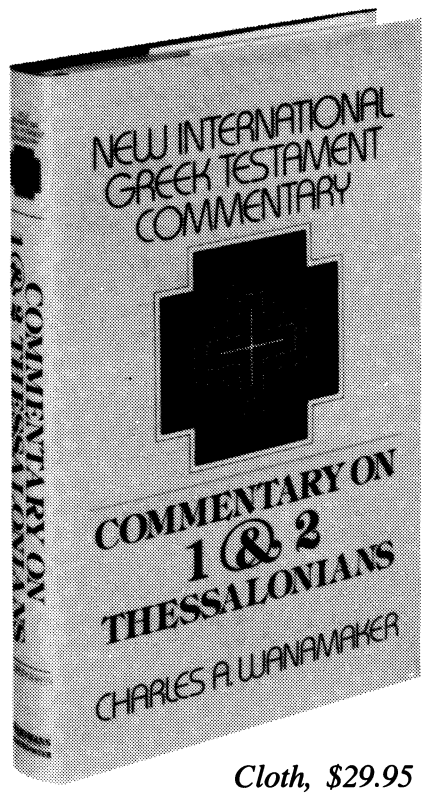
A brief chapter reviews the status of women in the Ancient Near East and in Israel. LaCocque creates rather too facile a contrast, but there is a hint that in neither locale were women put down exclusively. Women can be heroines, and in Israelite literature either sensitive men or daring women authors told women stories that profoundly challenge narrow perspectives.

LaCocque then admirably guides us through the stories, relishing their quality as story while showing how each subverts an "establishment" stance. Susanna's "victims" are two pillars of society. Judith subverts the establishment willingness to yield to Hellenization. Esther, a "diaspora novella," subverts the insistence that an Israelite one can only live faithfully in the land. Ruth subverts exclusivity. All, for LaCocque, contend with the hardening of positions that begins with Ezra and Nehemiah and carries on into the subsequent centuries. The

*Should be on the 'must read' list for every theological library"**

"Charles Wanamaker has written a useful and innovative commentary that provides a new benchmark for international scholarship. This is the first Thessalonian commentary to join traditional historical-critical methods with social-scientific research. It is also the first to use rhetorical criticism. Wanamaker's research is up-to-date, comprehensive, and fair-minded, while his conclusions are well argued and at times provocative. Although there is much to disagree with, especially in Wanamaker's reversing the traditional sequence of the letters, this is a quantum leap over previous commentaries. Yet the book is clearly written and easily understandable, offering significant stimulation for theological and ethical reflection."

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If I had any one quarrel, it would be with the return to a late date for Ruth—a much-contended point these days, which LaCocque energetically defends. As we reflect upon all that we do *not* know about Israel's pilgrimage through history, we should keep in mind that protest figures populate that entire pilgrimage. That Ruth could be subversive to attitudes and institutions of the monarchic period just as effectively as to the post-exilic period seems to me compelling.

LaCocque has sharpened the capacity of stories to undermine the establishment, and points us to what may well be one of the most interesting of the Bible's characteristics: its capacity for self-criticism.

Edward F. Campbell, Jr.
McCormick Theological Seminary
Chicago, Illinois

THE BIBLE WITHOUT THEOLOGY: THE THEOLOGICAL TRADITION AND ALTERNATIVES TO IT. By Robert A. Oden, Jr. New Voices in Biblical Studies. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987. 198 pages. Cloth. $18.95.

"Theology" in the title of this book has a restricted meaning. It refers to the apologetic enterprise of seeing the Bible over against its environment, of focusing on what is "unique" or contrastive about the biblical perspective. The Bible with which Oden deals is the Hebrew Bible, so this is a book that critiques the efforts of the OT theologians, such as von Rad, Eichrodt, and G. Ernest Wright.

The book opens by identifying the theological tradition of biblical apologetics and describing its development since the late eighteenth century. It moves then to tracing a corrective influence in biblical study and in modern sociological analysis that seeks to rescue the phenomenon of myth for use in describing and valuing the Bible. Oden will take a broadly structuralist stance in the two chapters that follow. In the first of these the focus falls on the theme of God's clothing of the first human pair in Gen 3:21 as a *conferral of status.* The effect is to place the J story in Genesis 2-3 in closer proximity to other Near Eastern mythic material, such as Gilgamesh or the Tale of Adapa, to take the emphasis off the uniquely gracious care of Yahweh in caring for sinful humanity, and place it instead on "the theme of the radical division between Yahweh and humanity." Here, then, Oden does not dismiss theology but proposes to redirect it.

With the patriarchal narratives, Oden works with a mythic agenda related to kinship and marriage that will establish the birth, separation, and cultural definition of "Israel." His key question is, "Why is Jacob the one to be named 'Israel'?" The main purpose of the patriarchal narratives is to trace a selection of the *right* line through Abraham-Sarah and Isaac-Rebekah (over against the *wrong* line through Hagar/Ishmael and through Esau) to the point where all of Jacob's offspring constitute the right group—settled now in the land, as "a complete kinship system." Thus Israel knows who they really are. With this as the purpose, sociological analogues become readily available. Oden uses this then to block the tendency of his "theology" antagonists to dwell on the election of Israel as something inexplicable except as an act of divine mystery.

Oden's final case concerns sacred prostitution, and the claim that Israel contrasts with its Canaanite and Mesopotamian neighbors in not practicing male and female prostitution. The evidence from Canaanite and Mesopotamian texts won't bear the weight placed upon them, and a perhaps ill-informed Herodotus was the source of most of the classical period's polemic against such behavior in southwest Asia. Oden sees the Israelite, notably Deuteronomic, diatribe against sacred prostitution as a typical move to define boundaries by accusing outsiders of heinous behavior which *we* would not practice. This happens irrespective of whether such behavior actually was practiced by the outsiders.

Oden's work is refreshing. It belongs to that effort on the part of biblical scholars to ask the faith communities not to use falsifiable warrants. Oden's claims are not anti-theological or anti-biblical; they do call into question "uniqueness" as an historical category and a theological apologetic, and they challenge faith

communities to explore wherein their claims upon allegiance really lie. Claims for biblical authority that rely on an objective "superiority" of the biblical tradition over against other religions are weakened. We will do well to hear.

Edward F. Campbell, Jr.

AFTER THE ABSOLUTE: THE DIALOGICAL FUTURE OF RELIGIOUS REFLECTION. By Leonard Swidler. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990. 212 pages. Paper. $14.95.

Leonard Swidler makes a strong appeal in *After the Absolute* for a turn from doing theology in isolated religious or ideological ghettos to "dialogue with peoples of living faiths and ideologies." In Swidler's view, we are today in the midst of another fundamental paradigm shift. The old paradigms for doing theology are increasingly being found deficient. Religious and ideological reflection (what Christians call theology) now demand dialogue from within and without in order to progress forward. Swidler sees his own book as an attempt to show the way forward in one particular cognitive area: the necessity of developing an "ecumenical Esperanto" which can supplement, though not supplant, the various religious and ideological languages as a tool for genuine dialogue.

Ironically, Swidler's book is weakest at this very point. Apart from a few pages which debate some possible foundational requirements for a future "ecumenical Esperanto" and the closing chapter (13 pages) which attempts a Christian experiment in this new ecumenical language, very little time is devoted to this subject. The heart of the book is Swidler's lucid chapters arguing for the necessity of "inner" and "inter" dialogues. For those interested in the entire panoply of "ecumenical" dialogue with Jews and Muslims, Buddhists and Marxists, Swidler's summaries are both cogent and insightful. Although Swidler is quick to point out some present weaknesses in these initial dialogues, he also gives the reader a definite, optimistic impression that the way of these dialogues is the only way to pursue truth in religion and ideology.

It is particularly at this point that many will be challenged, if not entirely disappointed, with Swidler's argument. Dialogue is necessary because the absolutes of Christians—and other religions and ideologies—have been dethroned in the modern world of critical reflection. Reality is process and mutuality. To find the "explanations of the ultimate meaning of life and how to live accordingly" one must therefore enter into the process of dialogue. This translates for Christians into the need for developing a "new" Christology which "attempts to go behind the traditions (whether *magisterium, traditio,* or *scriptura*) and locate the initial event, not in any foreshortened reaction to doctrine about the Yeshua event, but in the Yeshua of history" (93). Swidler's Christology, which tries to go beyond the apostolic, "absolutist" tradition to the historical "primary" facts about Jesus, leads to many other fundamental questions about how the author really views the practical and spiritual dimensions and implications of his Christianity "beyond the absolutes." The book leaves many stones unturned.

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UNITY AND DIVERSITY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT: AN INQUIRY INTO THE CHARACTER OF EARLIEST CHRISTIANITY. Second Edition. By James Dunn. Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990. xxxvii and 482 pages. Paper. $24.95.

In this second edition, Dunn has made only minor emendations to the text, added a few notes, and expanded the bibliographies for each chapter. Also, he has updated introductions for each of the fifteen chapters in order to include recent trends in the sociological study of the New Testament. These introductions are included together in the new preface. If you have already purchased the edition, the changes here may not be worth the price. However, if you have not read the first edition, this is a good opportunity to read an important book.

Dunn has given a comprehensive look at the diversity of earliest Christianity in order to

pursue the question posed by Walter Bauer: "Was there ever a single orthodoxy within primitive Christianity?" In Part One, Dunn begins by looking at some of the divergent kerygmata: Jesus' proclamation about the kingdom of God; the message in Acts about forgiveness, salvation, and the gift of the spirit, with no reference to Jesus' death as sacrificial; the kerygma of Paul, which focused on the atoning death of Jesus and which varied according to the audience of each letter; and finally the invitation to faith in John's Gospel leading to the experience of eternal life in the present. In subsequent chapters, Dunn treats diversity under such headings as Primitive Confessional Formulae, the Role of Tradition, the Use of the Old Testament, Conceptions of Ministry, Patterns of Worship, the Sacraments, the Spirit and Experience, and Christology. Dunn concludes that diversity was integral to first century Christianity. In his view, unity lay broadly in the identification of the historical Jesus with the exalted Christ: nonetheless, there is "no single... Christianity or Christology in the New Testament."

In Part Two, Dunn assesses other aspects of early Christianity, noting the diversity as well as the limits of diversity. For example, he lays out the spectrum of Jewish Christianity from John through Hebrews, Matthew, the Lukan Psalms, James, the opponents of Paul in Galatians 2, and ending with the unacceptable Ebionite Christianity. In subsequent chapters, he deals similarly with Hellenistic Christianity, apocalyptic Christianity, and Early Catholicism. In the conclusion, Dunn argues that the modern functions of the canon are to validate diversity for our time and to set acceptable limits to that diversity.

Dunn displays well the diversity in the New Testament, but he sometimes plays down incompatibilities among New Testament writers. It is doubtful that the New Testament writers had as eirenical a spirit toward each other as Dunn claims. Also, Dunn does not take account of the possibility that modern commitments to the liberation of oppressed groups might lead some to question the authority of parts of the canon.

Nevertheless, Dunn's fascinating presentation of diversity in the New Testament is persuasive and illuminating. Such diversity has enormous implications for the church today. It becomes clear, for example, why each denomination has a canon within the canon, for choice of beliefs and practices from among the New Testament writings is inevitable. There never was a unity to early Christianity except in the most general sense of allegiance to Jesus. Calls for unity in the New Testament are made on the limited terms of the particular New Testament writer. Thus, it was not common adherence to certain beliefs which enabled the earliest Christianity to survive and thrive but the rich diversity in belief and practice. This point has significant implications regarding the relative perspective of each denomination, the need for tolerance among denominations, and the importance of preserving diversity in the ecumenical movement.

I highly recommend this book for pastors, teachers, and upper-level students. Readers will surely recognize and appreciate the distinctiveness of each of the many expressions of Christianity evident in the New Testament witness.

David Rhoads

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Preaching Helps

Ninth Sunday After Pentecost—Eighteenth Sunday After Pentecost, Series B

The Greening of Our Days

Pentecost is the Big Green Season. The church spends this time seeking help in Scripture for the greening of the church, the greening of America, the greening of our mother earth.

As of this writing, the war in the Gulf is just over. The dominant colors at home are yellow (as in ribbons) and red, white, and blue. The nation is breathing a collective sigh of relief, and unashamed patriotism has broken out from sea to shining sea. In Kuwait, black may be the dominant color, as a viscous goo washes up on beaches and as fire from as many as 600 burning oil wells darkens the sky.

Pentecost is the season when the church concentrates on green and greening, on the Spirit of God breathing new life into the old bones of the church—and of the culture, and even of God's beleaguered creation. We pray "for the whole people of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs" and we dedicate ourselves "to the care and redemption of all that You have made." The horizons of those prayers stretch far beyond the borders of my psyche, my family, and my nation, far beyond my personal well-being and my patriotism.

Pentecost is the season when God once again bends low, takes the reddish-brown clay of our existence in hand, trying to smooth out some of the bumps and fill in some of the hollows, and breathes into us the breath of new life.

To help us read the texts during these days Andreas Teich has written the "First Readings." When I first contacted Andy in the summer of 1990, he was just in the process of leaving Bellevue, Kentucky, where he served as pastor of Prince of Peace Lutheran Church. He has since moved to Midland, Michigan.

Eccentric uncles, the odor of cow manure, a popping toaster, children's toys, and parents' admonitions—these are just some of the things that run and sparkle through the "Pastoral Reflections" prepared by Lucy Kolin, pastor of Central Lutheran Church in Oakland, California. Her evocation of special people and places, and her memory of moving moments, stand here not as cameos to be admired but as pathways into the texts Sunday by Sunday.

Many thanks to Andy and to Lucy for taking time from moves and pastoring to produce words that may be wings for the Spirit. May all our words add to the color of life!

Wishing you a green and greening season!

Robert H. Smith
Editor of Preaching Helps

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost
July 21, 1991

Psalm 23
Jeremiah 23:1-6
Ephesians 2:13-22
Mark 6:30-34

FIRST READING

The texts illuminate the difference, for the people of God, between the past and the present. Each describes the past as a time of being lost and the present as a time of being found. The contrasts between the two are drawn in sharp colors, making it quite clear that these two states can not overlap.

Jeremiah addresses religious leaders, the priests who were responsible for the spiritual welfare of God's people. God had called them, chosen them to be shepherds of the people of Israel. But they had not cared for the flock, letting the sheep wander from the fold, even driving them away. The sheep were lost, and no amount of human effort could bring them back.

Because of human failure, God must gather this people back into the fold. God will undo what these false shepherds have done. Jeremiah makes that very clear by using the same verbs for God's right deeds as he did for the shepherds' misdeeds. And in conclusion, God promises them a new good shepherd, like David, who will once again rule God's people with righteousness.

The author of Ephesians echoes that theme, using phrases such as "separated, alienated, strangers, no hope, far off and without God" (2:12) to describe the Gentiles' former condition. Such is the author's understanding of life apart from Christ. But now, all of that is undone by the work of God in Christ Jesus. The divisions that kept Gentiles from being part of God's people have been destroyed "in the blood of Christ" (2:13). New life belongs to all who are in Christ. These once hopeless Gentiles are now saints and members of the household of God. Aliens become citizens and are included in the fellowship of God's people.

In the Markan text, Jesus bewails the sad state of God's people and is filled with compassion (ἐσπλαγχνίσθη, 6:34). They are "like sheep without a shepherd," wandering aimlessly in the world. They are clearly lost and need to be found. They are ignorant and need to be taught. And that is Jesus' very ministry. He finds the lost, restores the alienated to their rightful place in God's community, and even brings back to life all those who are dead. He is the new shepherd who rules over the flock, the expanded flock of God. AT

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

We all know about walls. I remember canning applesauce in Aunt Elsie's Iowa farmhouse kitchen and hearing my Uncle Willard run in, angry and excited. "The Scheeders didn't repair their fence," he said, "and the pigs and horses are running in the corn." That wall of a fence, built to be useful, was ineffective in its disrepair.

But there are other walls as well—walls built without any positive intention, walls built to keep some people in and some people out, walls made of stones or barbed wire or brick... of fear or hurt or hostility.

Such walls, if we dare consider them, call up an uneasiness of heart, the uncomfortable suspicion that such walls are not right, are not meant to be, are symbols of some incompleteness in our lives and in our world. As Robert Frost puts it in his poem, "Mending Walls": "Something there is that doesn't love a wall."

And the writer of Ephesians tells us our suspicions are correct. Writing in full and painful awareness of the wall of hostility and fear that existed between Jews and Gentiles, Paul finds the healing link in Jesus who, in his own body, broke down the dividing wall of hostility.

Jesus himself became the cornerstone and began to build a house, a house built of love and faith. A large house because, as Jeremiah tells us, "None shall be missing." A house where walls create rooms:

—rooms made warm by the fires of love to take away the chill of living behind bare and unprotected walls;

—rooms where each person can be alone at times, to talk with God and to listen to God—just

as Jesus called the disciples away on retreat in today's Gospel;

—rooms where we can share a meal together, a meal of bread and wine which strengthens us and binds us together as family;

—rooms where we can work together, telling stories all the while, of what God has done for us and what God promises us we shall become; and

—rooms for those who come to stay, those who first come perhaps as strangers and sojourners but who become family in that house.

The lessons for this day call us to remember Jesus: how his heart was moved to see so many people, disunited, afraid, and helpless; how he became their shepherd—and ours; how he suffered, died, and rose again to break down the wall of hostility and reconcile each sister and brother. And we hear Christ's call to be, in our *own* bodies, our *own* homes, our *own* communities, reconcilers, peacemakers, builders of the house built on the one lasting foundation, Jesus himself, inviting, welcoming, showing hospitality and love, so that God's house may be filled.

By the power of God's Spirit, we shall answer that call. LK

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost
July 28, 1991

Psalm 145
Exodus 24:3-11
Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-16
John 6:1-15

FIRST READING

The instability and unfaithfulness of the people contrasts radically with the stability and faithfulness of God. God's people are like children, "tossed about by every whim and doctrine." On this Sunday, proclaim that contrast as well as God's continuing work to transform us into faithful people.

In Exodus 24, we witness a covenant renewal ceremony. As one reads it, one is led to believe that perhaps God's people are on the right track with their verbal affirmations of the covenant which Moses has brought from God. Yet later stories tell a different tale. Those who pledge covenant obedience will worship the golden calf (Ex 32), murmur about the quality of the food (Num 11), and attempt to conquer the promised land against God's better counsel (Num 14).

In John 6, we witness God's "covenant" people following Jesus because he does miracles and heals the sick, not because they understand him to be God's anointed. When he feeds the multitude, they want to make him king. When he refuses, they will shout for his death and look elsewhere for a bread giver.

Paul recalls for the Ephesians the true nature of the church—unity—and the variety of gifts which God has give them to build up the community of faith so that they might be God's servants in the world. But, instead of unity and cooperation, Paul hears of division. People are being led astray by false doctrine and deceived by the cunning words of false preachers.

Despite the faithlessness of the people, God is faithful. God abides by the Sinai covenant no matter what. YHWH will be their God, and Israel shall be God's people. Jesus feeds the multitude because he understands their needs even though their motivation is questionable. God's Spirit empowers the straying Ephesians with gifts so that they might equip the saints (*καταρτισμὸν τῶν ἁγίων*, 4:12). All of this is done with the hope that one day God's people will be faithful and "do everything that the Lord has commanded" them! AT

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

"Don't send a boy to do a man's work," went the saying when I was a girl. "Don't send a child to do an adult's work," is how we'd say it now. *Any* way you've heard it said, the meaning is clear: the small, the powerless, and the insignificant of our world don't have the ability or the knowledge or the power to handle the *big* problems of life. It's only reasonable, you can hear people say; they're not old enough, they haven't seen enough of

life, they're too weak, they're too small.

Evidently, Jesus hadn't heard that saying—or if he had, he didn't pay much attention to it. If anything, he deliberately turned it upside down, telling Nicodemus he must be born again, telling the crowds who followed him that unless they became like children, they'd never enter the kingdom of heaven, or, like today, accepting a little boy's small and simple supplies as food enough for thousands.

Five small barley loaves and two small fish; John really rubs it in. He doesn't write simply, "five barley loaves and two fish," allowing us to inflate them in our imagination. He tells us they were *small* loaves and *small* fish, meager indeed. Pretty meager stuff for a multitude, but not a bad lunch for a boy.

After some fifteen years of parenting and not a few years of teaching, I'm not surprised at the boy's response to the multitude's need. For children possess an uncanny ability to sense something wrong and hearts quick to offer a simple, generous, and straightforward solution. Is the person sleeping in the doorway homeless? "Well, let's buy them a house." Are children starving in Africa? "I'll send them my food." Are families splitting up? "I'll talk to my mom and dad and we'll all live together again."

Such talk makes us grown-ups smile, but we rarely take it seriously. "If they only knew," we say. That means, if they were only older and more realistic, they'd know how hard life is, how hopeless the situation is, and how powerless human beings are to change things.

Evidently Jesus didn't feel that way, however. For in the crazy, topsy-turvy realm of the gospel, five *small* barley loaves and two *small* fish were just the thing to feed 5,000.

And it was... enough and more than enough. What was insignificant and small—the boy—became crucial and important in Jesus' eyes. What was meager and insufficient—the food—became abundant and more than sufficient in Jesus' hands.

Just so the holy meal we share each Sunday. A small morsel of bread and a sip of wine become the food of life, even eternal life. And what makes that meal the meal of life? Incredibly, the death of one man, who died a criminal's death, one man, Jesus Christ, God's child, who like the boy in today's Gospel offered all that he had, himself, that *we* might eat and drink and live.

It's no sin in God's eyes to be small and insignificant and powerless. From the day of our baptism, God encourages us to recognize that we can accomplish nothing on our own. As the old Gospel hymn says, "I am weak, but thou art strong." But thanks be to God, who gives us the opportunity, by faith, to offer the five *small* barley loaves and two *small* fish of our lives, to be transformed by God's blessing into bread for the world, the bread of life. LK

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost
August 4, 1991

Psalm 78:23-29
Exodus 16:2-15
Ephesians 4:17-24
John 6:24-35

FIRST READING

Both Exodus 16 and John 6 deal with bread, one of the most essential life-sustaining substances. A lack of bread causes complaining in one text. In the other, bread is used as a visual aid to focus the people's attention on "spiritual" food. And through it all, we hear Paul exhorting the Ephesians to put off the old (the self that seeks only physical satisfaction) and to put on the new (the self that seeks spiritual satisfaction).

Exodus 16 records the first of many incidents on the forty-year journey through the wilderness when the people of Israel fail to trust the God who brought them out of the land of Egypt. Lacking in supplies, they complain to Moses and Aaron about their predicament. These two pass the word to God who establishes a system by which Israel will receive provisions all the days of their journey. These provisions are so that the people "will know that I, YHWH, am your God." YHWH provides the physical food for the liberated people of God.

Having provided for the physical needs of the people, Jesus calls their attention to the bread of life (6:35). Like the woman at the well, his hearers think only of the physical and ask for this bread always. But the eating of which Jesus speaks is to believe in the one whom God sent, taking that one into oneself so that one would never have to thirst or hunger again. The people want signs like the feeding in the wilderness, but Jesus leaves them with the promise, a promise which will become efficacious when they trust it.

The tension between the physical and the spiritual is accentuated in Ephesians. Paul describes the old life, the self-satisfaction seeking life, with phrases such as darkened and alienated, callous, licentious, and greedy. This is a life separated from Christ. But those who have "learned Christ" (4:20) and heard the message well, put on a new life, one which looks to Christ as a model. Such a change of wardrobe, writes Paul, is a natural response to all that God has done for the believer. Such "new clothing" will give the believer new insights into the physical and the spiritual bread which come down from heaven. AT

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

Has there been murmuring in your wilderness this week? Have you felt yourself walking in circles, facing again and again the same depressing scenery of things that don't change: problems with spouses, parents, or children; problems with illness, weariness, or depression; problems with jobs, employers, and employees; problems with dependencies, bad habits, and initiative? And have you begun to wax nostalgic, remembering when things were better... or at least different?

Yes, pastors murmur, too. They murmur about not enough sleep; about jobs that go undone unless the pastor cajoles or pleads or constantly reminds; about synods and denominations that ask for just one more report; about the frustration of trying to balance a ministry of mercy and a ministry of prayer. Yes, pastors are human, too... and find themselves dreaming of another time, another denomination, or another congregation they once knew.

For the children of Israel, it was the boredom of a dependable but predictable diet and the memory of an occasional piece of spicy meat in Egypt. For the children of Israel, it was the years of wandering in the wilderness, with the Promised Land no closer, no more visible.

But for the children of Israel as well as for us, it was really a case of selective remembering, or selective nostalgia. Because in the midst of their complaining about a boring diet, God continued to feed them reliably and well, every morning and every evening. And while they reminisced, closing their eyes and almost inhaling the smell of Egyptian meat, they failed to remember that every meal eaten in Egypt was a meal of bondage, eaten under the domination of a people who wanted them only as slaves. And though they were quick to complain about their years of wandering, they were loathe to remember that it was their own ungratefulness and doubt that sentenced them to this forty-year delay. The day of deliverance, the day they walked triumphantly through the Red Sea, the mighty acts of deliverance and providence God executed for them daily, were forgotten or ignored or taken for granted.

But are we any different? Each day we wake to life and breath, to a new day of God's love and care. Each one of us has our own personal history of liberation, of being saved by God, of being rescued from sin and death and evil; of being called and chosen for a special ministry as people of God. Yet it is easy to forget and easier still to complain, to wish for the magic of miracles instead of the steady mystery of grace.

But what are we to do? Is God suggesting that we simply stop our belly-aching? No, indeed. For ours is a God of honesty, patience, and understanding. In the midst of their murmuring God provided the children of Israel manna and quail. God enriched their diet with a special food instead of cursing them with hunger or more meager fare. God blessed their cursing not in kind but with more and more grace. So that, in the gathering and in the eating, God's people would remember, would no longer live in the dreamy past or fear an uncertain future, but faithfully and thankfully remember the one who saved them, who led them, who loved them, and who fed them.

And so it is for us. God does not curse our faithlessness nor punish our selective memory.

Instead, as the Gospel tells us, God sends us the grace of the true bread sent from heaven; God sends us Jesus Christ, the bread that feeds us forever.

John reports that when the people heard about this bread, they cried, "Lord, give us this bread always." And so God does—in the Sacrament. There God feeds each and all with the manna of memory, reminding us that God has created us, that God has saved us, and that God continues to sustain and care for us, giving grace upon grace... even to the murmurers. LK

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost
August 11, 1991

Psalm 34:1-8
1 Kings 19:4-8
Ephesians 4:30–5:2
John 6:41-51

FIRST READING

By the end of Ephesians 4, Paul has shifted his ethical expectations into high gear. Paul calls us to be imitators of God (5:1), walking in love, the same self-sacrificing love exhibited by Christ. Such a high calling requires us to put off our old attitudes, including bitterness, wrath, anger, slander, and malice. In their place we put on a new attitude including kindness, tenderheartedness, forgiveness toward others, which reflect the way God treats us. This is certainly a difficult calling and one which could discourage the believer very quickly. If the believer sought to do this alone, it would be impossible. But Paul has already declared us to be in Christ and Christ in us so that we do not live the new life on our own. We live it inspired by the Holy Spirit, the lifegiving one.

Nevertheless, this new life can be tough. To help us understand the kinds of frustrations that even the holiest of God's people experience, this text is paired with one from 1 Kings. Elijah had accomplished great things for God. Yet his life is threatened by Jezebel. He becomes distraught to the point of death and flees to the wilderness, offering up these words of despair: "It's too much, Lord. Take my life; I might as well be dead" (TEV). God empathizes with Elijah and responds in an unexpected manner. Instead of chastisement or admonishment, God nurtures Elijah and sends him on to Sinai, to the very source of Israel's covenant. God know that Elijah needs to be re-connected with the fundamentals of the faith so that he might once more be God's mighty prophet.

The bread with which God nourished Elijah for his journey has a passing value. After time, Elijah will hunger again. In order to be truly sustained in the imitative journey to which God calls us, we need the bread of life. We need Jesus. Throughout John 6, Jesus struggles to make his hearers understand that message. They are sidetracked by many issues such as Jesus' hometown. Jesus calls them to believe that he is a gift from the Father as was the manna in the wilderness and the bread that sustained Elijah. Yet the one new quality of this bread of life is that it suppresses all hunger. By partaking of the very person of Jesus, ingesting his word and his promise, we become new people. The word of Christ is the stuff which sustains new life. It is all the sustenance we need as we journey through the wilderness of this world. AT

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

Once upon a time our family had a plain, two-slice capacity toaster. This toaster looked like your average toaster, although perhaps a bit grungier: its chrome was rarely polished, and some shreds of yellow plastic from a bread wrapper were permanently glued to one side. And when bread was placed in it and the lever was depressed, one could expect toast to appear a minute or two later.

But, as anyone who ever used it would readily attest, although it looked like an ordinary toaster, this toaster was not what it seemed. How so? The answer is that you could never know how or where your toast would be delivered. Sometimes the toast would fly into the air and land back on top of the toaster; sometimes it would rise and

fall back into the slots. Another time the toast would explode out of the toaster and land several feet away in some hard-to-reach place. Occasionally, if we used the toaster at the table, there was special delivery service: the toast would flip gently onto our plates. And then, *very* occasionally, a slice of toast would rise gently and await removal, just as any proper toaster would.

Today's lessons are a little like that toaster, and not simply because they talk of bread. The lessons call us to consider again the ordinary elements of life and God's delight in making them the channels and signs of God's coming. In doing so, God's humor, tenderness, and creativity invest these ordinary elements with power and meaning capable of surprising us every bit as much as that toaster.

Bread in the wilderness is a central symbol of the day. In the story of Elijah on the run, God provides food for life, a sign of love and mercy in a form in which even a harassed and dejected prophet could receive and understand it. Like the ancestors in the wilderness before him, who received manna from the sky and water from the rock, Elijah is fed with the simple food of hope and promise, preparation for another journey of surprising twists and turns.

The Gospel opens with murmurings against Jesus, who had said, "I am the bread which came down from heaven." Such bold claims of divine heritage and eternal sustenance are an affront to the Jews' memory of manna, for Jesus confronts his hearers with the opportunity to leave behind the manna of history for living manna, capable of bestowing everlasting life.

In both stories, the eating and drinking are but the beginning. Even though we, like Elijah, are hoping that God will permit us to stop where we are, on the plateau of peace or the valley of dejection, the message of the manna is that having been refreshed and filled, we will be sent on... to further ministry, to further adventure.

In one of Samuel Beckett's dramas, a crazily rational character says over and over again, "I can't go on. I must go on." We may hear that voice in our hearts, too. The difference is, the promise is that we *can* go on, because Jesus has gone on. Jesus has journeyed into death and into life before us, and that hope and promise will sustain us in the days to come. LK

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost
August 18, 1991

Psalm 34:9-14
Proverbs 9:1-6
Ephesians 5:15-20
John 6:51-58

FIRST READING

This Sunday, the texts contrast two types of people—the wise (*σοφοί*) and the foolish (*ἄσοφοι*). All three texts focus our attention on these two types and invite us to reflect on where we stand. These are not anti-intellectual texts. Rather, they call us to reconsider how we understand foolishness and wisdom.

Wisdom, personified in Proverbs as a woman (Sophia) calls the simple, those who lack judgment, to her feast. She invites these not because they are dolts but because they are receptive to her teaching. They are willing to eat at her table and learn true wisdom, divine wisdom. The invitation to feast is an invitation to be transformed from simpleness to insight and understanding so that the newly wise may live a "better life," the life as described in the rest of Proverbs.

Ephesians 5:15-20 supports this notion of wisdom as insight on proper living. Wise Christians are those who make "the most of every opportunity" because they recognize these evil days (5:16). The wise ones understand the will of the Lord and are filled (5:18) with the Spirit. Their wisdom is reflected in the fact that they are "always giving thanks to God the Father for everything." They demonstrate wisdom by acknowledging the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ as the source and power of life.

How does the Gospel fit the scheme? Jesus never speaks of foolishness or wisdom. Yet it is clear that those who reject Jesus' invitation to eat his body and drink his blood do so because their learned "wisdom" finds it repulsive and sacrilegious. The graphic language of the text gives us no symbolic interpretation, no eucharistic over-

tones. The hearer is simply invited to ingest all of Jesus, the Christ of God. The only ones who can hear that word and receive it are the simple ones who accept this invitation as they did Wisdom's invitation. In their eating Christ's flesh (σάρξ) and drinking his blood (αἷμα) they discover the power of the feast and the new life which God in Christ offers to all who would receive it.

The wise one and the foolish one stand in contrast not by what they know or have learned but by their willingness or unwillingness to accept the invitation to feast at the table of grace and there to discover the wisdom of God. AT

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

It's true. This is the fourth Sunday in a row with Gospel readings about bread and the third Sunday in a row in which Jesus describes himself as the Bread of Life. Some of our parishioners are probably wondering (or betting!) whether the preacher can pull off one more sermon about bread. Or, perhaps, hearing once more Jesus' promise that whoever eats this bread shall live forever, you and your congregation are asking, silently if not aloud, "Live? Live forever? For what?"

For Paul's description of our time as "a wicked age" strikes home. Certainly there is enough daily evidence of dissipation, violence, dishonesty, and conflict. Indeed one wonders why anyone would want to live forever, when so many can find no reason to continue living right now. Why live forever, alert to the evils of this world but powerless to change them? If that is what eternal life means this side of the grave, then Jesus' words seem more curse than blessing.

But that is not at all what Jesus meant, and Paul's words help us understand why. Indeed, they give us a reason for living... even now. Paul writes:

> Be careful about the sort of lives you lead, like intelligent and not like senseless people. This may be a wicked age, but your lives should redeem it. And do not be thoughtless but recognize what is the will of the Lord.

Paul says, "Don't merely endure life; live life." He cautions us not to allow ourselves to be so drugged into senselessness that we no longer see the world as it is, in all its brokenness and cruelty and pain, for then we shall lose the ability to recognize as well the will of God for the world.

The apostle would be the first to admit that things are not as they should be. In his own body Jesus had known the cruelty and despair that a world separated from God can inflict. And in his own circumstance Paul knows the same wickedness and tribulation. Yet he calls on us to follow Jesus' own example, to be filled with the Spirit that comes to us through the bread and wine, the water and the Word, and to let our lives—like Christ's—redeem the world of God's creating.

And so we may. For Jesus invites us to eat the bread of heaven, which is no powerless food but instead food which provides the very energy, power, and vision to live life, not merely extend it. Such divine food enables us to live lives that are powerfully different, different enough to get the world's attention, different enough to redeem the world. So that seeing injustice and brokenness, wickedness and sorrow, we will speak up and stand up, advocate for the poor and powerless, and create new orders for our church and world, new orders fit for the realm of God.

Of course, the living won't be easy. The world is never eager to be changed. It is afraid and will strike out in fear. Jesus himself found it necessary to lay down life for the sake of our redeeming. And ought the servant expect to be treated any better than the Master?

Yet we go, daily filled and fired by the Bread of Life, with solid hope for the redeeming of "this wicked age." LK

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost
August 25, 1991

Psalm 34:15-22
Joshua 24:1-2a, 14-18
Ephesians 5:21-31
John 6:60-69

FIRST READING

In the texts from Joshua and John, challenges elicit confessions. The Israelites confess at Shechem and the disciples at Capernaum. But such confessions imply lifestyles of mutual service which the text from Ephesians proposes we apply to our marriage first and then to other relationships (5:32–6:9).

By Joshua 24, the conquest is complete. The people of God have taken the promised land from the Canaanites. Joshua fears that the people might forget how they acquired the land. So he calls them together at Shechem, one of the holy places, and invites them to renew the covenant. In vv. 14-15, Joshua calls on the people to give up the gods of their ancestors. Instead of those gods, they should worship YHWH, the God of the exodus. Even if they do not, Joshua and his household will. In vv. 16-18, the people respond that they would never worship anyone other than YHWH after all that God had done for them: freeing them from slavery in Egypt and bringing them to this promised land. Recognizing all that God had done and continues to do for them, the people of Israel declare themselves faithful servants of YHWH.

In the text from John, Jesus concludes the Bread of Life discourse. Jesus had been very direct with his hearers, and they understood clearly. Many began to grumble about the severity of the message and chose not to continue following Jesus. When Jesus asks the twelve whether they too would leave, Peter confesses for all that they have nowhere else to go since Jesus has the words of eternal life (*ῥήματα ζωῆς αἰωνίου*, 6:68).

All such lofty words become true confession only as they are acted out. The Ephesians text invites such action. 5:22-31 are among the most misused and maligned in all of Scripture. This occurs because many readers fail to recognize 5:21 ("Put yourselves in subjection to one another because you respect Christ") as the keynote for all that follows. The text speaks not of male dominance and female submission but of mutual service, mutual submission, the kind of life which Christ led. Paul speaks not of who has the upper hand but of who has the under hand, always seeking to outserve the other. Addressed both to husbands and wives, Paul argues that our Christian service begins at home in the context of marriage. For if we cannot love and serve our spouse, how can be learn to love all those others who need the love of Christ? Mutual subjection is service to God and the appropriate lifestyle for those who claim that they will serve YHWH only. (An interesting exegesis of this text is Margaret Gary's "Beating the Wedding-Sermon Blues," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 13 (April 1986): 106-7.) AT

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

Driving home across the endless valley fields of alfalfa and cotton, a splendid spread of cattle appeared to our right. They stood like a barely mobile sculpture, stretched across golden acres. I pointed them out enthusiastically to Brynna, then 13, awake and seated next to me. Of course, all our windows were open, our little Datsun's only form of air conditioning for the valley heat. So her response required not a word; she merely held her nose and grimaced. "That," I said, "is the reality of cattle and of beef," to which she replied, "Well, reality stinks!"

That's how many of Jesus' disciples felt in this Sunday's Gospel, although the Gospel writer is a bit more polite: he describes the disciples as "murmuring" and "taking offense." What that means is that they had begun to see the reality of Jesus, the truth about Jesus and his teaching, and they wanted no part of it. I'd prefer a third word, "scandal," the word of choice for St. Paul—and Martin Luther, too.

For the disciples, the scandal revolves around the cross: all Jesus' talk of bread becomes all too clearly talk of sacrifice. What is so precious to

Jesus' disciples in theory becomes unmanageable, impractical, and downright threatening: when the bread of life must be broken, when discipleship and crosses are spoken of in the same breath, reality stinks and Christ becomes a scandal, to be avoided at all cost.

We are not so different today. As disciples and as a church we simply have at our disposal a multiplicity of more sophisticated avoidance techniques. We work hard at keeping ourselves identified only with a Christ who cannot frighten us or challenge us, with a Christ more palatable to a society which finds faithfulness and vulnerability personal weaknesses and success at all costs the ultimate measure.

Daily the personal challenge arises, "Will I allow myself to be seen with such a Christ? Do I really want to be a disciple of the cross? Can we really afford such a vulnerable God?" Were we left to our own devices, were we to rely on our own timorous courage, we should—like the many in today's Gospel—merely walk away.

But there is good news here. As Jesus said, "It is the Spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail." And that Spirit calls us away from our unsullied crosses, raises our eyes to the cross and to the Christ, and gives us the gift to remain disciples of Christ and disciples of the cross.

Even in the now waning days of Pentecost, the Spirit inspires us to confess with Simon Peter, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." Through the body and the blood, through this troubling, unmanageable, risk-taking Savior, we find ourselves able to say with Peter: "And we have believed and have been persuaded that you are the Holy One of God." LK

Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost
September 1, 1991

Psalm 15
Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-8
Ephesians 6:10-20
Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

FIRST READING

This Sunday we are faced with the question of purity. How is one pure or impure? This question comes to a head in the confrontation between Jesus and the Pharisees in the Gospel. For the Pharisees, purity was ritualistic. As Mark points out, the Pharisees "observe[d] the traditions of the elders (*τὴν παράδοσιν τῶν πρεσβυτέρων*, 7:3). They knew the law inside and out and were suspicious of any who failed to observe it. Thus they were doubly surprised to discover Jesus' disciples, considering Jesus' reputation as a great teacher, eating with "hands defiled" (7:5).

Jesus seizes the opportunity to redefine purity. For him, purity is not primarily ritualistic in nature but relational. One may be ritually pure but still not be in a right relationship with God. Then one is truly impure and defiled.

Uncleanness, says Jesus, is at work in the hearts and minds of all people. Our very being is unclean and can not be cleansed by simple handwashing or other ritual ceremonies. Such change occurs only in the new relationship God has established with us through Christ.

Those who stand in right relationship with God, put on the whole armor of God. They stand clothed in their new garments, prepared to counter all who fight against God. They find their strength in God (Eph 6:10). They recognize that only the power of God and the armor (*τὴν πανοπλίαν*) of God will enable them to prevail over those things which seek to make them impure. Standing thus and living under the law of God, as correctly understood by the author of Deuteronomy, they and all of us make known the mystery of the gospel (*τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ εὐαγγελίου*), the story of how the unclean have become clean in Jesus Christ. AT

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

One day I walked into a Christian bookstore intent on purchasing some stickers and some music. As I cast my eyes about, looking for the sticker display, a large sign caught my eye: "Put on the armor of God." Aha! I thought, someone has been reading Paul's letter to the Ephesians. Looking beneath the sign, however, my heart

sank. For there, in a colorful cardboard box, was a suit of plastic armor and a toy sword, designed to be worn by a child at play. Now, whether or not you believe as I do that children should not play with weapon-like toys, the fact remains that whoever designed that toy missed the whole point of Paul's message to the church at Ephesus.

Of course, Paul wanted his listeners to be absolutely clear that there is a conflict, a fierce conflict. Persecutions were intensifying and martyrdom was often the price. Paul himself wrote these words while locked in a Roman prison. And he insists that we are not fighting against human beings, but "against the wicked spiritual forces in the heavenly world, the rulers, authorities, and cosmic powers of this dark age."

Did you see Walt Disney's film, "Fantasia"? Then you will remember "The Sorcerer's Apprentice." Mickey Mouse puts on the sorcerer's cap and brings to life a mop so that it can do the job of carrying water for him. When the mop cannot be stopped and the tower is flooding, Mickey in desperation seizes an axe and chops the mop handle to pieces. He sighs with relief, only to discover a moment later that the mop is multiplying... and soon there are hundreds of mops, all pouring water into the room, unstoppable now.

That's how Paul describes the enemy. Striking out against it, we discover it is not alone. Behind it, backing it, feeding its voracious appetite for power, is the evil one himself, something much more than human, something against which we feel fragile, puny, and defenseless, something which grows larger and more powerful with every assault. In our own time, reading the newspaper or watching the evening news can make us feel the same.

If we are not to condemn ourselves to isolation and retreat, we must then fight back. But how? What defense can possibly succeed against such all-pervasive evil?

St. Paul offers the answer. Amazingly, he points to a very different sort of defense: truth and righteousness, faith and salvation, the Word of God and the good news of peace. And each piece of this strange armor put on with prayer. Can God be serious?

Indeed, God has never been more serious. For into the fray, into the very heart of the conflict, God sent Jesus, armed with... truth and righteousness, faithfulness, the Word of God, and the good news of peace, all accompanied by fervent prayer. The battle was indeed fierce... a king slaughtered innocent babes to wipe out this royal child; wild beasts and the evil one himself stalked him in the wilderness; crowds stoned him; soldiers spat on him and beat him; and at the last he carried his own cross and was buried in a borrowed grave. And the outcome of his battle? Death... and life. Death... and the forces of evil laughed and jeered. Then resurrection... and the forces of evil knew they had been bested.

If we choose to put on God's armor, the battle will not suddenly end. Nor will the front move away from our own door. But we no longer need to fear, for Jesus himself has tested and proven this armor. Jesus himself now guarantees its invincibility and its success. Death and the grave could not hold him, the powers of hell could not vanquish him, and because he lives, we, too, shall live. LK

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost
September 8, 1991

Psalm 146
Isaiah 35:4-7a
James 1:17-27
Mark 7:31-37

FIRST READING

Isaiah 35 records words of encouragement to a people who are very discouraged. Considering all that is happening around them, they believe that God has abandoned them. But Isaiah does not see this as final. Isaiah declares that God will come and save them. God will take vengeance on all those who have oppressed his chosen people. In a bold move, Isaiah lists the signs of that time, of the messianic age. In that day, physical transformations will occur for the blind, the deaf, the lame, and the mute. Natural transformations will occur as the desert turns to fertile ground.

Isaiah speaks an encouraging word to a discouraged people.

And Mark declares that in Jesus this new age has come to pass. How do we know that this is true? Just look at the signs. In gentile territory, God does a new thing as Jesus heals a deaf mute. Though done privately and for the benefit of the person only, the word gets out and people declare to their neighbors that Jesus "has done all things well; he even makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak" (7:37). Could this be the bearer of the messianic age? Mark believes he is.

So does James. He asserts that "by the word of truth" God brought us forth "as a kind of first fruits of all [God's] creatures" (1:18). We are God's signs of the messianic age.

James offers some practical implications for our lives. We are called to be doers of the word (*ποιηταὶ λόγου*) and not hearers only (1:22). We receive the implanted word of God and live out its message in our lives, visiting orphans and widows in their affliction. We make the new age of God a reality in this world by our words and our deeds. What the people of Isaiah's day expected, Mark declares has come to pass in Jesus the Christ. For James and all of us who live in the light of that truth, there is life to be lived which declares that reality to the world. AT

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

Every family has its characters, those charmed eccentrics who embarrass and delight, the stuff of which family histories are made. Ours was Uncle Tony, whose irreverent wit and observant eye made every family gathering memorable.

One Sunday Uncle Tony came to dinner. Grandma set the table meticulously and was adding the final touches to the roast. Suddenly, Uncle Tony walked into the dining room, seated himself with grace at the table, and began an elaborate pantomime of fine eating: cutting invisible meat, mashing unseen potatoes, spooning up peas too tiny to be seen, sipping water from an empty goblet. He ate with apparent gusto, wiping his lips daintily with his napkin. My very proper grandmother, watching from the kitchen, was sure her cooking was being maligned. She marched out of the kitchen and stood threateningly over him, demanding, "What was that?!" "That," replied Uncle Tony proudly, "was a Christian Scientist eating dinner."

The lessons for this day talk a lot about illusions and pretending. The people to whom Isaiah wrote must have been sorely tempted to see the promise of a Messiah as only an illusion. Their enemies, seeing them in captivity, taunted them, proclaiming their dreams of salvation and freedom mere fantasies, illusions, and mirages. Yet Isaiah prophesied that the mirage would become a pool of clear water, that empty dreams would become promises fulfilled.

James, writing to the churches, also talks of illusions and mirages. He says, sometimes we are like persons who refuse to take a good look at themselves in the mirror and go off pretending they are something they are really not. Or, in Uncle Tony's terms, we pretend to ourselves and to others that we are full and satisfied and whole, when the truth is that we are thirsty and hungry, broken and unsatisfied. We pretend to be full when we are empty.

Today's Gospel responds to both these texts. Mark's account of Jesus healing a deaf man with a speech impediment shows us Jesus bringing Isaiah's promises to life.

To those who said a captive people couldn't demand God's attention and salvation, Jesus says, "You're wrong—look at me. I am the sign that God does care, that living water is bubbling forth from barrenness, that God *will* save God's people."

And to those who do not wish to admit the barrenness of their own lives and their own efforts, Jesus reminds us that in him is the abundance of life; indeed, in Christ is life itself. It is in admitting our weakness and need that God steps in and fills us with power and vision and strength.

And Jesus goes on to demonstrate what James also wants us to hear: that hearing the Word is not sufficient, that all will remain mirage and illusion, desert and emptiness, unless we are also doers of the Word.

Today and every day God fills us with the Spirit so that we might not be hearers only, but doers of God's word, calling all creation to the springs of genuine refreshment, to the pool of healing water, to the God who is our strength and our salvation. LK

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost
September 15, 1991

Psalm 116:1-8
Isaiah 50:4-10
James 2:1-5, 8-10, 14-18
Mark 8:27-35

FIRST READING

"Who do you say that I am?" (8:29). Jesus raises this issue with the disciples to uncover their understanding of his identity. He had ascertained from them what others thought; now he wanted their confession. Throughout the first eight chapters of Mark, Jesus gave many clues to his identity, clues which a good student of the Hebrew Scriptures would have recognized. Peter, speaking for the group, declares boldly that Jesus is the Christ. The disciples recognized the clues and solved the mystery. Or so they thought.

Now Jesus "ups the ante" for the messianic character. The Messiah must suffer, be rejected, be killed, and after three days rise again. The Messiah is a suffering servant, not simply a triumphant king. Peter wants no part of such a Messiah and tells Jesus that. So, Jesus rebukes him and teaches the disciples and the multitude that not only he but also they would be suffering servants. They will take up their cross if they would truly be his disciples.

The texts from Isaiah and James speak of the characteristics of such disciples. Both focus on the role of the faithful of God in a world that often turns hostile. Both illuminate the place of God's children in a world with very different values.

Isaiah attributes three characteristics to God's faithful and obedient servant. (1) The servant *speaks* God's word to sustain the weary, encouraging others with the message of divine hope. (2) The servant *hears* the word of God and is taught by it, listening like a disciple soaking in the riches of God's message of grace. (3) The servant *stands* with God in the face of opposition and hatred, trusting God's strength, and so is not overcome by personal weakness.

James adds two other qualities to those who have faith in Jesus Christ. First, they are not to show favoritism (προσωπολημψία) in dealing with people. Rich and poor alike are to be well received in the family of God's grace. Second, they are to demonstrate their faith relationship with God in actions. James is so bold as to say that "faith, apart from actions (ἔργα), is lifeless."

Having confessed Jesus as the Christ, disciples of Christ are called to lives of active obedience, serving others as God in Christ has served them. AT

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

"Be nice" is something adults often say to children. "Be nice," they say when dropping off their little ones with the baby-sitter. "Be nice," we say, when siblings are fighting and we haven't a clue how to stop them. "Be nice"—a handy, well-intentioned, but insipid value for church and society.

When used with children, it seems to be shorthand for being quiet and not fighting. But for adults—individuals and institutions—it has become a loose shorthand for doing what comes easiest, for doing what we've always done, for not naming the difficult question or issue, for not rocking the boat.

Each of us has learned to do it well; we are all very nice people. But in so doing, we have forgotten not only our own dissenting heritage, the heritage of Martin Luther and other reformers who chose truth over niceness but also the truth about Jesus, who wasn't nice, who challenged the religious and political authorities of his day, who told the truth about people's hearts, who held up sinners and outcasts as models for the faith, and who wouldn't stop any of this even when death was the price to pay.

This Sunday's Gospel finds Jesus turning his face and his footsteps emphatically toward Jerusalem and telling the disciples why. "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again." And, says Mark, "he said this plainly."

Then Peter, who had just a little while ago confessed boldly, "You are the Christ," balks.

This, he is thinking, is not nice and so unnecessary. This, he begins to argue with Jesus, is foolishness, a good and profitable ministry being thrown away because of gloom and doom talk. And, this is not nice, the disciples are thinking. You called us away from our jobs and our families, you put us in difficult situations, and now you're going to abandon us, maybe even get *us* crucified as well. "Jesus," Peter says, "we have to talk. Jesus, be nice and stop all this cross and death talk right now. It's bad for business, and it's downright scary."

But Jesus is not nice. Instead of reassuring Peter, he immediately rebukes him, accusing him of being aligned with evil, not with God. And Jesus goes on to tell all the disciples that their lives, too, are destined for the way of the cross, that their allegiance would be measured not in niceness but in faithfulness. No, this is not a nice Savior. This is a God who will not be stopped, who will not be tamed, who will continue to embarrass and shock us every step of the way.

The words from James spell out the perils of niceness for the church—the peril of saying all the right things at the expense of *doing* them, the peril of being a church which says "I'm sorry" over and over but does nothing to change the racism, pride, elitism, and homophobia that infect us all.

But Isaiah holds out hope. He writes, "Morning by morning, God wakens my ear to hear as those who are taught." Morning by morning, God speaks to us, encouraging, nudging, questioning, teaching us what is true, not what is nice; what is good news, not what is comfortable news; what is the word of eternal life, not easy living. And Isaiah promises that all our adversaries—those inside ourselves as well as those outside—will melt away, will be worn down and vanish, because God will have the final victory. And that victory is ours through Jesus Christ, through our not so nice Savior who risked death and the cross for us, who descended into hell for us, who calls us to be faithful, not nice, and who promises to walk with us. LK

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost
September 22, 1991

Psalm 54:1-4, 6-7a
Jeremiah 11:18-20
James 3:16–4:6
Mark 9:30-37

FIRST READING

What is the nature of discipleship? What does it mean to be a friend of God? What happens to those who follow the covenant of God? Those are some of the issues addressed by these texts. The simplest answer is that given by Jesus to the disciples. "If any one would be first, that one must be last of all and servant of all" (Mk 9:35). Those who live for God live as servants of all, facing conflict and turmoil.

Jeremiah was such a man. He quietly and faithfully obeyed God. When God gave him a message, he proclaimed it throughout Jerusalem. Because he thought that others were as concerned about God's message as he was, it never dawned on him that they might be offended by his proclamation. In 11:18, he states that God finally makes clear to him the plans of his enemies. They wanted to snuff him out, to "cut him off from the land of the living that his name be remembered no more" (11:19). In the face of such opposition, Jeremiah calls on God to stand by him and to take vengeance on those who seek to destroy him.

James laments the sad state of the community of faith to which he is writing. Instead of signs of a caring Christian community, he simply sees the agenda of the world carried out. Jealousy, selfish ambitions, passions, and coveting are alive and well in this Christian community. Apparently these attitudes are causing disaster among the believers. James calls the believers to leave their love for the world which shows their infidelity to God and instead to become lovers of God reaping a harvest of righteousness (*καρπὸς δὲ δικαιοσύνης*). Such an attitude may not make one popular in the world, but it will more clearly

reflect the relationship which one claims to have with God.

Mark 9:30-37 records the second passion prediction. The disciples understand it as well as they did the first one. Instead of asking about this bizarre future, they argue about their own future. Who will be number one? Who is the greatest? When Jesus catches wind of this discussion, he reminds them that discipleship is not about greatness but about serving and caring. Disciples are the least, last, lost, and little in the world. But they are great in the kingdom by virtue of their connection to the Christ.

For those who seek to be disciples and stand up against the forces of the world, Psalm 54 offers a prayer for deliverance. It reminds each of us that "God is my helper; the Lord is the upholder of my life." That promise is the good news which enables disciples of the Christ to follow his way even when the world makes life miserable. AT

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

"Oops! Caught in the act!" That was the dilemma for the somewhat dense and puerile disciples pictured in the Gospel for this day. At times preachers and scholars alike have portrayed their finding out as evidence of Jesus' divine powers of perception, and that may be so. But, as the parent of two teen-age daughters, I know that no such extraordinary powers are necessary—the huddled whispers and the flushed faces, and an occasional elbowing or two, are clues enough.

This would not be the last time the disciples jockeyed for position. Just one chapter later Mark records James and John, with an apparent case of amnesia on the subject, boldly asking Jesus for the seats of honor in the place of glory. The discussion in chapter 10 specifically cautions the disciples against following the example of the "gentiles," against adopting the way that makes sense to the powerful of this world. But both stories are directed toward the disciples and thus to the church, communities which still seem to have selective amnesia on the subject of greatness.

There are all sorts of mythologies of greatness thriving in the church:

—the mythology that the sign of maturity and success in the pastoral office is the solo pastorate, preferably of a a moderate or large congregation;

—the mythology that mergers, yokings, and federations of parishes are failures, signaling a loss of identity and a diminishment of ministry;

—the mythology of great numbers and great statistics to be recorded on statistical reports as the measure of ministry well done.

Such mythologies fit well within this nation's historic agenda of eternal progress and rampant individualism, but they have broken the spirits (and sometimes, the backs) of a number of pastors and congregations in this denomination and across the wider church.

Jesus said, "If any one would be first, that person must be last of all and servant of all." That is a message we are not always willing to receive, although we cherish the values of humility and sacrifice. Part of our reluctance perhaps stems from receiving the message as individuals, who see their gifts and authority potentially diminished as they yield to another. Yet this is not the way the message was delivered, yesterday or today. Instead, Jesus intended this message to be delivered and received in community, so that we might be joyfully assured that each of us and all of us are "last of all and servant of all," but ever first in the eyes of the God who calls us kin. When we understand our vocation as mutual servants in mutual service, no gift shall ever be diminished or neglected; rather, every gift and every person shall be greatly treasured for the good of the community.

When Jesus drew a child into the midst of the circle of disciples, he demonstrated the clear difference between the child and the childishness of his disciples. Children can bully and dominate as cruelly as any adult, yet at their best they live open and eager for constant learning. Children stand eager to learn from adults and peers the intricate workings of this world and the glorious mysteries of the faith. Perhaps the humility of greatness Jesus proposes affords the whole church a splendid opportunity to stand eager to learn from one another—from clergy peers, from laypersons of faith, from adults and youth, from the church at home and the church abroad. What a great community we may yet become! LK

Must We Continue to Wound the Ones We Love?

Roger Fjeld
President, Wartburg Theological Seminary

Nobody promised us a rose garden, when we formed the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. But neither did anyone suggest that our first years would be punctuated by the periodic wounding of the people and institutions we have called to serve us.

This is written just after the Church Council was forced to make another deep cut in an already lacerated ELCA budget for the current year. Again people will be asked to leave positions despite their good work at important tasks. Again significant programs will be eliminated and funds for ministry will be cut. Again seminaries and continuing education centers must make painful cuts in faculty, staff, and program because church funds are not flowing as promised.

How often do we intend to wound those we love? Beyond the irresistible logic of budgets and deficits, there is something cruel about the way we burden the people and programs which we have called into mission for the ELCA. It is not an intentional cruelty—of that I am convinced. We are not a mean people. We have some strong differences of opinion, but those who differ aren't using their differences to deny resources for the mission of the church. We didn't intend to call people and programs into being, only to sack them because we couldn't afford them. But what is happening is cruel, nevertheless, whether the cruelty is intended or not.

Where does the fault lie? It is surely not the fault of the Church Council or the bishop of the church or of those people who carried out the mandates of the Constituting Convention of the ELCA. It is surely not the result of having too many national staff: ours is a lean and efficient staff. And it isn't a "Higgins Road" problem, as some suggest.

The problem lies principally in the reluctance of many congregations and pastors to embrace this new church as *our* church and this mission as *our* mission. Old loyalties linger; new ones are painfully slow to develop. That was true in some of the earlier mergers, too, but those came at benign times in American life, times when we could afford to tread water while new loyalties and common life developed. Or loyalties are localizing and regionalizing, rejecting or failing to realize that we have

covenanted together to be a strong national church with a common mission.

Even among those people, congregations, and pastors who are reluctant in their support, there is no intention to be cruel. If they knew how much their lack of support is costing the church, how many people are being dismissed, how deeply programs are being cut, they might be moved to help. But in a new church and in a distracted culture, it is too easy to look the other way, to treat these things as budget matters, not as the wounding of people and mission.

It is time to put the question directly to every member, congregation, and pastor: Are you committed to this church and its mission? Do you want it to limp along or to run strong? Do you give it priority over the other things that tug at your heart and pocketbook? We are setting a pattern, these first years, for our life together. Right now, the developing pattern is a disheartening one. We have the time and the resources to turn that around, before we become entrenched in retreat.

Or to put the matter more directly and in a more theological framework: Must we continue to wound the ones we love? Is it not a breach of the very nature of the church, to call structures into being and people into ministries, only to deny them what they need to do their work? What we do to them, we end up doing to ourselves. When we wound them, we finally wound ourselves, because they are us. So the question persists: Must we continue to wound the ones we love?

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